The benefits of neighborliness

by unnieunnie

Summary

Being in heat sucks. Thankfully, Chanyeol has nice neighbors.
Among the many problems with heat was that if you were busy – covered head to toe in PPE, for example, with filters and a respirator and surrounded by ten floors of burning building, feeling your own sweat dripping into your ears – it could sneak up on you.

It took five hours to ferret out every little smoldering bit in that deathtrap of an office building, obviously built out of gasoline-soaked rags and strike-anywhere matches by crooks back in the day: five hours when concentrating on his own body would’ve probably resulted in the separation of his soul from said body, so he didn’t think about it.

Chanyeol assumed he was just tired and annoyed until he took his headgear off in the engine, and Baekhyun and Joonmyun reeled.

“Dude,” Baek said.

Chanyeol was too busy pulling at the neck of his jacket to register. It was so scratchy. Had he gotten something on it?

“Dude,” Baek said, louder.

“What?”

“Yeol, you reek.”

He waved his hand in front of Chanyeol’s face.

“I … what?”

Sehun growled.

Chanyeol noticed that his pants felt a bit tight. And, uh – wet.

Well, wasn’t that convenient.

“Yeol-ah,” Joonmyun said gently, “do you have a heat partner?”

Sehun grinned, breathing in deep through his nose.

Joonmyun smacked his leg, hard.

“Not you, jerk.”

Sehun narrowed his eyes at Joonmyun, then shrugged, opened the window and stuck his head out. The siren and wind made the cab loud, but the fresh air cleared some of all the fog Chanyeol hadn’t even realized had given him a case of the stupids. It also helped him remind himself not to stare at Sehun’s crotch.

“I’ll be fine,” he said to Joonmyun’s patient smile. “I was planning on riding this one out solo, anyhow.”
“I’d offer you my inadequate, knotless dick,” Baekhyun said, “but –“

“No way, man, I know Xing’s been on call for like a month straight. I’ll be fine. It’s a couple days early, but I’ve got everything.”

He was kind of getting less fine by the moment, but his coworkers did not need to know the gory details. Like they didn’t know the gory details. But he still didn’t have to talk about it. Especially when his jacket clasps were so hard to get undone. Had Baekhyun glued them? Why were his fingers so clumsy? The clasp edges were so rough, and his jacket was so hot.

“You’re a mess,” Baekhyun murmured, all up in Chanyeol’s personal space, patting his collar back up around his face.

Too bad about that knotless dick thing. Baek was so pretty.

“Oh god,” Baekhyun laughed. “And for the record, I did not glue your stupid jacket clasps, you dork. Keep it on.”

“It’s heavy, I don’t like it.”

“I know, dummy, but Sehun’s hanging halfway out the window as it is, you’re just going to have to deal.”

A few vivid pictures stood out over the next hour, amid the haze that had taken over his brain: Joonmyun’s laughing face buckling him – heat gear, boots, and all – into Baekhyun’s car, Baekhyun dangling his house keys in front of his face and enunciating, “Are. These. Your. Keys?”

Hanging onto the stair rail for dear life, trying to make it to his second-floor apartment without coming in his dumb work gear.

Leaning on the door frame of his cute neighbors’ place, fumbling for those stupid keys.

They were nice neighbors. And very cute. And they probably didn’t have to wear kilos and kilos of dumb work gear, and they probably knew how to find the right damn key to get in the damn deadbolt to get in the damn house. Because that’s how cute people were, the jerks.

Stupid heat.

Stupid self, thinking that it would be okay to stick it out alone.

Inside the door, Chanyeol could finally strip off all that awful, scratchy, heavy gear. Being slightly less hot and uncomfortable made sufficient space in his brain to flip on the air conditioner, grab a bottle of water from the fridge, and start the bath running.

He stood by the tub, stroking himself slowly and drinking the water, cool going down his parched throat. He tipped a chocolate-scented bath bomb in the water, thinking fondly of the particular heat in college when he had been informed that he smelled like roasted marshmallows. He’d been trying to make himself smell like a s’more ever since. Not that anybody ever bothered to appreciate it, since all the alphas he knew were dumb jerks who did stuff like get partnered up or run off to France for six months of culinary training or whatever.

Ugh, he was dripping.
Chanyeol finished the bottle of water and stepped into the tub, letting the warm, fragrant water wrap him up. It made things easier for a minute, soft and comforting against the simmer of his skin. He felt sticky and sooty. Trying to wash off the stink of the fire only reminded him of how stupid his own hands were, being not-alpha hands, even as he sucked on his own fingers and pulled himself off into the rapidly cooling water.

He didn’t bother drying off, just grabbed the bottle of lotion and took advantage of having two working brain cells post-orgasm to pile up all the necessary crap in the middle of the living room. Chanyeol had no idea how long he crawled around trying to get the pillows in just the right configuration. None of them seemed right, there was always some kind of dumb lump, and it was uncomfortable, and he didn’t want to be doing all this, it was too much work. For pity’s sake, he was an omega, somebody should’ve been taking care of him, why did he always have to do things the hard way?

Fucking heat and fucking stupid hands, and the air conditioner wasn’t working right, it was too hot, and he hadn’t had time to put the lotion all over, so he felt yucky and dry on his knees, and his dick ached, and it was unfair, he wanted a knot.

He scooted around on the mound of pillows until his ass was up in the air and he could cover his hands in his own slick. How could his arms be so stupidly long and still not long enough to get his hand properly into his own ass? It was unfair, was what it was. See also: not being able to find the fucking vibrator in all the fucking pillows.

There was a thump from the apartment next door. Chanyeol jumped, but he was too deep into the heat to give a shit if his neighbors had heard him.

In fact, he kind of liked that idea. His cute neighbors listening to him fuck himself. They’d probably get all inspired and jump on each other, and wasn’t that nice to think about. Hell, he thought about it plenty even when he wasn’t in heat: that tiny super adorable little alpha and tiny little super adorable terrifying murder beta. They were awesome. And the alpha had a knot. Probably like a really huge knot. And Chanyeol had seen the guy in shorts, he had legs like a power lifter, he could probably pound Chanyeol’s brain out through his goddamn ears, make him come for days –

Uh.

He was pretty sure he shouted out his neighbor’s name when he came.

He was almost entirely sure about a minute later when his front door smashed open.

Chanyeol leaned his head back, and even upside down, he could see that Jongdae was breathing hard, his jaw heavy-looking like his actual fangs were actually coming in.

Oops.

Jongdae swung the door shut behind him with another crack.

“Your fucking window is fucking open,” Jongdae growled.

Ooo, alpha growl. Chanyeol relaxed into a puddle and smiled, already stroking himself hard again as he watched Jongdae stomp across the room and slam the window shut so hard that the glass rattled.

He smelled pissed. And he smelled like petrichor. Chanyeol was so hot. He wanted that nice smell near him to cool him down. He whined for it.

“You want this?” Jongdae said, standing over him, eyes slitted like he was furious, but Chanyeol
could see.

He could see what he wanted.

“Yes, alpha,” he said, hearing his own voice deep and pleading.

He wriggled, and saw the moment when that wave of scent hit Jongdae, who growled again and leaned down to catch Chanyeol’s ankle in a firm grip.

Chanyeol whined again.

“You left your fucking window open,” Jongdae snarled, pulling Chanyeol to the edge of the pillow mound.

“Please.”

“Do you have any idea what I’ve been listening to for the past hour? You know I went out on my balcony and I could smell you?”

Chanyeol raised one slick-covered hand to his mouth and licked it. Jongdae hissed, and it was like his clothes evaporated off of him, he moved so fast. Then Chanyeol was the one growling, because tiny he might be, but Jongdae was nothing but lean muscle and hard, red dick, and Chanyeol wanted it.

“How dare you,” Jongdae said, grabbing Chanyeol’s ankle again and pulling him so his ass was balanced precariously on top of the edge of the pile.

“How dare you be like this,” he muttered, and put his hands on Chanyeol’s thighs.

Chanyeol moaned. Finally somebody else was touching him. An alpha, even.

“Look at you. Aren’t you some badass firefighter?” Jongdae said, leaning in to nuzzle at Chanyeol’s chest. “What kind of fucking muscles are these? You’re the size of a truck.”

Their dicks were rubbing together. Chanyeol wrapped one hand around them both, and Jongdae grabbed his shoulder, bit down on his chest. Chanyeol moaned and bucked.

“I’m gonna bend you in half,” Jongdae said.

“Please,” Chanyeol groaned.

“I hate biology,” Jongdae said.

But before Chanyeol could even attempt to figure out what that meant, Jongdae stepped back, disappeared briefly from the line of sight, then, in fact, bent Chanyeol in half. His thighs were pressed up against his chest, ass up in the air, and he was so ready.

“Say yes,” Jongdae growled.

“Yes, yes, please,” Chanyeol whined.

It wasn’t – Jongdae looked so pissed but he was also here and hard, and oh god, right there in the right place, finally, and they had barely exchanged ten words before but he had a dick, and that dick had a knot.

“Fuck.”

Jongdae smacked his leg, and once he started to move, Chanyeol relaxed into the weird stretch in his legs, Jongdae’s scent, and the awesome feeling of being filled up the way he wanted.

“So good,” he said.

“Jesus,” Jongdae said. “How do you even smell like this, god.”

He licked his fingers, wet with slick from where he’d been gripping Chanyeol’s thigh. His eyes rolled back, and he gave a pained-sounding laugh while he pounded Chanyeol harder.

It made the fever simmering under Chanyeol’s skin focus down into his belly.

“You like my scent, alpha?” he said, reaching out to grab Jongdae’s forearm.

Jongdae held on too, used the leverage to increase his pace.

“Smell so good,” he said.

Chanyeol could hear his own blood rushing in his ears. He wanted to be able to put his legs down, wrap them around Jongdae, pull him close, and be covered in that nice after-rain smell. He wanted Jongdae to kiss him. To take care of him.

“Alpha.”

“Yeah, baby?” Jongdae gasped.

“Give it to me.”

“I am, baby.”

“No, I mean —“

Jongdae put his hand around Chanyeol’s dick, which felt so good it shut him up.

“I’m telling you,” Jongdae said, his voice deep and fierce in a way that spoke directly to Chanyeol’s genitalia, “that you will get. My. Knot.”

This was punctuated by some exaggerated thrusts, on the last of which the knot in question stretched its way into Chanyeol’s ass, making him cry out, and then cry for real with sheer relief, and then come all over himself, which made him writhe and squeeze, and then Jongdae came too, holding onto Chanyeol’s forearm and leg like he thought he might fall into pieces, snarling.

Chanyeol felt so full up. His own skin wasn’t crawling off him anymore. This was so much better than a solo heat, even if.

Oh shit.

Oh shit.

“You have a partner!” he wailed.

And Jongdae’s knot ensured that they would be stuck together for the next little while to have this spectacularly awkward conversation.
Chanyeol couldn’t even figure out which one of them was worse here. On one hand, Jongdae was a cheating jerk, but on the other hand, Chanyeol was a grown ass omega who should’ve looked out to make sure this kind of thing didn’t happen.

Of course, it would be a moot point, because the cute murder beta would murder them.

Jongdae was sagging forward, expression miserable.

“Oh my god,” he said. “Minseok’s going to absolutely murder me, and I totally deserve it. He’s going to make me cry, I know. I hate biology.”

Chanyeol did cry, a little, because he was in heat, and he had had an abrupt and weird but very good fucking, and now it was all terrible, and he felt really bad about twenty different kinds of way, not the least of which was that there wasn’t going to be any more of this nice fucking, because his cute neighbors were going to hate him now, and he was still going to be in heat for days.

“Don’t cry, sweetheart,” Jongdae said, reaching out, trying to thumb away Chanyeol’s tears but also still obviously beyond upset.

“Please,” he whispered. “Please tell me you’re wearing a condom.”

Jongdae went very, very still, aside from a noticeable decrease in knot size.

“Of course he’s wearing a condom,” said a husky voice from near the front door. “If it had looked like he was going to be that stupid, I’d have intervened.”

Jongdae squeaked.

Chanyeol tipped his head back again to see the cute murder beta sitting on the floor, flipping through a catalog for camping gear that Chanyeol thought might have been in his pile of mail on a nearby table.

“Min?” Jongdae said.

Murder beta looked up, grinned a broad, gummy smile, and wiggled a set of teeny tiny fingers.

“I don’t know what you’re so worried about. You know I only ever make you cry when I’m fucking you.”

Chanyeol looked back up at Jongdae, who was red all the way down to his chest.

Well. Red except for the extensive mating scars covering each shoulder.

Hot.

“What the fuck,” Jongdae sighed.

Chanyeol agreed. He definitely did not have enough functioning brain to parse any of this.

Murder beta walked over and put his arm around Jongdae’s waist.

“You hate biology,” he said.
Jongdae nodded.

“I really, really do.”

Murder beta spanked his naked ass, and Jongdae jumped. Given that he was still stuck inside Chanyeol’s ass, Chanyeol benefited too.

“You really, really don’t. I’m Minseok, by the way,” murder beta said, leaning down to cup Chanyeol’s cheek with one cool hand.

Chanyeol nuzzled into the touch.

“Hi.”

“Sorry about my terrible alpha.”

“Oh, no!”

Chanyeol said, at the same time Jongdae went,

“Hey, what the hell –“

Minseok gave Jongdae a look so quelling that Jongdae was, sadly, able to step back.

Bummer. Although Chanyeol was glad to be able to put his legs down. His feet had fallen asleep.

“Please review the circumstances of this encounter,” Minseok said.

How was that for some sexy vocabulary? Chanyeol put his hand on his belly, thinking that maybe he could start heating back up again, but he felt how sticky he was, and how his feet had started to tingle from feeling coming back, and he whined.

Minseok put a hand on his shin, cool and soothing. Jongdae was staring at him, looking confused, until Chanyeol sighed and tried to rise up on one elbow to go clean himself off.

“Oh god,” Jongdae said.

“I suppose it’s my fault that you’re so bad at this,” Minseok said.

“Oh god!” Jongdae said again.

He crawled on top of Chanyeol, wrapping himself around and pulling Chanyeol’s face to his neck.

“I am so sorry, sweetheart,” Jongdae said, while Chanyeol inhaled alpha scent until he was dizzy and all his bones dissolved.

He licked Jongdae’s neck. It tasted as nice as it smelled.

“Hey,” Jongdae said, cupping Chanyeol’s chin and pulling his head up, looking into his face like he was searching for something.

“Hey, are you okay?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“No, seriously,” Jongdae said, his fingers stroking the hair at Chanyeol’s temples. “Everything about that was all wrong. I’m so sorry. Are you really all right?”
And he was, but he was also in heat and deeply confused and really sticky and Jongdae’s hands were so gentle and he smelled so good and once Chanyeol had started crying, it was easy to set him off again, so maybe he got a little wobbly in the lower lip department.

“Oh no,” Jongdae said, looking all worried and cupping his face.

He looked up, though, past Chanyeol’s shoulder.

“You had better kiss that poor omega, or I really will murder you,” Minseok said.

What a nice murder beta he was. Jongdae kissed him, all soft and nice, apologizing after about every third one, until Chanyeol was thinking about doing some stuff more fun than crying. He wrapped one hand around Jongdae’s ribs.

“Christ, how is your hand so large?” Jongdae muttered, and bit down on the skin under Chanyeol’s ear.

“He could probably jerk all three of us at the same time in one hand,” Minseok said.

Jongdae moaned.

“Yeah, okay, pause button,” Minseok said.

And here Chanyeol had just been thinking that he was the best neighbor anybody could ever have. Minseok pushed at Jongdae, who curled his lip until he saw Minseok’s expression, then sagged.

“I’m sorry,” Chanyeol said.

He had made a mess. As usual.

“Sorry for what, baby?” Minseok said, sitting down next to him and smiling.

“I don’t want Jongdae to be in trouble.”

“Aw, he’s not in trouble.”

Minseok’s voice was as soft as the warm, wet washcloth that he was using to wipe Chanyeol clean. Chanyeol sighed and stretched, tucking one arm around his head so he could watch this handsome beta make him comfortable.

“He’s a dumbass alpha, but seeing as how I’ve been trying to broach this topic for like a month now, I guess it’s good he cut to the chase.”

He held out his hand to Jongdae, who dropped his own washcloth into it with a,

“Huh?”

Yeah. Huh?

Minseok rolled his eyes.

“I mean, I’ve been trying to figure out how to ask you if you were also interested in asking our hot firefighter neighbor out on a date.”

Jongdae grinned, and just like that, Chanyeol was ready to go again.
“You think I’m hot?”

Minseok looked down at him, eyebrows going up at the engorged state of things. He put his cool little hand around Chanyeol’s dick and gave the head a friendly swipe with his thumb.

“Obviously,” he said. “It’s Chanyeol, right? How long’s your heat usually last, baby?”

“Four days, give or take?”

“Well. Four days of fucking sounds a hell of a lot more fun than dinner and a movie.”

He stood up, gross washcloths held away from his body.

“Don’t you go at him again yet, Dae, I mean it. Take care of him first.”

Jongdae climbed back into Chanyeol’s nest, hands sliding sliding sliding up his legs, and kissed him.

“What can I do for you, sweetheart?”

Oof, he was nice. Chanyeol wrapped himself around this nice, itty bitty little rain-smelling alpha and nuzzled up against his hair.

“I’m all dry,” he said, “and I don’t like my pillows.”

One of Jongdae’s hands snaked around his waist and down so his fingers played with Chanyeol’s entrance. He shivered.

“You are not dry,” Jongdae rumbled into his chest.

Chanyeol flopped onto his back.

“Not what I meant.”

But Jongdae crawled around with him, trying to make the nest more comfortable, discovering in the process that the problem was that “dump everything in the middle of the living room floor” was not exactly an efficient nest-building philosophy. The potato chips were crushed. The bag of caramels was squashed. Jongdae unwrapped and fed him a couple, smiling as he pushed his thumb into Chanyeol’s mouth. They found the vibrator, which made Jongdae grin in a way that increased Chanyeol’s temperature by several degrees, and the lotion, which Chanyeol pounced on with a happy cry. The bag of chocolate chip cookies had been next to it, in as sad a state as the chips.

Chanyeol leaned back into the less-lumpy pillows and rubbed lotion into his feet.

“Gonna have to eat these with a spoon,” Jongdae said, peering into the cookie bag.

He grinned.

“Over ice cream.”

“Aw, man,” Chanyeol said. “I wish I had some.”

“I’m making a list,” Minseok said. “Ice cream, pallet of condoms. Anything else?”

He took the lotion bottle out of Chanyeol’s hand, pumped some into his palm, and started smoothing it up and down Chanyeol’s left leg. Chanyeol sighed.
“What do you like, sweetheart?” Minseok asked.

“I like you.”

Minseok grinned and pinched lightly at his thigh.

“Hey now,” Jongdae said, settling on Chanyeol’s other side. “I’m the one with the knot, remember?”

“I like you too,” Chanyeol said, burrowing down happily while Jongdae lotioned up his other leg and Minseok started on his belly. “Nice neighbors.”

His skin was hot again, and he could feel his brain cells turning off, one by one, under those four friendly hands. Minseok’s hands were so calming and cool, and Jongdae’s were warm. The rain scent was digging itself up into his head again.

“God, you smell sweet,” Jongdae said.

“Like marshmallows,” Minseok said. “With all this lotion, he smells like a fucking s’more.”

Chanyeol grinned.

“You like that?”

“I’ve been trying to get somebody to notice that for years!”

“Hey, lover,” Minseok said in a voice that made Chanyeol’s toes tingle, “I think this omega we found wants us to eat him.”

And then he leaned down and showed off that he had like zero gag reflex or something, Chanyeol didn’t even know, except that his dick was all the way down murder beta’s throat, and he might’ve started to shout a little bit, except that Jongdae’s tongue was suddenly in his mouth, and they still had those four hands, one of which was pinning his shoulder down, one of which was pulling at one nipple, one of which was pumping his dick hard and fast, and the other of which had two fingers up his ass. He wasn’t actually sure who was doing what where, or even where his edges were, it was all so goddamn good that he hardly took any time at all.

Minseok swallowed him down, and Jongdae muffled his groan.

“Delicious,” Minseok said, pulling off and giving Chanyeol’s dick one more brief lick.

He dug around in his back pocket and dropped a condom packet onto the pillows.

“I’m off the store.”

He laid his hand against Chanyeol’s face and rubbed their noses together.

“What do you want, sweetness?”

“I like fruit,” Chanyeol said weakly.

“You got it.”

“Pizza for later,” Jongdae muttered, in between soft little bites on Chanyeol’s chest.

“Yeah, I’m down with your protocol, babe,” Minseok said, passing his hand over Jongdae’s hair. “Save some of him for me, and don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”
Jongdae looked up.

“The only things you won’t do involve non-seminal bodily secretions.”

“Then I guess you’d better make him give you a safe word,” Minseok said from the door.

The look on Jongdae’s face scared Chanyeol so much that he got hard again. Or turned him on. Kind of the same thing.

“Umbrella,” he said.

Jongdae laughed. He lay on top of Chanyeol. Chanyeol put his arms around him and stuck his face into Jongdae’s neck, inhaling and kissing a little, rutting up against Jongdae’s leg, feeling Jongdae grind down against his stomach.

“Next time you should watch,” he whispered, breath tickling Chanyeol’s ear. “See how beautiful Min looks with your dick down his throat.”

“Yeah?”

Jongdae laughed a little, sucked on Chanyeol’s earlobe. He was hot again, and itchy and empty. His heat was really starting to set in, now – that familiar heaviness in his spine and inability to concentrate on anything other than wanting. They hadn’t even had any of the conversations, and in a little bit here, he wasn’t going to be capable.

He grabbed Jongdae’s shoulders. Jongdae stroked his cheek.

“You’re really going to stay with me?”

“Are you kidding?” Jongdae said. “You think after I’ve had a taste of you, I’m gonna pass up having more?”

Chanyeol could feel a huge wave of want rising up in him, what Baekhyun had once called “the whiny mess phase,” which always made him think that maybe Baek only helped him out during his heats because they’d been friends since before they presented, and not because he wanted to actually be there or anything.

“Hey,” Jongdae said, running his hand down Chanyeol’s side. “Hey, Chan, what’s going on with that face? What’s wrong?”

He didn’t even know what to say, it would probably sound stupid, and this was already so weird, how were they going to look each other in the eye after this?

“Oh no!”

Jongdae kissed him, rubbed the side of his face against Chanyeol’s. The petrichor scent got up in Chanyeol’s head a little, making the upset ease and the desire flare.

“What’s going on, baby?”

Jongdae’s hands were so gentle on him. He wanted rough. He wanted more.

“Baby, I’m so sorry this is messed up,” Jongdae said. “I did this all wrong, I’m sorry.”

Chanyeol tried to shake his head, but Jongdae’s face was in the way, his mouth up against Chanyeol’s neck.
“I promise I’ll get you all the courting gifts you want after,” he said. “I’m not an asshole, I swear, don’t cry. I’ll be so good to you, I’m so sorry.”

And Chanyeol couldn’t help that that made him melt and whimper, because he was a dumb omega who was ridiculously large and prone to the weepies when he was in heat, and probably looked like an idiot, and once they didn’t have these stupid pheromones screwing with both of them, Jongdae would realize what a weirdo he was and hate how he always knocked stuff off the table when he got excited and smelled like smoke half the time and had a terrible work schedule and actually liked to top when he wasn’t in stupid heat and hated how he was almost twenty-eight years old and had not one single mating scar on either shoulder like Jongdae did.

“Oh, babe,” Jongdae said, kissing all over his face and neck, jiggling a little like he was maybe laughing. “Oh sweetheart, you are the cutest thing I’ve ever seen.”

Which was obviously a big dumb pheromone lie, because he lived with Minseok, who if he were a firefighter would definitely be in the half-naked calendar thing they made to raise money every year, and he was a beta besides and wasn’t going to fall for Chanyeol’s dumb marshmallow pheromones, even if he had sucked Chanyeol’s dick just to be nice because he was in heat. He’d pack Jongdae up after this and take him home and probably give him another bite scar.

“Oh, he probably will,” Jongdae said. “And I definitely want to see that calendar at some point. But you’re an idiot if you think Min isn’t susceptible.”

Oh shit.

“Stop worrying,” Jongdae said, grinding his nice, hard dick against Chanyeol’s belly. “I’ll tell you something you don’t know, omega. Minseok’s favorite food in the whole world is marshmallows.”

The haze parted a little – enough that Chanyeol could register the expression on Jongdae’s face: heated, sure, but also with a smile playing about his lips, like he was actually okay with being here.

“Oh?” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae nodded.

The front door opened and shut, and Jongdae smiled up over his head, then back down at him.

“Just relax, sweetheart. I’m going to take care of you, and Min’ll take care of us both.”

“Damn fucking straight,” Minseok said from the door. “Right after I put the ice cream in the freezer and bungee the door shut.”

Jongdae put one hand on Chanyeol’s chest and looked down.

“Relax, Chan,” he said.

Like Chanyeol had any choice, if Jongdae was going to use alpha voice like that. He went as floppy as one of his own pillows, neck arched for his alpha’s mouth.

His heat lasted five days, just to be perverse. Or maybe because the three of them had so much fun. Chanyeol got so thoroughly fucked that he had moments of actual lucidity during his heat, which was unprecedented. Maybe Minseok didn’t have a knot, but he was crazy strong and game for just about anything. Chanyeol learned that having his dick ridden while he was being knotted was so mind-bending that he had an entire hour afterward where he could think straight.
“Fuuuuuuck, I feel harpooned,” Minseok said afterward, splayed out and grinning.

“Yeah, I am getting on that once this heat is over,” Jongdae said. “Jesus, that was so hot I thought we were gonna need Chanyeol’s professional expertise.”

The thought that he’d get more of this even after his heat broke made Chan feel so warm and floaty that he went and fetched snacks and washcloths himself. Min and Dae sat on him and fussfed at him for moving when he got back, snuggling up on either side of him to feed him strawberries and coconut water.

A couple of times, Minseok went at Jongdae, using his own set of impressive legs to drive Jongdae into Chanyeol so hard that they both shrieked, his wicked grin beautiful over Jongdae’s shoulder. The second time, he winked at Chanyeol, then flashed his fangs and sank them into Jongdae’s shoulder, setting off an orgasm cascade that left all three of them unable to move for a long time afterward, other than Chanyeol and Minseok licking Jongdae’s shoulder clean while he purred at them.

It was all so hot.

And in between, it was all so nice. Minseok was a pervert with an insane sex drive, but he was also a beta, so he didn’t get caught up in the emotion-pheromone spirals that left Chanyeol and Jongdae Staring Meaningfully at each other and kissing for hours at a time.

So Minseok laughed at them, but his clear-headedness meant that Chanyeol never felt his eyes going gritty with dehydration, and he actually bathed a couple of times during his actual heat. Having two partners meant that any time he woke up from his fitful naps, there was pretty much always someone awake to pet his hair, kiss on him, and make him drink water. They really did eat cookie shards with a spoon on top of ice cream, which Chanyeol was trying to tell himself to remember to try later, but then Jongdae went down on him with a mouth full of it, and that kind of killed his brain for a while.

By the fifth day, Chanyeol and Jongdae were too exhausted to do much more than rock back and forth while Chanyeol wheezed, oversensitive but still hungry for it, unable to even process how it was possible to have a heat that was never going to end.

“You two need to spend more time at the gym,” Minseok said.

He kissed Jongdae over Chanyeol’s shoulder, messy and slow, then leaned down to take Chanyeol’s hair in his fist and kiss him too. He took such good care of them, and his minty beta scent was so comforting. Chanyeol tilted his chin up for more, but Minseok pulled away and smiled down at him.

“I’m gonna try something, okay?”

Chanyeol nodded. He watched Min hunch down, face level with his chest. Minseok tipped his face up, staring intently.

“What’s your word, baby?”

“Umbrella,” Chanyeol rasped.

“Okay, use it if you need to.”

He wrapped his fist around Chanyeol’s poor, tired dick, while his other hand crept back, and back.

“Hold still a sec, Dae.”
Jongdae stopped moving and kissed the back of Chanyeol’s neck.

Minseok slipped a finger inside.

Chanyeol was too tired to seize up, but he choked a little at the weirdness of it, that little bit of extra stretch.

“Jesus fuck,” Jongdae hissed.

“That hurt, sweetheart?”

Chanyeol shook his head. They’d both had him so many times over the past four hundred days or whatever it had been that it didn’t hurt at all.

Minseok added another.

By the fourth finger, Chanyeol was sobbing weakly. Jongdae had his teeth set firmly into the back of Chanyeol’s neck and was growling low and steady. Chanyeol felt like all his insides were going to squeeze out of him, and he simultaneously couldn’t stand it and couldn’t stand the thought of it stopping.

“What do you think, sweetheart?” Minseok said. “Want me up in there?”

Jongdae whined and bucked up against Chanyeol’s back, and Minseok curled his fingers a little, and for a second, the world blacked out.

“Please,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae clamped down tighter with his teeth and wrapped one arm tight around Chanyeol’s chest. Minseok pressed up close, throwing his leg over both of them, and it felt like he was far away while he tried to get the right angle, and then Chanyeol felt like he was breaking in half in the best possible way, hurting but also full full up and warm and not alone, with Jongdae now groaning in his ear and Minseok grinning up at him. Both of them used him for leverage as they started to move, so for once he was glad to be overly large, so he could take them both, lie heavy and still while they moved in him together, the delight on Minseok’s face and the way Jongdae’s hand clutched at his chest, the way Minseok’s hands felt gripping his hips and the steady stream of curses out of Jongdae’s mouth. All this rose up out of him until he arched, stiff and stretched long, in a sobbing, drawn-out, almost dry orgasm.

Jongdae went over next, finding it in himself somewhere to pound Chanyeol hard a dozen times or so, making Minseok’s expression go blank, and then he growled, and things got really sweaty and surprising, and Chanyeol thought that if they let him lie very still for about a year, then he might be able to get up and move again.

When he woke up, his heat had broken. Chanyeol had one cute neighbor draped across his chest and the other one curled around his hip, holding his soft dick in one sleep-loose fist.

He figured this was going to be the absolute pinnacle of his life, so excuse him, he lay there enjoying it for as long as possible. Sadly, it wasn’t even that long, because he was starving, and he had to pee, and if he didn’t stretch a little post-heat, he got wicked cramps in his calves.

It took him like five whole minutes of moving in increments to wriggle out from under them without waking them up. But as he stood up, Jongdae and Minseok rolled into the space he had left, Jongdae muttering in his sleep and Minseok curling a leg over Jongdae’s hip. Chanyeol thought his heart would seize up, looking at them.
They’d been beyond great. He definitely owed them like a dozen dinners. Assuming things wouldn’t be weird.

He really, really hoped things wouldn’t be weird.

But they would probably be weird.

One semi-long lukewarm shower later, Chanyeol felt like a functioning person again and no longer smelled like the back end of a five-day orgy. Jongdae and Minseok were still asleep when he padded by a second time. He took a minute to ogle, both of them compact and muscled and gorgeous, just in case he never got to see it again.

Round about the time the coffee pot was full and Chanyeol was staring down at the pan of fried rice, trying to decide whether to add more hot peppers, a pair of arms went around his waist. He lost a few centimeters in height, sagging from the pleasure.

“Why’d you have to go and shower?” Minseok mumbled to his back. “I liked you smelling like us.”

Chanyeol turned around, and his dark eyes were only about one-third of the way open, hair sticking up off his head in fifteen different directions. Minseok tipped his chin up for a kiss, quiet and sleepy. Chanyeol’s guts felt melty in a way that had absolutely nothing to do with heat.

“Heat’s broken,” Chanyeol said.

“Damn.”

Chanyeol laughed. Nice neighbors, but crazy. They were all half-dead; if his heat had lasted much longer they’d all be ghosts fucking in heaven.

“Coffee’s ready,” he said, and Minseok immediately abandoned him to paw at cabinets until Chanyeol reached down a mug.

“How spicy do you like your food?”

Min grinned down at his coffee.

“Spicy on the side, please,” he said. “I like it hot enough to make me cry, but my strong, dominant alpha is a wimp.”

“Shut up, asshole,” the alpha in question said, grabbing Minseok’s hair and kissing him roughly.

“Ugh, clothes,” he said to Chanyeol, pulling on his shirt until Chanyeol leaned down to get kissed too.

There wasn’t time for conversation once food was in front of them, with five days of excessive activity to make up for. Chanyeol could stare while he chewed, though. He could wonder what was going on behind those beautiful, sleepy faces, and what they would say to each other later. Probably something like “thanks, see you around,” right?

Wouldn’t that be terrible.

By the end of breakfast, Minseok and Jongdae were looking ready for another round of naps, and Chanyeol’s phone was blowing up.

“I’m sorry, I have to go to work,” he said. “My heat coming early and lasting so long screwed up the schedule, there’s guys who’ve been on shift for days - “
Jongdae squeezed his shoulder. Chanyeol hissed, and his spine went all wobbly.

“Get out of here, fireman,” Jongdae said, a little bit of alpha rumbling in his voice that made Chanyeol shift in his chair. “We’ll wash the dishes.”

Chanyeol felt bad, though, rushing out with his arms full of heat-reeking work gear, leaving the two of them with their heads hanging low at his kitchen table.

He powered through the morning, doing all the crap that needed to be done around the fire house when people had been on shift too long and were too tired to keep up with making sure the fridge stayed full and the bathrooms were non-gross. Being busy kept him from thinking himself into a fret. He had enough energy for about six people, even if he did keep finding himself staring off into space with a stupid grin on his face or wincing every time he sat down too fast.

Baek got in a couple of hours later and looked him up and down with narrowed eyes. Chanyeol braced himself for the inevitable teasing, when the bell rang.

It was a small fire, just somebody’s barbecue grill going out with a bang (literally), and the back yard catching on fire a little bit, but no big deal.

Baekhyun gaped at him in the showers afterward, though. It was reasonable. He had about nineteen hickeys.

“I thought you had a solo heat,” Baek said.

Chanyeol shrugged. He may have exaggerated the motion a little.

“Is that a – mating scar?” Baek squeaked.

Chanyeol felt himself flush, but he turned to show the other side.

“TWO? What the hell, Yeol, who is this alpha? Where’d they come from?”

Where was he even going to start?

How could he explain it, if he didn’t know how it was going to end?

“Oh, guys,” Sehun said, peering around the doorway. “There’s a couple of hot dudes standing out in the driveway, holding armfuls of, like, courting gifts.”

Baekhyun’s eyebrows reached for the stars.

Chanyeol’s face smiled on its own power, until his cheeks hurt.

Not an end, yet.

“Oh,” he said. “I guess those are for me.”

Chapter End Notes

oh my god I can't believe I wrote a/b/o
Chapter 2

Staying on-brand with the abrupt and weird heat he had had, Chanyeol received two bouquets of flowers, two boxes of fancy candy, and two bracelets from Minseok and Jongdae in the driveway of the firehouse. Followed by,

“I’m so sorry, man, I have to bolt for work like twenty minutes ago,”

and

“God, we are so terrible, but I gotta go too dude, please knock on our door later?”

Which, on the one hand, adorable.

On the other hand: nobody thought to exchange phone numbers?

Nobody thought to exchange phone numbers.

“Only you,” Baekhyun said, shaking his head.

Meaning, of course, that Baekhyun got zero of the fancy candies, no matter how much he complained.

So Chanyeol spent the three days of his firehouse shift trying to keep bouquets of sunflowers and hydrangeas alive, moaning over confectionary (1) because it was delicious and (2) to piss off Baekhyun, and staring at his right wrist like a total sap in off moments.

The bracelets were nice – nice enough that he’d want to wear them even if this Thing didn’t work out, which was more than Chanyeol could say about previous courting gifts. The one from Jongdae was made of heavy silver links, with a silver charm that had a weird-looking arrow symbol stamped onto it. Chaneyol puzzled over it, trying to do a reverse image search, for almost a whole day, before Joonmyun poked his nose into the business.

“That’s the alchemical symbol for fire,” he said.

Chanyeol had a little momentary trouble in the chest area.

“That’s actually super romantic,” Joonmyun said.

Chanyeol didn’t miss how he said this while staring at Sehun’s butt.

In fairness, Sehun had a really nice butt.

The other bracelet was a braid of black leather, with a swoopy shape in dark metal in the center that maybe didn’t mean anything but looked really good.

They looked pretty together on his right wrist. And maybe Chanyeol spent a ridiculous amount of time staring at them and shaking his hand so that they’d clink together, considering.

Considering that he didn’t even know their phone numbers.
Thinking this always drove him to eat a piece of fancy candy. As did catching sight of himself in the bathroom mirror, with the fading hickey all over his torso and the mating marks on his shoulders, scabbing over and receding to pink horseshoes.

“Quit freaking out,” Baekhyun said.

“Man, that’s more stuff than I would give you,” Sehun said.

“Sehun’s an asshole. You should feel lucky,” Joonmyun said.

“Aw, but this is adorable,” Yixing said on a visit to the firehouse, during the two-minute period when Baekhyun let him speak-slash-breathe. “They must really like you, Yeollie, that’s great.”

The problem being, Chanyeol noted as he tromped through the residue of a burned-out auto shop, kicking piles of debris to look for live embers and spraying suppressant foam on any he found, that while the five days of his heat had been excessively fun, and their gifts were excessively nice, they hadn’t actually, you know, ever talked to each other outside of being naked and compromised by pheromones.

Past experience hadn’t given him a lot of confidence that doing so would turn out well. If he sat down to think about it, he could remember a litany of disappointing post-heat conversations full of things like “well, this was nice,” and “I had a good time, Yeol, but I don’t think this is going to go anywhere,” and “I’m sorry, man, I think you misunderstood my intentions, here” and shit like that.

Still: Chanyeol dutifully changed the water in the bouquets and put tablets of aspirin in the vases to keep them alive. He ate the candies and shook his wrist so the bracelets would clink together. He only kind of dreaded when his three-day shift at the fire house was over.

“You’re a dork,” Baekhyun told him. “Nobody ever hates you as much as you think they do.”

And sure, Baek probably meant it, but they’d known each other since they were five years old, it wasn’t like he could trust Baekhyun’s opinion to be objective.

By the time Chanyeol finally got off shift and dragged his carcass home, the bouquets were looking wilty enough that he only felt about 50% guilty leaving them at the firehouse, and all the candies packed up into one box. He found himself walking more and more slowly, the closer he got to his apartment building, and he couldn’t make his feet move any faster.

Outside their door, he paused, then chickened out on knocking in favor of setting all his crap down and maybe changing into clothes that hadn’t spent a month wadded up in his locker at work.

His front door was covered in sticky notes.

“Hey when the hell are you coming home,” one read.

“Isn’t this a labor law violation?” read another.

“NEEEEEIIIIGHBORRRRRR :((((((((((((((((((” was another one.

“Seriously. Knock on our door when you get home” read one in slightly neater handwriting, stuck down near the doorknob.

Chanyeol gathered all the notes up and took them inside with him. He stuck them to the wall for the time being and set down all his stuff. And just in case, because he was an insecure dumbass who wouldn’t trust himself on a bet, he took an extra shower and changed into slightly better clothes.
before he went out to knock on Jongdae and Minseok’s door.

He was disappointed that there was no answer to his knock. But then, it was 2:00 on a Thursday afternoon. They were probably at work, right?

He took a cue from them and left a sticky note on their door reading, “I’m home, --C.”

Then he took a nap.

The note waiting for him on the door when he woke up said, “I knocked about 40 times, sleepyhead” in the neater of the two handwritings.

Chanyeol noted a slightly more optimistic feeling than usual.

“Oh my god,” Minseok said, opening the door to Chanyeol’s knock. “How dumb are we? Can’t even get your fucking phone number, what a couple of dweebs.”

Then he looked at the bracelets on Chanyeol’s wrist, broke out into that smile that made his cheeks look like steamed buns, and put his arms around Chanyeol’s waist.

Chanyeol sighed and hugged Minseok back, resting his cheek on top of Minseok’s head.

Minseok popped him in the butt.

“Quit smashing my hair, dude.”

Before Chanyeol could do more than blink at him, Minseok grinned again and grabbed his wrist.

“Come in and keep me company while I’m cooking dinner.”

Chanyeol found a brain cell.

“I dunno, am I going to get to eat some of it?”

Minseok leered up and down.

“Maybe if you earn it,” he said.

Chanyeol felt his ears go hot, and he smiled. Encouragement was a super nice feeling. Even better was when Minseok propelled him into a stool at their kitchen island, said,

“That’s a little better,”

then stepped between his knees and kissed him.

Chanyeol didn’t have a lot of specific memories of his heat, other than some very vivid mental images of damp body parts and feeling overwhelmed. This kiss was different from any of the ones he half-remembered: soft and warm. A nice ‘hello’ kind of kiss that made him feel like his lungs had forgotten how to work. Minseok leaned back, grinned at the expression on his face, and tweaked his nose. He had zero idea how to respond.

Kindly, Minseok put him to work, but he hadn’t gotten very far into chopping up a carrot when Jongdae bustled in.

“Channie,” he yelled from the door.
He slid the last couple of feet across the floor on his socks, slamming pleasantly into Chanyeol’s shoulder and pecking him on the lips. Then he skated around the kitchen island to Minseok and kissed him a little more thoroughly.

It was a level of cute that Chanyeol couldn’t believe existed in actual real life. Also, he had mostly only seen Jongdae naked and erect, which was nothing to sneeze at, but,

“You’re wearing a suit.”

Jongdae grinned down at himself.

“I clean up okay, right?”

Minseok elbowed him.

“Shut up, Min, you picked this out for me.”

Minseok rolled his eyes.

“You clean up great,” Chanyeol said.

It was the absolute truth. Jongdae looked very alpha in his grey suit and green shirt. Very take-charge. Very bossy. The kind of thing that would make an omega in heat melt into a receptive puddle and would make a topping sort of omega who was not in heat want to wrestle.

And no matter who won that wrestling contest, everybody would come out ahead.

Uh, coming. From the head. As it were.

“Keep on staring, I don’t mind,” Jongdae said.

“I guess your meeting went well,” Minseok drawled.

He looked pointedly at Chanyeol’s cutting board. Chanyeol finished cutting up the carrot and humbly accepted the bok choy.

“Aw man, great,” Jongdae said.

He tossed his suit jacket across the room to the sofa and rolled his sleeves up over his forearms.

Chanyeol did not miss the fact that Minseok did not miss the fact that his ears went hot at the sight of them. The whole opening-a-bottle-of-wine thing totally distracted Chanyeol from the bok choy that he was now supposed to be chopping.

Somewhere in all of that, Chanyeol became aware that Jongdae was actually making a point, not just to Minseok, and he felt like a little bit of a jerk.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Can you say that again?”

Jongdae grinned, which didn’t help at all with the whole distraction thing, and set a full wine glass down in front of Chanyeol.

“Sorry, I know I get really technical,” he said. “We just got a new project at work, I’m really excited. I get to design the control relays for this neat solar array system on a new apartment building.”

Chanyeol handed Minseok the cutting board while he tried to make sense of that.
“What do you do for a living?”

Jongdae laughed – high and loud, and so happy-sounding that Chanyeol automatically smiled in response.

“I’m an electrical engineer,” he said. “So thank god I met you, if I really fuck something up, I know who to call.”

Chanyeol grinned at him.

“What about you?”

Minseok upped his murder beta game with his facial expression, all arched eyebrows and pursed lips. Adorable.

“I’m a god damn artist,” he said.

It was nice to join Jongdae in some laughter.

“That’s awesome!” Chanyeol said.

“You don’t even know,” Jongdae said. “He’s the most ridiculous artist imaginable.”

“Ice is a perfectly acceptable medium,” Minseok said.

“You carve shit up with chainsaws for wedding receptions,” Jongdae said. “And don’t even act like you have feelings about it, you just love the chainsaw part.”

“I use the full array of tools available to achieve my artistic goals,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol wanted to clap his hands together, but he also didn’t want to ruin the comedy routine.

“Whatever, love, you like chainsaws and ice picks, it’s all really creepy,” Jongdae said.

He looked at Chanyeol and waggled his eyebrows.

“And twice a week, he carves up dead stuff.”

“Excuse me,” Minseok growled, in a way that betas weren’t usually able to speak to one’s essential omega nature and cause the desire to lie down on the floor and show one’s neck, “I am an artisan butcher, Kim Jongdae, it is a craft, and I’ll thank you not to insult it.”

“Sure,” Jongdae said. “It’s just more chainsaws at the end of the day, but at least that job results in steak.”

“I am going to strap you down and not let you come for a week,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol fumbled, so as not to drop his wine glass on the floor.

“You aren’t,” Jongdae said with a smirk. “I had a great work day, it’s totally a reward night.”

Minseok turned back to the stove.

“It is not,” he said. “Ulsan plays Jeonbuk tonight.”

“Ugh, fucking football,” Jongdae groaned.
Aside from the way one of them would say or do something so hot every few minutes that Chanyeol briefly lost his ability to think, it was surprisingly comfortable to chat with the two of them. Jongdae set three places at their table and pulled on Chanyeol’s sleeve until he relocated. Minseok’s curry was tasty – if really mild, until Minseok grinned and passed over a little bowl of pepper paste while Jongdae made a rude sound into his wine glass. A couple of times, between flirty remarks and when his right wrist wasn’t in his line of sight, Chanyeol almost went so far as to kind of relax.

“Coming up on five years,” Jongdae said in answer to Chanyeol’s question about how long they’d been together.

Chanyeol tried not to let his sigh show. Five whole years. That sounded nice. And he had no direct experience, but maybe five years was about the time that you could play around for a little while just to spice things up. And then go back to your stable, long-term relationship. Yeah. That sounded really nice.

“You’re leaving out uni,” Minseok said.

Jongdae’s face went blotchy.

“You guys met in uni?” Chanyeol asked.

Because any story that made an alpha – especially one as good-looking as Jongdae, who was all cheekbones and square jaw and charisma – look so horrified was a story Chanyeol wanted to hear.

“Oh yes,” Minseok drawled. “I was the RA on his floor his first year. I got a ringside seat to Jongdae’s sexual awakening.”

“Fuck me,” Jongdae said, and fetched another bottle of wine.

“Don’t be so fussed. Why shouldn’t he hear this? He already knows you overcame most of your shortcomings.”

“Shortcomings?” Jongdae spluttered.

“For example, you finally realized that you’re super gay.”

Jongdae rolled his eyes while Chanyeol tried to remember the last time he had been so completely delighted.

“I am a normal amount of gay, thank you.”

“Dude,” Minseok said, “you literally weep for my dick on a regular basis.”

“In his defense, you have a great dick,” Chanyeol said, glad to get in on the fun.

Minseok grinned down at his lap and then across the table.

“I do, don’t I?”

“Can you please not encourage him?” Jongdae whined.

“So these shortcomings,” Chanyeol laughed. “You can’t be trying to tell me that Jongdae wasn’t cute back then.”

“Sure, he was cute,” Minseok said. “If your taste runs to loud babies with bad skin who are all elbow and have hair approximately the texture of steel wool.”
Jongdae groaned.

“I was eighteen! And alpha puberty is awful!”

“You were really extremely eighteen,” Minseok said, laughing.

“Hey! Not everyone can be cool and wise beyond their years, you jerk.”

But Jongdae’s scowl melted at the way Minseok squinched up his face and poked his lower lip out. Anybody would. It was boss-level adorable.

“If it makes you feel any better, I was this height when I was eighteen, but I only weighed about forty-seven kilos, and I had my hair in a buzz cut,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae paused, wine bottle held at an angle over his glass, staring off into the distance.

“It does, actually,” he said.

Minseok laughed.

“Forty-seven kilos? Could anybody actually see you when you turned sideways?”

“Well, yeah, dude, there was the shade cast by his ears.”

That didn’t exactly go the way Chanyeol had hoped. But it went the way he probably should’ve expected.

Except that Jongdae stepped close and tipped Chanyeol’s head up, smiled down at him.

“Look at how well we grew into ourselves,” he murmured.

“Indeed,” Minseok said from the other side of the table while they kissed.

It was a little more involved than Minseok’s hello kiss, if still not too heavy. But Jongdae’s hand was pressed up firmly against the back of Chanyeol’s neck, and his mouth was so warm.

“That’s worth watching,” Minseok added when Jongdae stood up and filled everyone’s glass.

Chanyeol tried to remember what they were talking about.

“So you were actually in charge of all the betas in the middle of each floor to keep the alphas and omegas apart?” he asked.

Minseok rolled his eyes.

“I mostly wanted the excuse for a smaller class load, but no fucking way was that worth it in a first-year dorm. By the end of the first semester, every damn omega on the floor went on the same heat cycle. It was a nightmare.”

“It was amazing,” Jongdae said, looking dreamy.

“No,” Chanyeol said.

“Oh yes,” Jongdae said.

“This asshole climbed across the balconies outside of the damn building to the omega lounge.”
“Hey, not just me,” Jongdae laughed.

“Yeah, that makes it so much better that there were three of you.”

This was the kind of thing that Chanyeol had heard rumors about his whole college career, but he’d never thought it actually happened.

“Why do they even organize college dorms like that?” he mused.

Most people by far were betas. Wouldn’t it just be easier to house alphas all together in one place and omegas in another, without all that potential for trouble?

“So people can learn how to behave,” Minseok said, looking grumpy but sounding amused. “In the hope that by the time they’re out in the work place, they don’t do dumb shit like leave their windows open when they go into heat.”

Oh. Well. When he put it that way.

“Not that I’m not thankful,” Minseok said, curling his foot around Chanyeol’s ankle under the table until Chanyeol looked up at him.

“For real,” Jongdae said.

The way they both stared at him brought a few heat moments to mind. The way Jongdae blinked slowly over the edge of his wineglass had to be on purpose.

“So yeah,” Jongdae said when he lowered his glass. “Me and two other alphas behind a locked door with fifteen omegas in heat. It was a wild and happy time.”

“A wild and happy thirty-five minutes,” Minseok drawled.

Chanyeol choked on his wine.

“Thirty-five minutes is puh-lenty of time when you’re eighteen,” Jongdae said, then spoiled his snooty tone by laughing.

“You have no idea how hard I’ve tried to drink to forget,” Minseok said, “but I can still see it in my mind. All those horny, oily kids, and Jongdae’s flat little ass.”

“You are so full of shit,” Jongdae said. “My ass is awesome.”

“It is now, after years of me making you go to the gym.”

“And you’re only two years older than me!”

Chanyeol was laughing so hard his belly hurt. Even if this wasn’t actually a date, it was still the best date he’d ever been on.

“Anyway, you must’ve seen something you liked, since you let me think I’d seduced you the next semester.”

“I just figured it was my turn,” Minseok said, grinning, “since you’d already run through the rest of the dorm by then.”

Jongdae arched one eyebrow and shrugged.
“Wow, your experience of college was really different from mine,” Chanyeol said. “I thought I was hot stuff just because I never had a solo heat.”

“Don’t feel too bad, Channie, his grades were shit.”

“Then you left me broken-hearted, and my grief catapulted me to fifth in my class.”

Chanyeol felt his mouth make a little o, and Minseok rolled his eyes.

“What happened?”

Jongdae grinned. Minseok looked at him, and he shook his head. Minseok groaned.

“I hated college,” he said. “Like, studying fine art was pure bullshit from beginning to end. You had to like stuff in the same way the professors liked it, or fail. You had to use the approved media in the approved way or fail. And don’t even get me started on how I was required to take fucking algebra, which I didn’t need for sculpture, and not geometry, which I did need. How I had to take a chemistry class, but not learn anything about pigments or metal properties. Or I could take a physics class that wouldn’t tell me anything about how to counterbalance mixed media to make a piece stable. It was stupid.”

Chanyeol had always thought studying art meant stuff like clutching your hair over a ratty sketchbook and standing around in museums. He was pretty sure what made the whole speech so sexy was Minseok’s fierce expression and hand-waving, and not the bit about chemistry. Even though chemistry had been his own major.

“So he dropped out and left me,” Jongdae said, sighing dramatically but with a grin.

Minseok didn’t grin back.

“Man, I was not going to tie you down while you were in fucking college. We’ve had this conversation a hundred times.”

Jongdae’s expression went serious, and he put his wineglass down gently. He reached over and twined his fingers with Minseok’s. He waited until Minseok looked up at him. Chanyeol wanted to shift in his seat, feeling shy to witness this. At the same time, he ached a little. He couldn’t remember the last time anybody held his hand like that.

“Too far?” Jongdae said. “I’m sorry.”

Minseok’s shoulders dropped, and he made a slow, crooked smile.

“Nah, I got ramped up,” he said.

They smiled at each other for a long, quiet moment. Chanyeol was so jealous he could taste it. He finished his wine to chase the bitterness away.

“Maybe I should go,” he said.

“Aw, no!” Jongdae said, at the same time as Minseok’s “why?”

“I don’t want to interrupt your evening. Dinner was great, though.”

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, “don’t be weird.”

He reached over, hooked one finger through the two bracelets on Chanyeol’s wrist, and tugged a
little. Chanyeol definitely had no idea what that meant, but somehow it managed to make his ears go hot anyway, like everything else did.

“Besides, I need you to entertain me during Min’s dumb football game.”

“Heathen,” Minseok said.

“Oh, well, okay.”

While he helped clean up from dinner, Jongdae kept looking up at him, with an expression on his face that Chanyeol couldn’t read. But he put his arm around Chanyeol’s waist and squeezed when the dishes were done.

Minseok emerged from the back hallway wearing a sleeveless Ulsan jersey, athletic shorts, and black socks with white stripes at the calf. He had his hair pulled back into a little clip. Chanyeol had seen way more than just Minseok’s arm muscles, but something about seeing them in that jersey while he opened a can of beer made one a little crazy.

He looked over Minseok’s head at Jongdae and flapped his hands. Jongdae clenched his fists and mouthed “I KNOW.”

“I recognize that the goods are extremely hot,” Minseok said. “But you do not touch the goods during a football match.”

Jongdae groaned.

“Similarly, you keep noise to a minimum during a football match.”

He turned and glared at Chanyeol. Chanyeol nodded. The whole grumpy thing was very sexy.

They all sat on the sofa together, Minseok wedged into one corner, cross-legged and swatting every time Jongdae tried to poke at him. Chanyeol didn’t really follow either team, but he settled in to cheer along for Ulsan.

Except that after the first few minutes of trying to annoy Minseok, Jongdae transferred all his wiggling to the other side. He started out playing with the bracelets, sliding them around on Chanyeol’s wrist so that his fingers brushed along the sensitive skin there. Just when that was starting to give Chanyeol ideas, Jongdae escalated to rubbing his face against Chanyeol’s shoulder, smiling up through his ridiculously long eyelashes and looking like an invitation to sin. Ulsan did something that made Minseok curse, but Chanyeol missed it, what with all the mooning down at the alpha hanging off his right arm.

“Go ahead,” Minseok said, and then “shit,” though the latter was apparently at the TV.

Jongdae grinned and climbed into Chanyeol’s lap.

Chanyeol wondered whether this was maybe a date, after all. Between the jokes, and the flirting, he kept forgetting to bring up how they should probably debrief after his heat. And here Jongdae was, kissing him, and they were supposed to be quiet during the game, so he couldn’t bring it up now. Better to just go along with it. Right?

Especially given the way Jongdae had his hands cupped around Chanyeol’s jaw and smiled at him between kisses. It would be rude to interrupt that with chatting. Rude to interrupt the way Jongdae crept forward until his knees were pressed on either side of Chanyeol’s hips. The way he hummed and sucked on Chanyeol’s bottom lip.
“Defend, you motherfuckers,” Minseok snarled.

Jongdae lifted his head and rolled his eyes. His grin was so warm that Chanyeol returned it as if doing so was the easiest thing in the world.

“Don’t stop on my account,” Minseok said.

Jongdae dove back in, more eager, so that Chanyeol had to open his mouth wider, tip his head back, allow Jongdae inside.

“No fucking,” Minseok said, deep but with laughter in it.

Jongdae growled a little and drummed his feet against the sofa.

“Channie can have your thighs if he wants, or you can suck him off.”

Chanyeol suffered a series of small internal explosions.

“Am I allowed to come?” Jongdae asked.

Minseok shrugged.

“That’s up to Chanyeol.”

Jongdae tilted his head and stuck his bottom lip out, blinking a lot and wiggling in Chanyeol’s lap just enough to make him plant his feet on the floor and tilt his hips up. Chanyeol leaned forward to catch his mouth.

“The ball is right there, moron!” Minseok shouted.

Jongdae snickered and sat back. He held Chanyeol’s gaze the whole time he slowly unbuttoned his shirt, only closing his eyes when Chanyeol wrapped his hands around Jongdae’s waist. Jongdae leaned in and licked up the side of his neck; Chanyeol clamped his mouth around a groan.

“What do you want, Channie?” Jongdae murmured, close enough that his low voice rumbled in Chanyeol’s ear.

It really was amazing, the turn this evening had taken. He had approximately two hundred questions about all this, including what the hell was going on with their relationship dynamics and where he was supposed to fit into them, except that Jongdae’s tongue kept getting in his mouth and preventing him from speaking. And that had the side effect of turning his brain off and his dick on, which kind of made all those questions seem less pressing than. Uh. Pressing up against Jongdae.

“Mouth?” he said.

“Good choice,” Minseok said, then, “aw, for fuck’s sake, come on!”

To his knowledge, Chanyeol had never met an alpha willing to go down on an omega outside of a heat situation.

By contrast, Jongdae slid to the floor and unzipped Chanyeol’s fly with a look on his face like he was opening a present on Christmas morning.

“Oh, look at you, my favorite new friend,” Jongdae said once he had his hands around Chanyeol’s dick.
Minseok laughed. Chanyeol had to cover his face with his hands for a minute to try to figure out whether it was super cute, super weird, or maybe both. His moment came to a sudden end when Jongdae plunged right in with a lot of tongue and a lot of suction.

And then Minseok hissed “quiet,” so Chanyeol had to stuff his own forearm in his mouth.

Jongdae certainly treated his dick like a long-lost friend. The only reason Chanyeol didn’t come embarrassingly fast was because Minseok yelled a handful of curses and jumped off the sofa. Chanyeol was distracted, and then Jongdae was too busy laughing around him to pay attention for a minute.

But then Jongdae drove down, sucking hard and hand moving fast. Chanyeol clamped down on his own arm to stay quiet, letting his other hand clutch Jongdae’s shoulder, feeling all the overlapping ridges of mating scars under his fingers, and sooner than he would’ve liked, it all got to be too much, and his skin felt too small to contain him, and he muffled his own groan while Jongdae swallowed everything he had to give.

He looked so pleased with himself when he pulled off and rested his head against Chanyeol’s thigh that Chanyeol combed his fingers through that nice dark hair. One evening after a torrid heat seemed way too soon for the level of warmth currently trying to settle into Chanyeol’s insides. It was kind of hard to be stern with himself, though, post-orgasm and being smiled at by someone so handsome.

“He do a good job, Chan?” Minseok asked still staring at the TV.

Chanyeol scratched lightly at Jongdae’s scalp.

“Oh yes.”

“Good.”

Minseok leaned over and dug around in a drawer of the little table next to the sofa, then tossed something over.

“You can get him ready for me, then. It’s almost halftime.”

“Yay,” Jongdae said, and climbed back into Chanyeol’s lap.

The object in his hand was a small bottle of lube.

A very, very surprising evening.

Chanyeol had dated some alphas who gave him a great knot during his heat and argued with him about topping outside it, and a number of betas who liked switching and helped him out with heats without much enthusiasm.

Here he was with a warm and friendly alpha in his lap, shedding pants and socks, grinning up at him, with the memory of his knot still a pleasant twinge every time Chanyeol sat down the wrong way.

“Oh, you useless fucks,” Minseok said.

And that was a whole other thing.

“Hey,” Jongdae said, “you gonna finger me or what?”

It was so hot, watching all the facial expressions Jongdae made trying to stay quiet while Chanyeol opened him up. Even the times when Minseok yelled at the television and they stopped to grin at
each other and laugh silently contributed to the whole aura of excellence that made Chanyeol unable to stop his mouth from curling up into a smile.

Chanyeol knew he had overly large hands, and Jongdae was a teeny little alpha, so he tried to be slow and gentle. And anyway, it was so fun to watch Jongdae squirm, bite his lip, and stare up at him under furrowed brows. Chanyeol moved his fingers slowly, feeling Jongdae’s body relax around them, and actually let himself hope that they’d do this again in a different configuration.

“How is he, Dae?” Minseok asked.

“He’s good, Min,” Jongdae said, sounding breathless. “His fingers are so long.”

Of course Chanyeol had to live up to the compliment. He pulled out every trick he’d ever learned, until he found the good spot, and Jongdae made a high sound in the back of his throat, arching his back. He looked so good. Chanyeol wasn’t even in heat and he was starting to get interested in another round.

By the time Minseok stood up, Chanyeol had had three fingers pumping in Jongdae for several minutes, and Jongdae was glassy-eyed in his lap, breathing hard. Minseok smiled at Chanyeol, kissed his cheek, leaning in to grab the lube bottle. Minseok maneuvered Jongdae up onto his feet, leaning with his hands on Chanyeol’s legs, their faces close together.

So Chanyeol got to watch Jongdae’s face when Minseok entered him – the way he turned red, bit his lip, and twisted his head to one side, then exhaled sharply. He looked so beautiful that Chanyeol leaned in to kiss him, holding Jongdae’s head steady when Minseok started to move.

After a few thrusts, Jongdae had himself braced against Chanyeol’s shoulders, his head nestled under Chanyeol’s ear.

It was so weird – but great – to feel Jongdae’s mouth open and breath hard against his neck, hear those small sounds in his ear, and the way Jongdae’s torso moved against him, while Minseok stared at him, hair flopping over his forehead and a small smile playing on his lips.

After one hard thrust, Jongdae whined. Minseok and Chanyeol grinned at one another. Chanyeol freed one hand and reached down to pull at Jongdae’s cock, making Minseok grin even wider. Jongdae’s body rippled as he tried to arch up onto his toes and he moaned against Chanyeol’s neck.

“Chan,” Jongdae whispered, “Min, oh.”

And there was that troublesome warmth in Chanyeol’s chest again, entirely inappropriate. He compensated by twisting his wrist a little, which made Jongdae sob once.

“Did Chanyeol say you could come?” Minseok said. “I don’t recall that you have permission.”

Chanyeol felt Jongdae tense up.

“You can,” he whispered, and Jongdae kissed the side of his neck, sloppy.

“Give me your other hand, Chan,” Minseok said.

When Chanyeol reached up, Minseok wrapped their hands together and leaned back a little. Chanyeol tried to match Minseok’s rhythm with his other hand. Jongdae dug his fingers hard into Chanyeol’s shoulders, tossing his head a little until he went stiff and moaned in the back of his throat, coming all over Chanyeol’s hand and shirt. Minseok grinned wide and squeezed Chanyeol’s hand hard, and it wasn’t long until he threw his head back, making a groan that was almost a laugh.
When Minseok curled his arm around Jongdae’s waist and leaned in to kiss his back, Jongdae purred in Chanyeol’s ear. Chanyeol mostly hoped this wouldn’t be a one-time occurrence. They were both so hot, and they put him so off-balance. It was great.

Minseok patted Jongdae’s hip, pulling his shorts back up as he walked away. Jongdae sank to his knees and put his head back on Chanyeol’s leg, rubbing his face on Chanyeol’s knee and smiling with half-closed eyes. Minseok came back with a wet towel for Jongdae and a shirt for Chanyeol.

“Thanks for indulging me,” Minseok said, leaning in to kiss Chanyeol with an amount of teeth and force that left Chanyeol gasping.

Ulsan lost the football match, but they spent the second half sprawled together, Jongdae naked and pliant in the middle, dozing off a couple of times between pulling one or the other of them down for a kiss. The sofa wasn’t really big enough for all three of them to lie down, but by the end of the match he had his head up against Minseok’s side, Jongdae curled up against his front, with only his feet hanging off the far corner, and it was about as comfortable as he’d ever been. Even Minseok didn’t seem able to work up more than a disappointed sigh about the final score.

“I guess I’d better put this sleepy alpha to bed,” Minseok said when the program switched to the news.

The fondness in Minseok’s expression was so tender that Chanyeol had a second where his breath hitched. Especially since Minseok’s expression didn’t change when he looked up.

“Can I take you guys to dinner tomorrow?” he blurted.

Minseok smiled wide. Jongdae hummed and turned over, clutching at Chanyeol without opening his eyes.

“Yeah, that sounds great,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol extricated himself from groggy Jongdae with several kisses and application of his size advantage. Minseok even walked him to the door and pulled him down for a kiss so warm and slow that Chanyeol almost asked to stay.

“Glad you came over,” Minseok said, pressing their foreheads together.

“See you tomorrow,” Chanyeol said.

Next door in his bed, Chanyeol’s natural tendency to assume the worst tried to pick a fight with his satisfaction with the evening. Satisfaction won.

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 3

There was a lot to do during the day, which saved Chanyeol from thinking himself into a mope spiral. He’d gone straight from heat to work to – fucking his neighbors again, and his apartment was a wreck. Four days post-heat, the pile of pillows was truly rank, not only from bodily fluids of several kinds but also various spilled drinks, snack detritus, and yucky clean-up towels. More than a few knotted-off condoms.

So gross. Chanyeol thought several times that it would be way easier just to just burn and sterilize everything. But he cleaned, laundered, and scrubbed until his apartment looked like an adult lived in it and it smelled better. Going from a work shift to an intense heat straight back to work had made him tired all the way down into his bones, so he didn’t try to talk himself out of a nap afterward.

When he went out in the afternoon to check his mail, yet another sticky note was stuck to his door. Chanyeol laughed a little to see it. Oof, he was really working up a crush on his neighbors.

The note made it worse: the front had a cartoon drawing of a screaming face, with “quit being so cute, you keep making us stupid” written underneath. On the back were “M” and “J,” with a phone number written by each.

He stood right there in the hallway and entered both numbers in his phone. He reminded himself that he was a brave public servant unafraid to run full speed into burning buildings and sent each of them a request for a group chat. His back pocket buzzed while he was climbing the stairs back to his front door.

“Hey! Glad you saw our note. Friday morning’s a gym day, it was way too early to knock,” from Jongdae’s number.

“Thanks for sparing me,” Chanyeol typed back.

It wasn’t even a minute before the response popped up: a laughing-with-tongue-hanging-out emoji three times and “FOR NOW.”

The nice thing about texting was that Chanyeol could make a happy, high-pitched sound and flap his hands around without anyone knowing about it.

He sent back the screaming emoji.

“Min keeps his phone off at work,” Jongdae texted a couple of minutes later. “It’s terrible. I’m SO GLAD to have you to distract me during stupid work meetings.”

“My life is one of service.”

Shit, his thumb hit send before he could delete that.

“God dammit Chanyeol, if I weren’t sitting between my boss and her boss, I would DETAIL what I’m thinking about right now.”

Which meant that Chanyeol got to thinking about it too, of course – a complicated mental picture of Jongdae’s ass clenching around his fingers, his hand gripping the back of Chanyeol’s neck, and one of those times during his heat when they had gotten caught up in staring at one another and kissing for who knows how long.
The stupid-making definitely went both ways.

“Sorry,” he typed.

Got a yellow heart back.

“Gotta pay attention now. Ought to both be home & ready around 6:15, okay?”

“OK.”

A couple hours of guitar practice let his brain work itself out in the background and the rest of him calm down. Between the sticky notes and the surprise after-dinner sex last night, even Chanyeol could admit that it seemed like Minseok and Jongdae liked him at least a little bit. They’d both looked really happy to see their bracelets on his wrist. That made going to dinner Officially A Date: but since they’d already fucked each other like a hundred times, he didn’t even have to be nervous about it.

But he also wasn’t stupid. They’d been together a long time. They’d marked him, sure: and he’d always be proud to wear the marks of their fangs on his shoulders. His first mating scars, which would always make them special, no matter who else might come along in the future to (he hoped) add more. But he couldn’t lay more on that than was reasonable. Eventually, they’d want to go back to themselves, their nice bonded pair.

All he had to do was keep his own feelings in order. Just enjoy the fact that a couple of really nice, ridiculously hot guys wanted to play around with or maybe date him for a little while. He was capable of having fun. They were all adults. And neither Jongdae nor Minseok seemed like the type who’d try to screw around with his emotions. They’d probably even find a way to break things off with him and still be friends.

He could do this. He could be a grown-up about it, and just have a good time.

Baekhyun called.

“Why do I date an ER doctor?” he whined.

“You’re weak in the face of dimples.”

Baek groaned.

“It’s true, they’re my fatal flaw.”

“Yixing’s back on the night shift, I guess?”

“Ugh, I need to convince somebody to take that software that they use to figure out shipping packages around and have them use it to sync our schedules up. We’re both mostly three-on, four-off, there has to be a way to have more than like two days off together in a month.”

This complaint had been going on since about ten minutes after Baek and Xing had met.

“It does suck, dude.”

“Come cheer up your best friend. I’m thinking wings, pizza, infinite beer, and me kicking your butt at Battlefront.”

Chanyeol grinned at the shock Baekhyun was about to get – usually by this point in the conversation he was already putting his shoes on.
“Can’t, Baek. I’m taking my neighbors out to dinner.”

“You’re what? Oh HO, you mean the two hot neighbors? Surprise heat partner neighbors? *Mating scar* neighbors?”

Chanyeol figured he was about red enough to pass for a brake light by this point.

“That would be them.”

“Park Chanyeol, are you taking *two men* out on a date?”

“Yes I am.”

“My puppy is all grown up! I’m so proud of you! I figured by this time you’d be crawling in and out your bathroom window to avoid them in the hallway, while wearing those courting bracelets until they fall off.”

“First off, you’re an asshole. Second, I can’t fit through my bathroom window. Third, I don’t think they’d let me avoid them. I got back from the firehouse yesterday and my door was covered in sticky notes.”

“That is so cute!” Baekhyun shouted. “Pesty but adorable, I approve of them already.”

“Yeah I had dinner at their house last night,” he said, going for broke.

Baek was his best friend, after all. And he wanted to talk about it. He wanted to jump up and down, and maybe scream one time a little bit.

“Hey now. Were you dinner?” Baek said.

“I guess technically Jongdae was?”

Baekhyun laughed so hard that Chanyeol had to pull the phone away from his ear.

“Which one is that?”

“The alpha.”

“Dude! You found your unicorn! The one true gay alpha switch! You might have to kill that boyfriend.”

“There’s no way,” Chanyeol said. “For one thing, he would kill me first, he’s super scary. For another thing, he’s extremely perverted and strong, and his favorite food is marshmallows.”

“Oh my god, you smell like marshmallows.”

“I’m saying.”

“Yeol,” Baek said, sounding serious for once in a decade, “they sound terrific. God knows I want you to have fun and be happy, and you deserve it. Just don’t – jump in with both feet too fast, okay? You gotta protect yourself too, you know?”

Chanyeol had to laugh a little.

“I just spent half the afternoon having that very conversation with myself,” he said.
“Good. And remember. If they aren’t good to you, we’ll set your building on fire and save every unit except theirs.”

“Right!”

He ran his choice of restaurant by Baek (with approval), and Baek bossed him into an outfit both a little fancier and a lot tighter than what he had been planning to wear.

“Look, man, you are totally capable of looking like a nineteen course meal when you put in a little effort. Put in a little effort. You already know they want to fuck you, why not make them thirsty?”

“Thanks, I think?”

“Don’t act squirrelly with me, I’ve helped you out with heats since we were nothing but acne, braces, and terrible hair. You’re weirdly emotional about sex, but you have a huge and excellent dick. Be proud of it!”

Chanyeol laughed.

“Jesus, Baek!”

“Hey, man, threesomes are a lot of fun, but they’re exhausting. The person causing the most thirst is the one who has to do the least amount of work.”

“Whoa, wait a minute. You and Xing?”

“Oh yeah,” Baekhyun drawled. “Last summer he and I put our considerable powers of persuasion to use on Joonmyun.”

“Our Joonmyun?”

“Yes.”

“Our supervisor Joonmyun?”

“The very one.”

Chanyeol had to shake his head to let the world settle into its new configuration.

“That’s. Wasn’t that weird at work for a while, after?”

“Yeollie, not everybody gets all squishy on their insides about sex like you do. Joonie came over, we spent a very sweaty weekend together, and the only effect that it had on work was that he brought in donuts every day for about three weeks straight.”

Chanyeol remembered that. It had been great.

“Was it – fun?”

Baek laughed again.

“Of course it was, dummy! I’m not giving you any details, though, because I know too much about your overly active imagination.”

Yeah, okay, that was probably a good point.
“But you didn’t keep on with it?”

“Nah. Never intended to. We just all thought it sounded fun. Joonmyun likes things a little more complicated than Xing and I do, anyway. That shit’s fun short-term, but mostly Xing and I just want to get going, get done, and get some damn sleep.”

Which Chanyeol knew very well, having finally figured out a couple of years ago why he was always the one who got sent out to the convenience store to replenish snacks – usually about a fifteen-minute round trip. The one time he had hustled to get back through the rain, he had gotten an eyeful of Yixing’s many charms.

“Huh.”

“I also have an overly active imagination, you know, and I don’t have to work with your hot neighbors. So spill, adventure boy.”

Probably Baekhyun would give him an “I told you to be careful” kind of frown if he knew how Chanyeol didn’t want to talk about last night, and the way Minseok seemed to be in charge, and how he didn’t really know what that meant. Maybe later, when he understood better.

Anyway, the story Baek would really want to hear was from his heat, when they had both been in him at once.

“Whoa, what the hell, I can’t believe you didn’t die of orgasm-induced heart failure!”

“You and me both.”

“I knew you had to have some good reason for being one and a half times the size of a normal person.”

“As reasons go, it’s very compelling.”

“No shit, man. I think I feel competitive.”

That’s the point when Chanyeol laughed at him and rang off. He had to get ready. For his date.

He followed Baek’s advice and put in some effort: not only wriggling into his nicest super skinny jeans and wearing the dark red shirt Baek had told him to wear (“top three buttons undone, Chanyeol, don’t be a fucking nerd”) but also fussing with his hair so that it made a comma across his forehead. He pulled out a necklace, given to him by one of the previous alphas he’d been most unhappy to see leave. But it was a cool-looking silver shape on a leather thong that sat just in the vee of his unbuttoned shirt. Of course he wore the courting bracelets.

He may have put on a tiny bit of scent-enhancing cologne.

“Jesus fuck,” Jongdae said when Chanyeol opened the door.

“Easy there, church-goer,” Minseok said.

Jongdae clutched his arm.

“I’m going to be in confession for an hour next time. Are you sure we have to go to dinner?”

Chanyeol grinned and remembered not to mess with his hair. Anyway, they were ones to talk, both
also in admirably tight pants, hair pushed up off their foreheads. Jongdae had on one of those blue and white Russian sailor—looking shirts, and Minseok was all in black. Wearing a choker. They both had in earrings. Chanyeol wondered whether maybe he had died during his heat after all.

“Considering that when we introduced ourselves, you were naked with an erection the size of a baseball bat, I didn’t think you could look a lot better,” Minseok said. “I’m delighted to be proved wrong.”

Jongdae stepped forward, looking like he had a few kissing sorts of things on his mind, but Minseok pulled him back.

“We have a dinner date, babe.”

He winked at Chanyeol when Jongdae whined.

The restaurant was only a short walk away, and it was nice to walk with them while Jongdae chattered about his work day, the way he would bump into Minseok, then Chanyeol, like a drunk reeling back and forth. It was just a grill place, but with a little nicer décor and a couple of tables shoved in a back corner that weren’t quite so loud. Chanyeol led them to one of these tables and ordered drinks, ducked his head at the way they both grinned at him over the menus.

“So,” Jongdae said when the server had taken their orders, “bring a lot of dates here?”

“You’re as smooth as sandpaper,” Minseok said, and dodged Jongdae’s fist.

“You guys are the first,” Chanyeol said.

He laughed.

“And only partly because it just opened six months ago.”

Jongdae and Minseok frowned at each other in a deeply weird way.

“Six months?” Minseok said. “Are you not. Uh. Interested in a relationship?”

Jeez, starting in with the hard questions right away. Chanyeol knocked back a shot of soju for strength.

“Sure I am. I’ve just had a bit of a dry spell. Weirdly, there aren’t a lot of people who get all excited about an omega half a meter taller than usual.”

It was very flattering, the way they both glared.

“I guess the world is full of stupid jackasses,” Jongdae said after a minute.

“I’ll drink to that,” Minseok said.

They all clinked glasses and drank, and the food came, so for a few minutes they were busy laying out beef and pork on the grill and passing side dishes and utensils around.

Then they all stared at one another for a minute.

“This is weird, right?” Jongdae said, grinning. “We skipped all the preliminaries, and now where the hell do we start?”

It was just what Chanyeol had thought too. Knowing he wasn’t alone made all that seem less strange
and scary. He grinned and stuck out his hand.

“Hi, I’m Park Chanyeol,” he said, “I’m twenty-seven, and I grew up across the river.”

They both smiled at him and shook his hand.

“Kim Minseok, twenty-eight, from Guri.”

“Kim Jongdae, twenty-six, goddammit, from Siheung.”

“Well, we’ve sorted out who has to pour, anyhow,” Minseok said.

It was good to laugh. And from there it was easy to start talking about their families.

“My grandma is an alpha, but I’m the first omega in my family in like five generations,” Chanyeol said. “So nobody really knew what to do with me. I mean, I was too horrified to talk to my dad about anything, so my poor mom had to hear all of it. I do not even want to remember that shopping trip we took for heat supplies.”

“Oh god,” Jongdae groaned, laughing.

Minseok had his hands over his mouth, and his eyes were crinkled up into little crescents so cute that he didn’t look capable of murder at all.

“You guys. She asked my best friend over to help me out, the first time.”

“Oh god!” Jongdae shouted.

“How many minutes into that did your friendship end?” Minseok laughed.

“Nah, you met him, at the fire house,” Chanyeol said. “Baekhyun’s capacity for the ridiculous is limitless. We’ve been best friends since kindergarten. I don’t think I could get rid of him if I tried.”

Jongdae wasn’t laughing anymore.

“He help you out with heats a lot?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“Yeah, I guess. I mean, even an obnoxious best friend is better than solo.”

“I don’t think I like him.”

“What?”

Jongdae sat back in his chair and glared.

“You tally up every heat he ever helped you with, and once we’ve exceeded that number, I’ll think about maybe liking him.”

Which was ridiculous, while at the same time making Chanyeol want to knock Jongdae down and kiss him. He looked at Minseok.

“I think that sounds reasonable. By that point we’ll have had, what, years to wear you down and convince you of our merits?”

Chanyeol wondered whether he were capable of knocking both of them down. His wingspan was
pretty wide, but alas he only had one mouth with which to kiss.

It had been a really, really long time since he’d been on a date with anybody willing to spout that kind of romantic nonsense. He could eat it up with a spoon.

“But that can’t have been all the time,” Minseok said. “Like, no mom is so open-minded to let her kid spend several days straight banging in her house four times a year. Especially a family without a lot of omegas in it.”

“Yeah, I went to omega summer camp every year of middle and high school, so that cut things down by one. And they give you a very vivid education about how to handle it yourself.”

“Omega summer camp!” Jongdae shrieked, but Minseok nodded.

“My sister went to that too.”

Jongdae eventually got hold of himself.

“How high are the walls around that place?”

“Curfew was very strictly enforced, and if you were in heat, curfew was twenty-four—seven,” Chanyeol said.

“My family’s almost all betas too,” Minseok said. “Me and my sister are outliers because I couldn’t bring myself to do anything sensible for a living and she’s an omega. She really liked that camp.”

“Yeah, there were a bunch of kids who were assholes about it at school. It was nice to hang around with people who got it.” Chanyeol said. “That we’re not, like, in a perpetual state of freak out, and we actually give a shit who we spend our heats with, and that there’s a difference between being upset and being overwhelmed.”

They both looked so serious to hear that. Had he been stupid? Chanyeol played back what he’d said. Had he said something rude?

“What does that mean, difference between upset and overwhelmed?” Minseok asked.

“Just like – you saw a few times, how I would cry. Close to and during heats, or sometimes when you’re with somebody you have a really strong bond with, it’s like you just – feel a lot. And sometimes it gets to be too much, and it comes out as crying. Not that your feelings are hurt, or anything. It’s just that you have too many of them. Kind of like when alphas punch stuff.”

They both stared at him some more.

“Excuse me,” Minseok said, and walked outside.

Oh shit.

“No, Channie, calm down,” Jongdae said. “That’s not about you.”

For a second there, Chanyeol thought he might provide an example of his little speech. Which was weird, because he barely knew them, they shouldn’t be able to make him cry. Jongdae moved his chair closer and rubbed his hand up and down Chanyeol’s arm. It helped.

“He got in a fight with his sister’s boyfriend, maybe about eight months ago? They were at some family thing and she started crying, and he assumed the worst. Things have been pretty cold between them ever since, it’s been hard on him.”
“Oh.”

“If that’s what it was, you really helped, Channie. That’s a good thing.”

Chanyeol nodded. He kept feeling like he was tripping over himself, with them, but here Jongdae was, rubbing his arm and pouring him another glass of soju, leaning close while they drank.

Here Minseok was, striding back through the restaurant, eyes on Chanyeol the whole time, until he leaned around the grill to grasp his chin and kiss him, right out in public and everything, his mouth a little rough.

“Thank you,” he whispered into Chanyeol’s mouth before he sat down.

Jongdae was grinning wide.

“Everything okay?”

“Yeah,” Minseok said. “She was willing to agree with me that I’m an asshole. We’re gonna have lunch on Monday.”

Jongdae curled his hand around Minseok’s elbow.

“I’m really glad, love.”

The way that Jongdae kept smiling and Minseok kept tilting his head to look over and blink slowly was not helping one bit with Chanyeol keeping his emotions in check.

“This is great,” Minseok said after a minute or so. “I’ve really missed all those family gatherings where thirty different people ask me whether I’m ‘still doing that artist thing’ and when I plan to do something normal. Thanks, Chan.”

“What do they call normal? I could probably hook you up with a spot at the firefighting academy.”

Minseok laughed.

“That’s no good. They’re all mortgage bankers and lawyers and crap. I would literally rather die.”

“You even can, now!” Jongdae said. “I’ll have Chanyeol to comfort me, so I’ll be fine.”

Jongdae tried to dodge Minseok’s fist and was unsuccessful. Baekhyun was going to love jumping in on all this teasing.

“You say that like you’re the one I’m here for,” he said, pursing his lips at Jongdae.

Minseok flat-out giggled, and a little part of Chanyeol’s soul detached itself and floated up to heaven, playing a tiny harp.

“You’ll pay for that later, omega,” Jongdae growled.

“I hope so,” Chanyeol said, then shook himself all over, which made them both laugh.

His plan to keep his feelings in check was definitely headed toward total failure.

“What about your family?” Chanyeol asked, nudging Jongdae’s foot when everyone had emptied and filled their plates and there was another round cooking on the grill.
That was not among the things he would’ve expected to kill the mood.

“Why ruin this nice date?” Jongdae said after a minute.

Minseok took his hand. Chanyeol wondered whether he was allowed to take the other one, and didn’t, just in case.

“Nothing’s getting ruined, here,” Minseok said gently.

“Definitely not,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae looked up at the ceiling and blinked a lot, and Chanyeol was almost tempted to think that he was blinking away a couple of tears, if alphas did that sort of thing.

“There’s a lot of alphas in my family,” he said. “The really traditional kind. Most of my dad’s side of the family. My dad, my brother, and me. My mom’s an omega.”

Chanyeol cringed.

“By ‘really traditional,’ you mean -?”

“I mean I don’t like the way her own husband and son treat my mom like she’s something less, and justify it to themselves on account of a bunch of bullshit none of us can help because of our fucking hormones,” he said, his voice fierce and low.

“And you’re a huge mama’s boy,” Minseok said, but softly, his thumb stroking Jongdae’s hand.

“My mother. Is delightful,” Jongdae gritted.

“Your mother is a wonderful person, who knows damn well that she’s welcome in our guest room any minute of any day and chooses to be where she is because she’s a grown-up. That’s not your fault, Jongdae.”

Jongdae ducked his head, looking so upset that Chanyeol didn’t care if he wasn’t allowed. He scooted closer and pressed up against Jongdae’s shoulder.

It was nice to let Jongdae lean on him, watching Minseok’s thumb move back and forth, until Jongdae took a deep breath.

“How bad is it?” Chanyeol asked, barely above a whisper, in case Jongdae wanted to pretend not to hear it.

Jongdae shrugged against him.

“I mean, they’re not abusive. If they were, she would be living in our guest room, I don’t care what anybody says. I just hate how they don’t – value her.”

He let them smash up against him for another couple of breaths, then said “okay” and shook them off. Chanyeol caught Minseok’s eye while Jongdae drank, and Minseok nodded in a way that soothed him.

“Anyhow,” Jongdae said after a long moment, “that’s what I mean when I say I hate biology.”

Which made sense, if it added about thirty levels of confusion to why they stayed with him during his whole heat and why they were all here right now. It would make more sense if Jongdae’s reaction to getting caught up in alpha stuff was to hate him afterward, right?
But he didn’t. He had looked so happy to see Chanyeol in his kitchen yesterday, sliding across the floor. And called Chanyeol’s dick “my favorite new friend,” for shit’s sake. Whispered his name while Minseok fucked him.

This was. Oh gosh.

“What has your brain on fire, Channie?” Minseok asked.

He looked up. Jongdae was gazing at him, concern plain on his face.

“I guess the way we started out was even weirder for you than it was for me,” he said.

Jongdae laughed, and Chanyeol couldn’t sit up straight because relief transformed him into goo.

“Well, my god!” Jongdae said. “If I’m gonna be wrong, I’d rather be wrong with something awesome!”

“Fucking straight,” Minseok said.

So that was nice, even if it meant that Chanyeol had to take a second to hide in his soju glass, in case too many Feelings were showing on his face.

There was a round of nudges and little smiles while they settled themselves down. Even though Chanyeol knew he had to ask yet another potential grenade of a question.

“So is that why, um?” he said. “Er, Minseok’s. In charge?”

“How do you even go through life this adorable?” Minseok murmured.

“Yeah,” Jongdae said after another laugh. “I mean, it’s a relief to get bossed around, when my natural tendency is to want to take over all the time. And I’m convinced that it has made me less of an asshole.”

“A little,” Minseok laughed.

“No, seriously. I mean, I’m not a sociologist, but somebody needs to do a study about why lady alphas, aside from their scary levels of horniness, are so much more reasonable to deal with. My theory is that a deep dicking knocks some of the nonsense out of you.”

“In another universe, you’re probably a scientist,” Minseok said, “with a lab full of alphas getting their brains fucked out while you measure their nonsense levels. And you wander around in a lab coat with a clip board, little glasses on your nose …”

He trailed off.

Chanyeol also took a moment to explore this excellent mental image.

“Sorry, playing doctor is not on the menu,” Jongdae laughed.

What a shame.

Chanyeol shook his head. Minseok smiled at him.

“Ask what you need to ask, Channie.”

“Are you – in charge all the time?”
“Nah. I mean, a lot of the time, just because Dae is lazy.”

He wrinkled his nose at Jongdae’s rude sound.

“It’s mostly whatever sounds fun at the moment. Which frequently means me ordering Jongdae around, because I know he loves it. But sometimes I order him to fuck me until I forget my own name, so.”

Jongdae grinned and gave a thumbs-up.

“And we agreed on a signal for when either one of us isn’t up to play. Because believe it or not, even the two of us sometimes want to be all soft and mushy.”

Just the thought of them being soft and mushy, lying tangled up and kissing softly, gave Chanyeol’s heart way too many ideas.

“Neither one of us is going to boss you around without extensive talking about it first,” Minseok said.

He reached over and laced their fingers together. His dark eyes, looking up, were wide and soft. Chanyeol took a shaky breath.

“It was really generous of you to just go along with us last night.”

“And hot as fuck,” Jongdae said.

“Thanks for ruining the moment, Jongdae,” Minseok, sitting back.

“Who’s ruining? It was hot!”

“Chan and I were having a moment of emotional connection, asshole.”

Jongdae scrunched up his face, and Minseok rolled his eyes.

“I guess I just don’t know where,” Chanyeol said, and didn’t know how to go on.

“Where you fit in the mix?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Over, under, inside, enveloping, behind, in front, in the middle. Wherever sounds fun at the moment.”

Chanyeol blinked.

“I like all those things,” he said faintly.

“So there you go, nothing to worry about,” Minseok said. “Even when we’re not on the same page, there’s some kind of fun compromise to get our rocks off.”

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, leaning forward. “You ever have that thing happen where Min says something all casually and your brain melts?”

“Yes!”

Did that answer all his questions? Did he even know what questions he wanted to ask? Anyhow, it
was nice to just chat through the rest of dinner. Minseok jeered at him and Jongdae for preferring baseball to football. Somewhere along the line, Jongdae noticed that Chanyeol liked the spicy pickled cucumbers and kept putting pieces of them on his plate. They asked him a bunch of questions about the firehouse, his coworkers, and his schedule.

“Are there really that many fires?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“It’s not all fires. We go to a lot of car wrecks and emergency medical calls, too. It’s just that nobody can ever tell when you need all hands on deck. So you have to keep the fire house full all the time, just in case.”

“Man, when I have a bad work day, it’s usually because a giant piece of ice cracks in half,” Minseok said. “Your bad days must be awful.”

That wasn’t first-ish date conversation. It wasn’t twentieth date conversation.

“I don’t have as many of them as you might think.”

He’d been out on dates with guys who tried to push him for gory details, the gorier the better. He’d walked out on most of those dates, because dead people weren’t entertainment.

“Good,” Minseok said. “I hate the thought of you having to deal with that.”

Jongdae reached under the table and rubbed his leg. Chanyeol had a moment of pure disbelief.

“How have you been living next door to me for three months and I didn’t know you were like this?” he said.

They both grinned.

“Like what?” Jongdae asked.

“I mean, I could tell the day you moved in that you’re both super hot, but how did I not know that you’re so nice?”

“I don’t know, man, I felt like every time I saw you, you were looking intense and soot-streaked or I’d been listening to you play sad guitar music for an hour,” Minseok said. “I assumed you were having some big sad romance going on. It never occurred to me that you were single.”

“Yeah,” Jongdae said. “But at least we can stop reporting Hot Neighbor Sightings in the hallway and at the convenience store and start reporting them from our bed.”

Chanyeol figured that was designed to make him put his hands over his face. He did. Because holy shit, they needed to stop. Not that he wanted them to stop. Maybe ever.

Once all the last bits of food and liquor had been consumed, Jongdae leaned back in his chair.

“So. Who’s for dessert?”

“Stupid question,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol sure did like they way they smiled at him like that.

“Well I was going to also take you out for ice cream,” he said, giving his best flirty smile and tilting
his head to the side.

“I don’t think I can say no to that face,” Jongdae said.

“We do like ice cream,” Minseok said.

Ugh, they were so cute.

Minseok held his hand for a little bit on the walk to the ice cream shop, which almost shocked him out of his own skin. They took their cones to a park across the street and lounged on the playground equipment.

“Butter pecan,” Jongdae said. “Okay, grandpa.”

“You’re an adult who orders sprinkles, your opinion doesn’t count,” Chanyeol said.

“They’re cheerful!”

“Now, now, children,” Minseok said.

It was great. Also great: the way each of them started upping the suggestiveness of their ice cream eating game, until Jongdae broke first and snickered.

This was a terrific date.

“This shirt,” Minseok said, tugging at Chanyeol’s collar after he’d thrown his napkins away. “It’s fucking distracting. If I have to wait much longer to put my mouth on your neck, I’m gonna hit something.”

“Can’t have that,” Chanyeol managed to get out, even though his voice sounded gravelly.

“For real,” Jongdae said.

Their pace was faster, walking back home. One or both of them had a hand on him the whole way. Chanyeol felt like he could hardly breathe.

He had barely gotten his second shoe off before Minseok had a hand on his chest, pushing him backwards across the living room floor. Minseok’s expression was heated, with a fierce little smile that did nothing to help Chanyeol with his breathing problem.

Minseok maneuvered him around the sofa, and straddled him the minute Chanyeol sat down. His fingers were cool where they rested lightly, almost tickling, on Chanyeol’s neck, but his mouth was hot, licking until Chanyeol parted his lips.

“Been thinking all day about you fucking me,” he murmured when he moved his mouth to Chanyeol’s neck.

Jongdae laughed a little at the sound Chanyeol made in the back of his throat.

“You looked so good last night, Channie. Opening up Dae for me, holding him while I fucked him.”

Minseok rolled his hips, and Chanyeol inhaled hard.

“And then you show up tonight looking so fucking hot.”

He bit down lightly on the skin under Chanyeol’s ear, then licked the same spot.
“Wearing whatever this is that almost makes you smell like you’re in heat.”

He moved his hand down Chanyeol’s chest.

“Delicious. I can’t wait for you to take me apart.”

Chanyeol grabbed him, one arm pulling him close and the other grasping the back of his head, kissing Minseok hard and messy until Minseok gave a little moan. Both of them were breathing hard when Chanyeol let him go. Both smiling. Both pretty hard.

Jongdae’s hands slid down Chanyeol’s shoulders from behind. Chanyeol leaned his head back and watched through lowered eyelids as Jongdae leaned in and kissed Minseok. It was slow, with a lot of tongue. They looked so good. It felt so good when Jongdae bent down and kissed the side his neck.

“What is this?” Minseok asked, eyes going to his necklace, fingers skating around it. “A lover give you this?”

Chanyeol nodded.

Minseok brought out his murder face, wrapped his fist around the necklace and pulled until the clasp snapped, then tossed it to the floor.

“I don’t want you wearing any jewelry we didn’t give you,” he growled.

Chanyeol barely had time to process how obscenely hot that all was before Minseok’s mouth was on his again, rougher, and Jongdae’s fingers were unbuttoning his shirt, Jongdae’s tongue running along the outside of one ear.

“Fuck,” Chanyeol said when they let him have a breath.

“That’s the plan,” Jongdae said. “Let’s go wreck this beta.”

Minseok had proved several times during how strong he was during Chanyeol’s heat; Chanyeol took the opportunity to show off a little, standing up with Minseok in his arms. Minseok hummed happily and put his legs around Chanyeol’s waist. Chanyeol didn’t know where he was going, and it was hard to walk and kiss at the same time, but Jongdae guided him from behind with two hands on his ass, and when they made it to the bedroom he dropped Minseok, who sprawled with a grin, one hand moving down to cup himself.

Chanyeol dropped his shirt and belt to the floor, then reached back to pull Jongdae to him and give him a little oral attention. Jongdae was so handsy, and the way he squirmed and cried out when Chanyeol sucked on his collarbone was extremely gratifying.

Minseok made a low sound. He was palming himself while he watched them, his other hand balled up in the bed covers.

“You should get him ready,” Jongdae said. “Let him feel those terrific fingers before you fuck him.”

“If you insist,” Chanyeol said, grinning and reaching for his fly.

Amid a lot of kisses and groping, they got the blankets pulled down, supplies put in reach, Minseok unclothed. They left the choker on. Chanyeol sat down by Minseok’s hip, scratching lightly at the inside of Minseok’s thigh while he watched them make out, so comfortable with each other but still so hungry. Minseok was paler than Jongdae, broader in his shoulders. Both of them were so beautiful.
He watched how Minseok arched up into Jongdae’s mouth when one finger breached him. Watched how Jongdae smiled around his kiss when he swatted Minseok’s hand away from his dick.

“Trying to get me to hold you down, love?” Jongdae murmured.

“No,” Minseok said, then gasped when Jongdae sucked at one nipple, then Chanyeol added a second finger.

Cool, collected Minseok. Falling apart under them.

Chanyeol leaned in and licked Minseok’s dick, smiling at the high gasp. He stayed there for a little while, not trying to suck or hurry things along, just kissing Minseok’s belly, his thighs, his dick, while he moved his fingers, spread them apart a few times, getting him ready for more. Feeling Minseok jerk and arch, hearing him give sharp little moans.

Chanyeol looked up, and the expression on Jongdae’s face, watching him, made his own cock jump. He held Jongdae’s eye while he inserted another finger and Minseok groaned, long and low. Jongdae’s smile was filthy.

“He’s good, right?” he said, nosing up under Minseok’s ear. “Those long fingers moving inside you?”

“Yeah,” Minseok said.

“Tell me.”

“So deep,” Minseok choked out, then arched up hard when Chanyeol dragged one finger across the good spot.

“Already so full, and –“

Jongdae bit down on Minseok’s nipple, eyes still on Chanyeol, who hoped that he would actually make it to the fucking part and not spontaneously combust first.

“And what, Min?”

“Keeps putting his mouth on me,” then groaned when Chanyeol did just that and drove his fingers in as far as they would go.

“You ready for him?”

“Not yet,” Minseok gasped.

“Faster or slower?” Chanyeol asked, and Jongdae grinned at him.

“Faster,” Minseok said.

“Slower,” Jongdae said, and Minseok sobbed once.

Chanyeol went slower, using the whole length of his fingers with each thrust, twisting a little when he was in deep, and licking at the tip of Minseok’s cock, feeling it twitch when his breath moved across it.

“Take a little more, Minnie,” Jongdae said.

“Want to fucking take it all,” Minseok growled.
Chanyeol figured that was sufficient to give him what he wanted and moved his hand, fast and hard, until Minseok was arched like a bow, panting.

“Okay,” Jongdae said.

He did all the maneuvering, pulling Minseok up onto his hands and knees and braced against the headboard, handing Chanyeol a condom.

“Put your knees wider,” he said, holding a pillow in one hand.

When Chanyeol did, Jongdae shimmied under Minseok, head propped up on the pillow, where he could get at Minseok’s dick with his mouth.

“Holy shit,” Chanyeol said.

“Yeah, I’m a genius,” Jongdae said.

“You watch a lot of porn,” Minseok growled.

He groaned long and loud when Chanyeol entered him, then drew in a sharp breath and clutched at the headboard – Chanyeol figured when Jongdae started to suck. He couldn’t think about that, though. Not until Minseok was wrecked.

His ass was so tight, so warm. Lasting that long would be a challenge.

Chanyeol moved. When he wrapped his hands around Minseok’s ribs, the way Minseok arched was so gratifying that Chanyeol held on tight, moving slowly but slamming home with every stroke.

He kept that up for as long as he could, until his whole body seemed honed in on the slide of his dick in and out of Minseok, and Minseok was breathing with a little cry at the end of each stroke, his arms shaking a little. Every couple of minutes, Jongdae would hum, or there would be a dirty little wet sound, and Minseok would groan. Jongdae shifted, and when Chanyeol looked back, he saw Jongdae working himself, rough and fast.

Chanyeol snapped his hips faster, leaned in over Minseok’s back, his arm wrapped around Minseok’s chest. He kissed the back of Minseok’s neck. It was so good. He couldn’t come yet, but it was so good.

“Grab my hair,” Min whispered.

He did, pulling when Minseok cried out, leaning in to go at Minseok’s neck with tongue and teeth. Slamming in hard and hearing Jongdae give a choked-sounding laugh.

“Oh god,” Minseok said, his voice high and broken.

“God, Dae, it’s too –“ he broke off, moaning again.

Chanyeol bit down, braced his knees, thrust harder.

“Ah, fuck,” Minseok said. “Fuck, fuck, god, I, oh shit Chanyeol.”

Chanyeol was hovering on the edge, so close and so determined not to screw it up and come first.

Minseok was chanting curses hoarsely, trying to toss his head against Chanyeol’s fist, then giving a long groan that started low and kept rising, until he went stiff, clenching hard around Chanyeol’s dick, sobbing.
Chanyeol pounded him hard, felt something hot against the back of his leg that he figured was Jongdae coming, and that sent him over too. He let go of Min’s hair and tried to hold himself up with quivering arms while his legs tensed and he came so hard that the world blacked out around the edges.

It took them a few minutes to come down and summon the energy to move at all. Even after Chanyeol pulled out and flopped over and Jongdae wormed his way out from under, Minseok stayed on his knees with his arms braced against the headboard and head hanging low.

Jongdae looked amazing, his hair a mess, mouth red, eyes wet. Chanyeol wanted to kiss him forever.

“Give me that,” he said, taking the gross condom out of Chanyeol’s fingers. “See if you can get Min to reinhabit his body.”

Chanyeol crawled up and laid his cheek against Minseok’s shoulder, running his hand down all those nice muscles in Minseok’s back.

“Okay there?”

Minseok gave a tired-sounding groan and tipped over sideways. It was so cute. Chanyeol leaned over until he rested his head on Min’s chest and combed his hair with his fingers.

“Was that enough wrecking?” Chanyeol asked, unable to keep the laughter out of his voice.

“Ask me in thirty minutes.”

But Minseok’s voice was hoarse, and his smack to Chanyeol’s shoulder was quarter-hearted at best. Chanyeol kissed on him softly, letting his fingers play over the mating scars on his shoulder – still plenty of them, if fewer than on Jongdae’s.

“When’s the last time anybody carried you around like a fragile flower?” Jongdae said, climbing on the bed and applying a warm towel to the backs of Chanyeol’s legs.

“Ngh, hot,” Minseok murmured snuggling in against Chanyeol’s chest for more kissing while Jongdae wiped him down.

Chanyeol was hardly going to disagree.
Chapter 4

It had been years since Chanyeol had slept all night with somebody who wasn’t Baekhyun (who kicked), and never with two people. Previous boyfriends had seemed to expect, in their sleep, that an omega needed to be the little spoon, or curl up into a ball against their chest, so he mostly associated sleeping next to someone else with back pain and creaky knees.

Jongdae and Minseok treated him like a mattress. A little bit of Jongdae’s drool on one shoulder and Minseok’s ankle bone smashing his shin were a huge improvement. Were they actually perfect? Was he in deep trouble, or benthic trouble?

Definitely deep-sea, scary-creature kind of trouble.

Okay, they weren’t perfect perfect. Jongdae, for example, woke up perky. A true sign of lack of character. Perkiness wasn’t supposed to be allowed until at least half an hour after waking, even if it did mean that he talked them into testing out Min’s suggestion from his heat that Chanyeol could jerk all three of them at once in one hand.

He could – just barely, but it was so damn awkward that they ended up just each jerking each other off in a tangle of hands.

“At some point, I’m going to need a break for a few days to let my balls recover,” Minseok mumbled afterward, leaned over in a lump across Chanyeol’s legs.

“Weak,” Jongdae said.

“Alphas are gross,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok patted his thigh.

“You’re so nice to back me up here, you’re definitely adding decades to my life.”

“Enh, you guys think I’m great,” Jongdae said, stretching his nice, lean body out as long as it could go (not far).

Chanyeol rubbed his belly, and Jongdae went limp, smiling sweetly up at him.

They played rock, paper, scissors to see who “got to” shower with him.

“You guys,” Chanyeol said, hiding his face behind his hands, “stop.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Minseok said. “You think we’re not gonna act like we like you? Forget it.”

“Yeah, dude, you’re the one who accepted our bracelets, now you have to put up with us.”

Chanyeol tried to take refuge in sarcasm, so he wouldn’t, like, giggle or coo at them.

“Technically, that just means I’ve potentially accepted you for my next heat, so I should get three months to myself.”

“‘Potentially’?” Minseok said, making his murder face.

“Dude, that’s not even funny,” Jongdae said. “Quit it.”
He dragged Chanyeol by the wrist into the shower, where, being a gross alpha, he fucked between Chanyeol’s thighs until he yelled so loud that it echoed around the bathroom. Which, okay, was maybe pretty fun.

“You are ridiculous,” Jongdae said afterward, while Chanyeol sat on the floor of the shower and Jongdae washed his hair. “Talking like you don’t even want to be here. You make me so mad, I’m going to suck your brain out through your dick so you can’t be stupid anymore.”

Chanyeol tried to make sense of that statement. He was unsuccessful. Was he supposed to think he was in trouble? Or be flattered? Or turned on? How would having no brain make him less stupid?

Wait, no, it probably would.

“How am I supposed to respond to that?”

“By shutting up and leaning your head back,” Jongdae said, and rinsed the conditioner out.

It was funny how much trouble they had trying to find something for him to wear. He ended up in some of Minseok’s football-watching gear, which made Minseok’s eyes narrow, and he patted Chanyeol very thoroughly for a couple of minutes.

Jongdae followed him next door for actual clothes, even perkier post-shower. He was like a super ball, bouncing around.

“When are you fixing your door?”

“Today.”

“Ah,” he said, standing in the middle of Chanyeol’s living room with his hands on his wee little hips, “so many fond memories.”

Chanyeol snorted. Then he tried to protest when Jongdae barged in while he was picking out clothes.

“What? I’ve seen you naked more than I’ve seen you with clothes on. Besides,” he said, leaning back on his elbows. “I’m your alpha, you can’t be shy in front of me.”

Chanyeol buried himself in his t-shirt drawer while he tried to get his face under control. Like he wouldn’t love it if Jongdae were his alpha. Both of them his. Which was a stupid way to be thinking, two days into – whatever this was. One day after he had told himself very firmly not to get weird about it.

“Did you faint?” Jongdae said. “How long does it take to pick out a t-shirt?”

Chanyeol whipped his arm back, throwing one. By the splutter, it hit its mark.

“OH MY GOD,” Jongdae yelled when Chanyeol finally tugged on a shirt and turned around.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe you wear Human Torch t-shirts I AM SO HAPPY RIGHT NOW.”

He dragged Chanyeol back next door so fast that he had to carry his sneakers in his hand.

“Minseok! Look at him!”

Minseok was wearing a towel around his waist, and his hair was dripping. The person to look at was clearly not Chanyeol, at the moment.
“Human Torch!”

It was so much yelling for 9:30 in the morning.

Minseok stopped scrubbing his hair and sighed.

“It is too early for this much cute.”

Chanyeol looked down at the ratty t-shirt he and Baekhyun had each bought years ago just because they thought it was hilarious.

“He’s a FIREMAN!” Jongdae yelled.

Which, yeah. Was the joke.

Minseok rolled his eyes and grinned.

“Babe,” he said, cupping Jongdae’s face and kissing him softly. “You are a mess before breakfast.”

“Is he like this every morning?” Chanyeol asked.

Minseok resumed drying his hair, which made the muscles of his torso do all kinds of interesting things.

“One of the reasons why we work out so early is that it’s too early even for his powers of chatter.”

“You want me to be quiet, put something in my mouth,” Jongdae said. “I will accept a dick or a pancake.”

He was hanging off Chanyeol’s arm again. And since Minseok was padding off to get dressed, Chanyeol figured he might as well curl his arms around Jongdae. If he inhaled deeply, he could catch Jongdae’s nice rain scent. Even outside his heat, it made Chanyeol feel relaxed.

“Mmm, Channie,” Jongdae said, and lipped at Chanyeol’s earlobe.

Chanyeol could feel the mush rising up from his chest, and he could tell he wasn’t going to be able to stop himself from saying the kind of stupid, romantic, too-much thing that he always said, and always at the exact wrong time.

“Gonna eat some bruuuu-uuunch,” Jongdae sang into his ear.

Saved by stupid alpha appetites.

They took him to the most adorable little restaurant, which made him feel underdressed in his old t-shirt and Converse, but Minseok smiled at him and tangled their fingers together. They ordered enough food for an army and talked easily about nothing much in particular.

“So how’d you guys get back together?” Chanyeol asked. “After uni, I mean.”

“Well, you have to understand, we actually live in a romantic comedy,” Jongdae said.

They smiled at each other so softly that Chanyeol wanted to fall down, it was so cute.

“Okay, first off, I really thought I was doing the right thing for him when I broke up with him,”
Minseok said.

“Boo,” Jongdae said.

“Yeah, I know, babe. I regretted it after about twenty minutes. I was just trying to be all strong and sensible,” he added, looking at Chanyeol, but his arm going around Jongdae’s back.

“I got a bunch of dumb jobs, did my butcher’s apprenticeship. Made a lot of bad sculpture.”

“Felt sad,” Jongdae said.

“Felt sad,” Minseok agreed. “And eventually lucked into my ice sculpture job.”

“For which he did the centerpiece for the cake table at my brother’s wedding.”

That really was like a romantic comedy.

“Whoa.”

“Yeah,” Jongdae said. “There I was, feeling all conflicted and grumpy about my brother marrying the world’s second-sweetest omega—”

“Third,” Minseok said.

“Right, third now,” Jongdae said.

And Jongdae tapped him on the back of the hand, so Chanyeol couldn’t even pretend that they meant somebody else. Unfair.

“And I walk into the wedding hall to see my damn ex-boyfriend with purple hair, hauling this giant ice swan across the room on a pair of spectacular legs.”

“Purple hair!”

“I had a phase,” Minseok said.

“It was a great phase,” Jongdae said. “Wait until you see him make it curly, you will have a nuclear reactor meltdown, I swear to god.”

Chanyeol couldn’t even imagine. Though Yixing had once made nice noises at him when he curled his own hair, so maybe they could tag-team Jongdae and see what happened.

“Anyway,” Minseok said. “He startled the shit out of me.”

“Yup, just as he was sliding the sculpture onto the table was the terrific moment I took to say his name.”

“Yikes,” Chanyeol said.

“Yeah. There’s Min, staring at me like I’m a ghost, and this meter-tall fucking ice swan starting to tilt, and I just launched myself.”

“Straight under it,” Minseok laughed.

“Oh no!”

Chanyeol couldn’t believe these people were even allowed. How could they be like this?
“Yeah, it was a life-defining moment, lying on the floor, watching from up close what his thighs did when he caught the damn thing.”

He put one hand on his chest and sighed.

“Caught most of it,” Minseok said. “The edge got him and broke his arm.”

“Worth it,” Jongdae sang.

“So his brother hates me, because Jongdae had to spend the afternoon in the hospital getting his arm set and missed the wedding. And I had to pay for the sculpture out of my own pocket.”

“Worth it,” Jongdae sang again, a little more forcefully.

“Totally worth it,” Minseok laughed. “I sat in the emergency room holding his hand while he whined like a little baby, and we’ve been back together ever since.”

Chanyeol had to plonk his chin on his hands and sigh.

“That is the best story ever.”

“Definitely tied for first place now with how we met you,” Jongdae said, tapping his foot under the table.

Which was super nice to say, but they were hardly going to stand up at their twentieth anniversary party and tell the story about that one time when Jongdae barged in on a strange omega’s heat.

He liked picturing it, though. The surprise, and Jongdae flinging himself to the floor. The two of them murmuring over each other in the hospital. Very romantic.

“Did you date a lot? In between?” he asked.

Minseok shrugged.

“Some. I was with one guy for a long time. But I never really had both feet in it, you know? Which was pretty unfair to him. He met an alpha he liked the scent of better. That sucked, but he’s a lot happier now.”

“We see them a couple times a year,” Jongdae said. “Zitao is the craziest alpha you’ll ever meet, your eyes will pop out of your head.”

He bumped shoulders with Minseok, who was still looking at his coffee mug. Jongdae put his arm around Min’s shoulders.

“I wouldn’t call what I did dating,” Jongdae said. “Though I fucked around a lot. I was semi-serious with this one medical student for a hot minute, but I think I was kind of an asshole to him.”

Minseok finally smiled at that.

“I really missed you when we were apart,” he said, leaning his head on Jongdae’s shoulder.

Jongdae kissed the top of his head.

“Well, you don’t ever have to miss me again unless I’m stuck late at work, and now you have Chanyeol to keep you company.”
Feelings status: critical.

Thankfully, they did not ask Chanyeol about his tragic dating history. They talked about stupid stuff and ate breakfast. He was glad of the opportunity to re-balance himself.

“Chanyeol, I feel like I should apologize,” Minseok said out of the blue a few minutes later. “About your necklace.”

Jongdae smirked around a mouth full of pancakes.

“I mean, I’m not sorry. But I apologize for breaking it.”

Chanyeol remembered the fierce expression on Minseok’s face when he had wrapped his fist around it, the low growl in his voice when he’d said he only wanted Chanyeol to wear jewelry they’d given him. It made a spark deep in his belly. They seriously had to stop doing this to him.

“I don’t mind if you buy me another one,” he said to his plate.

Both of them gave a little self-satisfied growl, and Chanyeol shivered.

It took him a minute to work up the nerve to look up. They were both giving him a smile that he couldn’t read. He stared at his plate some more, until Jongdae took pity on him and started talking about the merits of sausage over bacon.

And it kind of seemed like they assumed that they’d all keep hanging around together. Jongdae and Minseok went with him to the hardware store to pick up the stuff he needed to fix his door, and Jongdae rummaged through his video games while Minseok watched him replace the door hardware. Chanyeol kept expecting them to say they had something better to do, and they just – didn’t.

They lounged around for a while on Chanyeol’s sofa once the door was fixed, while Minseok teased Jongdae about breaking it in the first place. They tussled a little, which was a great opportunity to grope them both, especially when Minseok got Jongdae pretty well pinned and kissed him. He liked how he could watch that and not feel left out.

He liked how he had arms long enough to put around them both.

He liked how doing so made him feel just right, instead of too much.

When Minseok pulled back, Jongdae was smiley and snuggly. Minseok hummed and tilted his head up to place a couple of closed-mouth kisses to Chanyeol’s neck.

“This is so nice,” Minseok said. “When do you go back to work, baby?”

Baby. He was holding both of them at the same time. Baby.

He loved it.

“Tomorrow night.”

“Boo,” Jongdae said.

“I’ll get back Wednesday night around nine.”

“Booooo,” Jongdae said.

Minseok laughed silently, his fingers in Jongdae’s hair.
“My schedule’s pretty variable too,” Minseok said. “We’ll need to make a calendar to go with our group chat.”

Who knew the thought of making a dumb calendar could cause this much warmth inside a person’s chest? A calendar! This was definitely, actually dating.

Minseok smiled at whatever his face was doing.

“Calendar,” Jongdae said. “Hold on, what do I remember about a calendar?”

“What?”

“Seriously. Why do I remember that there’s something important about a calendar?”

Jongdae’s thinking face was so serious. Chanyeol wanted to kiss on it, but he also didn’t want to interrupt.

“Something about Min and a calendar? From your heat, Channie, do you remember?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“Only calendar I know about is the charity one we do at the fire house, but I don’t know what that has to do with Min.”

“Charity what?” Minseok asked.

“We do a dumb calendar every year to raise money. All the guys in their gear with no shirt on, looking all sexy and stuff.”

It was extremely sad how quickly they both sat up.

“Give it,” Jongdae said.

“Immediately,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol huffed, but he got up and fetched the calendar, and then had the completely terrific experience of watching his maybe-kinda brand-new boyfriends drool over his fucking half-naked coworkers. It was great.

“Who’s this?”

“Sehun.”

Of course.

“You wouldn’t think a single ramyeon noodle could look that good,” Minseok said.

“Alpha,” Chanyeol said, not very nicely.

“Oh, I’m full up on those,” Minseok said, and let Jongdae hit him.

They paged through every month, looked at each other, paged through them again. Turned facial expressions on him so fierce that Chanyeol leaned back a little.

“Where are you?” Minseok asked.

“Oh. Well. Uh.”
Their expressions got even worse.

“Chan. Why aren’t you in any of these pictures?”

This had seemed like a non-issue at the time, why did he feel like he might barf if he had to say it out loud to them?

“I mean?”

“You mean what, Chanyeol?” Jongdae asked, his eyebrows vying with his tone for ferociouslyness.

“Why would I? This is for – the hot guys?”

Oh shit, they both looked so furious.

“Who in the world wants to spend January starting at an oversized omega, right?” he said.

It was so – it was so hard, the way they glared at him. Why would this make them so angry? Was this like when Kris broke up with him, with that “I can’t spend all this time trying to comfort you, Yeol, I have my own life to live,” and “come on, man, you’re an omega, act your place”?

Was this like Baekhyun’s “you know I will love you forever, dude, but you’re too much, romantically. I just can’t get there with you, I’m sorry”?

Yonghwa’s “we haven’t had any omegas in our family in a hundred years. And you want me to bring you home when you’re a head taller than my own dad? What are they going to think? There’s no way.”

Or even Jongin’s “Kyungsoo’s an alpha, Yeollie. My alpha. You have to understand how I can’t pass this up, you know what it’s like.”

He could feel himself trying to make himself smaller, which never worked, but he couldn’t help it. Not in the face of how furious they looked, and just when he was starting to actually feel comfortable.

Starting to feel too comfortable too soon. As usual.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, alpha bleeding out so that Chanyeol had to check himself from leaning back and exposing his throat.

“Who the fuck convinced you that you’re some kind of hopeless dweeb? Because I’m going to remove their trachea from their fucking neck. With my teeth.”

What?

“Damn fucking straight,” Minseok said.

“I. Huh?”

Jongdae straddled his legs and pressed one hand firmly against his chest, face close.

“I will tell you who wants to spend January looking at an oversized omega. I do. February and March and all the other months, too. And I will not fucking have this business of your trying to make yourself small, Park Chanyeol. Anybody who wants to make you feel small has to come through me and they will not enjoy the experience, you get it?”
It was too much: too much emotional whiplash, too much closeness, too much alpha, and too much like something he had wanted for a very long time.

He started to cry.

All the anger immediately dropped off Jongdae’s face.

“Oh, Channie. Sweetheart.”

He tucked Chanyeol’s face up against his neck, one hand in his hair and the other rubbing little circles on his back. Chanyeol tried to make himself take deep breaths and let Jongdae’s scent calm him down – with only marginal success.

He felt Minseok’s cool hand clasp his, Min’s warm mouth against his knuckles.

“This is, um, the too-much thing, right?” Jongdae asked, and Chanyeol was able to laugh a little at the worry in his voice.

He nodded.

Minseok pressed up close to his side.

“Did we come on too strong, baby?” Minseok said after a minute. “Do you want us to back off?”

He meant to say “no,” but it came out more like a little wail that made Jongdae pull him even closer and Minseok get on his knees to tuck his face into Chanyeol’s neck and kiss his jaw.

Chanyeol wormed his arms out of the crush and put them back around them. His boyfriends.

His boyfriends.

That set him off a little again, but in a way that made him a little annoyed with himself, which was always a sign of calming down. So he squeezed them tight and kept inhaling so his head would get filled up with the scent of rain on wet ground. Licked Jongdae’s neck a couple of times, and tangled his fingers in Minseok’s belt loop.

They held him like that for way longer than he would’ve expected, long past the time that he sighed and leaned back into the sofa. Jongdae kept smoothing down the hair on the back of his head, and Minseok had one hand on his neck, thumb moving back and forth.

Eventually Jongdae sat back.

“Better?”

Chanyeol nodded, and Jongdae totally disregarded his wet face and snotty nose and kissed him.

“Be right back,” he said.

Minseok leaned back and pulled Chanyeol with him, so that Chanyeol had his head on Minseok’s chest. Minseok played with his hair, and Chanyeol suddenly felt tired enough to sleep for a month.

Jongdae returned with full hands and handed over a box of tissues.

“My instinct is to wipe your face for you, but I figure you’re a damn adult and would prefer to do that yourself.”
Chanyeol was able to make an unsteady smile at that, and sit up to blow his nose and blot his eyes. Next was a wet washcloth (which, if there was going to be this much sex and crying, he was going to have to buy more of), and then a glass of water.

“Thank you, Dae.”

He hoped it got across that he meant for all of it.

By the time he was done with his water, Jongdae was draped over the two of them with his back arched, a sly little smile on his face, and wandering fingers. Chanyeol didn’t know it was possible to be so thoroughly tempted and uninterested at the same time.

“Jongdae,” Minseok said, lifting Jongdae’s hand from his chest and kissing the fingers. “Dial it back, babe. We’re doing comfort right now.”

Jongdae stuck his lip out.

“Maybe Channie finds it comforting for me to fuck him.”

It was just so alpha. Chanyeol laughed, and leaned down to kiss him.

“Maybe in a little while,” he said. “I will find it comforting to fuck you.”

Jongdae laughed and clutched him around the neck.

“Min! Our omega is so awesome!”

It turned out instead that they lounged on one another for a while, kissing a little and talking less. Eventually, Jongdae’s wiggling tendencies won out, so he and Chanyeol fired up the gaming system and cussed each other out over tank battles while Minseok curled up with his phone. It was good to do something loud and dumb, to get him out of his own head. After a while of that, he felt normal again – well, not normal, given that he apparently had two awesome boyfriends all of a sudden, but at least not ready to do any more crying any time soon.

Three days in and they already argued about dinner. It was a little obnoxious, but so relationshippy that it was mostly great.

“I have a low tolerance for takeout,” he said.

Jongdae clutched his chest and gasped.

“You have a flaw!”

Chanyeol swatted at him.

“Shut up.”

“I have some pork ribs,” Minseok said. “Got any side dishes?”

Did he have side dishes. He filled a bag with little containers, and Minseok went on ahead while Jongdae annoyed him throughout the process of gathering up some clothes, his face stuff, and a toothbrush. He kept standing so close that at some point, Chanyeol was definitely going to trip over him.
But it was cute the way he herded Chanyeol into their bedroom and patted a spot on the dresser for Chanyeol to set his things down. Cute the way he hung onto Chanyeol’s arm again the minute they were back in the kitchen.

“Don’t worry, Chan,” Minseok said, looking at the two of them with a crooked little smile on his face. “This is just Dae at peak happy. He won’t be quite this much forever. He should calm down in a year or two.”

“You’re so mean, I don’t know why I love you,” Jongdae said. “You won’t be mean to me, will you Channie?”

“I can’t pull it off, I don’t have the face for it.”

Minseok laughed.

“The best I can do when you’re annoying is pick you up and put you somewhere else.”

Jongdae made a face of such outrage that Chanyeol did exactly that. Jongdae stood by the table for a minute, grimacing, then opened his mouth and yelled.

It was hilarious. Chanyeol chased him around the living room a little bit, then caught him and dragged him back to the kitchen, where he sat on a stool and trapped Jongdae inside his arms and legs. Jongdae didn’t really try to get away.

Minseok was standing with a food container lid in his hand, head tilted to the side, grinning so widely that his gums were showing, looking all dopey.

“God damn,” he said after a pause. “This is so fucking fun.”

Chanyeol agreed. It was fun. Fun and he had kind of already jumped in with both feet, and that seemed like it was okay. He wasn’t about to make anybody promise anything, but they had made it really damn clear that they wanted – something. Him, even if it was only him-for-now. Not just sex, but comfort. Time. Presence.

He decided to trust it. To trust them, and their frequent little assurances that they wanted him around and wouldn’t put a timeframe on it. He thought that maybe relaxing into this, even if it didn’t last, would be worth it – and that even if it didn’t last, it wasn’t going to end like the others, with him feeling cut down.

He exhaled out all the fretfulness that grew out of trying to keep himself separate, felt his back let go. He pulled Jongdae back into his chest and hugged him.

“Man, you’re gonna be great to have around in the winter,” Jongdae said.

Oof. Just because he was going to let himself be happy didn’t change that this was all still a lot.

“Come walk me through these,” Minseok said, pointing forcefully at the wine rack when Jongdae protested his loss of hugging.

Chanyeol showed him what all the various containers held: mostly veggies, with the remains of a kimchi pancake that needed eating and some nice little stir-fried anchovies that he was really pleased with.

“Did you make all of these?”
He nodded. Minseok hugged him.

“And you cook? We should’ve bought you twice as many courting gifts.”

“My mom owns a restaurant, I’m genetically obligated,” he said.

They had a hundred questions about that, and Chanyeol wondered how long he’d have to wait to introduce them. It was too soon, right? Three days was too soon.

“Well, and we have a cooking rotation at the firehouse, too. If you want takeout, you have to pay for it out of your own pocket, but the station has a grocery budget. I’m so used to cooking for a crowd that I’m not really capable of making small amounts anymore. My fridge is always full of stuff like this.”

And that was another bunch of questions, while Minseok rubbed some dry spice mix onto a couple of racks of ribs and piled them into a pressure cooker. Chanyeol made a mental note to get a lesson on how to use that thing.

“How do you get your groceries?”

Chanyeol grinned.

“We drive one of the trucks over. You have to. A couple times we’ve been halfway through shopping and had to abandon our carts in the cereal aisle or whatever and go running out on a call. It’s pretty awesome, though. Everybody likes ogling fire trucks, and all the little kids go bananas.”

“Do you – like kids?” Jongdae asked, staring off into the distance and sounding a little growly.

Minseok’s eyebrows went a bit murdery.

Chanyeol reminded himself that he had chosen the path of trust and less worrying.

“I love ‘em, and I have exactly zero interest in ever bearing any myself,” he said.

The pause was not very long, but it was very uncomfortable.

“Ohay,” Jongdae said with a nod, but still looking away.

“Okay?”

Jongdae gave a sharp smile, then rubbed his nose, and his posture relaxed.

“Yeah,” he said. “I mean, Min and I can’t exactly go there. So the status quo remains. And the status quo is good. That’s for figuring out maybe possibly someday.”

“This is hardly an appropriate conversation for this stage in the relationship.”

Minseok had his boss voice out.

“I don’t care how much we both like him, it’s too much. Stop thinking with your glands, Jongdae.”

Chanyeol got “it’s” out of his mouth, but then Minseok transferred the glare to him, so he shut his mouth on “okay.”

It wasn’t like the sex kind of ordering around. The two of them stared at each other, and Minseok seemed like one of his own blocks of ice. Chanyeol wouldn’t have pushed him on a bet. This was a
backing-down situation. Except that alphas didn’t usually do that for anybody but a bigger alpha.

Then Jongdae glanced over at Chanyeol, and he just looked really sad.

Minseok was next to him in a heartbeat, arms around Jongdae’s waist.

“I have no idea what I’m doing,” Jongdae said.

“You’re doing fine, babe. It’s okay.”

“I’ve been super obnoxious, right?”

Minseok combed through Jongdae’s hair and kissed him.

“You have mostly been the cute kind of obnoxious. But yes,” he said with a soft smile.

Jongdae nuzzled Minseok’s cheek briefly, then came around to put his arms around Chanyeol’s waist.

“I’m sorry.”

“I don’t really understand what you’re apologizing for.”

And they both smiled at him.

“You’re nice,” Jongdae said, and gave him a squeeze before retreating to his wine glass.

“The few omegas I’ve spent time with were not – like this,” he said. “It was all very, very short-term, and I didn’t. Feel anything. This whole thing with you has me reeling, Channie. I keep wanting to growl at people, and like, hand-feed you. And don’t even get me started on what my brain does any time anyone mentions the word ‘pup.’ It’s like ever since the minute I regained consciousness after your heat, I’ve been cross-eyed, and I don’t know what to fucking do with myself.”


“I mean, I pretty much like it?” Chanyeol said. “Though I guess Min would tell me I’m thinking with my glands too.”

“Definitely,” Minseok said with a laugh.

“I had a big conversation with myself on Friday afternoon, that I was going to keep strict control over my feelings, and just have a nice fun time with you guys without any drama,” Chanyeol said.

“Oh god.”

Jongdae leaned his head down on the counter and curled his arms over himself. He laughed a little.

“We’re a mess, Channie.”

“You’re not a mess,” Minseok said. “We’re all in the first flush of deep like, plus the two of you are walking contradictions of your own presentation. It’s just a little complex psychology. We will fuck it out.”

Chanyeol shouted with laughter.
“Did you actually just say ‘we will fuck it out’ after all that fancy talk?”

“Most people say ‘work it out,’ you know,” Jongdae said, shaking his head.

“Most people are stupid.”

Their quiet dinner was followed by a lot of quiet snuggling, so they didn’t fuck it out until the next afternoon, when needing to be at work loomed unpleasently ahead of him, like having to wake out of a really great dream. But in the meantime, lying on their sofa with Minseok’s back curled into his chest, and Jongdae down at the end of the sofa where he could roll around as needed without knocking anybody over, Chanyeol felt himself start to notice all his edges. Min’s ass pressed up against him. The scent of mint when Chanyeol nuzzled into his hair. The thin shirt that separated his fingers from Minseok’s chest.

He stood up and took his clothes off.

“Hi there,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol leaned down and kissed Minseok, driving in until Min had to open his mouth wide and his hand curled around Chanyeol’s neck. He tugged Min’s shorts off, ran his hands back up those excellent legs, pushing them apart. Knelt down and returned Minseok’s hungry little smile.

“Do I get to be in on this little scenario?”

Chanyeol looked at Jongdae, watching as Jongdae watched him skate his fingers over Min’s rapidly hardening dick, and Jongdae bit his lip. He made his voice as deep as it would go.

“Didn’t you say something yesterday about comforting me?”

The object in his hand increased noticeably in size. Nice.

Jongdae grinned and slid to the floor. He looked at Minseok.

“Do I get to come?”

“This is Chan’s show,” Minseok said, his voice sounding even huskier than usual.

Chanyeol grabbed Jongdae, pulled him up flush so the front of his sweats was pressed hard against Chanyeol’s thigh. He cupped Jongdae’s ass with one hand and took him by the back of the neck with the other.

“You had better find my ass so fucking irresistible that you can’t help it,” he growled, still low, and kissed roughly around Jongdae’s groan, bit his lip hard.

“Fuck,” Jongdae breathed when Chanyeol let him go.

Clothes went everywhere, and while Jongdae rummaged around, Chanyeol knelt between Minseok’s legs, chin ducked down and smiling upward, tilting his head when Minseok’s eyes dropped to his neck. He trailed his fingers up to Minseok’s hips, leaned in to kiss his belly.

“Where the hell do we keep the condoms in here?” Jongdae growled.

“Pocket of my shorts on the floor,” Minseok said with a breathless little laugh.

He sounded way too together. Chanyeol licked up the length of his cock, and Minseok hissed.
“Always so prepared,” he murmured, lips against skin. “Taking care of us.”

He kissed that little curve at the base of the head, licked at it. Felt Jongdae’s hands run up the length of his back, Jongdae’s mouth on his shoulder. Minseok was sucking on his own bottom lip, staring at them. Jongdae ran his hand around to the front, leaned in close, and reached out to circle Minseok’s dick. Chanyeol arched down, ground a little at the erection pressed against his leg, and sucked lightly at Minseok’s very tip while Jongdae’s hand moved slowly.

“God damn,” Minseok whispered.

Jongdae bit down on Chanyeol’s shoulder until he squirmed, then backed off and pulled at Chanyeol’s hips so that he was up on his knees, elbows braced on either side of Minseok’s legs. Chanyeol felt him patting at his thigh and turned back to look; Jongdae had a pillow in his hand.

“Knees up.”

Chanyeol grinned at him, lifted up on his toes so Jongdae could slide the pillow under his knees.

“What a good alpha,” he rumbled, happy to see how Jongdae grinned and flushed at it.

He was going to gladly give himself a sore throat pushing how deep his voice could go, if they liked it this much.

He kissed Minseok’s thighs while Jongdae’s hands moved over his back, kneaded his ass. He leaned in and sucked a mark into the soft skin inside Minseok’s hip, until he swore and his fingers pulled at Chanyeol’s hair.

Between the hair-pulling and Jongdae’s fingers playing with his ass, his mouth on Chanyeol’s shoulders, this was going a little faster than he wanted. He placed a series of sucking little kisses up Minseok’s shaft, hissed a little when one of Jongdae’s fingers almost entered him, then backed off.

“Min,” he said, arching his head up and letting his mouth drop open.

Minseok curled his hand around Chanyeol’s jaw.

“Yes, kitten?”

God damn.

“You think you can last until I go over?”

Jongdae gave a dirty laugh as Minseok gaped down at him, then grabbed his hair roughly.

“I will do my very best,” he snarled.

Chanyeol looked back at Jongdae, who looked overjoyed by the proceedings.

“Don’t make it fast.”

Jongdae’s grin sharpened, and he slid a finger inside. Chanyeol arched, growled, turned back to Minseok.

It was a feedback loop of awesome: Jongdae teasing Chanyeol, Chanyeol teasing Minseok, every one of Minseok’s small noises making Jongdae’s fingers twitch or his teeth set into Chanyeol’s back. Chanyeol stuck to licking and light kisses until he was well stretched over two fingers, then took Min deep into his mouth, let Minseok feel the moan in the back of his throat when Jongdae added the
third. But even then he went slowly, savoring the weight of Min’s cock in his mouth and the faint flavor of salt overlaid with the scent of mint.

He looked up, and Minseok was staring down at him, mouth slightly open and cheeks pink.

Jongdae entered him slowly while they stared at each other, Chanyeol fighting to keep his eyes from fluttering closed at the pleasurable burn of it, Minseok’s cock on his tongue, Minseok’s fingers in his hair.

Jongdae bottomed out, hands warm and firm on Chanyeol’s hips. Chanyeol dipped his head, took Minseok down as far as he could get, and Min groaned.

“Eyes on me, beta,” Jongdae growled, and heat flashed through Chanyeol.

Chanyeol moved at the same time Jongdae did, both with long, slow strokes. Jongdae laughed a little. After several minutes of this, Minseok lifted Chanyeol’s hand and sucked two fingers into his mouth, and Chanyeol had to exhale hard through his nose. He glanced up, and Minseok’s eyes were intent on Jongdae while his mouth licked at Chanyeol’s fingers.

He hardly knew where to focus, all of it was so good. He teased Min some more, licking when Minseok licked, sucking when Min sucked.

He did not follow through when Minseok bit down, but he did smile around Minseok’s dick, then closed his lips and sucked hard until Minseok’s mouth fell open, and he dragged Chanyeol’s hand down his own neck as he groaned.

“Fuck,” Jongdae said, and snapped his hips, making Chanyeol whine.

He had to brace his hand against Minseok’s chest to keep from choking as Jongdae moved harder. Put his other hand around Minseok to stroke and get some backup. He pulsed his tongue in time with sucking, and Minseok shifted, moaned sharply.

“I said keep your eyes open,” Jongdae snarled.

Chanyeol tipped that much closer, arching his back a little, trying to dig his toes against the floor.

“You gonna come untouched for me, baby?”

Chanyeol lifted his head and looked back. Jongdae looked beautiful, sweaty, hair falling over his forehead, the veins in his arms standing out.

“I don’t know,” he said. “How fucking good are you?”

He dragged his hand up Minseok’s cock, and Jongdae grinned, slapped his ass.

“Brat,” he said. “Get back to work.”

Chanyeol’s punishment was severe.

“Shouldn’t have stopped,” Jongdae said, reaching around and grasping his dick. “You gave Min a second to pull himself together. Now you’re gonna come first.”

Fuck, they were going to kill him. At least he’d die happy.

Chanyeol shook his head. He sucked harder, dug his fingers into the skin under Minseok’s collarbone. Moved his hand faster – if not as fast as Jongdae’s hand, and if not as hard as Jongdae
was currently fucking him. Shit, he was in trouble.

He moaned, and lost his footing for a second. Jongdae pushed him forward until he choked a little. Minseok keened, high and desperate-sounding.

“No,” he gasped. “No, I’m coming first. Suck harder.”

Chanyeol hollowed out his cheeks, and Minseok put both hands in his hair, holding his head still while he pulsed down Chanyeol’s throat, totally silent, his head tipped back.

His smile was fierce when he dragged Chanyeol’s head up by the hair. He moved forward, leading with the back of Chanyeol’s head, until Chanyeol went up on his knees, Jongdae shifting weight as they went but still moving in and out of him.

“You fucking mark him, Jongdae,” Minseok growled.

Jongdae groaned. Minseok dipped his head down and put his mouth around Chanyeol’s cock. Chanyeol thought he could maybe hold out for long enough to at least enjoy it a little, but then Jongdae’s fangs entered his shoulder and he emptied into Minseok’s warm mouth. He sobbed and flailed his arms until Jongdae pinned them against his chest, shifting to dig his fangs in harder while Chanyeol tensed around him.

“God damn me,” Jongdae said after a minute, and Minseok surged up to kiss his bloody mouth over Chanyeol’s shoulder while he shuddered into Chanyeol’s ass.

Chanyeol hadn’t known it was possible to be so completely taken apart outside of his heat. He had no idea how they were managing to stay upright. He gave some thought to crying again.

“How are you so fucking hot, Chanyeol?” Minseok said, and kissed him.

“I think you made me this way.”

Jongdae laughed in his ear, sounding breathless, and he let go enough for Chanyeol to put his arms around Minseok so they could balance together for a little bit more. They licked his shoulder clean.

By the time they had all caught their breath and Chanyeol and Jongdae had stretched out their stiff legs, time was running short, and he was going to have to hustle to get to work on time.

“Three days with no Channie!” Jongdae said. “I hate your job, no more fires allowed.”

“It sucks,” Minseok agreed. “Though my poor empty testicles need the break.”

“You really are the world’s last true romantic,” Jongdae said, rolling his eyes.

“You’ll text me, right?” Chanyeol said, alternating kisses between one beautiful face and another.

“More than you want me to,” Jongdae said.

That was believable.

“Yeah, we have to make our calendar,” Minseok said.

Ugh, it was awful having to detach himself from them at their front door and go back to his stupid apartment with no boyfriends in it. He would’ve preferred to go straight to the station smelling like them – none of the betas would mind. But for Sehun’s sake, he took a shower, then ran over.
They all cross-trained regularly, but there were three main teams that rotated shifts, mostly grouped according to academy class-plus-supervisors. Chanyeol’s bunch was the B team, much to their annoyance. The A team – a little older, and fond of singing the theme from the TV show – never stopped thinking it was hilarious to talk about the “backup boys,” the “B list fire stars,” and stuff like that.

They were great, though. A and B were less often on shift together, C team being a bunch of kids who needed more hand-holding. So it was nice to see Yesung when he walked in.

“Aw man, not your ugly face,” Chanyeol said.

“Yeah, well, at least I don’t have a horrible personality,” Yesung said with a grin.

Being on a night start made it easier: they had a debrief meeting about dumb administrative stuff, everybody found the opportunity to say something rude to everybody else, and from that point, nobody would look sideways at anyone who wanted to go straight to bed.

Except Baekhyun, being Baekhyun.

“Nice to see you didn’t die on your date, thanks for getting in touch.”

“You had a date?” Sehun said.

“I had a date, I in fact didn’t die, I totally should’ve called you, good night.”

“Dude!”

Baek followed him into the bathroom. Chanyeol wondered whether there was any point in their history when it would’ve been possible to train Baek into respecting personal boundaries.

Probably not.

“Are you honestly just going to – go to sleep?” Baekhyun spluttered. “A man needs details, Chanyeol. I was alone all weekend, all I had to entertain me was the fond hope that maybe, perhaps, you got a little action. And you’re going to deprive me of the final reward?”

“I am exhausted, go away.”

“No,” Baekhyun said, and followed him into the bunk room. “I’ll let you get into bed, but I call the top bunk, and we’re going to lie around in the dark and giggle while you tell me about getting to second base or whatever.”

Chanyeol gazed at him, then pulled off his shirt. Baek looked at his shoulder, and his eyes went round.

“Fuck me,” he said, then, “fucking hell, Chanyeol! That’s.”

He stepped back, eyes narrow.
“That’s barely an hour old.”
Chanyeol looked at his watch.

“Yeah. Seventy-five minutes, give or take?”

“You came to work straight from fucking?”

“Well, I took a shower first.”

“Thank you,” came Sehun’s muffled voice from the hallway.

Baekhyun flapped his arms.

“I forbid you to go to bed. I require every detail, if it takes all night.”

“Baek.”

Chanyeol put his hands on Baek’s shoulders.

“I. Am. Exhausted. I did nothing all weekend but have sex and about four thousand feelings, and I am literally incapable of holding my eyelids open anymore. If there were a fire right this minute, I would be a literal, actual danger to myself and everyone around me.”

Baekhyun was nosy and obnoxious, but he had a sense of responsibility about a mile wide.

“Fine,” he huffed. “But god damn, I want details later!”

“You will get some details later.”

“Some! Why would you hold back on me, you jerk?”

Chanyeol cracked one eye open from his place wedged into one of the tiny little bunks they had to cram themselves into.

“I don’t want to violate the privacy of my boyfriends.”

“Your? What?”

Chanyeol snuggled down and pulled the blanket over his head.

“Jiminy Christmas,” Baekhyun said, and stomped away.

Chanyeol grinned. Baek resorting to middle school curses was a sign that he was really peeved. He was nice enough to turn the light out when he left, though.

He kind of wanted to stay awake for a little while, just to have a minute to himself to take stock of what was going on inside and maybe replay some of the weekend’s highlights. No doing, though – he dropped right out. Overnight was easy: he only had to get up for one medical call, an old lady who seemed to be having a mild heart attack. Chanyeol held her hand and her glass of water while Joonmyun checked her out and made her take an aspirin, and the ambulance came right away.

He was first up on the cooking rota (disadvantage of having a reputation) and was busy with fried eggs and kimchi jjigae for way too many people when Baekhyun accosted him again. After some sleep, he was up to the task.
“So. Boyfriends, huh?”

“Yep.”

Baekhyun peered at him, and his expression went soft.

“Damn, Yeollie, I have never seen that expression on your face before, and I’ve known you my whole life. You’ve fallen into a big good thing, haven’t you?”

Chanyeol smiled so much that it hurt his cheeks, and he had to look down into the soup pot, because his breath was caught in his throat, and he didn’t want to cry.

“I think so.”

“Dude.”

Baek hugged him. Good old Baek. It was nice to squeeze on him and inhale his nice thyme scent.

“Okay, I guess since you’re all emotionally compromised I won’t pester you for details.”

“Thank you.”

“Let’s see this shoulder again, though.”

It was kind of gross by that point, scabbed over and bruised. Every time he moved that arm it ached, and his belly muscles contracted with want.

“Shit. You want a little lidocaine on that?”

Chanyeol shook his head, and Baekhyun gave him a knowing smirk.

“Are you sure you didn’t, like, run off and get married or something?”

“Who had the time?” Chanyeol said with a grin.

Baekhyun laughed.

He took a picture of it in the bathroom mirror (read: he took 26 pictures and deleted all but the one in which he looked the hottest) and sent it to the group chat.

“WHO MAULED YOU” Jongdae texted.

“Some jerk alpha,” Chanyeol texted back, receiving a ton of hearts in response and an offer from Minseok to kiss it better that somehow found a way to seem dirty even in text.

There was always something that needed to be done around the station: cleaning, cooking, the many gear inspections to ensure that nobody would get a surprise in the middle of an actual call. But there was also a hell of a lot of downtime, and the A team was a pack of troublemakers. So among the workouts, card games, and group guitar practices, there were a couple of messy pranks that drove Joonmyun past the point of bearing, and he yelled at everybody, including his seniors, then went and put himself in time out. Nobody was sure whether it was to decompress or because he was so horrified about yelling in front of the older guys.

After that, they tried to behave a little. And Chanyeol remembered his errand.
Siwon caught him in the kitchen, putting his name on the calendar sign-up list. Siwon was excessively handsome, with not an ounce of self-consciousness about him. He was very prominently featured in the calendar.

“Aw, dude,” he said, clapping Chanyeol on his bitten shoulder but not noticing the wince. “You have just made my wife so happy!”

Chanyeol had of course met Siwon’s wife and tiny son at various cookouts and stuff, but she was married to an actual god, so?

“Huh?”

“The rugged omega thing is her favorite trope. She’s in the middle of some drama right now, I keep coming home to find her sobbing her face off while some muscly dude kneels on the floor, looking up through tear-filled eyes. I could probably write one of those things in my sleep by now, she’s watched a hundred of them.”

“Rugged? What are you talking about?”

Siwon stared at him.

“Don’t you watch TV?”

“Not? Really?”

“You haven’t read the two point six million manhwa?”

“No?”

“Hold on.”

He pulled out his phone while Chanyeol boggled that the phrase ‘rugged omega’ was even a thing.

“Honey,” Siwon said. “Are you busy today? Can you bring over some of your dirty omega books? My coworker wants to borrow them, since he’s thematically consistent. Right, that one.”

Chanyeol tried to die on the spot, but didn’t succeed.

Siwon pulled his phone away from his face.

“You’re gay, right?”

Chanyeol snorted.

“Very.”

“Yeah, the gay ones. I knew you’d be excited! Plus you’ll get to see me, which I know is way less interesting. Love you. She’s going to bring you a pile of books. And probably a list of shows as long as your arm, prepare yourself.”

Any bewildered pondering Chanyeol might do about this conversation was shoved aside by Minseok reporting that he was headed out to lunch with his sister. This necessitated sending infinite encouraging gifs.

Siwon’s wife came by not much later, pulling her little son in a wagon behind her. He was holding a tote bag between his legs, and the rest of the wagon was taken up by pizza boxes.
“You are the best woman on the planet,” Siwon said, kissing her with a loud smack.

He set his son on his shoulders and carried the pizzas inside.

“I expect a full review of all of them,” Eunmi said, handing Chanyeol the (very full) tote bag. “I hope you love them, I have so many more.”

“Thanks.”

Chanyeol wasn’t sure where to look, and he knew his face had to be the same color as the truck.

“You seriously haven’t read any of these?”

He shook his head.

“I didn’t even know it was a thing.”

“Oh my god!” Eunmi said. “Here, wait, give me that bag and write these down.”

She made him get out his phone and take down the names of a dozen dramas.

“My Prince, My Omega just finished, it’s so good, if you like historicals. And Strong Omega Kim Josoek is so cute I almost couldn’t – oh. You have on two courting bracelets.”

If he had a heart attack, at least there were plenty of people on site with advanced cardiovascular life support training.

“Yes?”

Eunmi poked his arm.

“Boyfriends?”

And he might have been embarrassed enough to crawl in a hole, but he couldn’t help smiling when he told her yes.

Weirdly, Eunmi clasped her hands together.

“And what are their presentations?”

“Um. Alpha and beta?”

She screamed.

“Aaaaaa, that’s so romantic! Forget all those others for the moment. You have to have to have to start with Complete Love. Oh my god! It’s so beautiful, you will love it. Promise me you’ll watch it and tell me all about how great it is.”

Chanyeol promised and followed her into the firehouse, listening to her describe yet more dramas that he’d never remember the names of.

Eunmi was swept up by the A team guys as soon as they got inside, and Chanyeol was able to cram the bag of books into his locker. By the time he made it to the kitchen, pretty much everyone was in there.

“Oh yeah,” Donghae said. “Strong Omega Kim Josoek was hilarious.”
“Loved it,” Sehun said.

“I liked Secret Professor Omega,” Joonmyun said.

Chanyeol tried to back out of the room, and crashed into the alarm bell on the wall instead, making a thunk.

“Here’s our own oversized weirdo!” Siwon said. “You look freaked out. What do you want, pizza or baby?”

He took the pizza first, but playing with little Hyunwookie on the truck afterward went a long way toward calming him down. They had a good time trying to sound like the siren, and Chanyeol let Hyunwook practice his CPR.

“Make a beat,” the little boy said after patting his fist on Chanyeol’s chest several times.

Chanyeol sat up and spread his arms wide.

“I’m alive!”

“Yay!”

By the time they left, he had gotten over himself sufficiently to be able to thank Eunmi properly for all the books. Minseok reported “provisional forgiveness received” to the group chat. And not long after that, he got an invitation to a group calendar and had to spend some time at the front desk, entering his schedule into it.

“God, your schedule is awful,” Jongdae texted when Chanyeol wasn’t even halfway done yet.

He was getting ready to crack open the first manhwa (Hell’s Heat) when Baek plopped down next to him.

“Want any of these to send to your boyfriends?” he asked, waggling his eyebrows and handing over his phone.

He had a few pictures of Chanyeol playing with Hyunwook. The one of the two of them dramatically “steering” the ladder truck was actually really cute. Chanyeol sent it to himself.

“Oh, I’ve read this,” Baekhyun said, flipping through the manhwa. “It starts getting racy around volume three.”

Chanyeol could not even.

“You knew about the whole rugged omega thing and never told me?”

Baekhyun looked at him like he’d just spouted a second head.

“Uh, yes? Because I didn’t think you actually lived in an actual cave and were generally aware of, like, basic cultural knowledge?”

“How is it basic cultural knowledge if I’ve never heard of it?”

Baekhyun rolled his eyes.

“Dude, because until like two minutes ago your life consisted of work, baseball, playing the guitar, and pestering me while I kick your ass on the Xbox. It was a sad existence, I’m glad it’s over.”
Chanyeol would’ve liked to protest this description, except that it was accurate.

“You forgot cooking complex and delicious side dishes,” he mumbled.

“Aw shit, I forgot how your exciting romantic life is gonna fuck with my meals. That’s it, you have to break up with them.”

Chanyeol made a face at him. Baekyun handed back the book.

“Well, you’ll like this, anyhow. It’s a good story. Oh!” he said. “Ooooooh. Yeol.”

He almost put his hand on Chanyeol’s shoulder, then grinned and grabbed his arm instead.

“Dude. There is so much porn.”

Chanyeol, having had a traumatic experience with omega porn while in high school, cringed.

“No, dude. I’m serious. You have to be kind of careful with your search terms, obviously, but the whole big, masculine omega thing has some great, great porn. Oh my god. I am so envious that you get to see *Receptive Partner* for the first time. It will blow your fucking mind. Hell, it still blows mine, and Xing and I have watched that thing like fifty times. Or the first twenty minutes, anyway, you know how it is.”

He did not.

A team switched out for C on Tuesday morning, making for a stuffed-full morning meeting. Several of the A guys went out of their way to loudly inform the C kids that Chanyeol’s shoulder was super interesting and that his locker was full of dirty books, which was great. Chanyeol thought Mark, their probie, might actually faint from blushing so hard.

Jongdae was true to his word and texted a lot during the days – mostly stupid stuff about work and things like “are you thinking about me? Which body part?” and funny gifs. Chanyeol heard from Minseok less often, until Chanyeol agreed to download Words with Friends. He spent most of Tuesday morning hunched up on the sofa, wracking his brain for vocabulary and totally cheating by recruiting Joonmyun's help. He still lost every game, though.

Both Monday and Tuesday, the texting slowed down around 5:30, and he found himself getting wistful, thinking about Minseok and Jongdae eating dinner together, hanging out on the sofa for the evening. There was a flurry of goodnight texts, and then he’d lie in the dark bunk room, listening to all the noises made by a bunch of sleeping dudes, wondering whether they were making out, whether they were wrapped up in one another. His shoulder still hurt like a son of a bitch, and he didn’t *really* think that he’d knock on their door Wednesday night to “oh, it’s you?”

But bad habits were hard to break.

Wednesday it rained, and they were busy all day running around to a variety of car wrecks and medical calls – nothing too bad, just time consuming and emotionally exhausting. Many upset people wanted an omega when they were out of danger, no matter what their presentation, if they didn’t have a bonded person around. So he did a bunch of hugging and walking people through phone calls to loved ones. A fair amount of encouraging people to keep their oxygen masks on and let the EMTs work while they clutched at his hands. It was a lot of strangers up in his personal space, putting their hands on him and crying onto his work jacket.
Baekhyun and Joonmyun, knowing how it was, let him sit wedged in the corner of the truck on the way back to the station. It was already past the time when they’d normally go off shift: the firehouse was full of C team and the ever-varying roster of academy students and part-timers that rounded out the in-between times. There were too many voices, and he had a pile of paperwork to fill out. There was a check-in meeting to make sure nobody was freaking out. A couple or police reports related to the car wrecks. All of it pulled at him, until he felt ragged around the edges.

“Get out of here,” Joonmyun said around 10:15. “You look like you’re ready to fall over. I’ll finish your paperwork.”

Chanyeol didn’t argue. When he pulled his phone out of his locker, it lit up with over a dozen text messages, mostly Jongdae using ever-greater proportions of all caps and several key smashes, and Minseok a few times, with things like, “I thought you said you’d be done by 9?” and “please let us know when you’re on your way home.”

“On my way in a minute,” he texted. “Are you guys still awake?”

“FFS,” Jongdae texted.

“Of course, waiting for you,” Minseok sent.

The bag of books felt like it weighed a thousand kilos while he trudged home through the hot, damp late-summer air. His backpack was full of clothes that needed laundering, and he needed to pay the electric bill, and he wanted to sleep for a week.

He wanted to lie down between Jongdae and Minseok and have them put their arms around him and block out the world for a while. He wanted to able to ask them to do that without being afraid they’d say no.

Chanyeol climbed the stairs to their floor and only had to remind himself once to knock straight on their door instead of going to his own apartment to set all his stuff down. The door opened after approximately 2.5 seconds, and Jongdae leaned out of the doorway to crush his face against Chanyeol’s chest.

“Oh my god, who are you,” he said, “what do you think you are, my boyfriend or something?”

The world immediately improved by 200%.

“Come in,” Jongdae said before Chanyeol had time to feel weird about standing in the hallway. “Put that crap down, it’s in the way of hugging.”

Oof. The way they both hung onto him. It made him feel like everything was okay.

“Sit,” Minseok said. “Did you eat? Do you want anything?”

He assessed.

“I’m actually starving,” he said.

Minseok smiled at him.

“You want ramyeon or leftover curry?”

“God, curry, please.”

He had spent all day with people intruding on his personal space. But when it was Jongdae, putting
his nose under Chanyeol’s ear and inhaling, rubbing his face against Chanyeol’s shoulder and face, it was the complete opposite of the intrusion and burden of those others. He felt himself relax by degrees. He put his arms around Jongdae.

“How was your day?”

Jongdae snorted.

“Jeez, it was fine. I’m starting to pick up steam on my project, and it’s really cool. You smell so unhappy, Channie. Are you okay? Was there something bad?”

Chanyeol nuzzled up against Jongdae’s hair.

“Nah, just a lot. Lots of wrecks, on rainy days. Lots of upset people.”

Minseok brought him a bowl and a glass of wine, and set them on the coffee table.

“Lots of people wanting a nice, comforting omega to hang onto?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

And they let him slide to floor to eat, Minseok stroking his back softly and Jongdae on the floor beside him, pressed up against his left shoulder.

“We’re such dorks,” Jongdae said once Chanyeol had gotten a few bites in him. “You said you’d be home around nine, and by nine-fifteen we had the news on, thinking maybe there was some big fire.”

If he gave that one single gram of thought, given how tired he was, that would make him cry. Chanyeol sought refuge in administrative details.

“I had a lot of paperwork to fill out,” he said.

Minseok snorted.

“But. If you want. I could put you guys on my emergency contact list. That way, if anything happened you’d know.”

“If we want!” Jongdae said.

“Channie, for shit’s sake, do that,” Minseok said. “And I’ll put you on mine at the shop.”

Chanyeol blinked up at him.

“Is that dangerous?”

Minseok grinned. Three days without seeing that grin was enough to have made Chanyeol forget how powerful it was. He sighed at the sight, and Jongdae’s hand scratched his back, like a little laugh.

“Not generally.”

“Half a cow fell on him once, though,” Jongdae said.

Minseok laughed.
“Thankfully it fell on me very slowly, so it was more obnoxious than anything else. It’s not like Jongdae’s work, with the constant threat of paper cuts and carpal tunnel.”

“Yeah, I really suffer,” Jongdae said.

Had he ever been so glad to be somewhere ever? He couldn’t remember. He didn’t feel any pressure to be anything, to do anything. It was okay just to be where he was.

“You sure you’re okay?” Minseok asked.

More than.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said, hearing the hoarseness of his own voice. “I’m just really, really tired, and really, really glad to be here.”

“Well, if you’re done eating, there’s no point in keeping upright any longer,” Minseok said. “You’re that tired, let’s get you to bed.”

Jongdae grimaced at the sight of his shoulder.

“Fuck,” he said, and kissed across the bruises and scabs. “That’s too much, Chanyeol, I’m sorry. Does it hurt a lot?”

“In kind of a good way?” Chanyeol said. “I mean, I guess it’s a bit much for everyday, but for special occasions, it’s kind of great.”

They both laughed.

“That was fucking amazing,” Minseok said.

“I defy any volcano to go up against the two of you any day for hotness scores,” Jongdae said. “I defy any other alpha to produce a harem of such excellence.”

Chanyeol and Minseok had to hold onto one another to stay standing.

“Harem?” Chanyeol shouted.

“You are such a jackass,” Minseok laughed.

The warmth of Jongdae’s smile as he looked at them, pleased that his joke had made them laugh, with his crinkled eyes, the way his eyebrows canted up in the center and one front tooth was ever so slightly crooked: he was so beautiful that for a second Chanyeol couldn’t stand it, and he had to hide by burying his face in Minseok’s hair.

Except that was no good either, because Minseok’s hands were so cool against his back, and he was so steady and strong when Chanyeol leaned against him. He took such good care of them, hiding his lopsided, gummy smile behind that murder face, fierce and gentle at the same time.

Chanyeol couldn’t understand what they wanted with him, and he was terrified to ask, in case they stopped.

“Let’s go to sleep, sweetheart,” Minseok said. “You seem like you’re too tired to deal anymore.”

Walking home, the thought of lying between them had ached, as if it were beyond hoping. But the two of them maneuvered him into the center, on his back, with Jongdae’s head on his left shoulder and Minseok’s back curled up next to his right side, their fingers twined together, and Chanyeol
couldn’t imagine that he had ever been more comfortable.

Jongdae was up early, proving how much of his obnoxiousness was just play by how quiet he was getting ready for work, kissing each of them soft as a breath so that Chanyeol only halfway awoke. He woke up for real later, when Minseok flopped over, grumbled, and rolled to his feet.

They each got halfway through their first cup of coffee and eggs on toast before either of them said a word. It was nice.

“I’m at the shop ten to three. What do you have going on today?” Minseok asked.

“Lot of nothing. Laundry.”

“We upgraded to a big machine, if you want to do it over here.”

“Yeah, that would be great. Want me to do yours while I’m at it?”

Minseok’s face could move from surprised to intimidating really quickly.

“Who’s asking,” he said, his voice flat. “Omega or boyfriend?”

Chanyeol grinned.

“Definitely boyfriend.”

“Then sure.”

“I helped mess up some of those sheets, I ought to help clean them.”

And that got Minseok to smile. They had a corner unit with a nice little balcony; Minseok showed him how to work the retractable clothesline.

“Okay, which one of you installed this?”

“Me. Jongdae’s really smart and a talented engineer, but please do not ever ask him to repair or throw anything. It’s just asking for disaster.”

“Duly noted.”

“Chanyeol, I’m in the mood to mess with Dae tonight,” he said while he was getting dressed. “That okay with you?”

Oh boy.

“You mean, uh, boss him around?”

Minseok grinned.

“I do, with you as a featured player, if you agree.”

“Sure?”

Chanyeol thought maybe he was learning the difference between murder face and gonna-fuck-some-people-out-of-their-minds face.

“What are you going to do?”
Minseok’s smile came on so slowly that the wickedness quotient was increased by about a thousand percent.

“Why don’t you think about what it might be and tell me later whether you were right?”

Yeah, sure, he could do that. And probably spend the day masturbating, but yes, he could definitely direct his imagination to a few boyfriend-related activities.

Especially if Minseok was going to wander around in work pants and a tight black t-shirt with his hair up in a ponytail like that. His work boots gave him several centimeters more in height, which he took advantage of by tipping Chanyeol gently back against the wall and leaning up for a kiss.

Minseok had this habit of ending most closed-mouthed kisses with a tiny lick to the underside of one’s bottom lip. Standing at the doorway of their apartment, waving goodbye, Chanyeol decided that it was one of Min’s most charming qualities.

He was used to quiet, domestic days just off a work shift. This one was way less morose and tedious than usual. Their furniture had been purchased with actual comfort in mind, instead of “fuck it, I just need a sofa,” and between their clothesline and both his and their drying racks, the pile of laundry seemed like it was done in a flash, even if he did have to keep stopping to respond to texts from Jongdae.

“Hey will Min mind if I get dinner going?”

“That is the stupidest question I’ve ever read with my own two eyes Chanyeol”

So once the pork shoulder he had found in the back of their fridge was roasting in a slow oven, the place smelled nice and homey, too. He rewarded himself for paying all his bills by calling his mom.

“Son! Are you back on your regular schedule?”

This was her standard way of acknowledging his heat without feeling like she had to ask any other questions about it, which was fine with him.

They chatted about what everybody was up to – mostly the usual, his sister angling for another promotion at work and his mom still trying to push her terrible idea that his dad should quit his office job and help her at the restaurant. It was his one point of true contention with his mother, but he’d never tell her that. Dad wouldn’t give in.

It was a pretty sad comment on his life that she didn’t even ask whether anything was new with him, and he had to bring it up out of the blue.

“So I’ve been out on a couple of dates recently,” he said into a brief silence.

He tried not to imagine how Jongdae would tease him for this inaccurate description.

“Oh! Yeollie! Really? Who is he, tell me all about him!”

“My neighbors,” he said.

“Goodness, I thought you said there were two cute boys next door.”

Yikes.

“There are.”
“So which one asked you out? I thought you said they were a couple?”

To reiterate: yikes.

“They are, and, um? Both?”

“Oh,” his mom said, and “oh!”

He gave her a minute to digest.

“Oh my. Gosh, son, I think maybe we’d better wait to tell your dad about this until you know for sure that it’s serious. But I’m certainly glad to hear that you’re having a little fun.”

Wow, yeah, his dad was going to need like a bathtub full of soju to deal with this news.

“Well!” his mom said. “I guess it’s like Complete Love, and heaven knows I loved that drama, so I shouldn’t be so shocked!”

Oh for pity’s sake.

“You watched that?”

“Of course I did, it was all anybody talked about while it was on! Didn’t you like it?”

“I never heard about it!”

“Chanyeol,” she said, sounding severe, “you’ve never paid proper attention to the things going on around you, but how in the world do you miss a thirty-two episode drama that the whole country goes bananas for?”

“I don’t know? Mom, I just found out this weekend that the whole giant omega thing is even a trope.”

She laughed for a long time.

“Oh, son. I love you, but that is plain ridiculous. How could that be?”

Then her voice went softer.

“Sweetheart. You really did make your world very narrow, didn’t you?”

Chanyeol blinked a lot, trying to keep his eyes clear.

“I know you hate to talk to me about that kind of stuff, and that’s fine. But you know, I watch a lot of those dramas. I really liked Strong Omega Kim Joseok because the main character reminded me so much of you.”

And wasn’t that a hell of a thing to hear.

“I guess I’ll. Watch it?”

“You should, I think it’ll make you smile. Maybe you can watch it with your new friends.”

“Maybe so.”

So that was weird. And it was always great to discover that one had been a huge dumbass for, like, a decade.
But he folded laundry and played guitar for a while and stopped worrying about it, which was a refreshing change from his usual tendency to brood. And there was a new bottle of lotion by the bathroom sink that he hadn’t noticed the night before. That it was chocolate-scented made him feel extremely wobbly in the chest area.

Chapter End Notes

I hope the enhanced silliness helps make up for the lack of porn in this chapter.
When Min came home, Chanyeol was draped across their sofa reading volume 4 of *Hell’s Heat*. Baekhyun had not been kidding about it getting racy in volume 3. The omega demon had a prehensile tail, which was excessively freaky in the hottest possible way.

“God damn,” Minseok said while taking his shoes off, adorable ponytail sadly gone. “That smells terrific. What is it?”

“Turning that pork shoulder into bo ssam. I hope you don’t mind.”

Minseok leaned over the back of the sofa.

“Mind? Why the hell would I mind? Though you know,” he said, pushing Chanyeol’s hair off his forehead with gentle fingers. “Laundry and dinner are usually my jobs. If you take over any more of my chores, I won’t have anything left to do but make out with you.”

“Oh no.”

“Your nefarious plan is uncovered.”

He bent down and put his nose up under Chanyeol’s ear to catch his scent. Chanyeol gave in to his presentational instinct to go limp and lean his head back. It didn’t matter that Min was a beta. Min was his. For the time being.

Minseok ran his hand through Chanyeol’s hair and hummed, then noticed the book.

“Oh, what’s this?”

Chanyeol held it up.

“Apparently I’m a fetish object.”

“Obviously. But what is it?”

Chanyeol laughed.

“Because I’m very obedient,” he said, and returned Minseok’s sharp grin, “I signed up for the damn calendar. And my coworker got all excited, because his wife is super into ‘the rugged omega thing,’ which I didn’t even know was a thing.”

“You didn’t? Aren’t there a bunch of dramas about that?”

“Yeah, I guess. And even more manhwa,” he said, holding up the book. “And apparently porn.”

“Oh I already knew about the porn.”

Because of course he did.

“The question is why you didn’t, Channie.”

Terrific, his favorite topic, himself, oh boy.

“Jeez, between seeing some really bad omega porn the first time I went looking when I was a kid,
and all my prior relationships ending up with either me being wrong because I’m omega or being the wrong variety of omega, I kind of went out of my way to avoid anything that seemed like it was about that stuff."

Minseok came around the sofa to sit on his legs and look into his face with a serious expression.

“I wondered what it was,” he said. “And I would definitely be there with Jongdae to help with trachea removal, if I ever met anybody who made you think you’re wrong, Channie. Even though I’m grateful to them.”

The forty different protests Chanyeol tried to have to that speech were blunted by the way Minseok rested two fingers on the hollow at the base of his throat and stared at his mouth while he spoke.

“If any of them had appreciated you for who you are, you wouldn’t be here now.”

It was definitely better to let Minseok kiss him than to have to come up with something smart in response to that. It was better to let Minseok kiss him than many other things in life: whether his soft little kisses, warm with affection, or the ones where he took control and invaded, all were enough to blot out just about any troubles.

Having met himself, Chanyeol had set an alarm on his phone to interrupt his reading. It went off just as Chanyeol was starting to think fondly of afternoon sofa sex, and they both startled.

“What’s this for?”

“Making the damn sauce for dinner.”

Minseok tossed his hair out of his face and grinned.

“I’ll help.”

They chopped and stirred, opened the oven long enough to moan over how delicious it smelled, washed the lettuce. Minseok went so far as to text Jongdae to buy oysters on the way home. Chanyeol, being Chanyeol, had just figured they’d do without.

“So,” Minseok asked over his cutting board. “Given much thought to my plans for the evening?”

Chanyeol’s ears got hot, but it was nice to give back what he got.

“Not really, man, I was too busy all day folding your underwear.”

He was really starting to see where Jongdae was coming from, trying to make Minseok laugh all the time. What a good sound it was, uncomplicated and happy. But with plans afoot, he didn’t press his urge to lie down on top of Min and kiss him breathless. They finished dinner preparations and ended up at either end of the sofa, legs tangled together, while he finished volume 4 of *Hell’s Heat* and Minseok started volume 1.

“You know you need to tell Jongdae what you said earlier. He needs to hear it, Chan, and he needs to hear it from you,” Minseok said at one point.

Just because he did know it didn’t make him want to.

The man himself got home and destroyed all their quiet, per expectations.

“How great is this? What’s that amazing smell? How cute are the two of you?”
He had on a deep purple dress shirt and little wire-rimmed glasses. Chanyeol reminded himself to breathe, even while Jongdae kissed him briefly and pressed their foreheads together, and then he and Minseok had a brief conversation about oysters, as if Jongdae wasn’t standing there looking like that.

“Yeah, there’s a reason why I always give him clothes for his birthday and most of them are jewel tones,” Minseok drawled once Jongdae had gone to change.

This was nice, because it reminded both of them to add birthdays to the group calendar, and he discovered that he barely had a month to figure out what to get his little super adorable alpha for a birthday present.

“Damn, that’s during Chuseok this year, so we won’t see him. He’ll be so pissed.”

“We won’t?”

Minseok’s expression was carefully blank.

“I’m not welcome at his family functions. You might be, though, you’re the correct presentation, if the less-preferred gender,” he said with a shrug.

Chanyeol growled.

“Kim Minseok, why are you making our Channie growl like that?”

Minseok winked at Chanyeol.

“Because it’s fucking hot.”

“Mmm, granted,” Jongdae said. “Man. Who am I supposed to properly kiss first around here?”

“Chan. We’re still working on his deficit,” Minseok said.

And once Jongdae had kissed them both and wandered off toward the wine rack, he added in a voice only Chanyeol would hear,

“Also since you’re not going to get to touch him again tonight.”

If the way Minseok grinned and squeezed his big toe was any indication, whatever Chanyeol’s face did in response to that was pretty funny.

He was so pleased by the way the pork fell to pieces the minute he waved a fork in its direction, and even more pleased by the way his boyfriends (boyfriends!) raved about it. So glad to have somebody to talk to over dinner at home and such nice faces to look at.

Jongdae wanted to know all about the books.

“It’s about this huge omega demon and his non-demon alpha. Gets really explicit in volume three.”

“I need to read faster,” Minseok said.

“Into your own stereotype, I see,” Jongdae said. “Valid. The stereotype is very sexy.”

Chanyeol looked to the heavens for support, because for fuck’s sake.

“He seems to have just learned about that stereotype this week,” Minseok laughed.
“How is that possible? Isn’t it the subject of like fifty movies every - wait.”

Jongdae waved his hands around.

“Wait. Does that mean you haven’t seen Receptive Partner?”

Chanyeol put his hand over his face.

“No, but for real? You haven’t seen it? It’s like must-watch porn, I mean if you have that and Oral Harem you’re pretty much set for life. You know, the first twenty minutes of each one.”

Okay, he had seen Oral Harem, and that was a pretty strong recommendation.

“Don’t we own Receptive Partner?” Jongdae said, apparently intending to talk about porn forever.

“Is that the one where the tall blond walks slowly out of the ocean, totally naked in the setting sun?”

“Babe, that is literally the opening scene,” Jongdae laughed.

Minseok shrugged.

“That’s all I need.”

So maybe Chanyeol was starting to develop a tiny bit of interest in this legendary porno.

“Well I guess I know what we’re doing later,” Jongdae said with a wide grin.

“No.”

When he thought about it, it was weird for Chanyeol that it had only been a week – how was that possible? – and he already knew them both so much better. He could see the progression across Jongdae’s face: the way his nostrils flared, and his jaw clenched, but then his cheeks pinkened and he looked at the center of the table, the habitual smile his mouth fell into ever so slightly wider. The way Minseok’s order went against his instinct, and he liked it anyway.

The precision with which Jongdae made another lettuce wrap and ate it, not looking at either of them and with such quiet control, was super sexy. Chanyeol looked at Minseok, who winked.

But big self-declarations to trust it and feeling like he had gotten to know them a little better didn’t make Chanyeol any more comfortable with weird silences. So when it dragged on, he started talking, ignoring Jongdae’s eyebrows and Minseok’s quiet little smile. He talked about the tote bag full of books (Minseok seemed excited that Hell’s Heat had forty volumes), and Eunmi’s list of dramas. Not yet about the conversation with his mom.

“Everybody keeps telling me to watch Strong Omega Kim Joseok, but the minute they see my bracelets, they start screaming about one called Complete Love.”

“Complete Love,” Jongdae sneered.

Chanyeol shrugged.

“I don’t know, man, everybody said it’s really good. I guess it’s about a. Um? Relationship like ours?”

“Throuple,” Minseok said.
“That’s a stupid word,” Jongdae said at the same time as Chanyeol’s “Euw.”

“Attitudes like this are why I always win at Words with Friends.”

So things were easy and normal through the rest of dinner, even if they made Chanyeol sit by himself on the sofa after dinner because he cooked and wasn’t “allowed” to help clean up.

“Didn’t we watch a couple of episodes of that strong omega one?” Jongdae said, flipping channels later. “Why’d we stop?”

“Your rut,” Minseok said.

“Oh, right.”

And there was a thing Chanyeol hadn’t considered and didn’t really want to delve into. Jeez. Heats were one thing, but ruts? Yikes.

The yikes didn’t last long: not with the way Minseok’s fingers trailed over his knee. Min’s cat-shaped eyes were half-lidded, and he didn’t look at either of them, but Chanyeol thought he could feel Minseok’s attention, waiting for Jongdae to notice.

Well. As a “featured player,” maybe it was up to him to play along. How terrible.

He shifted and sighed, stretching his legs out long, and Minseok ever so briefly pinched his knee - he thought in approval.

He let himself lean to the right by degrees, and by the time his head rested on Minseok’s shoulder, Min’s hand was halfway up his thigh, his dick was starting to show some interest, and Jongdae had definitely noticed, the remote tilting out of his hand.

“Chan, you haven’t had Dae yet, have you?” Minseok asked, as if he were asking about the weather.

It took Chanyeol a moment to find his voice, and when he did, his “no” was so deep that he felt Minseok’s grin against his hair.

“Ah, won’t you enjoy that,” Min said.

And yeah - between that sweet tight fit of his fingers and the memory of Jongdae’s face when Minseok had moved inside him, Chanyeol felt sure it would be a top-shelf experience. Which he was now interested in achieving at the first opportunity.

Min made them wait through two more segments of the dumb variety show on the tv before he spoke again.

“So Channie, what happens in volume three of Hell’s Heat? Tell me how they fuck the first time.”

If only he had known that, as a murder beta, Minseok’s preferred method of killing was though desire-induced heart failure. He would’ve bought a defibrillator.

“Um, the demon pulls them both off. With one hand.”

“Oh, that sounds fun,” Minseok said, though his tone sounded bored. “And we know you have the
hands for it.”

Another long pause, idols doing some dumb shit on the screen, and Chanyeol felt like a match about to be struck.

“You want to take me to bed, Channie? Make us both come with your lovely hand?”

“I do.”

“What about me?” Jongdae asked.

Chanyeol wished there was a way to keep his head where it was and still see the expression on Minseok’s face when he turned to Jongdae.

“You want Channie to have you?”

“Yes.”

“How do you want it?”

Chanyeol looked over; Jongdae’s eyes were wide, and if he were any more tense, he’d be quivering.

“I want to ride him,” he said, so raspy it was almost a whisper.

“You’re good at that,” Minseok said. “You know how strong his legs are, Chanyeol. He’ll bounce on you until you both see stars.”

Chanyeol wondered whether this was what volcanoes felt like, just before they erupted.

“But no. You don’t get that today,” Minseok said, so coolly that ice cream wouldn’t have melted in his mouth. “You get nothing today.”

Jongdae clenched his jaw.

“Can I watch?”

Minseok shrugged.

“Sure. As long as you keep your hands off us and yourself. You do any touching, nobody’s fucking you any time soon.”

Jongdae managed to look thrilled and annoyed at the same time. It was quite a facial expression.

Chanyeol had never thought before that it sounded fun to be watched. But Jongdae’s attention didn’t bother him: he wanted to look good for Jongdae. Wanted to make Jongdae want him more. So when Minseok stripped them each of their shirts and pulled him down onto their bed, Chanyeol turned them before he lay down so his right, bitten shoulder would show.

Minseok noticed – Minseok noticed everything, with a knowing smile on his face when he leaned in to kiss the still-bruised skin. He bit down, and Chanyeol cried out once, jerked. The sound Jongdae made was more like a growl than a moan, though it wasn’t angry, and Chanyeol fed off of it, pushing Minseok onto his back and grinding against him, kissing that beautiful neck. Minseok dug his fingers into the muscles of Chanyeol’s back and rolled against him, a low hum in the back of his throat when he tipped his head back to give Chanyeol more room to work.

“God, Chan,” he said, still shifting his body, “I don’t know which I like better, your hands or that
fucking mouth of yours.”

Want flashed like lightning through him, and Chanyeol grinned as he wrapped the former around Minseok’s ribs and set the latter to the hollow under Min’s sternum. Minseok scrabbled at the hair at the back of his head, and Chanyeol slid his hand down to Min’s hip, dragged himself upward to lay claim again to the warm eagerness of Minseok’s mouth.

Minseok rolled them back over on their sides, his agile little fingers undoing Chanyeol’s fly and pushing his jeans down around his knees before Chanyeol could do much more than start to fumble with the button at Minseok’s waist. When they had both peeled their lower legs out of their clothes, Jongdae’s hand appeared in Chanyeol’s line of sight, placed the bottle of lube between them, and lifted back out without touching either of them.

He couldn’t stop himself from grinning at that ridiculous, careful little gesture. He looked up, and Jongdae quirked one eyebrow and shrugged. But his cheeks were red and his eyes dark.

Then Minseok wriggled up close, one leg thrown over Chanyeol’s hip, and he poured lube over Chanyeol’s fingers, so there was a job to do.

“Go slow, Channie,” he said when Chanyeol wrapped his hand around them both.

He bit his lip, leaned in to kiss Chanyeol messily, then rested their foreheads together, one hand stroking Chanyeol’s neck while Chanyeol stroked them both off.

“You were so sweet during your heat.”

Minseok’s voice was low, just above a raspy whisper.

“So pliant, Channie, begging for us to fuck you, however we wanted.”

Chanyeol’s toes tried to curl.

“Slow down, sweetheart.”

He nipped at Chanyeol’s chin.

“It was so good, taking care of you. But I like you like this even better.”

Chanyeol tightened his grip, and Minseok closed his eyes briefly, pressed his lean, small body even closer.

“The way you’re up for fucking anything, as long as it feels good. So fucking generous, Channie. The way you don’t give a shit what anybody’s supposed to – fuck, like that, Channie, god, not too fast.”

Chanyeol had a close and friendly relationship with his own hand, strong from both work and music, callused from both in ways he knew how to use, from the roughness at the top of his palm pulling up his own shaft to the ridges on his fingertips teasing his head. He’d do this better for Min if it weren’t both of them, but the sensation of Minseok’s cock sliding next to him inside his own fist was so good. Other times when he’d done this with lovers, it was fun, but it had been fast, almost perfunctory. Minseok’s repeated whispers for him to go slower kept Chanyeol paying attention.

“Kiss me,” he said, and Minseok grinned briefly before dragging his head down.

God, his hand may have been small, but it was so strong on the back of Chanyeol’s neck, his tongue
hot in Chanyeol’s mouth. Chanyeol felt Jongdae shift and opened his eyes – Jongdae had moved, sitting on the pillows directly behind Minseok’s head, staring down at Chanyeol’s hand. Chanyeol shifted his grip, and Minseok ducked his head, his hand tightening on Chanyeol’s neck, and he hissed.

“Time for me to go faster, Min.”

Minseok gave a choked-off little groan, and his body undulated. He wormed his head up under Chanyeol’s chin, still hanging on to the back of his neck as if for dear life.

“God, your voice.”

Chanyeol went faster.

“Is he watching?” Minseok asked, lips up against Chanyeol’s neck.

He smiled, and Jongdae grinned back, want so clear all over his face.

“Yeah, he’s watching,” Chanyeol said. “Watching me get us off.”

Minseok laughed a little and shifted again, gasped. Jongdae’s smile turned more fierce. Chanyeol increased his pace again. Minseok’s scent was all around him, and Chanyeol could feel himself getting close.

That was no good.

He’d never been much of a talker outside of heat sex, but if Minseok and Jongdae liked his voice so much, he would fucking well learn.

“You gonna come for me, sweetheart?” he said, as deep as he could get.

And he would’ve immediately felt stupid about it, except for the way Minseok shivered and gave a brief groan, kissing his neck, and delight broke out on Jongdae’s face.

“You will,” he growled.

Minseok shuddered again, and Jongdae laced his hands behind his own neck in what Chanyeol assumed was a desperation move not to touch them.

“You fucking come all over me, Minseok,” he said, keeping the growl in his voice and his grip tight but his stroke not quite fast enough. “You show this alpha how you come for me.”

God damn, he had to get a metaphorical grip on himself in addition to the literal one, or he’d be the one going off first.

“I told you to come,” he said, somehow finding it in himself to go down a couple more tones, feeling so fierce for a second there that his own fangs started to come in, which had only ever happened, like, twice in his life, and then he was on his way over the edge for sure, his hand moving faster of its own volition.

Jongdae’s mouth was hanging open.

And then – it worked. Minseok squirmed up against him, making a high sound in his throat that was muffled against Chanyeol’s neck, and the slick heat of come on his chest, then coating his hand, was more than Chanyeol could resist anymore, and he was gone too, quivering against Minseok’s hand and leg holding him close, groaning into Minseok’s hair.
“Well,” Minseok said a few minutes later, rolling onto his back. “That went even better than expected.”

His hair was a wild, dark mess around his head, and his red face wore a broad grin. He looked up, and the warmth that broke open in Chanyeol was so big that he had to take refuge in bonking the top of his head against Min’s shoulder. Which was maybe dumb, but Minseok grabbed him and pulled him in, so that Chanyeol rested his head there, Min’s hand soft in his hair.

“Argh,” Jongdae said, flopping onto his back on the other side of the bed.

That he had been entertained was visible in the crotchular region, and Chanyeol grimaced in sympathy.

“Jongdae, did you know our omega was such a bossy bastard?”

“I’ve been starting to get that idea, yes.”

“Hey, don’t you pin that on me,” Chanyeol said. “I was never like this until I got with you two terrible influences.”

“I’ll pin you any time, baby,” Minseok said.

“Yeah, that is not how that went, tiny little murder beta.”

Minseok laughed and hugged him. Chanyeol definitely felt loopy. The way that Jongdae smiled over at them was not helping, nor was the way Minseok kissed the top of his head.

Even loopy people eventually got tired of being covered in dried come. Chanyeol took advantage of the opportunity to paw Minseok a little more in the shower. And when they came back, clean and damp and sleepy, their nice alpha had even changed the sheets.

“Ah, you did so well, Dae,” Minseok said.

Jongdae sagged and closed his eyes when Minseok put his hands in his hair. Chanyeol snuggled down into the bed to give them a minute.

“Worth watching, yes?”

Jongdae nodded, head on Minseok’s shoulder.

“I stand by my comment about volcanoes yesterday.”

Minseok pulled him into the bed.

“Here, you can kiss on me a little, since I’m old hat.”

Jongdae scowled at him.

“Shut up, you know you’re the most beautiful thing in the world.”

Minseok rolled his eyes and pulled him down.

“I’m pretty sure he’s right,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok swatted one hand at him, but Chanyeol was more concerned with watching their mouths move together, the way Jongdae rested his fingertips against Minseok’s jaw, and the way Minseok
He cupped his ass with one hand.

Definitely loopy, even if Min did make him sleep off on the side, away from Jongdae.

He was slightly less loopy and significantly more grumpy-slash-groggy when the alarm went off before dawn and through some black magic Min convinced him to go with them to the gym. At five-thirty am. Horrible.

He woke up (sort of) on the way there.

“You have a car?”

He appeared to have put on workout clothes – which would’ve required going back to his own apartment – in a dead sleep.

“Yes, we have a car,” Jongdae said. “You’ve been riding in it for ten minutes.”

Disorienting.

Their gym was a nice little neighborhood setup, not fancy but a little better equipped than the one at the firehouse.

The lady alpha at the desk who had him sign a guest waiver had an awful lot of smiles for the awful hour.

“Joining us, or do you have your own program?” Minseok asked.

“I’m good.”

Which meant that he could take advantage of the much fancier rowing machine while he watched his boyfriends push the sled back and forth. Would’ve been better if they were wearing smaller shorts, but still an excellent view.

That left him warmed and woken up enough to get a little music going in his headphones and open the workout app on his phone. Workouts at the firehouse were a lot louder and slower – there was always a group in there, with tons of banter, people spotting each other on the weight bench. Jongdae and Minseok were more efficient, moving around the gym almost silently. He’d have made more of an effort to chat with them between sets, but they both looked really serious about what they were doing, and that lady alpha was very – present.

“I can help you set that up,” she said when he stood by the Smith machine, trying to decide whether he was going to let himself to a little easy on leg day just in case he needed his legs for something later on.

He got it. People around his neighborhood were used to the weirdo 190-some-cm omega and generally didn’t crowd around him in stores and stuff anymore, waiting for him break something. But this lady didn’t know him. She probably thought he was going to find a way to drop a 60-kilo plate onto his own foot.

“Oh! I know how to work it. Thanks, though,” he said, smiling.

She smiled back, brightly. Morning people, ugh.

“Just let me know if you need anything, or I’d be happy to spot you.”
He nodded. Figured that if Minseok and Jongdae were so serious about working out, he’d better stay on program, and racked up the machine for some squats.

By the time he was done with them, his legs felt like jelly. On the other hand, Jongdae was standing with a kettlebell seemingly forgotten in his hands, looking like his eyes were about to roll back in his head.

Sweet. Seemed like a good time to pull his shirt up and wipe his face.

Off to his left, Minseok snickered at the way Jongdae fumbled and almost dropped the kettlebell, and then a couple of minutes later when Chanyeol nearly fell off the fly bench after Jongdae’s set. He had no idea whether that amount of hip-snapping was good kettlebell form, but it definitely put Jongdae’s ridiculously round little butt into proper perspective. Meanwhile, Minseok was bench-pressing.

He was really working up a Thing about Minseok’s arms.

And he was pretty well over resenting the fact that they woke him up so early. Enough, anyhow, to do a few late-workout chinups, on the off chance one of his boyfriends might have a thing for his arms.

He got through thirteen of them – not a personal best, but close to it. And the lady alpha was standing really close.

“Just spotting,” she said. “Safety first!”

Chanyeol lowered his feet to the floor, still holding the bar. Jongdae laughed. The lady blinked at him slowly, then shrugged and went back to her desk.

“She’s got a fucking knot on her,” Jongdae said once they had all cleared the door (“come back any time!” from the office on their way out). “Remind me to buy you a bracelet that covers your entire forearm.”

“Don’t be dumb,” Chanyeol said. “She was just afraid I’d break something. People do that all the time, it’s fine.”

“People do what all the time,” Minseok asked, sounding flat.

Chanyeol flapped his hands.

“You know. Hover.”

“Hover?” Jongdae said. “You are an oblivious dumbass, Chanyeol.”

“Well, he’s our oblivious dumbass now,” Minseok said.

Whatever. They could tease him all they wanted. He was in a small enclosed space with his two tasty boyfriends, and they were all a little sweaty, and the inside of Chanyeol’s head was humming with contentment. It was like he was walking through somebody’s mint patch in their garden after a cool spring rain, and he were any calmer, he’d be back asleep.

They dropped Jongdae off at an office building, with a kiss for Minseok and, while Chanyeol was extracting himself from the back seat, a

“See all of you later,” and a wink.
But he stepped out of arm’s reach too fast for Chanyeol to catch him. Rude.

“That alpha is a terrible tease,” Chanyeol said when he had climbed back into the car.

Minseok grabbed his hand.

“He has learned some extensive lessons from his beta about the value of anticipation.”

Chanyeol groaned, and Minseok’s utter lack of sympathy was completely obvious in his cackle.

He wasn’t wrong, though. They got home, and Minseok pulled him into the shower, where they only made out a little bit, but Chanyeol couldn’t help thinking of it as a prelude, and wondering whether it had been a mistake to show off with all those squats. Couldn’t help blushing when Minseok reached around while brushing his teeth afterward and handed over the chocolate-scented lotion.

(Which didn’t stop him from using it.)

“Shit, I’d offer to help you out if I didn’t have to go to work,” Minseok said, ogling the whole skin treatment process.

“Aw, no,” Chanyeol said before he could stop himself.

And it was nice how Minseok smiled at that, climbed up on the bed with him and pushed him backward to kiss him, slow and sweet.

“I’ve got a huge sculpture job due tomorrow night,” he said. “Should’ve gone over straight from the shop and started it yesterday. But the thought of spending time with you was too tempting. Now I’ve gotta pay for it.”

Chanyeol thought he should probably feel guilty about that, but somehow he was too distracted by the handsome face so close to his.

“Fuck, quit looking at me like that,” Minseok said, “I have to go, I’ll be lucky to get to come home tonight at all as it is.”

Which meant that. Oh wait, what did that mean, exactly?

“I didn’t quite mean for such a drastic change in expression,” Minseok said. “What’s that?”

“I was kind of working up some plans for Jongdae.”

“As he intended,” Minseok said.

“But is that? Okay? If you won’t be here?”

Was it stupid to ask this? They should probably have had a conversation or thirty about this kind of thing.

Minseok didn’t laugh at him, anyway.

“Sure it is, Channie. Does it bother you if he and I have sex when you’re not around?”

When they’d been together for so many years?

“Of course not, but –“
Minseok put his hand over Chanyeol’s mouth.

“Just stop at ‘of course not,’ will you? Then I don’t have to get annoyed while you’re so nice and naked.”

Chanyeol pressed his lips together.

“I’ve gotten some good one on one time with you, the past couple of days. Jongdae needs that too.”

Was this what it would be like, then? The three of them, just – taking time together when and however they could find it? And being okay with that?

“You’ve done this before,” Chanyeol said, sure of it all of a sudden.

He was unafraid to ask about it, with Minseok right here, lying on top of him, one cool hand on his face.

“I have,” Minseok said. “Not Dae.”

Chanyeol was actually happy about that. It was good to not be the only one who felt in over his head. And it was easy to trust Minseok to take care of them.

“Lu – my ex – and I didn’t break up right away when he met his alpha. We tried for a little bit, the three of us,” Minseok said softly.

“No good?”

He shook his head.

“I found myself the odd beta out.”

“Oh no.”

Chanyeol grabbed his shoulders, but Minseok smiled and rubbed his face against Chanyeol’s cheek.

“It’s fine, Channie, I’m not hurt by it anymore. How could I be, when we’ve all come out happy? I really cared about Lu, but Dae and I are mates. Whatever I might say about thinking with your glands, that is different. And Zitao is great, but I didn’t like him like I like you. And he never once looked at me the way you do, Chan.”

Well. However the hell he looked at Minseok, he sure hoped it was doing it right now. He guessed he must be, given the way that Min leaned down and kissed him, just a little bit hungry but still soft, for long enough that Minseok finally groaned,

“Fuck, I have to gooooo,”

and ran around, getting dressed and packing food into his bag.

But he made time at the doorway for one more kiss, and to press close against Chanyeol and say in a wicked voice,

“Have lots of fun tonight with Jongdae.”
The texts came in around 2:30. Chanyeol was back in his own apartment, in the middle of trying to work out a tricky part in a new song he was learning, so the first two times his phone buzzed, he didn’t pay attention. When he finally looked down to read,

“You waiting on me, Chan?

I’m counting down the seconds until I get home.

Remember when you shouted my name when you came? Gonna ride you until you do it again,” he broke a guitar string. The response to the picture of it that he sent was a gif of a laughing cartoon cat.

That this was followed by silence made it worse. He kept checking his phone every 5 minutes, looking for a new text, huffing his irritation when there wasn’t one, and it made him unable to settle for the rest of the afternoon, bouncing from gaming console to book to scrubbing the bathtub, just to have something to do to keep him busy that didn’t require thinking.

It was a long few hours before he heard a loud alpha complaint from next door, followed by banging on his front door.

“Why are you here?” Jongdae muttered during the process of manhandling Chanyeol against the wall and pulling him down.

“I live here,” Chanyeol said when his mouth was briefly free.

And it seemed like Jongdae started a rude comment about that, but interrupted himself with more kissing, messy and hard. Chanyeol felt in his skin, all of a sudden, the number of days it had been since he last gotten his hands on Jongdae like this (however few it had been, still too many). He wrapped one arm around Jongdae’s waist and pulled him up and in, bent to put his nose under Jongdae’s ear.

There was the scent he wanted, digging deep into his brain so that he pulled Jongdae even closer, and Jongdae laughed low, then went up on his toes and made an eager sound when Chanyeol put his mouth to work. He ran his hands up under the hem of Chanyeol’s shirt and curled his hands over the waistband of Chanyeol’s shorts.

“All day,” he murmured. “All fucking day, this is all I could think about.”

Well. Chanyeol had, too, and none of it had involved standing up against the wall by the front door. He pulled Jongdae down the hallway by his wrist toward that nice bed that, if less comfortable than the one next door, was still just fine for all the non-sleeping activities they had planned for the immediate future.

Jongdae’s ability to remove clothing with one hand while walking was amazing. When Chanyeol turned around, the only things he was wearing were his unbuttoned shirt and one sock. And those little wire-rimmed glasses, which Chanyeol figured might be his actual cause of death some day.
“Wow,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae grinned.

“I have many talents. No, leave yours on for now.”

“Only if you leave your glasses on.”

Jongdae’s grin probably meant that Death By Cute Glasses would happen sooner rather than later.

“You like to sit on me,” Chanyeol said once Jongdae had maneuvered him to his liking, upright against the headboard with his legs out.

“Who wouldn’t?” Jongdae said. “You’re comfy.”

He pulled Chanyeol’s arms around him – Chanyeol gladly took the hint, one nice, round ass cheek in each hand. Jongdae put his face against Chanyeol’s neck.

“There’s my omega,” he said, nuzzling, his hands kneading Chanyeol’s shoulders. “There you are, Channie, hi.”

Chanyeol could’ve stayed that way for a long while, kissing, pulling Jongdae close against him and running his hands all over that very naked body. He had beauty marks all over him, and Chanyeol hadn’t gotten anywhere near to kissing even a quarter of them yet.

“More,” Jongdae said, grinding against him and nipping at his bottom lip. “Open me up, like you did the other night.”

How could he refuse that? When Jongdae was so warm and smiling in his lap, his lips so eager on Chanyeol’s mouth and neck. The way he leaned into the crook of Chanyeol’s arm and hung onto his shirt. The way his low hum turned into almost laughing groans and he arched his back.

“I’m not going to break, Chanyeol.”

“Impatient.”

“Yeah, I’m impatient.”

Jongdae tried to arch down, but Chanyeol pulled his fingers back, grinning at Jongdae’s scowl.

“Watching you and Min last night, fuck, listening to you last night. You keep taking him apart, I want – ah, yeah, like that – I want you to. Fuck, more, more.”

God, just the sheer eagerness with which Jongdae pulled at him, kissed him sloppily, made Chanyeol almost as impatient. He could see and feel the way Jongdae was pushing himself to relax around his fingers, to allow more, to get himself ready.

This alpha.

Chanyeol wrapped his right arm more securely around Jongdae’s chest, drove his left hand up hard, and bent to kiss Jongdae, licking deep into his mouth.

“A little more?”

“Yeah, a little more,” Jongdae panted. “Almost, Chan. Just a little more.”
Four fingers, then. And Jongdae was red down to his chest, head thrown back. Chanyeol stroked his thumb gently across Jongdae’s ribs, trying to help him relax. This was a dumb position to be in, he wanted to be able to get his mouth on Jongdae better, and he still had all these stupid clothes on.

“Fuck, enough,” Jongdae said. “I’m done waiting.”

He pulled himself up and off, knees on either side of Chanyeol’s hips, tugged Chanyeol’s shirt over his head. It was a damn relief to kiss him from a better angle, to feel Jongdae’s hands roaming over his torso.

“Get these fucking shorts off,” he growled, if not quite giving Chanyeol enough room to do so efficiently.

Chanyeol felt like he’d been waiting forever, and a squirming alpha in his lap had only pushed matters along. His dick just about leaped when Jongdae touched it, and he didn’t bother trying to muffle his groan. If Jongdae didn’t look out, it’d all be over before it started. He could barely keep himself together enough to grab a condom from the nightstand.

“I love this industrial strength lube of yours,” Jongdae said, coating Chanyeol with it liberally.

“Tastes horrible, though.”

Jongdae leaned up against him, licked under his ear.

“Not like your slick. That tastes amazing. Shit, I can’t believe I didn’t take the opportunity to eat you out during your heat, Channie. I won’t forget next time.”

And yes. Chanyeol whimpered a little. It was a whimper-worthy statement.

Jongdae’s grin was sharp when he raised up, but his jaw dropped open as he lowered himself slowly, hissing a little, bracing himself on Chanyeol’s shoulders. It was so hot, such fantastic pressure, that Chanyeol had to struggle not to thrust into it.

Jongdae was breathing hard by the time he sat flush, grimacing a little.

“You okay?”

“Yeah. Fuck, that is a lot. Give me a second.”

Chanyeol concentrated on keeping still by wrapping one hand carefully against Jongdae’s neck, noticing how his palm tucked up under Jongdae’s chin while his fingertips touched vertebrae. He stroked that beautiful jaw with his thumb, ran his other hand up and down Jongdae’s slim waist.

How was he even here, fucking this alpha? This beautiful, eager alpha.

“Jongdae.”

His eyes flew open, and he smiled, slow and wicked, then rocked forward a little, making Chanyeol gasp to finally, finally move inside. Jongdae rocked back and forth like that for a while, his mouth hungry against Chanyeol’s, the tiny bit of movement making Chanyeol tremble with the effort not to push him backwards and slam into him.

Then Jongdae gripped Chanyeol’s shoulders and really started to ride. He ducked his chin and looked up over those glasses, rising up slowly and driving down hard.

“Ah, god,” Jongdae breathed.
Chanyeol braced his hands under Jongdae’s elbows, trying to give him some leverage – not that he seemed to need it, the way he bounced on Chanyeol in that steady, unhurried rhythm, just like Minseok had said he would. Chanyeol thought he’d be able to see both stars and fireworks, if he tried. The pressure and friction on his cock were stealing his ability to think. The way Jongdae tossed his head and bit his lip stole Chanyeol’s ability to breathe. Jongdae swiveled his hips, and Chanyeol moaned.

“Fuck, the way you fill me up,” Jongdae said, digging in with his toes and going faster, making Chanyeol’s voice break when he cried out.

Jongdae put his hand on Chanyeol’s neck – not firmly enough to choke, but enough to make an omega open his eyes and pay attention.

“Who’s your alpha,” Jongdae said, grinning sharply.

“You are.”

Jongdae slammed down, and his fingers twitched once as he bowed his back and gave a brief groan. He shifted his angle, breathing as hard as Chanyeol was, now, squeezing a little so that Chanyeol’s head dropped back at the rush of pleasure.

“You close, omega?”

“Yes.”

“Good,” Jongdae said, resuming that fast, brutal pace, making one of those half-laughing moans that Chanyeol had never heard from anyone else.

God, he _was_ close. And his mouth felt so empty not to be on Jongdae’s body. His hands couldn’t settle because they wanted to touch everywhere. He canted his hips up to meet Jongdae’s, tension coiled deep in his pelvis, and Jongdae’s grip on his shoulders tightened.

“Come on,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol’s hands slid over the sweat on Jongdae’s torso. Those glasses had slid down to the end of his nose, and his hair had flopped over his forehead. He bounced hard a few more times, and _there_ it was.

Chanyeol tried to thrust up, get more of that excellent tight heat, but Jongdae grinned and grabbed the headboard, letting all his weight rest on Chanyeol’s legs. He squeezed, and Chanyeol lost track of himself. Not being able to move made his orgasm seem like it lasted for a fucking week. He was pretty sure he made about a hundred embarrassing sounds during the whole process, but at least one of them was Jongdae’s name, so at least he got that right.

Shit, and the expression on Jongdae’s face when Chanyeol finally stopped shaking and crying out. He looked so pleased. And not at all bothered that he hadn’t come yet.

Well, it bothered Chanyeol. He shoved Jongdae backwards, moving with him, hissing at the sweet slide of pulling out, and clamping his lips around Jongdae’s erection.

“What –“ got interrupted by a groan when Chanyeol started to suck. Holding Jongdae’s wriggly hips down, he realized he hadn’t done this yet either. No wonder Minseok had said Jongdae needed time with him. Chanyeol had a lot of work to do to catch up.

He dragged his tongue up, hard and slow, and that was all it took for Jongdae to fill his mouth.
“Fuck, Channie,” Jongdae panted when Chanyeol pulled off with one more lick and a little kiss to the tip. “You didn’t even let yourself catch your breath!”

Chanyeol shrugged. Now they could be all gooey in the afterglow together, which was better. He dropped the knotted-off condom to the floor to be later’s problem and burrowed his head into Jongdae’s armpit. As he had hoped, Jongdae wrapped his arms around tight and tucked one foot between Chanyeol’s knees, kissed the top of Chanyeol’s head.

“You smell so sweet,” Jongdae said after a couple of minutes of the two of them lying still, Chanyeol stroking Jongdae’s chest and Jongdae scratching him lightly behind the ear.

“It’s making me hungry.”

Chanyeol pinched him, and he convulsed, slapped Chanyeol’s shoulder with a laugh.

“Come on. We have to go next door anyway, in case Min comes home. We’ll order a pizza and you can be all floppy in my lap while we wait for it.”

It was a compelling argument, even if it meant that Chanyeol had to put clothes back on.

“Excuse me, you like what,” Jongdae said a few minutes later, phone in one hand and disgust plain on his face in response to the entirely reasonable suggestion of a ham and pineapple pizza.

“That is fruit, Chanyeol, how dare you.”

“So are tomatoes.”

Thankfully, Jongdae had removed his glasses once they were back in his apartment, so that glower didn’t have enough power to move him.

“Sausage, peppers, and mushrooms?” Jongdae asked with an aggrieved sigh.

“And onions.”

“Fine.”

He may have been lying face down on their sofa with his eyes closed, but he heard Jongdae order that additional small ham and pineapple pizza. He smiled into his elbow and wondered for the nine hundredth time how they were both so nice and what in the world he had done to get them to focus it on him.

He didn’t even open his eyes when Jongdae came back to sit down and lift his head onto one thigh. He just shifted around a little so he could tuck one hand under Jongdae’s ass. He heard Jongdae messing with his phone but focused on the fingers carding through his hair.

“Hey,” came Min’s voice over the speaker.

“Min, bad news. We’re going to have to put Chanyeol back where we found him.”

Chanyeol opened his eyes while Minseok laughed.

“What?”

“He likes pineapple on pizza, so he’s obviously morally degenerate.”
Oh. What a dork. Chanyeol closed his eyes again. Minseok’s laugh was so nice.

“He accepted our bracelets, Dae, we have to at least keep him until his next heat.”

“Damn.”

“I know, you’ll have to find a way to persevere.”

Chanyeol poked Jongdae in the side, and he jumped.

“You coming home tonight, Min?”

“Unlikely. This ice is not cooperating. Why are you calling me? Aren’t you supposed to be fucking right now?”

“Round one complete!” Jongdae said. “I think he bruised my liver, it was awesome.”

“I must’ve done a bad job, Min,” Chanyeol groused into Jongdae’s hip. “He’s so perky.”

“Poor Chan,” Minseok, his voice low and warm. “You’re caught in his enthusiasm loop now. The only way out is through.”

Chanyeol groaned for comedic effect and was rewarded with two nice laughs.

“We miss you!” Jongdae yelled at the phone.

“Yes!”

Minseok hummed.

“I’ll be back tomorrow evening as soon as this is delivered. I feel certain the two of you can figure out how to occupy yourselves in the meantime.”

“Yah, you’re a party pooper,” Jongdae said. “You’re lucky I love you.”

“Bye, Min,” sounded lame, but Chanyeol couldn’t come up with anything better.

“Love you too, now go have more sex,” Min said.

But Jongdae let him flop in his lap as promised, his fingers in Chanyeol’s hair. A couple of times, Chanyeol opened his eyes and looked up to see a small, quiet smile on Jongdae’s face. He couldn’t decide whether it made him feel shy or thrilled – either way was a sensation incompatible with lying like a cooked noodle over Jongdae’s legs, so Chanyeol ignored it.

The door buzzer sounded.

“Aw, you almost make me sad to see pizza arrive,” Jongdae said when Chanyeol sat up.

He took the opportunity to ignore Jongdae’s incorrect commentary about his delicious pizza by checking his phone, which had been buzzing in his pocket the whole time he’d been lying on the sofa. Given the sheer number of buzzes, Chanyeol was unsurprised that they were from Baekhyun.

“I didn’t know you were one of THOSE people

“I thought most people stopped abandoning their best friends for dates in high school

“But not you, apparently
“Too busy with your TWO boyfriends

“And I’m left all ALONE

“Despite my YEARS of dedication to our friendship

“And all the times I’ve dragged your heavy ass out of burning buildings

“And let you get snot all over my precious band t-shirts after every breakup

“But it’s fine

“I guess I understand

“Two dicks are better than one best friend

“I’ll be okay

“I’ll just die of loneliness, don’t worry about it”

Dork.

“What are you smiling at that’s not me, I hate it,” Jongdae said.

Bracelets and mating scars or no, a week in was definitely too soon to meet his family. But maybe it was good timing to meet his best friend. They were either going to hate each other or team up to cause worldwide mayhem. Either way, it would be pretty entertaining.

“You want to maybe hang out with Baekhyun tomorrow?”

Jongdae scowled.

“You mean, Baekhyun that I hate, Baekhyun?”

Chanyeol pulled out his very sweetest smile – the one that made every granny everywhere pat him, call him a good boy, and compliment him on his teeth.

“Yes.”

“That is a horrible facial expression, Chanyeol, and I’m powerless against it. I guess I will meet your horrible best friend, even though I hate him.”

Dork number two. This one, however, Chanyeol crawled over to and kissed.

“You’re so nice, alpha.”

“I know it. Text your dumb friend.”

“I will let you meet one of them,” he wrote.

“aw yiss bring the sexy scary beta”

Chanyeol didn’t pass that comment along to Jongdae. But they eventually agreed on a time (after lunch, with enough time before dinner that they could bow out if things turned out awkward). And when that was done, he lay on top of Jongdae on the sofa for some dessert.

The advantage of lying on top of Jongdae was that it kept the wiggling under control for a little
while, until the wiggling became a positive feature. Chanyeol had spent a lot of time recently simply kissing Minseok. It was weird (in a great way) to get to focus on Jongdae. When he wasn’t trying to bend a person’s mind inside out, Minseok’s kisses were sweet and soft. Jongdae’s mouth was too filthy to ever be considered sweet: even kissing slowly, his tongue curled into Chanyeol’s mouth like it was promising more, and his hands wandered. He smiled and tipped his head back when Chanyeol nipped at his bottom lip, rolled against Chanyeol’s body at the touch of lips against his neck.

Vaguely, Chanyeol wished for an end to things like rent and needing to eat so he could do this forever, the back of Jongdae’s head nestled in his hand, his mouth moving over Jongdae’s face and neck, everything warm and comfortable. Jongdae’s scent was lodged so deep in his head that Chanyeol figured he couldn’t fret about anything even if he tried. He was with his alpha. Everything was all right.

“I want you again,” Jongdae said, running his hands up under Chanyeol’s t-shirt and scraping his teeth along the side of Chanyeol’s neck.

Chanyeol’s dick approved of this plan, despite his brain’s interference.

“Even after that ‘bruised liver’ comment?”

Jongdae flicked him in the forehead. Rude.

“You were supposed to take that as a compliment to the size of your dick, not take it seriously, jesus. It was too fast. I couldn’t help myself, you looked so good coming apart. I want to do it again.”

He pulled Chanyeol’s head down and kissed him.

“Make me feel it, Channie,” he whispered up against Chanyeol’s mouth.

Chanyeol had to remind himself how to inhale.

“Like this?” he asked when he could, his voice sounding hoarse. “So I can see you?”

Jongdae grinned.

“Hell yes.”

As usual, making out was even better with their bare chests pressed together. When Chanyeol reached up for supplies from the side table, Jongdae did a few things with his mouth that made Chanyeol briefly forget how his body was supposed to work. He hadn’t known his abs were such an erogenous zone.

Jongdae took the bottle and packet out of his hand and laid them on his own chest while Chanyeol shifted around to get a better angle.

“Minseok and I are pretty lazy about condoms,” he said. “But lately, every time I go looking for a pen or a cotton ball or whatever, I find stacks of them stashed everywhere.”

Chanyeol blinked at this.

“It’s like he has ideas,” Jongdae snickered.

Gosh, how awful.

“What, you don’t have ideas?” Chanyeol said, figuring it was okay to start with two fingers, given how recently they’d been at it and thereby forestalling any snappy comeback.
The way Jongdae bit his lip and tossed his head was better than snappy comeback. He hummed and
writhed, egged Chanyeol on in a breathy voice until Chanyeol ached for him, cursing when he
finally pushed himself inside.

“Ah, god, that’s good,” Jongdae said.

“You tell me when I can move,” Chanyeol rumbled, his mouth up under Jongdae’s ear, biting a little
at that tender spot where his scent was strongest.

Cupping the back of Jongdae’s head. Kissing deep into his mouth, until Jongdae arched against him
and said, “please.”

Who was he to deny such a beautiful alpha, asking so nicely? Chanyeol moved, slowly but thrusting
deep. It was so good that he broke out in goosebumps briefly, and Jongdae’s hands moved over his
back, his heels digging into the backs of Chanyeol’s thighs.

“You feel it?” he asked, his lips up against Jongdae’s cheek.

“Harder, Channie,” Jongdae murmured in his ear. “So good.”

Harder, he could do. It was the easiest thing in the world, to move, to slide in and out with Jongdae
undulating against him, both of them breathing hard.

“Chan.”

He fucked harder, and Jongdae cried out sharply. The sound urged Chanyeol on, as did Jongdae’s
nails in the skin of his back. He reached down between them to wrap his hand around Jongdae’s
dick. The rhythm was all off – he couldn’t keep up the same tempo, fucking and stroking at the same
time, when he was getting so close himself. He wanted Dae to come first.

Chanyeol tilted his hips a little. That Jongdae squirmed and cursed told him that he had hit where he
was aiming. Good. He worked Jongdae’s cock hard, his ass harder, gritting his teeth against the lure
of their skin slapping together and the way his own rhythm was driving him crazy, Jongdae’s body
warm under and around him.


God, Jongdae was so beautiful, coming underneath him, with a long cry and his neck a perfect arc
for Chanyeol’s mouth. As long as Chanyeol drove into him, he kept on making breathy little cries,
then wrapped his arms and legs around tight when Chanyeol moaned and jerked his way into his
own release.

“How disgusting would it be if we just lay here like this for the rest of the night?” Jongdae asked
after a few minutes.

“Very,” Chanyeol said, though he was sad about it.

“Boo.”

They stayed for a little while, anyway, Chanyeol ready to hum with contentment at the softness of
Jongdae’s kisses and hands in his hair. Even after a quick rinse-off and back on the sofa in pajamas,
Jongdae remained quiet and sleepy, like that first night, curled up against Chanyeol’s chest with
smiles and slowly blinking eyes until they gave up trying to stay awake anymore.

All that and waking in the morning with Jongdae wrapped around him like the world’s best-smelling,
most handsome barnacle made Chanyeol stupid enough to agree when Jongdae muttered some nonsense about how he usually went for a run on Saturday mornings. Ugh.

Not that he wasn’t low on his exercise quotient in the past little bit for some strange reason (two of them), but really, after a day that started with lifting and ended with pounding Jongdae halfway to the moon, his legs totally deserved a rest. Not to mention the nice morning erections they both sported, which would be way more fun to deal with than running.

So: a stupid idea to begin with. And then the run was a complete disaster.

There was just literally no way that Chanyeol could run slowly enough to make a reasonable pace for Jongdae and still be doing anything remotely run-like. By the time they made it to the local middle school and its track, Chanyeol was itchy with the desire to do anything other than the stupid little hitching power walk he was doing, and Jongdae’s eyebrows had reached a level of bitchiness that made him a little scared. It was just super great to be able to see their first fight coming, and to know that it was going to be about something so completely stupid. And, of course, about something he totally couldn’t help. He didn’t ask for such long legs.

“Just go,” Jongdae growled when they were on the track.

Having been given an opportunity to postpone the yelling, Chanyeol took it. He tore off at a sprint to bleed off the frustration, until the way he ate up the cinder track under his feet was too satisfying to ignore, and he let himself feel the stretch in his legs and the sun on his face.

He passed Jongdae at least twice.

Pelting flat out around the track meant that he was gassed long before Jongdae was done with his much more sensible run. Chanyeol sat in the grass in the center and stretched for a while, letting himself ogle. Jongdae was still stupid hot, no matter how much fighting they were going to do. He had real stamina, too, running smoothly around the track for half the morning on those ridiculous legs, with that ridiculous butt, until Chanyeol had stretched every part of him that could stretch and he flopped back onto the grass, one arm over his face.

Just when he was starting to forget and let the heat of the day melt into his bones, he felt the shove of a toe on his hip.

“Get up, skyscraper. It’s coffee time.”

He got up. He stared when Jongdae pulled his shirt up to wipe his face. He walked beside his alpha, waiting for the yelling to start. And waiting some more.

And tripping over his own feet when Jongdae hooked his index finger through Chanyeol’s bracelets.

Jongdae led Chanyeol by the wrist that way to a coffee shop, paid for their drinks, and dragged him to a table outside before he spoke.

“Dude. Why do you keep looking like I’m going to kick you?”

Chanyeol had no idea how to answer that. If he was supposed to be the one starting the fight, he was – resistant.

“Chan. What is up?”

What was he supposed to say?
“I’m sorry.”

Jongdae tilted his head to one side.

“For … what?”

Now that he thought about it, apologizing for being tall would sound pretty dumb.

Jongdae wound several fingers around Chanyeol’s bracelets.

“Please do not fucking tell me that you were trying to apologize to me for my little hissy fit, or I really will kick you.”

Since that was in fact what he had been trying to do, Chanyeol applied attention to his iced coffee instead.

“Chanyeol. Jesus, man, now I feel bad.”

“No –”

Jongdae curled his hand over Chanyeol’s wrist.

“Dude.”

Chanyeol nodded at his cup, though he’d be damned if he could figure out what he was supposed to be feeling at the moment.

“Channie. You thought I was mad at you?”

He nodded again, and Jongdae’s hand gripped his wrist tighter.

“I hate your ex-boyfriends.”

The inside of Chanyeol’s chest got a little wobbly at that, and he figured it would probably be weird to either smile or get watery-eyed in response, so he drank more coffee. Sadly, as usual his face was doing a thing, and even more sadly, Jongdae was looking at him.

“You really did think I was going to yell at you?”

Chanyeol nodded at the table, feeling that his ears were flaming red.

“I mean, it’s not like I love being the tiniest alpha in all the land, but I don’t see how that’s your fault.”

Chanyeol stared at him.

“And it’s not like I just had the incredible realization this morning that you’re taller than me, fuck.”

Put that way, several painful incidents in Chanyeol’s past actually became kind of funny.

Jongdae gazed at him for a little bit, eyebrows angled and mouth drawn down like he was annoyed, but his hand still tight around Chanyeol’s wrist, his thumb rubbing back and forth. That was good. Chanyeol hung onto that point of contact, let it help him drop his worry.

“Who the fuck would start a thing with you and then turn around –” Jongdae murmured, then rolled his eyes.
He sat back in his chair and worked on his drink, still staring.

“You have no idea how many fights I have been in,” he said finally.

“Isn’t fighting what alphas do?” Chanyeol asked, hoping it wasn’t too big a risk to make a joke.

And then going giddy when Jongdae grinned sharply at him.

“Among other things,” Jongdae drawled, his voice deep.

“But I mean, it's a minor miracle my face still looks this good,” he said in an easier tone.

He fiddled with his straw.

“You know how when we get our knots in a twist, alphas only back down to somebody bigger or meaner. So I learned mean pretty young, just to keep from getting my ass kicked all the time. And it's taken me a long time to make myself become less of a dickhead. But I sure as hell hope I've at least grown enough as a person not to blame my own damn boyfriend for me being short.”

It was a damn good thing Chanyeol had already decided not to bother trying to tamp his feelings down anymore, because for crap’s sake. By the time they returned home, hand in hand, Chanyeol was ready to burst at the seams with either mush or more sex. Which seemed like an awesome excuse to busy his mouth by putting it on Jongdae.

“Chan, I’m all sweaty.”

Which was maybe objectively gross, but it just meant that Jongdae smelled extra Jongdae-like and tasted salty, and Chanyeol couldn’t think of anything he’d rather be doing at that particular moment than licking Jongdae like a goddamn popsicle and sucking until his alpha was scrabbling against the wood floor just inside the entryway, alternating curses with his name until he came down Chanyeol’s throat.

Jongdae returned the favor in the shower, so by the time they left again, Chanyeol had floated up way past cloud nine to like cloud fifty-seven. No fighting and blow jobs: a recipe for a good morning.

Between that and the way Jongdae kept dancing around and singing half his sentences, Chanyeol was sure they looked like a couple of smitten doofuses at brunch. From his standpoint, at least, it was an accurate description.

“Wine store!” Jongdae sang when there was actual space finally visible on their plates.

“Is that a random comment or a suggestion?”

“That’s our next destination.”

Jongdae waved a fork laden with half a pancake at him.

“I love the wine store.”

Which was clear from the way he wandered the aisles, putting bottles in the cart and taking them back out again, chattering nonstop. His opinions about wine sounded numerous and strongly held. Chanyeol had no idea about half of what Jongdae was saying, but he was happy to lean on the cart and listen to Jongdae’s voice, and to give his opinion, as long as it was only about the labels. Plus there were free samples, so that was cool.
“I thought pink wine was supposed to be crap,” he said, accepting a second little plastic cup.

“Crap pink wine is crap,” Jongdae said. “Good pink wine is good.”

“Thank you, that’s so informative.”

Jongdae stomped lightly on his foot and asked the lady handing out the samples approximately two hundred and eighteen questions about the pink wine. It was a terrible revenge.

But it was definitely more fun than Chanyeol had thought would be possible to have, spending almost two hours wandering around a giant liquor store. Jongdae’s enthusiasm was infectious, and they chatted about all kinds of stuff while they tooled around. Off in the back corner, in the lonely tequila aisle, Jongdae kissed him just thoroughly enough that Chanyeol had to bend over the top of the cart for a few minutes while he pushed it.

“Seriously, what’s your favorite from what you’ve drunk at our place? I’ll get a case of that, so you know we’ll have something you like.”

“It was all – good?” Chanyeol said. “I mean, it all kind of tasted the same? But I liked it?”

Jongdae stared at him.

“All tasted the same? I know from recent experience that there’s nothing wrong with your tongue, Chanyeol, so what the hell is wrong with your brain?”

Chanyeol tried to poke him, but he dodged.

“All tasted the same. Ugh, I’m going to take you to every wine bar in town until we cure your terrible ignorance.”

“Oh no,” Chanyeol laughed. “Don’t take me out on dates.”

Jongdae winked at him.

They still had a little time after the boxes of wine bottles were stowed in the car, so they walked around some, poking into a couple of shops. The swanky candy store had a big display of homemade marshmallows, dipped or rolled in various flavorings. Chanyeol had a box mostly filled with them before Jongdae noticed what he was up to.

“Look at you,” he said.

He put his arm around Chanyeol’s waist and leaned his head against Chanyeol’s arm.

“He’ll love it.”

And when they parked in the lot at Baekhyun’s building, Jongdae climbed on him, kissing him roughly enough to make Chanyeol’s lips tingle and rubbing his face over Chanyeol’s face and shoulders. It was all so totally obvious that he wanted them to show up at Baekhyun’s door with Chanyeol looking mussed and smelling of him. Baek would think it was hilarious. Chanyeol found that he didn’t mind even one little bit.

Baekhyun did in fact quirk an eyebrow when he answered the door. Chanyeol tried to hide his blush by messing with his hair, but he didn’t miss how Baek sniffed him when he walked by, then grinned. Jongdae mostly behaved during introductions and getting settled around the snacks Baek had set out,
though his eyebrows were giving his skepticism away.

“Well damn,” Baekhyun The Ruiner said finally. “You are cute. Yeollie, he’s totally out of your league.”

Jongdae grabbed Chanyeol’s bracelets and growled, “no.”

Chanyeol wondered how rude it would be to kick his best friend’s ass on this first meeting. Especially given that smirk on his face.

But then he leaned back and said,

“Well, Jongdae, I’ve known Yeol since kindergarten, so I have literally all the dirt. I also have photo albums. What do you want to know?”

The corner of Jongdae’s mouth twitched.

“Photo albums?” Chanyeol demanded, with what he thought was a completely reasonable level of outrage.

“Yeah, of course. I got a few from my mom, considering the occasion.”

So that was horrible, because Jongdae laughed, and Baekhyun actually pulled the fucking things out, and they were from middle school. It was so awful. Jongdae took pictures and texted them to Minseok. Chanyeol took back every thought he had ever had about Jongdae being nice.

“Quit looking so mortified, Yeollie,” Baek laughed. “At least I didn’t bring out the ones of us naked in the bathtub together.”

“Oh please,” Jongdae said, “seen it, done it. Will probably do it again later today.”

Which was probably the response Baekhyun had been going for, given the way he shrieked and smacked Chanyeol’s arm.

“He’s trying so hard not to like me,” Baek whispered when Jongdae was in the bathroom. “He will absolutely not succeed.”

He put his arm around Chanyeol’s shoulder.

“He’s super hot, Yeol. And relatively nice, given the alpha thing.”

Chanyeol slugged him.

There followed a stupid conversation about Chanyeol’s video game skills and some idle chatter, and then Baek put on the smile that meant he wanted something.

“What.”


Jongdae’s eyebrows rose fifty stories.

“What, Baekhyun.”

Baek tossed his hair and smiled some more.
“Make me some ramyeon.”

“What? No.”

“Come on, Yeollie. You make it better than anybody, pleeeeeeease.”

“Don’t be weird, no way.”

“Come on. It tastes better when you make it!”

Chanyeol only agreed because he knew Baekhyun was actually capable of behaving like an adult, so he was probably acting weird to get the chance to talk to Jongdae alone. And the best friend code required that he get the chance to threaten Jongdae’s life or whatever if he didn’t treat Chanyeol right.

Baekhyun was obviously terrible at that conversation, because it had never once worked.

But he padded into the kitchen to cook up one of Baek and Xing’s super mild little baby ramyeons. He didn’t actually make it any different from anybody else, other than treating the egg a little more gently so it didn’t come out so tough. It was just as easy to stir the egg gently and get nice, tender little shreds. Not that he wasn’t tempted to whip it hard like everybody else did in response to the low laughter from the living room. So far, Baek hadn’t brought out any of the super embarrassing stories, but there were some real doozies, and you could never tell when Baekhyun would decide to go for maximum awkward.

When he took the pot in and set it onto the coffee table, they were leaning toward each other, Jongdae looking at Baekhyun’s phone. Baek looked up at him and winked.

When he sat on the sofa, Jongdae pushed Chanyeol down and climbed on him. He didn’t growl, really, just made a little noise like “rrrrrrrrrr” in Chanyeol’s ear.

“What the hell.”

“Betcha didn’t know I had a video of Hyunwookie practicing his CPR on you,” Baek said.

Well.

“That was pretty fun,” Chanyeol said, and wondered whether Baekhyun would (a) mind or (b) tease him forever if he squeezed on Jongdae a bit.

(He figured no, and yes.)

“Ugh, my glands,” Jongdae murmured in his ear, which made Chanyeol laugh, and then he did have to squeeze a little.

It was cool, because things were easier after that. Baekhyun and Jongdae chattered at each other and bonded over their weakass inability to tolerate spicy food. He didn't even care that they teased him, because his best friend and his boyfriend were laughing together, and it was just the best thing ever.

When they heard Yixing’s key in the door, Chanyeol couldn’t help grinning even wider. Everybody liked Yixing. This was going great.

“Yay, Xing’s here!” Baekyun said.

Except that when he looked in, Yixing’s face did a thing Chanyeol had never seen in the three years they’d known each other.
Being an ER doctor, most of Yixing’s work days were bad days, and Chanyeol had seen him upset plenty of times – sad, or frustrated with hospital bureaucracy or particularly stupid patients, mad when people didn’t get the care he thought they needed.

He had never once seen Yixing look cold.

Similarly, he hadn’t seen the look on Jongdae’s face, staring at the floor with his hands twisted together like he didn’t know what to do with himself.

“Uh, Yixing,” Jongdae said.

“J.D.”

Chapter End Notes

Delayed update + cliffhanger = terrible author

You can't argue with math.

Brought to you in part by THIS photo (oof):
https://t1.daumcdn.net/cfile/tistory/997FC4405BB994BA29?original
“Whaaaat,” Baekhyun said, sounding entirely too gleeful, given the implication of that name.

Even Chanyeol had heard, on several memorable occasions (involving massive amounts of alcohol), all about Xing’s ex, That Asshole J.D. Mostly it was memorable for the way it sounded like Chanyeol’s own personal recurring nightmare, Yixing even weeping a little bit when he said,

“Like, I didn’t even need him to say he loved me back, Yeollie. It wasn’t meant to be a burden. But I sure didn’t expect him to walk out and never even speak to me again.”

Chanyeol thought about all those times in the past week (week) that he had almost busted out with something mushy, and he shivered.

Fuck.

Yixing walked around Jongdae, kissed Baek on the cheek, and dropped into the remaining empty chair, crossing his legs and staring at Jongdae again with that cold expression. Jongdae still grimaced at the floor. The silence was making Chanyeol feel desperate, but when he looked up, Baekhyun shook his head. Chanyeol clamped his mouth shut.

“So I guess you’re a doctor now.”

The fact that Jongdae broke first made everything weirdly worse. You just didn’t expect that from an alpha.

“I’m an emergency room physician,” Yixing said.

“That’s great. That’s what you always wanted. That’s. That’s great.”

Another silence stretched out for approximately eighty-seven years. Chanyeol was ready to throw himself to the floor with discomfort, but Baekhyun kept giving him a Look that he knew meant “sit still and shut up.” He tried.

“And you’re. Uh. Dating Baekhyun?”

Yixing’s eyes went narrow.

“Been living together three years now!” Baekhyun chirped, as if this was the friendliest conversation in the world and not the most awkward.

“Ah,” Jongdae said. “That’s great. I mean. I know you’re great, and Baekhyun seems great, so that’s – uh. Yeah.”

“Great?”

Jongdae glared at Baek, who smiled back.

“What is that supposed to mean, you know I’m great?” Yixing asked, his Chinese accent coming out strongly in his agitation. “You left me. In a restaurant. On our six-month anniversary.”

That’s right. Six months. And here Chanyeol had been, ready to get gooey after a week. Jesus, bullet dodged.
Jongdae had cringed himself into a half-circle of discomfort. But no matter how much Chanyeol felt like he needed this little smack in the face, he still wanted to put his arm around Jongdae and tell him not to worry.

“I did. Do that,” Jongdae said.

He rubbed the back of his neck with one hand and sighed.

“I did that,” he repeated. “And it was one of shittiest things I’ve ever done. And I’m sorry.”

Yixing was still blinking in surprise when Chanyeol turned to look at him.

“Why are you in my home?” he asked after a minute.

“Yeollie wanted to introduce me to his boyfriend,” Baekhyun said.

It was kind of terrible, the way Yixing leaned forward so fast, like he wanted to jump up out of his chair.

“Not too hung up on that other beta after all, huh?” was what he said, though.

“More hung up than ever,” Jongdae said, more softly. “We’ve been back together for almost five years.”

Yixing looked over at Chanyeol, and Jongdae did that thing that Chanyeol liked so much, even if it didn’t mean what he had hoped, hooking a finger through Chanyeol’s bracelets.

“He’s at work, or he’d be here too.”

Yixing shook his head.

“What does that even mean, J.D.? Because I’m not going to let you play our Yeollie like you did me.”

“No,” Baekhyun said.

Wait. Baekhyun said?

“It’s not like that, honey.”

Then what the hell was it like, and why in the world did Baek know about it? How many parts of this conversation was he missing?

“I didn’t play you, Yixing,” Jongdae said. “I just didn’t know how to be any better. I was an asshole.”

“And you’re better now?”

Sarcastic, angry Yixing was not Chanyeol’s favorite version.

“Yeah, a little. I hope,” Jongdae said.

Yixing stood up.

“I’m going to need you to leave right now. I have to think about all this, and it makes me too mad to look at you.”
“Okay, sure.”

He let go of Chanyeol’s wrist and stood up.

“You want to stay here and talk stuff out with them, Channie? Maybe you want to hear what Yixing has to say. I’ll come pick you up later, if you don’t want to take the bus.”

“Huh,” Baekhyun said.

Yixing sat back down.

Maybe that would be the smartest thing to do, but –

“No, I want to go with you.”

Jongdae looked so plainly relieved that Chanyeol felt bad to see it.

Jongdae and Baekhyun shook hands, and Yixing went so far as to nod when Jongdae apologized to him again. But Jongdae pelted down the stairs ahead of Chanyeol and started pacing circles in the parking lot.

Chanyeol didn’t know what to do. Should he say something? Should he walk around in circles too? Call Minseok?

He had his phone in his hand, ready to call Minseok, when a text message popped up reading,

“HUG HIM YOU IDIOT”

Chanyeol looked up. Baek and Xing were standing where they always stood after he left their place, at their bedroom balcony window, so they could see him at the bus stop and make sure he caught his bus. Baek waved his hands around.

Chanyeol did as he was told. Jongdae would throw him off if he didn’t want it, anyhow. Except that when he grabbed the back of Jongdae’s shirt and tugged, Jongdae spun into him hard, pulling so that Chanyeol bent down enough to put his neck within nose distance. He could feel Jongdae trying to get his scent, inhaling deep just under his ear. He could feel when some of the tension in Jongdae’s back let go.

“God, Chan, the shit you must’ve heard about me;” he said. “You sure you don’t want to stay with them?”

He pulled Chanyeol even closer.

“You said you’re less of a dickhead now,” Chanyeol said into his ear, and Jongdae gave a sad little laugh.

“Yeah, I guess. But seeing Yixing made every stupid fucking asshole thing I’ve ever done come rushing back. I was such a fuckup, Channie. And you know Yixing. He’s one of the best guys in the world, I was just awful to him.”

“Not so awful that he didn’t love you,” Chanyeol said, and then blessed that instinctive part of himself that could say something so smart.

Jongdae reared his head back.

“What?”
“You can’t have been too awful, if one of the best guys in the world fell in love with you.”

Jongdae scowled.

“At which point I left him in the cold, Chanyeol.”

“Right. But before that. There must’ve been something good?”

Jongdae glared at him, then kissed him so hard it hurt a little, then glared some more.

“I can’t believe you just found out I’m your best friend’s boyfriend’s horrible ex and you’re trying to make me feel better.”

“But you’re my current.”

Jongdae kissed him again, even if he still followed it up with a glare.

Back in the car, Chanyeol checked his phone again.

“GOOD JOB DINGUS
hope there aren’t any big fires this week, looks like u&I are gonna b having GossipCon 2018”

Yikes.

Jongdae drove the long way back to their apartment, in a silence that Chanyeol didn’t know how to break, aside from the few times that Jongdae would shake his head and whisper “fuck” under his breath or the time he pounded his hands on the steering wheel. Inside the car, Chanyeol could smell his upset, a sour overlay of his usual scent.

Weird that it was upset, and not the bitter, smoke-like scent of anger.

Chanyeol reached over and curled his hand over Jongdae’s forearm on one straight stretch of road. Jongdae gave a heavy sigh and squeezed his hand. Back home, they carried the boxes upstairs, and Chanyeol spent a long time moving the box of fancy marshmallows around a millimeter at a time on the coffee table while Jongdae put wine bottles in racks.

The omega in him was having a meltdown to be around an upset alpha. He kept wishing to sit in Jongdae’s lap, which would be ridiculous. Or to kneel by Jongdae’s legs and present his neck, which would be both ridiculous and awkward. Less ridiculous was the urge to pull Jongdae close and make out, but Jongdae’s body language was an obvious “stay the hell back,” and Chanyeol wasn’t going to push. Or risk getting pushed away.

But maybe – maybe this was like a worse version of that conversation about his family, on their date. That he’d be upset for a little while and then want to move on. Chanyeol knew he was no good at just sitting around waiting, but he was great at occupying himself.

“I’m gonna go next door and get some stuff,” he said.

Jongdae paused, a wine bottle held in midair.

“Sure thing,” he said.

Chanyeol took his time, just to give Jongdae space – stuck his sheets in the washer, scraped the
partially dried-out condom off the floor (gross). He gathered up the next few volumes of *Hell’s Heat* and an extra shirt, grabbed his guitar. It had been about 20 minutes when he knocked softly, stuck his head inside the door, and said “it's me.”

Jongdae was gripping the edge of the kitchen island and turned his head to stare as if he’d never seen anything so surprising.

“You came back,” he said, his voice gravelly.

Oh gosh.

Chanyeol set his stuff down gently.

“Yeah, of course I did.”

Jongdae made a bitter little laugh at the countertop.

“Of course,” he said. “Fuck, I thought –”

Apparently taking his time and giving Jongdae space had been a colossal fucking mistake. Now what was he supposed to do? Upset people at work always wanted to cling to him. Honestly, he’d be thrilled to have Jongdae clinging to him right now.

“Can I, like, hold you?” he asked.

“What?”

“You’re obviously really upset, and maybe I can’t do anything about that, but it’s freaking me out not to be touching you right now.”

Jongdae stared at him, and Chanyeol had no idea what his expression meant.

“I mean. Aren’t I your omega?” he said in a last-ditch effort.

It didn’t count as mush if it was a fact of the moment, right?

Jongdae almost knocked him over, he moved so fast. And then it was kind of funny, the way they both immediately tried to catch each other’s scent, craning their heads around, until Jongdae went “heh” in his ear.

Better.

Jongdae still didn’t talk, but he let himself be pulled to the sofa, where he lay on top of Chanyeol for a long time, face buried up against his neck, until Chanyeol felt him go loose and heavy with sleep, and Chanyeol reached out for the pile of books on the table.

He had progressed to volume 5 when Jongdae’s hand tightened over the neck of his t-shirt.

“I could’ve loved him back,” Jongdae said, just above a whisper.

Hoo boy. Chanyeol could even see it, Jongdae’s enthusiasm and Yixing’s sweetness, the sharp charisma and nonstop libidos they both had.

He could see how Baekhyun would’ve been, without his jagged edges burnished away by Yixing’s patience and affection. Maybe even how Minseok would be lonely and stern. How he himself would be – not here. Not anywhere near here, with two bracelets on his wrist and the damp earth scent of
“Yixing is very lovable,” he said.

“Yeah.” Jongdae said. “It could’ve been easy. To love him. Like he loved me.”

His fist tightened. Chanyeol put his book down and wrapped his arms around Jongdae’s back.

“But then I wouldn’t have been the guy whose heart Minseok broke, right? That’s who I was. That’s how I thought of myself. Couldn’t be serious about anybody because I was too hurt, and I didn’t want to stop. Because then I would’ve had to let him go.”

“Jongdae.”

Chanyeol tightened his arms.

“I know it was unfair.”

“Hey,” Chanyeol said. “Yixing is so happy now. He and Baek are so happy.”

Jongdae nodded up against the side of his face.

“How old were you?” Chanyeol asked.

Jongdae huffed.

“Twenty-one.”

Chanyeol couldn’t help smiling at that, nor scratching at the back of Jongdae’s neck.

“Who isn’t dumb about that stuff at that age? Hell, when I was twenty-one I was hung up on a guy who literally would not be seen in public with me, so,” he said.

Jongdae’s head popped up, eyebrows in the full annoyance position.

“Are you fucking serious?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Why would you put up with that?”

“Because I was twenty-one and didn’t know any better,” he said, poking Jongdae in the back. “Like you told Xing you were.”

“Well, that’s fair and I hate it,” Jongdae said to the air behind Chanyeol’s head.

He touched Chanyeol’s face with warm fingertips, looking down, so handsome and serious. Chanyeol wanted to kiss that frown away.

“Why aren’t you more upset about this, Channie? Baekhyun’s your best friend. And you’ve known Yixing for years. You can’t possibly be willing to risk that over – us. Me.”

For a second, omega-ness flooded Chanyeol completely. He wanted to go limp and show his throat, cry and swear that he would belong forever to this alpha.

It was terrifying – in part because it would be so easy to give in to that. Except that that was the kind of thing that had made Jongdae get up from that restaurant table almost six years ago. Also because
Chanyeol knew that omega instincts were sometimes as dumb as a box of rocks.

And he knew Baek as well as he knew himself. He knew Xing pretty well too.

“Xing would never ask me to choose between you,” he said. “He’s just not like that. You guys might never be able to be friends, but he wouldn’t refuse to be in the same room as you or anything like that.”

He poked Jongdae again.

“As long as I’m happy.”

Jongdae looked like Chanyeol had knocked the breath out of him.

“Are you happy, Chan?” he murmured.

There was that dumb rush of emotion again.

“Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, I am.”

And wow, Jongdae’s non-dirty kiss was as soft and warm as an evening in summertime. It left Chanyeol smiling, and then smiling some more, full all the way up with something he was definitely not ready to name, no matter how good it was.

“Oof, that is quite a smile, Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, and kissed him again, quick but still soft.

“I wouldn’t guess Baekhyun is as easygoing as Yixing,” he said after a minute, looking serious again.

“No. But he starts out willing to like anybody he meets. I mean, he can hold a grudge like nobody’s business, but people have to work to get there. And he doesn’t play around. If he were already thinking he hated you, he never would’ve shaken your hand when we left.”

Anything else he might’ve said was interrupted by both their phones buzzing on the table with a text from Minseok, reading,

“Off to deliver this son of a bitch. Be home in about an hour.”

Jongdae was curled in on himself again, staring at his phone.

“I’m going to ask you for a favor,” he said.

“Okay.”

“I don’t – want to hash this out with Min tonight.”

Chanyeol cringed.

“No, Chan, I promise.”

Jongdae looked so sad, he hated it.

“I promise I’ll talk to him about it. Just not tonight? We haven’t seen him since yesterday morning, and he’s gonna be tired, and I just. I just want to enjoy having him home. Okay?”

It would’ve been hard to turn down that sad expression no matter what Jongdae would’ve asked.
That it was something he could fix if Jongdae tried to get out of talking to Min made it easy for Chanyeol to agree.

Jongdae went on a little cleaning spree, which was adorable, and gave Chanyeol the opportunity to go hang his clean sheets up while taking the trash out. There were still like thirty minutes left when all that was done, and they stood around staring at each other for a few minutes.

“I mean, we could be super dorky,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae grinned.

“Minseok loves dorky.”

Which is why they were both naked under the sheet, heads hidden and covering their mouths when they heard the door, followed by,

“What the hell is, ooo, a marshmallow.”

They looked at each other and tried to stifle their snickering, with zero success, at the thought of the little line of fancy marshmallows in paper cups that they had set out, leading from the front door to the bedroom. Minseok was laughing quietly by the time he reached them, where the box with the remaining marshmallows sat on the pillows at the top of the bed.

He leapt into the middle, knocking Chanyeol solidly in the shin with one knee and laughing aloud at their protests. Minseok flopped onto his back and helped not at all while Jongdae and Chanyeol tried to disentangle themselves. When Chanyeol finally got free, Minseok’s cheeks were puffed out to maximum cuteness while he chewed, looking pleased. He had that deadly little ponytail action going on again.

“Almost as nice as licking this one omega I know,” he said. “What is this rolled in, matcha powder? I love it.”

He sat up to take his shirt off. It made a nice opportunity to snuggled in and start rubbing on Min’s high-quality pecs.

“Hi,” Jongdae said, rubbing his face along Minseok’s jaw.

“Hi,” Minseok answered. “So, tell me about the fucking.”

It’s a good thing Chanyeol didn’t have anything in his mouth at the moment, or he’d have choked.

“My ass needs a couple days’ break for sure,” Jongdae said, grinning.

“You rode our Channie like you wanted?”

There went his ears, going all red while Jongdae nodded.

“He went to absolute pieces, it was great. I wouldn’t let him move when he came, I thought he was going to pass out.”

“Mmm, lovely. You liked it, Chan?”

Jeez, the way they talked. Between the hotness and the embarrassment, his brain was going to short-circuit.

“I made him leave his glasses on.”
Minseok laughed.

“Good call. Did you come, Dae?”

“Well, I was going to save it for later, but someone decided he just had to get his mouth on my dick.”

Minseok petted his hair.

“Our Chan is so generous that way.”

“He is,” Jongdae said, his voice deep, and he snuggled in on the other side, looking at Chanyeol across Minseok’s bare skin. “Later on, he fucked me so well, Min, gave me everything I asked for, watching me the whole time, with that look he gets.”

Wait, what look?

“Like he’s trying to memorize you?” Minseok asked.

“Yes.”

Chanyeol tried to retreat a little, but Minseok’s arm firm against his shoulder wouldn’t let him. He held up a marshmallow to Jongdae, who took the other end and helped him pull it apart. Minseok took the half and held it to Chanyeol’s mouth, dragging his thumb along Chanyeol’s bottom lip and smiling when Chanyeol took the opportunity to place a tiny lick to his thumb.

“So sweet,” Minseok said. “Come up here and kiss me.”

Of course he did, Min’s mouth sugar-sweet and warm, Jongdae’s hand hot on the back of his neck, and Minseok shifting when Chanyeol reached down to roll one nipple between finger and thumb. The skin of his chest smooth under Chanyeol’s mouth when Minseok turned to kiss Jongdae. It was always so easy, the way the two of them lit him like a match.

“Can I ask you to be generous again, Chanyeol?” Minseok asked with one hand cupped under his chin. “Will you let me have you while Dae uses your mouth?”

Was it seriously, actually possible to die of horniness? Because if so, he was on the verge.

“Yeah,” he said.

Not that it felt like being generous – more like being spoiled rotten, the way all he had to do was lie there while Minseok opened him up with teasing hands and biting little kisses to his hip, while Jongdae kissed him until he was cross-eyed and thoroughly molested his torso.

Minseok’s fingers moved so gently and steadily that Chanyeol was crawling with want by the time he was finally, finally ready, a lump in his throat just from hating to wait anymore. Then, instead of the good old-fashioned spit-roast Chanyeol had envisioned, Minseok maneuvered him onto his side, kneeling over his bottom leg, and had Jongdae pile a bunch of pillows under his head.

Nice. Not the best angle for suction, but it would let him get his hands in the mix.

“Chan,” Minseok said, his hands kneading Chanyeol’s bent top leg. “You don’t like to choke, do you?”

This was it. He would literally die from talking. And not even himself doing the talking. What a terrible way to go. Min didn’t even have his fingers in his ass anymore, he would end this life empty and grumpy.
“I mean?”

“Hey,” Jongdae said, while Min smacked his thigh. “No hedging when it comes to what you don’t like, it’s a yes or no question.”

“Not really? I mean, I’m not going to freak out over a tiny bit,” he said.

“So you be nice to him, Dae.”

Jongdae reached down and put his hand in Chanyeol’s hair, his smile broad and eager.

“I plan to,” he said.

“You guys,” Chanyeol said. “Can you just shut up for one second and get to fucking me?”

To be stuffed full at both ends by two hot laughing guys definitely fell on the awesome end of the spectrum. Minseok wasn’t in his usual mood to tease, ramping up right away to a hard, fast pace that had Chanyeol gasping around Jongdae.

And how cool that he felt like he was learning them – that Min liked suction but Dae liked motion, sliding his hand and his mouth up and down while Jongdae gasped encouragement, one hand in his hair. Minseok’s fingers gripping his leg, his hip. How he knew that little cut-off groan that meant Jongdae was biting his bottom lip and ducking his chin to the side. How he knew that when Minseok leaned in to hang onto his shoulder, Min was getting close and he was about to get jackhammered in the best possible way.

How good to be filled up, surrounded by the scent and flavor of them, the small noises they each made, Minseok saying “Chan” in a low groan, Jongdae’s fingers in his hair. Minseok’s callused hand wrapping around his dick, making him lean back some and moan while Jongdae moved in and out of his mouth.

“Fuck, you look so good,” Jongdae said, then groaned loudly, as if he were surprised to come, and Chanyeol had to lean in to catch it all in his mouth, warm and a little bitter.

His hand replaced Minseok’s, smoother but working Chanyeol faster, while Minseok tossed his head, teeth clenched, and Jongdae grinned at him. The two of them, mint and rain already dug so deep into his head, both of them so beautiful, he wanted –

“God, there you go, Channie, so good, I can feel you,” Minseok rasped.

Jongdae gave a deep little laugh when Chanyeol spilled over his hand, covering his face and groaning through the overwhelm. Minseok’s own cry a moment later was a little broken-voiced.

“What’re you hiding from, sweetheart?” Jongdae asked, dragging Chanyeol’s hand down and smoothing his thumb over Chanyeol’s cheek.

Chanyeol shook his head and was glad to accept a soft kiss. He was less glad to feel Min slide out of him and lose the warmth of their bodies sharing space. But then Minseok wriggled his way up the middle, pressed against Chanyeol’s chest, and kissed him too.

“Mmm, the two of you certainly make a man glad to come home,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol looked at them, Min smiling at him and Jongdae’s chin on Minseok’s shoulder, eyes closed but smiling, and momentarily forgot how inhaling was supposed to work. He let himself run his fingers over Minseok’s face, bend down to Min’s mouth. Let himself grin when Jongdae pursed
his lips out for his own kiss.

Even after the nice, calming business of washing up and de-grossing the bed, Chanyeol should’ve known that Minseok was too smart to let them get away with anything.

“You planning on telling me what’s wrong?” he asked around his toothbrush.

Jongdae grimaced.

“I’m closely acquainted with your face, love. Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Jongdae said.

Min looked at Chanyeol, who nodded, happy to have the excuse of his own mouth being full of toothbrush.

But his face must’ve done something, because Minseok arched one eyebrow.

“Did you two argue?”

And that was funny, because they kind of had, even though that wasn’t the issue, and Jongdae’s expression tried to go in about four directions at once.

“We sort of did, but we worked it out,” Chanyeol said, not missing Jongdae’s grateful look. “It was just a lot of day. Up and down like a roller coaster.”

“But you’re okay?” Minseok asked, obviously slightly alarmed. “Both of you? We’re okay?”

Chanyeol finished brushing his teeth in record time and reached for Min’s wrist.

“We’re definitely okay.”

“I’ll tell you all about it tomorrow, Min,” Jongdae said.

Minseok looked back and forth between the two of them.

“But we’re okay?”

“We’re okay, love.”

It kept Chanyeol up for a while, after the two of them were draped over him, breathing softly with sleep - that Min would look so worried, asking repeatedly whether they were okay. Jongdae seemingly so relieved that Chanyeol wasn’t going to drop them because he once dated Yixing.

Anything they might mean by all that was just his dumb omega clinginess talking, right?

Right?
Dang, you guys, how good is DMUMT?? I super dig it - so far, trending toward either Damage or Oasis as my favorite song.

Chapter Notes

Making breakfast was the only thing Chanyeol could think of to help himself feel better, given the way they all woke up broody. Jongdae kept avoiding everyone’s eyes in a way that made Chanyeol’s guts feel cold, whereas Minseok kept staring intently at each of them, deep shadows under his eyes. Chanyeol’s own dreams had been upsetting, though he didn’t remember details. It helped that Minseok let him bustle around their kitchen while he made coffee and rice, a couple of times squeezing Chanyeol’s arm as he passed by.

Rolled eggs were just fiddly enough to busy Chanyeol’s brain, and there were enough bits and pieces in their fridge that he made five different kinds for a little variety. Might as well at least have good food for an awkward conversation. It was a nice table, by the end, with his eggs, and the side dishes, and a little soybean sprout soup for each of them.

“Please, one of you,” Minseok said after several minutes of pushing food around on his plate. “Each thing I imagine is worse than the next. But you were happy to be all over each other last night. Please explain what for fuck’s sake is going on.”

Jongdae scowled at the table. For once, Chanyeol didn’t want to be the one filling the silence. He wanted Jongdae to keep his promise. To be that kind of alpha, who kept his promises, even if it meant that promises were rare things. He wanted to not have to think about what it would mean if Jongdae were not that kind of alpha.

Jongdae rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Chanyeol and I didn’t argue,” he said. “He and I had the dumbest misunderstanding possible, you’ll laugh when you hear about it. It’s that – “

He sighed.

“It’s that. You know he took me to meet his friend Baekhyun. Who is, um. Turns out to be dating. Yixing.”

Minseok put his chopsticks down.

“Yixing Yixing?”

“Yeah.”

“I see,” Minseok said. “That’s certainly not anything I imagined.”

Minseok straightened all the utensils and dishes at his place until everything was exactly the same distance from everything else. The hair on the back of Chanyeol’s neck stood up, it was so spooky.
Jongdae looked like he was about to jump across the table.

“Well, he didn’t break your face, so I guess it went better than expected?”

“He let me apologize, which is probably more than I deserve.”

They watched Minseok continue to make minute adjustments to his silverware. If it went on much longer, Chanyeol thought he might start knocking stuff to the floor, like an alpha.

“Channie seems to think all of this is going to work out somehow. I can’t really imagine that, but he knows better than I do at this point.”

Minseok’s head snapped up.

“You know Yixing?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Yeah. Really well, actually. Ever since he and Baekhyun took one look at each other across a gurney in the ER and moved in together about ten minutes later. Given how Baek and I have always been up in each other’s business, we just added Xing to the mix. That was about three years ago now.”

Minseok blinked a bunch of times.

“They’re - serious?”

“Eh?”

“Min,” Jongdae said softly.

“Oh,” Minseok said, then “OH.”

He sagged and shook his head.

“I don’t really worry. But if there was ever any one of your exes that I thought might – and you were so weird about not wanting to say anything …“

“No,” Jongdae said.

He went and kneeled by Minseok’s chair, arms around Min’s waist.

“No, love. Never.”

Chanyeol failed completely at his attempt not to feel simultaneously left out and like he was intruding. But he couldn’t stop staring at them, the way Jongdae rubbed his face slowly against Min’s shoulder, and the way Minseok eventually gave a soft smile and kissed him. The way Jongdae hadn’t said anything like, ‘you need to manage your own jealousy, Chanyeol. Minseok, I’m not in charge of your feelings.’ The way Minseok had been able to just say what had upset him, without sounding cringey about it.

“Besides, who else would take me?” Jongdae said. “You’ve chewed my shoulders to pieces over the years. We’re just lucky Chan seems to have a weird fetish for that sort of thing.”

“Wow, you let that soft moment go on for almost two whole minutes before you ruined it,” Minseok said dryly.
He looked over at Chanyeol. His hand was curled around Jongdae’s cheek like it belonged there and nowhere else.

“I’m sure you’ve noticed that Dae is allergic to feelings.”

“They make my throat all itchy.”

Which, sure. That was totally obvious by the way they rubbed their noses together and kissed some more and smiled at each other like that.

He knew he was being stupid. He knew it. He stabbed a piece of egg anyhow.

“How is this weird for you, Channie?” Minseok asked. “You’ve known them for so long. I would hate for us to cause you trouble.”

“I kept trying to tell him,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol shook his head. That part of it was not the trouble. His own clingy dumbassery was the fucking trouble.

“I mean, it’s a little awkward. But I’ll talk to Baek. And Yixing always needs a little time to work stuff out. I think we just surprised him.”

“Surprised the shit out of me,” Jongdae said.

“What a small damn world,” Minseok said.

“For real.”

Chanyeol tried to get his face in order and to apologize to his breakfast by picking up the next piece of egg very gently.

“What’s Baekhyun like?”

“Hilarious. You can definitely tell that he and Chan have known each other forever. I guess some time in the distant future, we’ll have the dubious pleasure of Channie being way less sweet and rolling his eyes at us a lot more.”

Chanyeol paused in his moping to integrate this kernel of information.

“Hmm, no,” Minseok said. “I like him how he is. We’d better spoil him so he stays this way.”

Chanyeol did roll his eyes at that, and Minseok quirked one eyebrow.

“There you are. What’s got you bothered?”

“I don’t know,” Chanyeol said, which was a lie, and

“I don’t like when people are upset,” which was the truth. Kind of.

Aw, Channie,” Jongdae said, getting up and coming to hug Chanyeol’s neck from behind.

It made a good dent in his grumpiness levels to get in on a little of the comforting action.

“He was so nice, Min. I was so sure he was going to kick me to the curb, and instead he kept trying to make me feel better, I couldn’t believe it.”
Moping or no, nobody could pass up a joke opportunity this obvious.

“I can’t kick you to the curb. You’re my in with Minseok.”

“You jerk,” Jongdae laughed, squeezing him. “I thought you said you weren’t gonna be mean to me!”

It helped, the way Jongdae clung to him and lightly bit the side of his neck. The way Minseok laughed with one hand held in front of his mouth. Chanyeol reached up to rub at Jongdae’s forearm, hearing how their bracelets clinked together.

“You didn’t really think I’d just break up with you on the spot, did you?” he blurted.

And then wanted to hide from the way Minseok’s expression sharpened and Jongdae went still.

“Is that what you’re so upset about, Chan?” Jongdae murmured in his ear.

“I didn’t sleep well,” Chanyeol muttered in lieu of a long explanation.

“Neither did I,” Minseok said.

“Lazy Sunday protocols?” Jongdae asked.

Minseok nodded. “Yes.”

“Okay,” Jongdae said. “First, you’re going to let me feed you a bite of these delicious eggs, because I’m a needy ass alpha. Then we’re going to all pile on the sofa and snuggle until we gross ourselves out.”

Chanyeol wasn’t aware that it was possible to get grossed out by snuggling, but then, he wasn’t an alpha. He let Jongdae feed him three pieces of rolled egg, because (1) Jongdae looked so thrilled to do so, (2) Minseok made a cute little squeaking sound, and (3) every once in a while, it was nice to coddled. For example, when one was overly tired and stuck in a dumb emotion loop in one’s head.

Jongdae herded him and Minseok onto the sofa, then bustled around, putting coffee into a carafe and bringing it over with their mugs, clearing the table and washing the dishes. Minseok watched him with a tiny smile and half-lidded eyes, one hand on the back of Chanyeol’s neck.

“You okay, sweetness?” he asked.

Given that he knew he was being stupid and clingy and jealous and weird?

“Yeah, probably.”

Chanyeol figured that the way Minseok stared at him, hardly blinking, meant that he could tell that ‘okay’ was pushing it. He tried to project an aura of ‘please don’t make me talk about my feelings.’ After a long, uncomfortable pause, Min nodded and pulled Chanyeol’s head onto his shoulder. Chanyeol went limp with relief.

“I probably would’ve gotten to come home to sleep on Friday, if it weren’t for those Ulsan bastards,” he said. “I had the football match on the radio, and they were so stupid that at one point I shaved the corner off one of the little side pieces.”

“Oh god, that’s terrible!” Chanyeol said.

He’d never heard anything so wonderful. Best deflection ever.
“Right? I tried to put it back together, but the seam always fucking shows when you do that. Had to start it over from the beginning. I’m tempted to transfer my loyalties to another damn team.”

“Well shit,” Jongdae said, finally done with the dishes, “if you’d been here yesterday morning, we probably would’ve engaged in some high-quality boning, and Channie and I could’ve avoided acting like a couple of morons.”

Chanyeol tried to identify the point at which he himself had behaved like a moron, pegged it at the moment when he agreed to that stupid run, and took the wise path of burrowing his head into the curve of Minseok’s neck.

“Lord,” Minseok said. “What did you do?”

“Talked him into going for a run.”

Minseok’s hand stopped its rhythmic rubbing of Chanyeol’s arm. There was a pause, and then the shoulder under Chanyeol’s ear quivered.

“Are you kidding me?”

“You should’ve seen us, Min. I’m practically sprinting, and Channie’s barely above a walk, and I just lost my shit.”

Minseok laughed aloud – that nice, high, happy sound that always made the air seem lighter.

“God, you poor dumbasses,” he said.

“We worked it out,” Jongdae said, poking his bony ass between them and wiggling until he was ensconced in the middle. “I heard some more about Chan’s stupid dickweed ex-boyfriends and told him a little about how I used to be an asshole, which was probably useful later, given the Yixing crap. And then he blew me on the floor in front of the front door.”

“His fucking mouth,” Minseok said in a deep voice.

“For real,” Jongdae said.

It was difficult to stay broody, with Jongdae’s arm around his shoulders and Minseok smiling at him. Especially if they were going to keep talking like that – he’d just end up with a dick in his mouth. And with a dick in his mouth, he couldn’t say anything stupid.

“So basically you two slingshotted yourselves from one extreme to the next for thirty-six hours straight,” Minseok said.

Put that way, Chanyeol felt less guilty about his level of exhaustion.

“The wonderful world of alphas and omegas,” Jongdae said.

He squeezed Chanyeol.

“Hmm, yes,” Minseok said. “Lazy Sunday for sure, unless Channie wants to talk about relationship stuff.”

“Please no,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok reached over to take his hand.
“You get a pass on feeling off, but not on stuff that’s a real issue, okay?”

Jongdae poked him in the shoulder.

The question was: what was the difference?

“Okay,” Chanyeol said.

Over Jongdae’s (half-hearted) groans of protest, after refilling their mugs, they decided to give _Complete Love_ a try. It was dicey at first, because of course the omega was a girl: a tiny, delicate, wide-eyed girl.

Of course.

Chanyeol pouted over it, with his knees drawn up and leaning away from Jongdae, and he hated himself a little for it. They should’ve started with one of the other ones on Eunmi’s list. One of the funny ones.

“You’re so grumpy,” Jongdae said, poking him and grinning at Chanyeol’s scowl.

Of course he was grumpy. This was the same shit that had followed him around since the moment he presented as omega: the expectation that he should be little, he should be delicate, he should be quiet and soft and yielding and adorable and just – _let_ – anybody do what they wanted.

Everything he had always heard was wrong with him, since he wasn’t like that.

And then the little omega lady saw a groper on the train and hit him in the face with her bag. Chanyeol laughed aloud with surprise.

During the scene after this, while some guy followed her from the subway, the actress wore a scowl so fierce that it would give Min’s murder face competition, and Chanyeol started to feel better about this experiment. By the time she had planted her feet in front of an office building, ready to fight the guy who had followed her, Chanyeol was over his snit. When it turned out that the guy just worked in the same building and held his hands up, laughing, complimenting her on her groper solution, Chanyeol thought maybe he had been a little silly.

So the first episode was okay. The guy was obviously the beta lead - cheerful and sensible, treating the lady with the kind of friendliness and respect that had pretty much convinced Chanyeol (prior to recent events) that betas were way nicer than alphas to date, even given the no-knot situation.

At the end of the second episode, the show introduced the alpha lead: an actor so famous (and hot) that even Chanyeol recognized him, as the omega lady’s brand-new junior coworker. He took one sniff, smiled as if at a child, and immediately dropped honorifics.

“Aw shit, she’s gonna punch that guy in the nuts,” Jongdae snickered.

And they were all pretty well hooked.

Just after this, Chanyeol’s phone vibrated with a message from Baekhyun.

“Everything ok over there?”

He looked down at Jongdae leaning against his shoulder, Minseok tucked under Jongdae’s arm.

“Yeah,” he wrote. “You?”
“Oh sure. Xing stomped around & yelled in mandarin for a while, but he’s working it out. U know my honey, he’s a philosopher. He’ll prob decide this is all meaningful or some shit.”

Chanyeol sent back a thumbs-up.

And then, a couple of minutes later.

“Back to it tomorrow, Yeollie. It’s okay to just enjoy today.”

Which he knew was Baekhyunese for ‘quit worrying.’

That was an impossible task. There was too much to worry about: what would happen with Jongdae and Xing, if this lasted. Whether this would last. Whether he was being stupid, to have fallen so deeply into this so soon, and whether he was even capable of pulling himself back out. Whether it might be okay to say that to Jongdae (no) or Minseok (maybe?), and, if so, when. Whether it would ever be okay to just – to just ask them where they were in all this.

They kept saying stuff like ‘he’s ours now’ and mentioning timeframes like ‘winter’ and ‘a year or two’ - but did they mean it? Jesus, he could hardly ask: what if the answer was ‘of course not, don’t get ahead of yourself’?

So yeah. Not-worrying was not really in the realm of possibility.

Ignoring worry, however, he could totally do for whole months at a time. And since he would soon be trapped in a firehouse with Nosy Busybody Byun Baekhyun for three days, might as well make use of his ignoring skills for the rest of the afternoon.

“I want to be in the middle,” he said.

And his nice boyfriends let him finagle his way to lying with his head on Jongdae’s legs and his feet in Minseok’s lap all the way to lunchtime. By that point, they were all invested in finding out how in the world the jerkass alpha in Complete Love was ever going to deserve the tiny omega lady and that nice beta, and Chanyeol felt more like himself.

As good as the show was, by mid-afternoon, the way Minseok’s shorts rode up while he sat cross-legged on the sofa and the thin little white tank Jongdae was wearing were starting to make themselves noticeable. By that point, Jongdae was back in the middle, his torso draped across Chanyeol’s legs, making it convenient for Chanyeol to trace his fingertips over the pale scars on his shoulder, until Jongdae turned and smiled up through his stupidly long eyelashes.

“These are all from Min?”

“Every damn one,” Jongdae said. “Almost broke my dick once, twisting out of the way of this one chick’s fangs.”

Chanyeol couldn’t tell whether he or Minseok looked more smug.

“I suppose that if you’d been sidelined by a broken dick for a while, I might not have felt such a pressing need to stake my claim so thoroughly when we got back together,” Minseok said.

Jongdae’s response to that was to stretch in a deeply alluring way that also just happened to rub one shoulder against Chanyeol’s crotch and made Minseok grin sharply.

“Yours too?” Chanyeol asked.
Minseok shook his head.

“Not technically. Somewhere under there’s a mark from the guy to whom I gifted my virginity.”

Jongdae growled, and Minseok squeezed his shin.

“Covering that up was one of Dae’s early projects.”

Chanyeol barely had any time to appreciate the very hot mental image of all this biting when Jongdae’s fingers crab-walked up his belly and Jongdae said,

“And all of yours are from us.”

There it was again – the way one or both of them could set him alight like flipping a light switch. All the worrying he had done in the past 24 hours, and he had left out this one thing: that no matter what, he would wear their marks forever.

And that just seemed like an imperative to haul up that handsome alpha and kiss him until he was squirming.

Their binge was less successful after that, the makeout window having been opened, and they kept having to rewind episodes owing to someone’s mouth getting on someone’s body somewhere or a person’s hand getting inside someone’s pants and attention wandering. It was excellent – especially by the point that all of them were shirtless in a pile, and Chanyeol wasn’t actually sure whose hand was kneading his left ass cheek, and he had their scents back up in his head.

When he found himself leaned against Minseok, with Jongdae lying on his chest just like he had been the day before, Chanyeol got to replaying all the crap from the weekend. The way Jongdae had fussed at him for assuming he was in trouble over the run, while holding onto his wrist for comfort. The way Jongdae had scent-marked him before they went inside Baekhyun’s apartment.

The way he had apologized to Yixing, right away, and had responded to Xing’s anger without one single flash of alpha jerkishness. The way he had told Chanyeol about the hard emotional stuff. The way he kept his promise to tell Minseok about it.

Chanyeol tugged on Jongdae’s hair until he hitched himself up within getting distance. Maybe it took five years or being Minseok for Jongdae to stop being allergic to feelings, but Chanyeol knew more than one way to say ‘I like you’ with his mouth.

Given the way that Jongdae laughed once, then dove in for more, and a bit later, Minseok cupped his cheek with a quiet smile, Chanyeol thought maybe he got his point across.
I think I'm settling into Gravity and Oasis as my favorites off of DMUMT. But dang if the whole thing isn't GREAT. I'm so proud of them!

Baekhyun was waiting outside the firehouse, sucking on whatever candy-flavored coffee substitute he was into these days, a drink carrier dangling from his other hand that he held out as soon as Chanyeol got close. Chanyeol was grateful to pluck out the very large iced coffee it contained.

It was a better morning – he’d slept great after coming once in Minseok’s mouth and once on Jongdae’s back, his Meaningful Kissing having turned into sticky, slow-paced sex so good that his knees still felt wobbly thinking about it. Even accounting for the rude awakening by their stupid gym alarm and finishing out his sleep stupidly alone on his stupid sofa.

“Got any new and interesting bite marks?” Baekhyun said, grinning around his straw and waggling his eyebrows.

“Nope. You?”

He’d meant to be kind of snide, but Baekhyun broke out into a high-pitched cackle.

“Yes, actually, among other awesome aches and pains. I guess I’ll have to send Jongdae a thank you note for inspiring so much depth of feeling.”

“Oh god, please don’t.”

Baekhyun laughed again and put his arm around Chanyeol’s back.

“Glad to see you didn’t roll up here looking miserable, buddy,” he said, squeezing a little.

They got caught up in the morning rush of the firehouse – seeing C team out and refamiliarizing themselves with the random folks they’d spend the first half of their shift with, talking about the schedule for the calendar shoot. Chanyeol sat in the back with Baek and Sehun at the morning meeting, unable to stop his leg from jiggling, knowing that Baek would corner him at the first available opportunity and having no damn idea what either one of them would say.

But first: work. There was an equipment check, inventory of the kitchen, some stupid horseplay for bonding or whatever. A little medical call that left the fire house half-empty, and Baekhyun dipped his chin, looked at Chanyeol, and cut his eyes toward the stairwell door. Chanyeol, as an obedient and faithful best friend well acquainted with the protocol to sneak away for private conversations, followed him.

It was hot on the roof, in the blazing sun at the end of summer. They sat against the wall in the tiny bit of shade, and Baekhyun leaned into his shoulder, warm and familiar, like he’d been doing since
they were kids. Pressing against Baekhyun, with his scent of thyme, had comforted Chanyeol through breakups and bad grades and other disappointments since he was a kid. He put his arm over Baekhyun’s shoulders. Baekhyun huffed, but he shifted so that he leaned harder against Chanyeol’s side.

“I guess you must be okay, if you’re willing to be the comforter instead of the comforted.”

Which – yeah. That was something, wasn’t it?

“You need comforting, Baek?”

Baekhyun snuggled in.

“Nah,” he said. ‘I’m just low on best friend cuddles lately. I was really worried about you guys, though. Is Jongdae okay? Did – what’s his name, the other one – was he mad?’

It was a lot of thoughts to try to get in order.

“Short answers, yeah, Dae’s okay and no, Minseok wasn’t mad.”

Baekhyun snorted and knocked his head against Chanyeol’s.

“Dude, when have I ever in my life wanted the short answer?”

Fair point.

“He was so surprised when I hugged him in the parking lot, Baek. Like he honestly thought I was just gonna break up with him right there.”

“Ugh, alphas,” Baek groaned, “so fucking melodramatic.”

“Well, thanks for that, anyway. I hope it didn’t make Xing mad.”

“There was some rude-sounding Mandarin commentary, but I think he would’ve been more mad if Jongdae had pushed you away. Pretty sure he would’ve been down there ready to fight if that had happened.”

Since Yixing wasn’t around to squeeze, Chanyeol squeezed Baek instead.

“He’s a good friend.”

“Of course, my honey’s the best.”

“That’s what Jongdae said about him. ‘One of the best guys in the world’.”

“Ha, let’s maybe give him a little more time to process before we tell him that part, even if Jongdae is correct.”

“Xing’s still pretty upset?”

Baekhyun shrugged.

“You know he hates surprises, and that was a whole bunch of them at once – seeing Jongdae, finding out he’s dating you, and the fact that he apologized. I think that’s the part that freaked him out the most. You don’t expect an alpha to just up and say they’re sorry like that.”
No. One didn’t expect that from an alpha. Even one who seemed to be the promise-keeping kind of alpha. Oof.

“I think at this point, he’s more worried about you than anything,” Baek continued. “So he might bug you a little, until he believes me that they’re not messing with you.”

And that was another thing.

“Until he believes you? You said that on Saturday, too. What did Jongdae say to you?”

Baekhyun pulled away and looked at him, serious.

“Ask him.”

“I’m asking you, Baek.”

Baekhyun shook his head.

“Nope. I did my best-friend duty looking out for you, but I’m not going to do your relationship work for you, Yeol. If I thought they were a couple of assholes like your usual boyfriends, I’d tell you. But I’m not poking my nose into something that already seems good for you. You have to ask him yourself.”

Chanyeol stared at him.

“Hey, man,” Baek said, holding up his hands. “You’re the one who started it, calling them your boyfriends and refusing to give me details about the fucking. This is your doing that we have to act like grownups now, not mine.”

So of course Chanyeol had to elbow him, which Baekhyun didn’t successfully dodge, and in the resulting wrestle, Baek’s drink got knocked over. He totally deserved it.

“Ugh, you asshole,” he said, failing to remove his miniature head from Chanyeol’s hold around his neck. “It’s your fault if I fall asleep mid-shift from my lack of caffeine and sugar.”

“Maybe if you say nice things about my boyfriends, I’ll bake cookies,” Chanyeol said.

“Okay, deal.”

Chanyeol let him go, but Baek just resettled himself, leaning against Chanyeol’s shoulder again. It was good to sit and talk like usual, to let Baekhyun tease him for his blushes and cackle over the story of him and Jongdae running together.

“How many times did you try to apologize for being abnormally large?”

“Only once,” Chanyeol laughed.

“Oh, look at you! There’s hope for you yet, Yeollie.”

It was so comfortable. He knew he could trust Baekhyun with anything, and that helped him push past his lingering discomfort and settle.

“They’re so great, Baek. I really think – we have so much fun, just hanging out together, you know? And I think, I mean, they tell me they like me? But it’s weird, sometimes. They’ve been together for so long, sometimes I don’t know what to think.”
Baekhyun hugged him.

“Yeah, Yeol. Yeah, I bet it is. That why you have to keep asking them. And you have to keep believing what they tell you when you ask. So if they say they want you around, if you’re happy, run with it.”

Chanyeol felt not one molecule of embarrassment to hang onto Baekhyun until his eyes felt drier and his chest didn’t feel quite so tight.

“Have they done this more-than-two-people thing before, Yeollie, or are you all feeling your way through blind?”

“Minseok knows, from before. It didn’t work out, but – “

“Aish, this sexy beta of yours, I’m working up a crush and I’ve barely met him.”

Chanyeol pinched him, and Baekhyun complained at his usual (loud) volume.

“When’d you get so smart?”

“I have been watching you make boneheaded relationship decisions our whole damn life, Park Chanyeol. I would have to be a complete idiot not to have learned from your example.”

He rolled away, out of pinching distance, and grinned.

“Also, it helps to be a beta.”

Chanyeol couldn’t even work up fake annoyance. It felt too good to let Baek tease him. He knew Baekhyun would’ve said if he needed to watch out. If Baek told him to trust it, he’d try to trust it. Try to talk to them and not be stupid. It would take no effort at all to lean on his best friend for help.

“Aaw, Yeollie,” Baekhyun said, his expression going soft. “I hope those guys properly appreciate your smile.”

Chanyeol nodded.

Sehun, finding them a short while later, laid his bony limbs on top of the pile.

“I can’t believe I wasn’t invited to the cuddle meeting,” he said.

“Because your elbows are deadly weapons,” Baekhyun said. “Speaking of which, remove yours from my spleen, please.”

“What are we talking about?”

“Yeollie’s love life.”

Sehun went limp and heavy. Chanyeol was fairly certain his circulation was cut off in several critical places.

“Unfair,” Sehun said. “When do I get a love life that we can gossip about on the roof?”

Chanyeol and Baekhyun pulled faces at each other. Sehun was spared their jeering about Joonmyun by the return of the truck, and the need to get back to work.

They hadn’t even gotten the first truck checked back in before B team was called out. The fire itself
was a lot of nothing – a tiny oil fire on a stove that the homeowner tried to put out with water, singeing much of the room. When they arrived, the pan was still flaming on the stove, and the alpha was full-on fangs out with upset, on the verge of actual howling.

“Guess I’m staying with the truck,” Sehun said, rolling his eyes.

Chanyeol sighed, removed his helmet, and waded in to speak softly and be all nonthreatening, etcetera, while Baek and Joonmyun applied fire extinguishers as needed around the room and smothered the main fire by stacking another pot on top. About the time they finished, the homeowner’s wife got home, looked around, and detached her wheezing alpha from Chanyeol’s arm. He stopped growling right away, putting his face up against her neck in a way that made Chanyeol wish he were back at Min and Dae’s apartment.

“I’m so sorry,” she said, then sighed, and, “what a mess.”

Joonmyun gave her a little lecture about household fire safety. He was so handsome, and spoke so seriously, that people always listened to him as if they were going to be graded on the material later. Business as usual.

“He bother you, Yeol?” Joonie asked when they were back in the truck, fearing for their lives with Baekhyun at the wheel.

“It’s fine,” Chanyeol said, shrugging. “I mean, that’s what I’m here for, right?”

Joonmyun kicked him.

“Your being able to comfort people is a bonus, Chanyeol. You passed the exam on the strength of your firefighting skills,” he said in his school principal’s voice.

“Correct,” Sehun said. “Also, you’re not that comforting.”

So it was nice that Chanyeol got to pay Joonie’s kick forward.

The real discomfort began back at the firehouse, which had been visited in their absence by the calendar stylist. She scowled at Joonmyun, who as usual categorically refused to appear shirtless, and beamed at Sehun, who categorically refused to appear anything but shirtless, and at Baekhyun, who was always willing to try the cheesiest possible poses.

“Oh my,” she said, shaking Chanyeol’s hand with slightly painful enthusiasm. “Oh my, really? Aren’t you just a lot of omega, my goodness. This is just. Well.”

The part-timers were exempt from calendar duty, so they got to hang around in the back and snicker while the stylist and her assistant poked and prodded the B team, making notes and muttering at each other. And staring at him so earnestly that he agreed to let them dye his hair.

“I promise it’ll look good,” the stylist said. “You’ll be a great redhead. But if you hate it, I’ll dye it dark the minute the shoot’s over, I promise.”

“Do it,” Baekhyun said, once she had left, as if he’d ever seen a weird hair color he didn’t love. “What’s the harm?”

“Looking like an idiot?” Chanyeol said.
“Nah, that’s Baek’s job,” Sehun said.

The slap fight that followed was how Baekhyun and Sehun got put on bathroom-cleaning duty for the rest of the shift, but it at least provided cover to Chanyeol to escape and get the promised cookies started.

When he fetched his phone out of the common room on his way to the kitchen, it was full of notifications from the group chat - mostly Jongdae complaining his way through a meeting. They both answered right away when Chanyeol invited them to the post—calendar shoot barbecue.

“Let me see, hang around staring at half naked fire fighters and then eat grilled meats how about YES,” Jongdae wrote.

“Of course we’ll be there to support you, and we’d love to meet your coworkers,” Min wrote.

Chanyeol was barely done laughing when Jongdae wrote,

“Wow babe, way to show me up, thanks a LOT.”

Nice.

Nice to be back to their banter, too. Following the first batch of cookies and the resulting rush of greedy people, he had a brainwave and a short chat with Joonmyun, then called Minseok.

“Channie.”

Chanyeol couldn’t imagine ever getting tired of hearing Minseok say his name. And he sounded so pleased to be asked to help with the barbecue.

“How extravagant are we talking here? The shop’s got everything. I could bring you a whole pig on a spit.”

Chanyeol thought about how completely delighted certain members of A team would be at that prospect. Sadly for them, they’d never know they even had the option.

“I don’t really enjoy when my food looks at me,” he said.

Minseok laughed.

“That’s reasonable. How many people?”

“Probably about fifty? Is that too much? If you bring the invoice on Saturday, I think we’ll pay it pretty fast.”

“Of course it’s not too much, and I’ll take care of it, don’t worry about it.”

Well, if he and Minseok were going to disagree now, at least his first argument with each of them would be over something dumb.

“Absolutely not, Minseok, we have a budget for this.”

The silence on the other end of the line was very obviously Minseok doing a thing with his face that probably involved some scowling and perhaps a sigh.
“I’m serious,” Chanyeol said.

“Okay, but you’re getting the family discount.”

Chanyeol took a breath to remind himself that the ‘family’ discount was probably just the same thing as the ‘friend’ discount, and he shouldn’t get caught up in vocabulary.

“Great,” he said, then pitched his voice deeper. “You can take the difference out of my hide.”

“I accept,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol shook himself and grinned.

“They want to dye my hair for the photo shoot,” he said. “Do you think I’ll look okay as a redhead?”

“Oh yes,” Minseok said, almost in a growl. “I think you’ll carry that off beautifully, Chan.”

The brief conversation after that was totally inappropriate for work, and if it had gone on much longer, he would’ve had a very obvious problem below the waist when half the station ran in at the sound of the oven timer.

Anyhow, it was a busy few days that left him no time to fall back into brooding: they cleaned the station top to bottom to get it ready for all the visitors, every person not completely hopeless in the kitchen was put to work making side dishes for the barbeque, everybody involved in the photo shoot had to work out at least once a day, and of course all these had to be squeezed in around actually rescuing people and small animals from fires and various accidents. Tuesday night he fell asleep mid-text in the group chat and sent three long strings of ‘ᄅ’ with his face, prompting an outpouring of hilarity from Jongdae that made Chanyeol grin when he saw it in the morning. It was super early when he responded Wednesday morning, but it must’ve been a gym day, because right after he sent a pouty cat sticker, Jongdae responded with,

“hey can we take you out Saturday night?”

Chanyeol sat back down on the narrow bunk and exhaled. It seemed like such a little thing, especially given how they’d all fucked each other ninety different ways and he had barely stepped foot into his own apartment since his heat ended, but desire still flashed through his belly, hot and fluttering, at the thought that they wanted to be seen with him. Wanted to do things with him. Other than just doing him.

“Of course,” he wrote back.

The crazy-busy shift was capped off by a middle-of-the-night fire at a rickety illegal gambling club filled with old people, so the team was there for hours, putting their own oxygen masks on people after the ones in the trucks ran out and trying to keep all the grannies and grandpas from hobbling off before the police arrived. It was equal parts annoying and hilarious, but they didn’t return to the fire house until after five a.m., so when he got off-shift at seven, he didn’t so much walk home as fall forward for four blocks.

But Minseok had texted that he should knock on their door, so he did. Minseok took one look at him and pulled him inside by the wrist.

“Did you sleep at all?”

Chanyeol shook his head.
“Well, damn, and I had really been looking forward to making out,” Minseok said, but with a smile on his face and his fingers soft against Chanyeol’s chest.

He settled them on the sofa, Chanyeol’s face nestled up against his neck, which was complete bliss for the four seconds Chanyeol experienced it before Minseok was waking him up and cruelly abandoning him in favor of his own dumb job. They got in a little groggy kissing, at least, before Chanyeol relocated to his own bed. He’d spent so little time in it lately that it felt weird.

His lingering lassitude, when he could no longer ignore the fact that it was daylight, drove him to take the bus to his mom’s restaurant, where he could stare blearily at a tabletop and let somebody else feed him. It was late enough in the lunch rush that she didn’t even tuck him back in the kitchen, installing him instead at the table closest to the welcome stand, where she could sit with him between customers.

“Now son, you know I’ve had your father watching *Complete Love,*” she said, making him almost choke on the really lovely piece of fish she’d plunked in front of him.

She grinned.

“I’m preparing him, in the hope that you can bring your new friends over during Chuseok.”

“You’re the best mom in the entire universe,” he said.

“Well, I don’t know about universe, but I’ll definitely accept best mom in the city.”

He pulled up his calendar.

“I’m on shift the first night, but I’ll ask them. Sounds like Jongdae might be caught up with family stuff, though.”

His mom pursed her lips.

“And we don’t count as family?”

Chanyeol rubbed his nose.

“We’ve barely been dating for three weeks, Mom.”

She narrowed her eyes.

“I don’t know! He’s really touchy about the subject. Says they’re one of those really traditional alpha families.”

“Oh,” she said. “Oh dear, I’m not sure what I think about that. I guess you’d better follow his lead, then. But you know your sister and I are going to start camping out in your hallway if we don’t meet them soon.”

Presumably his horror at this showed on his face, because she snickered at him.

But he promised to work something out. It was nice to catch her up on everything (everything rated 7+, anyhow). She laughed about the smoked-out old people trying to wander off into the night with their fistfuls of cash, and turned fifteen shades of red when he said he was going to be in the calendar.

“Now I’m going to have to cancel my order!”
He dropped his chopsticks.

“You order the calendar?”

This was something he had definitely never wanted to know.

“Of course I order the calendar! I have to support your firehouse, after all! I always give it to your auntie next door, because you know I’d never be able to look your coworkers in the eye if I had to spend all year seeing them half-naked. But I’m not sure I could bear to even stand in her kitchen if you were hanging on the wall looking all – “ she waved her hands around – “well.”

“Um, yes,” he said.

She wrinkled her nose.

“I suppose it’s good that you feel confident enough to participate, son.”

“And we can definitely drop the matter here and never discuss it again,” he said.

“What a sensible idea.”

Brief hiccups aside, it was great to see her, great to let her pack up enough food for nine people, great to text ‘I’ve got dinner covered’ to the group chat, and great to see his phone light up with nice messages in response.
Chapter 11

It was even more great to open his door not too long after he got home and have Minseok press his whole body against him, one hand dipping into his waistband in the back. Chanyeol sighed happily.

“Three days isn’t that long,” he said. “Why do I miss you so much?”

Minseok squeezed him and laughed under his breath.

“I think we might like each other, Channie.”

How had he let himself get so twisted up last weekend? Now it was like he was filled up with contentment.

“That sounds serious.”

“Oh yes,” Minseok said.

They carried all the food next door, where Chanyeol kept having to drape himself over the counter, because the adorable faces Min made over his mom’s food – all raised eyebrows and wide eyes and cute little mouth shapes – were too much for his spine to handle.

“How often do you generally visit?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“Whenever I have time, I guess. It’s weird if I don’t talk to her at least once a week, and I keep in pretty close touch with my sister, too. My mom said they’re going to start camping out in the hallway if they don’t meet you guys soon.”

Minseok grinned.

“I’m not sure the doors are soundproofed. They might regret it.”

Then he laughed aloud at what Chanyeol’s face did in response.

Thank goodness the upcoming major national holiday provided an excuse to stop thinking about that.

“Ugh, Chan,” Minseok said around a scowl. “I hate to ask it, because it’s always awful, but my extended family has a big formal dinner every year. I’d genuinely appreciate it if you came with me. Though I understand if you don’t want to.”

“Of course I’ll go. My mom said they’ll work around your family’s schedule if it means you can come see us.”

Minseok looked so surprised.

“I. Really? They shouldn’t put themselves out, Chanyeol.”

He shook his head.

“We never do anything fancy. Mom shuts the restaurant down, so it’s usually just the four of us hanging out. They want to meet you. And I – would like that too.”
Minseok smiled down at the food containers spread across the counter.

“That sounds lovely, Channie. I’ll look forward to it. And I really want you to meet my sister, too.”

Oh boy, this was making him giddy, and it was too bad that Minseok was all the way on the other side of the kitchen island and thus outside of kissing distance.

Jongdae, with his unerring ability to ruin soft moments, bustled through the door. He yelled, skated around on his socks, and squeezed Chanyeol around the neck a little too hard.

“This is so great,” he said once he had kissed them both thoroughly but before he had quite let go of Minseok. “What do I have to do to get to come home to both of you every day?”

“Make more money,” Minseok said, and Jongdae jumped as if he’d had his butt pinched.

“Remove my sense of civic responsibility,” Chanyeol said.

For once, Min joined Jongdae in making a rude sound.

Oh, it was good. It was so, so good to sit on the floor around their table and listen to them in raptures over food his mom made. To make them laugh about the gambling club fire and the freaked out alpha and hear about Jongdae’s work project. Minseok had a cute story about a big family trying to crowd into the butcher’s shop. It was so happy and comfortable that Chanyeol kept watching for openings so he could lean across the table and kiss one or both of them. After dinner, and over Chanyeol’s protests, Jongdae fed him and Minseok way larger portions of cheesecake than he himself ate.

“I have to be half-naked in front of a camera in a day and a half!”

“We’ll work it off,” Jongdae said with a shrug, wiggling the spoon for emphasis until Chanyeol ate the proffered bite.

“Yeah, three things about that,” Minseok said, then scowled at Jongdae before eating the bite held in front of his face.

In Chanyeol’s previous experience, alphas in a hand-feeding mood were usually clingy and vocal about it, with a bunch of pet names and deliberately getting food on his face (yuck). From the way Jongdae’s mouth was set in a straight line, with his eyebrows tilted up and his cheeks pink, for him it looked more like he considered it an Important and Sexy Job.

Honestly, very cute.

“First,” Minseok said, and glared so hard that Jongdae veered the spoon into his own mouth, “what time do you need to be there on Saturday morning?”

“Six-thirty,” Chanyeol said, “they need me there early – “

“Right, to work out all the lighting and stuff,” Minseok said. “Photography, ugh. So technical.”

He winked, very slightly. Chanyeol knew he was about as subtle as a two-by-four to the face, but even he could take a hint as obvious as that.

“Yeah, it’s a bummer.”

“Boo,” Jongdae said.
“Second, I’ve got to get my carving job done early, since we have plans on Saturday, so don’t plan on me tomorrow night.”

“What?” Jongdae said, “boo!”

Chanyeol would’ve protested as well, except for the way Minseok kept glancing at him with just the tiniest bit of smile in the corner of his mouth. And Jongdae was so outraged, it was beyond adorable.

“What time should I bring all the stuff over?”

“Any time,” Chanyeol said. “I should be there all morning, and if not, anybody’ll be happy to sort you out.”

“Third,” Minseok said, “I’m not in charge of Chanyeol, but no one is getting in my or Jongdae’s ass until Saturday night.”

“Boo,” Jongdae said sadly.

Chanyeol felt himself blush. It lent their date a certain – weight – if that was how Min was going to be about it.

“A agreed,” he said to the table, and somebody growled.

Things were a little more tense after that, if in a positive way. They packed up the leftovers with fewer words than lingering touches, and the two episodes of *Complete Love* that they got through they for sure would have to rewatch, given that during the first one Minseok spent half the time either playing with or kissing Jongdae’s neck, and Jongdae spent the entire second episode stroking Chanyeol’s dick so slowly that he didn’t get anywhere close to coming, despite almost perishing of want.

Jongdae kept it up after they relocated to the bed, still with that maddeningly slow, tight grip, with Minseok kissing him, hands roaming over him, so it seemed like it took forever before pleasure coalesced in his pelvis.

“There you go,” Jongdae said when Chanyeol’s hips started to buck of their own accord. “Give it to me, Chan.”

And Minseok took all the sounds Chanyeol made into his own mouth, his hand cool and firm on the back of Chanyeol’s neck, so that when he came, it was like he was surrounded by them, their care and desire: warm, safe, wanted.

“My sweetness,” Minseok said afterward, thumbing salt water away from Chanyeol’s temples and kissing him softly.

“So good,” Jongdae said, lips up against his ear.

In the dim light of their bedroom, his belly covered in his own come, it was easy to believe that he was both good and theirs. Especially just after, with Jongdae thrusting between Minseok’s thighs, when he was pressed against Min’s back, one hand working Min’s cock, and the bright mint of Min’s scent in his nose and under his mouth.

If he thought about it, he could remember how left out he had felt, the previous weekend, when they had kissed each other. But with Minseok’s back rocking against his chest, watching the expressions flit across Jongdae’s face, Chanyeol could only remember what Baekhyun had said: ‘if you’re happy, run with it.’
He tightened his grip on Minseok, set his teeth into Minseok’s nape, and kept his eyes open to catch Jongdae’s gaze.

“Chan,” Jongdae said, before he kissed Minseok and one, then the other of them went over with a groan.

Did this count as avoiding? Chanyeol found it hard to care, changing sheets and brushing teeth, falling into bed with the two of them curled against him. Kissing Jongdae half-asleep before dawn and wrapping close around Minseok until after the sun rose.

“So nice,” Minseok murmured when they both stirred for real, kissing one another’s cheeks and stretching against one another before they rolled up to fetch coffee.

It was a terrific day, during which they did just about nothing. Chanyeol did some laundry; they lounged around on the sofa reading various volumes of *Hell’s Heat*, only moving when one of them needed to get off an elbow or move an ankle. It was about as comfortable as Chanyeol had ever been, in the quiet, with Minseok lying on his torso, the only sound when one of them turned a page or huffed in response to something they read. He didn’t let himself be that lazy very often, and it felt like total luxury.

“How come you didn’t want me telling Jongdae about my hair?” he asked over lunch.

“You’ll enjoy watching him process the surprise,” Minseok said with a grin.

He stayed most of the afternoon, past the time when they both got tired of reading and moved on to almost a full hour’s worth of soft, slow kissing, making the day probably one of the top five in Chanyeol’s entire damn life.

“You are delicious,” Min said at one point, working his neck with warm, gentle lips and tongue.

And for a second, Chanyeol almost babbled it all out – how off-balance he felt with desire and affection and wanting to fit into what they had without screwing anything up. How very much he wanted to believe them when they called him ‘ours.’

But then Minseok sucked on his earlobe, and it was easier to just shift and sigh and tangle his fingers in Min’s hair. By the time Min left, he was buzzing inside his own skin.

“She’ll be home in about twenty minutes,” Minseok said, after he had changed clothes and put his bag together, then leaned in to kiss him one last time. “Greet him well, Channie. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Chanyeol lay on the sofa, palming himself and sucking his bottom lip, trying to still taste Minseok. By the time he heard Jongdae open the front door, he was naked, one foot braced against the arm at one end of the sofa, one arm overhead, grasping the other end, one hand playing with himself, slow and teasing, and he was hard as granite.

“Hello?”

“I’m here,” he said, hearing the roughness of his own voice.

He probably looked like he was in heat, splayed out and turned on. Ready and wanting.

“Fuck,” Jongdae breathed when he saw. “Fuck, Chan, look at you.”

He climbed over the arm of the sofa, kneeling between Chanyeol’s legs, running his hands up them.
“God, Chanyeol. Fucking look at you.”

With Jongdae crouched between his legs, hands on his hips, staring hungrily, Chanyeol smiled and pulled his hand hard up his own cock, so that he shifted and breathed hard.

“Fucking gorgeous,” Jongdae said, and swallowed him down.

Jongdae didn’t hurry, though he grasped too tight and sucked too hard to be teasing, and Chanyeol was already so close that it didn’t take long before he was grabbing at Jongdae’s shoulders and coming with harsh groan into that warm, wet space.

Once he caught his breath, he yanked Jongdae upward and flipped them over, grinning at Jongdae’s low laugh. Filling his mouth with Jongdae’s cock brought Chanyeol fully back into himself. He worked Jongdae over, letting himself enjoy the taste of Jongdae’s skin and the sounds from Jongdae’s mouth, Jongdae’s fingers in his hair. The satisfaction of feeling Jongdae writhe under him and pulse down his throat.

“What a fucking homecoming,” Jongdae said after a minute, then dragged him up and kissed deep into his mouth.

It made for a continuation of his lazy day. They ordered pizza and lay wrapped around each other on the sofa for the course of one superhero movie, a variety show, and a music show, almost none of which they paid attention to.

“So glad you’re here, Channie,” Jongdae murmured at one point, his hand curved over Chanyeol’s face.

Yeah.

Jongdae was so cute in the morning, the way he clung to Chanyeol when the alarm went off and kept saying “boo” in a sleep-rough voice, that Chanyeol didn’t start to get nervous about the calendar shoot until he was halfway to the station, but by that point the people standing in the driveway of the firehouse could see him coming, so he couldn’t chicken out.

Those people turned out to be a couple of the stylist’s assistants, who pounced on him immediately and covered his hair in terrible goo.

“Don’t be a baby,” one of them said when his nose-wrinkling crossed some line.

“Don’t worry about Tzuyu, she’s just mean,” another of the assistants said while she shampooed out the goo, and then, “oh, not bad. You should consider going blond some time.”

The next layer of goo smelled slightly less awful but itched more. Chanyeol was profoundly grateful that only a few people had had to come in so early (other than the part-timers on duty), and they were similarly occupied, so that he wasn’t followed around by coworkers trying to smear dye on his eyebrows or anything like that.

“It’s a lot of work being beautiful, eh?” Yesung said, grinning, his own head covered in goo and plastic wrap.

“It’s a lot of work being something, I guess.”

Their elbowing each other was cut short by four tiny stylist assistants with ferocious glowers and pointy hair tools. He and Yesung sat down.
By the time the other full-timers started to show up, Chanyeol had a head of dark red hair with a few curls in it falling across his forehead. He kept getting hissed at by small ladies every time he tried to mess with it.

The day was a total scorcher – between the sun outside and the photographer’s lights inside, the air in the garage was sweltering. Several of his coworkers (Siwon and Sehun among them) abandoned their shirts immediately. Chanyeol, instead, agreed to go on a grocery run for ice and last-minute items, just to get a few minutes in air conditioning.

Arriving back at the fire house, Yesung and Sehun pounced on him.

“Dude,” Sehun said.

“What?”

“Park Chanyeol, you lucky fucking bastard,” Yesung said.

“Seriously, what?”

“Your boyfriend came by.”

Sehun was hanging onto Yesung like he had low blood sugar or something.

“Yeol!” Siwon yelled across the station. “Come look at this grill!”

A full quarter of their small back yard area was taken up by a monstrosity of a grill, currently surrounded by five large coolers and many firefighters.

“It is absolutely imperative that you never, ever, ever, ever break up with that beta,” Siwon said. “Look at this grill. I could grill my enemies on it.”

“You have enemies?”

“Of course I don’t have enemies, everyone loves me. I’m just saying I could.”

“Five coolers,” Donghae said. “Full. I want to be his best friend forever.”

Five coolers stuffed full. Chanyeol was bummed to have missed Min’s visit, while at the same time thrilled that he had knocked everyone off their feet by virtue of his Minseok-ness. He found Joonmyun in the office.

“The number on this invoice is really small, Chanyeol. Please tell me you’re not going to feel weird if I give your boyfriend a sixty-percent tip, just so we at least use up a decent amount of our budget.”

“No, of course not.”

Joonie was more than welcome to be the one to fight with Min about it, not him.

“He is really handsome, Yeollie.”

The way he said it sounded pained. Chanyeol could relate.

“Yeah.”

Joonmyun blinked at him.
“Oh. You look good with red hair.”

That was the general gist of the comments he got, which was nice. Baekhyun was kind of loud and obnoxious about the compliments, but it wasn’t like that was a surprise.

He looked up from getting his makeup done (tickly, and very weird-feeling in the eyelash area) and learned really fast just why all his coworkers looked like Minseok had clocked them upside the head. Minseok was standing by the garage door next to a stunned-looking Baekhyun, wearing his work pants and boots and a green t-shirt tight enough to make clear what he had going on in the torso department. His hair, falling over his eyes, a little wavy and messy-looking, was silver-white with pink tips.

Chanyeol figured that the only reason why he didn’t lose consciousness was knowing that all the little stylist women would kill him for messing up his hair and makeup.

“Oh, you’re done except for the last-minute stuff,” the makeup lady said. “Do not touch your face.”

She set him free, and he floated over, as if the weight of Minseok’s gaze had an actual gravitational pull.

“Wow,” he said.

“Wow yourself.”

Minseok twined their fingers together.

“I told you that you’d look great as a redhead.”

“I keep jumping every time I walk past a mirror,” Chanyeol said.

He halfway expected Baek to jump in with an insult, but he just stood there, staring at Minseok with an expression on his face that meant he was caught up in a dirty-thoughts cascade. Reasonable. Minseok looked like he had stepped out of a magazine or something.

“I’ll be happy to express my admiration later,” Min said.

Baekhyun made a little high-pitched sound, then did so again when Minseok grinned. Something about the glint in Minseok’s eye made Chanyeol suspicious.

“You didn’t actually have a carving job, did you?”

Minseok laughed, and Baekhyun put one hand to his chest.

“I did. It just happened to be the kind of basic thing I could literally turn out while asleep. I delivered it just now. Gave me time to work up a little something else.”

He tossed his hair, and Chanyeol grinned.

“What,” came Jongdae’s voice from behind him.

Chanyeol turned around, and Jongdae took a step backward.

“What the fuck.”

Minseok stepped around Chanyeol. Jongdae clenched his fists.
“What. The *fuck.*”

Minseok put his arm around Chanyeol’s waist and leaned his head against Chanyeol’s arm. Obviously going straight for the kill.

“Oh uh,” Jongdae said. “Nope, calendar shoot canceled. I am definitely entering my rut right this second, and we have to go home *right now.*”

“Oh for shit’s sake,” Baekhyun said behind them. “Screw all of you, figuratively, I am going to go get my damn hair done.”

“How is my harem doing this to me?” Jongdae groaned, stepping forward and trying to reach his little arms around both of them at once. “Why are you so fucking hoooooooot?”

“For the sole purpose of torturing you, babe,” Minseok said.

“God, well, it fucking works, ugh.”

“Can’t,” Chanyeol said in response to pulling on his shoulder and a tilted-up chin. “Makeup.”

“Won’t,” Minseok said in response to the same. “Public.”

“Ugh, you’re both the worst.” Of course, he was still clinging to them when he said this, and it was followed by several minutes’ worth of really flattering murmurs about Chanyeol’s and Minseok’s (a) hotness and (b) gorgeousness, until Chanyeol was starting to see the benefit of bailing on the photo shoot to go home and fuck a whole lot.

“Is there, like, gold on your cheekbones? You look like the surface of the goddamn sun, Channie.”

“DO NOT TOUCH THE FACE,” one of the tiny stylist women bellowed from a couple meters away, startling all three of them into jumping apart.

Which Chanyeol supposed was kind of good. They didn’t really need to be hanging all over each other in public like that. He was going to get enough teasing from his coworkers as it was.

Eunmi arrived not long after and demanded introductions while Hyunwook yelled “uncle! uncle!” until Chanyeol picked him up. Eunmi’s grin was very wide, and she giggled a couple of times, especially during the parts when Minseok set off a charm bomb, tossing that hair and talking about how much he liked *Hell’s Heat* and what series should he and Chanyeol read next.

“Oh gosh, you’re reading it together,” she said, looking vaguely faint.

Jongdae, hanging to the back staring at Hyunwook hugging on Chanyeol’s neck, looked his own variety of vaguely faint.

“Wife!” Siwon yelled, running up.

He looked Jongdae and Minseok up and down.

“Nice job, Yeol,” he said, and peeled his son away.

“Honey. It’s time for the glitter oil,” he said, winking at Eunmi, who blushed and grinned.

“I’ll bring you some more books, Chanyeol. Gotta go perform my responsibilities in support of the
firehouse. Nice to meet you both!”

“My glands,” Jongdae said in a strangled voice.

Minseok patted his shoulder.

“Stay strong, babe. If they’re going to cover Chanyeol in glitter oil, it’s only going to get worse from here.”

“Oh god,” Jongdae whispered.

“They won’t!” Chanyeol said. “Will they?”

They totally did – after the grumpy one re-touched his makeup, grumbling under her breath about people causing her trouble without ever quite fussing at him directly, since Eunmi was standing within hearing distance while she applied what Chanyeol was positive was way too much glitter oil to Siwon’s torso.

“I’m not getting that, am I?” he whispered.

The grumpy stylist looked up at him, and the side of her mouth twitched.

“You are,” she said. “And I am personally begging you not to have either one of your boyfriends apply it, because we’re trying to remain professional here.”

Chanyeol cringed, and that twitch at the side of her mouth repeated itself.

She reminded him a little of Sehun.

“You want me to grab one of our omegas to put it on you?”

“I mean,” Chanyeol said. “If I’m not allowed to do it myself?”

“You’re not,” she said.

But she patted his arm.

“Don’t worry. Somin gets it. She won’t make you stand around long enough for anybody to wig out.”

The stylist waved, and Chanyeol looked over to see one of the photographer’s assistants looking in their direction. When he caught Chanyeol’s glance, the guy nodded, gave a thumbs up, and leaned in to speak to the photographer.

“Okay,” she said to Shindong, currently mugging atop the hose truck with his helmet held in front of his chest (and not, Chanyeol noted, wearing glitter oil). “Couple more and then we’ve got – who? Park Chanyeol up next.”

This, despite the fact that pretty much everybody was primped and shiny, and some of them had been standing around for a while.

It occurred to him that Taeil from C team hadn’t signed up for the calendar, and Heechul had been on medical leave for over a year.

Yikes.
“Hustle it,” the stylist said, pushing him toward yet another skinny woman wearing a bandolier full of mysterious-looking brushes. How many stylists were there? It seemed like there were a hundred of them.

“Hey,” the new one said. “Let’s come back here.”

She pulled him behind the truck, into a quiet corner near the gear racks.

“Sorry to put my hands all over you,” she said, gesturing for him to take off his shirt.

“It’s okay. I appreciate your doing it instead of, um.”

She grinned.

“Yeah, no, Tzuyu gets it. I’m not exactly quiet in my opinions about how to treat omegas at photo shoots.”

She rubbed the oil on him briskly, wiped her hands clean, and tweaked his hair a little.

“You look amazing,” she said. “Get in there and don’t worry about anything but the camera. Somin’ll take care of you.”

It was hard not to curl in on himself at the feeling that many, many eyes snapped to him the minute he walked around the side of the truck. He focused on the photographer, who was also staring at him, but in a photographing kind of way, not a ‘half-naked omega present’ kind of way.

“Matty,” she murmured when Chanyeol was close, and the bigger of her two male assistants – almost as tall as Chanyeol and broader – angled himself so that he blocked Chanyeol from much of the room.

“Forgive my not shaking hands,” she said. “As you’ll learn, that oil is pernicious.”

Oh great.

“So look, I know it’s really cliché, but would you super hate it if I had you lying on the pile of hoses? We can totally do something else if that makes you uncomfortable, but it would look incredible.”

On one hand, it was super cliché and he knew he’d feel like a total weirdo doing it. On the other hand, the whole point of the calendar was to be a little cheesy and dumb. And it did raise a lot of money for the station.

“It’s okay,” he said.

“And, um.”

The photographer turned and waved at someone behind her. By the quickness with which Jongdae appeared at her side, he and Minseok were now standing significantly closer than the doorway. That was helpful to know.

“You’re his alpha, right? Would it be okay to take off his courting bracelet just for the shoot?”

Chanyeol wondered whether she could tell that the position of Jongdae’s eyebrows was not friendly.

“What are you asking me for?” he said. “Chanyeol is an adult.”
The photographer and her assistant both grinned.

“Nice,” she said, and “that okay with you, Chanyeol?”

He held his wrist out to Jongdae and tried not to shiver at the touch of Jongdae’s fingers. But he couldn’t help rubbing his wrist afterward – it felt strange and bare. He couldn’t help but see that Jongdae noticed and blinked slowly at him.

Chanyeol tried to pay attention only to the photographer and her assistant while he lay across the pile of hoses, and then sat up while they rearranged the hoses to get a different angle, and then again. But it was like he could feel everybody’s eyes on him. And it was so hot under the lights that he was starting to sweat, and there were fans blowing across the photoshoot area, which wouldn’t do anything but waft his scent around.

“Hey,” the photographer said, after the shutter had clicked about a hundred times and he had shifted his position ever so slightly about fifty, “just focus on your alpha, okay? You’re doing great, we’re almost done.”

Chanyeol looked up, and Minseok and Jongdae were standing just on the edge of the shoot area, right in front of him.

Neither of them may have been tall, but surely the space on either side of them was because everyone else could see the presence they had, standing shoulder to shoulder, watching him. What had he been nervous about? They were both right there. They’d wade right in if anybody tried to mess with him.

So it didn’t matter how many eyes he may have been under, in those lights. Those four dark eyes were the only ones that mattered.

It struck him that the position he was lying in was almost a copy of the one the night before, on their sofa when Jongdae had come home from work. That memory flashed through him – the tension of his desire, the expression on Jongdae’s face, the heat of Jongdae’s mouth.

He relaxed, felt himself smile, stretched his arm behind his head. Faintly, he heard the camera shutter go off a bunch of times. Even further in the background, more than one person growled. Chanyeol focused on the way Minseok and Jongdae smiled, slow and sharp, and bit his lip.

“Oh, excellent,” the photographer said. “Just beautiful.”

She crouched down in front of him.

“That was perfect,” she said. “And I would make a break straight to the showers, if I were you. Great job.”

She stood up and yelled, “Okay, Choi Siwon and Byun Baekhyun, you are up, chop chop, we’re on a schedule, people!”

In the resulting bustle, Chanyeol slipped upstairs and into the showers without incident, though he did have to ignore a couple of people trying to get his attention on the way. The glitter oil was just as tenacious as the photographer said, but he couldn’t be bothered to spend much time working at it. The itch to get next to Minseok and Jongdae was too strong. A basic scrub-down would have to do.

It was a relief to pull on jeans instead of his uniform pants, though he wished he’d packed a looser t-shirt into his backpack. He’d had enough of people looking at him for the day.
There was a single text on his phone, from Yixing.

“Yeollie - will you have lunch with me on Monday? 11:30 at the hospital? Pls.”

His stomach dropped a little.

“Yeah,” he typed. “U okay?”

He waited a minute, in case it was a slow spot and Xing would be able to answer. What a relief that it was.

“Yeah, fine. Just want to check in w you. See you w my own eyes when I’m not distracted.”

That didn’t sound so bad. Maybe Baek was right, that Xing was working this stuff out with himself somehow. Maybe they’d find some way around to okay. Preferably without his having to hear too many details about Jongdae’s Asshole Moments of Old.

“See you then.”

Jongdae was waiting for him in the hallway outside the locker room, looking very alpha with his drawn-together brows and little smile, leaning against the wall. Chanyeol was so happy to see him that he could’ve yelled a little. He held out his wrist.

“Let’s do that when Min’s around,” Jongdae said, his voice deep, smiling when Chanyeol shook himself before he nodded. “Got a place where we can sit down for a minute?”

He followed Chanyeol into the common room and climbed in Chanyeol’s lap the minute he sat on the sofa. It was an absolutely terrible place to make out, but before Chanyeol had a chance to point that out, Jongdae was rubbing his face against Chanyeol’s cheek.

“You looked so fucking beautiful, Channie,” Jongdae said, moving his head around. “My omega.”

All the lingering nervousness dropped right out of Chanyeol, sitting with his hands on Jongdae’s hips while Jongdae made sure everybody downstairs would scent alpha on him for the rest of the day and forget whatever they’d been thinking when he lay on those rolled-up hoses.

“Thank you.”

Jongdae kissed him once, quick and soft.

“Believe me,” he said, “I am perfectly happy to encourage everybody to back the hell off from you. Any day, any time.”

Nice.

“Now let’s go see Minseok about some bracelets.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Whew, this one is a monster (length-wise)! Hope it's worth the wait.

Baekhyun and Siwon were such hams that they were still going by the time Jongdae and Chanyeol got back downstairs. Baekhyun was posed like a pinup girl on top of the truck, one finger held to pursed lips, looking as cute as he ever did. Chanyeol, holding Jongdae’s hand tightly, chose not to notice whether anyone glanced their way as they walked across the room.

Minseok appeared out of the crowd on Chanyeol’s other side; they herded him to the wall opposite to the excitement and sat on the floor. He held out his wrist. Jongdae went first, clasping the silver bracelet around his arm with warm fingers that trailed up to the inside of his elbow. Minseok leaned down and kissed the inside of his wrist when the catch of the black bracelet closed. Chanyeol shivered, then shook his wrist and rubbed at the bracelets. He hadn’t realized how much he had gotten used to that slight weight at the end of his arm, that it would feel so weird – and wrong – not to wear them.

Oh boy.

“Things got a little focused there for a minute, didn’t they, Chan?” Minseok asked, scooting up close with one arm around Chanyeol’s back.

He didn’t miss how they were each slowly rubbing their faces against his shoulders. At this rate, he’d smell like them even to them. He had exactly zero problem with that, and leaned into Minseok with a nod.

It had been so long since he’d been in a crowd where people had that ‘hey look, an omega’ moment, aside from working, when he knew he was surrounded by coworkers who had his back. It was no good reminder – and even worse that it had been mostly coworkers having that moment.

“I know I can take care of myself,” he said, “I mean, look at me, but – “

“But it was weird, and you handled it great, so don’t fucking apologize,” Jongdae said.

“Ten more minutes and everyone will forget,” Minseok said. “We’ll sit here as long as you like.”

Chanyeol blinked away some damp stupidity trying to start up in his eyeballs and leaned back, tried to encourage his shoulders to come down from chin level.

“Okay?” Joonmyun asked, crouching down in front of them.

Chanyeol nodded, and Joonie patted his ankle before walking off. Over the next few minutes, he caught a few eyes – Yesung with a thumbs up, Donghae with a wink and a nod, and Sehun with a gagging gesture that made him laugh. Probie Mark brought him a water bottle.

Baekhyun skipped over and acted like he was going to fall on top of them, still glittered up and sweaty.
“If you get that oil on me, I will shave your fucking eyebrows off,” Chanyeol growled.

“Well I guess somebody’s all right,” Baek said, pulling a fake pouty face before he kicked Chanyeol’s foot and wandered in the direction of the stairway to the showers.

And actually, he was. The mood of the crowd was back to silly, he knew at least some of his coworkers had noticed and gotten it, and – well. His excellent boyfriends continued being excellent. He rubbed his cheek against the top of each of their heads.

“Okay, sweetness?” Minseok asked.

“Okay.”

All the guys who were done with their photos had reached their limit of grill resistance: the minute Chanyeol sat up straight, a whole group ran up next to them, talking over each other in Minseok’s direction. He scratched Chanyeol’s back lightly before he got up and led them all out. Chanyeol followed, so he could take a look at the thing, too.

Because come on, he was a firefighter. He loved fire. And the grill was totally astounding. Also, it was super cute to watch how Sehun hung on every word out of Minseok’s mouth.

Arms went around his waist, and a pointy chin dug into the side of his arm, which meant it was Baekhyun. Jongdae grabbed his other hand too tightly for comfort.

“Yeol. You good?” he asked, softly enough that nobody would overhear.

“I’m good.”

Then he smacked Chanyeol’s butt and yelled,

“You jerk, trying to take my place as the hottest piece of ass in the station. You’ll never win!”

“Not while I’m around anyway,” Donghae yelled over his shoulder.

Jongdae practically broke his fingers.

Because Baekhyun had the self-preservation instincts of a drunk lemming, his next excellent life choice was to drape himself over Jongdae, who growled.

“Aw, who’s a grumpy alpha?”

Jongdae shook him off, which was successful for exactly one second before Baekhyun had an arm back over his shoulders.

“So J.D. – can I call you J.D.?”

“No.”

“Okay. Aside from Yeollie, since I know you’re biased because he smells like candy, who’s the hottest piece of man-flesh you’ve seen here today? Me, right?”

A muscle in Jongdae’s cheek twitched.

“Minseok,” he said.

Baek stood up straight, opened his mouth, looked over at Min (currently pulling his hair up into a
ponytail – Sehun looked weak in the knees), and rubbed his nose.

“Yeah, okay,” he said. “Valid.”

Chanyeol and Jongdae laughed, and it didn’t take long before Baekhyun joined them.

“Don’t worry,” Jongdae said after a minute. “You’re easily in the top twenty.”

“Oh for pity’s – that’s more people than are even in the calendar!”

Baekhyun tried to look like he was pouting, but he couldn’t hold it. He looked too pleased when Jongdae elbowed him.

That was the point when Minseok beckoned Chanyeol over, and he got a nice personalized tour of the ginormous grill, complete with one hand on the small of his back that made him wonder how the hell long they were going to have to stay at this barbecue before they could go home to make out. When Donghae and Siwon pushed him out of the way, bearing platters of meat and tongs, Baekhyun and Jongdae were still talking quietly.

Chanyeol watched them for a minute, both standing easily, even if their expressions were serious. Baekhyun nodded in response to something Jongdae said and patted his upper arm.

Then Baek turned to the crowd at the grill and yelled “BEER! Why the hell hasn’t anybody tapped the keg yet?” and there was a flurry of keg-tapping, beer-pouring, and fetching of the piles of plates, side dishes, and dessert stuff from the kitchen to the tables outside.

In all that, Chanyeol lost track of Minseok and Jongdae for a little bit. When all the food was finally set out, he scanned the crowd and saw Jongdae standing with Joonmyun by the keg, both staring into their cups with snooty facial expressions, for the least surprising interaction in the history of the world. Minseok was showing Sehun and Yesung something on his phone. Chanyeol figured that’d be the more interesting of the two conversations.

“Fucking ice!” Sehun said when he got close. “I had no idea. It’s freaking Namsan Tower, look!”

Minseok turned his phone to Chanyeol with a little smile. The ice sculpture in question was in fact fucking amazing, and Chanyeol felt like a jerk for never having asked to see any of them before. Jesus, way to repay how nice they were to him all the time. He must’ve made an expression, because Minseok reached over and squeezed his arm briefly.

But it was cool to see how they let themselves get folded into the general discussion. Any time the grill needed adjustment, of course Minseok had to be consulted, and he didn’t seem put out about it once. Baekhyun appeared to have decided that he and Jongdae were already bros, and it was unclear how much Jongdae actually enjoyed all the pestering, but he never snarled at Baek and usually gave back as good as he got.

There was one of those stupid things where all the alphas in the vicinity stood in a tight circle and bumped at one another, glaring, which was particularly hilarious given that three of the tiny stylist ladies were alphas. They stood on either side of Jongdae and made a wall of small-n-grumpy that all the other alphas seemed satisfied with, and no fangs appeared or punches were thrown.

“Dummies,” the omega stylist lady said to Chanyeol while he was refilling her cup at the keg. “I don’t know why we like them.”

He grinned at her, and she winked, then went to bump shoulders with her alpha friend and share the full cup. Chanyeol let Jongdae feed him some beautifully grilled pork belly until Jongdae’s eyebrows
rearranged into a more favorable position.

Sadly, Joonmyun had left poor Sehun hanging, so once Jongdae was calm, Chanyeol grabbed Baek, and they went and knocked Sehun over and sat on him for a minute.

“Stop it,” Sehun grumbled. “I know where you’re both ticklish.”

Which was Sehun for ‘thanks,’ though really he was most pleased by Minseok bringing him a plate of food and crouching down to hand it over with a sardonic twist to his mouth. Baekhyun tapped Chanyeol’s hand and nodded – when he looked over, Joonmyun was staring over with his worry face even more pronounced than usual.

Joonie took it out on them not long after, walking over to babble at Minseok for a truly awkward length of time about the invoice for all the food – a weird mixture of thanks and rebuke that had Chanyeol cringing, though Min was super polite about it.

“That’s a tightly wound individual,” Minseok said when Joonmyun wandered off.

Baekhyun laughed.

“Yeah, Joonie can’t decide whether he wants to be in control twenty-four seven or because he’s the one in charge here all the time, at home he’d rather be somebody’s precious baby boy.”

“I could help him answer that question in about ten minutes,” Minseok said in that extra husky tone that made Chanyeol’s toes wiggle. “I hope that pretty alpha pup can figure out how to daddy up real fast.”

Chanyeol was struck by a cascade of vivid mental images about his coworkers that he had never wanted to have. Minseok looked down at his cup.

“Empty,” he sighed. “You want another one, sweetness?”

Chanyeol nodded. Sure. His own empty cup was why his throat was so dry. Sure.

“Fucking hell, how do you ever have a coherent thought around this guy?” Baekhyun said, eyes goggling.

“I don’t,” Chanyeol said.

“Please,” Baekhyun said, tugging at his arm. “Please please let him tie you up and do – whatever – and the tell me about it in great detail. I’m begging you, Yeollie.”

Fat chance of that happening. The telling Baek about it, anyhow.

The photographer’s giant assistant sidled up the minute Chanyeol was alone and handed over a tablet.

“Still needs to be touched up, but I thought you might like to see,” he said.

Chanyeol could not freaking believe that the picture on the tablet was of himself. It looked like him, but an idealized version, the way the light bounced off the glitter on his torso and the gold on his cheeks, and his eyes looked bigger and brighter, outlined in black. The way his posture made his biceps look huge and his waist look small.

And that was not even touching his damn facial expression. She’d caught him just when he bit his lip and smiled. It made him look ready (eager) to be *debauched.*
“You’ve already worked on this a little, right?”

The guy shook his head and smiled.

“Nope, you just looked that good. Better watch out, you might make the cover.”

Oh geez.

Minseok was super pissed that the guy had taken the tablet away by the time he returned with their beers.

By midafternoon, all the people actually on shift were getting antsy about the number of folks wandering around their critical lifesaving equipment. There was a rush to grill up all the remaining meat, and a coordinated appeal by all the kids on site to have Chanyeol lift them up onto the truck, as the tallest person present.

He didn’t miss that Jongdae leaned against the wall in the back to watch that. It made a weird mixture of being pleased and discomfort, with a lot of implications that he didn’t want to think about. Better to just lift the kids onto the truck and back down again, until somebody told him to stop.

Minseok sauntered in, and Chanyeol called down all the littles from the truck so he could go coordinate.

“I parked the truck for the grill around the corner,” Minseok said. “I’m off to go get it now.”

Jongdae looked at Chanyeol with an ‘I have plans for you’ sort of look.

“Jongdae will come with me,” Minseok said coolly.

“Aw, seriously?”

Minseok grinned but grabbed Jongdae around the waist.

“It’s not Saturday night yet, babe. Cool your jets.”

Jongdae groused, and then Chanyeol took the opportunity of their walking out to ogle two extremely nice butts. The real cleanup would be endless, but he helped move tables inside and pack leftover food into the fridge among saying his goodbyes. Min and Dae showed up with a giant pickup and even more giant trailer. Once the grill was loaded up and they drove away, he made a rude face at Sehun, waved to Joonie, hugged Baek, and headed home.

In his own bathroom mirror, Chanyeol learned that he had done a terrible job of removing his makeup – his eyes were still smudged with black. He didn’t hate it. With his tousled hair, it actually looked pretty hot, and the more he saw the red hair, the more he liked it. The glitter was still fucking everywhere, though, and he dreaded the idea that it would infiltrate his washing machine and infect all his clothes.

He was still immediately post-shower and mid-moisturizing when there was a loud thump from Min and Dae’s apartment and a knock at his front door.

What a bunch of nice heat memories that brought on.

As he opened the door, he heard Jongdae yell. So he wasn’t surprised to see Minseok standing in the hallway. He was a little surprised to see that Min had his hands full of clothing and bottles, with a
jacket on a hanger slung over one shoulder.

He let Min in, of course, and took the jacket.

“Don’t you look nice,” Minseok said, leering at Chanyeol’s towel.

There was another thump next door.

“Um. Is everything okay over there?”

“Oh yeah,” Minseok said, grinning. “Somebody’s just annoyed and horny. This is all by design.”

He tossed that stupidly attractive hair out of his eyes.

“He’ll bang around and yell for a while, and then he’ll start to simmer. He’ll wander around thinking about us until it’s time to go.”

He patted Chanyeol’s butt.

“We’re gonna get our brains fucked right out of us tonight, Channie.”

“Oh,” Chanyeol said, very bravely not falling down. “Great.”

“We’ll know we’re really in for it if he brings out the black skinnies and pointy shoes,” Minseok said, and sighed. “Can I use your shower?”

That the pink tips washed out in the shower made not one difference in how incredibly good Min looked, padding around Chanyeol’s apartment in one of his big towels, borrowing Chanyeol’s hair dryer and blowing his hair dry with his bottom lip stuck out. Maybe Chanyeol would’ve been more polite to retreat to his bedroom and give Minseok space, but he was right there and practically naked, Chanyeol wasn’t a monk.

Minseok kindly applied lotion to his back, brushing off his thanks with,

“Oh please, like I’d pass up an opportunity to put my hands on you,”

even if he didn’t try to turn it into anything.

He did pick off a few stray flecks of glitter, which reminded Chanyeol of a couple things he wanted to say. He sat on his bed, pulled Minseok into his lap, and hugged him.

“Channie,” Minseok said, rubbing his face against Chanyeol’s jaw again.

“You’re so good to me,” Chanyeol said, taking the opportunity to rub his own face against Minseok’s. “Both of you. And I never even asked to see your sculptures, I’m sorry.”

Minseok laughed, cupping his hands around Chanyeol’s cheeks and kissing him.

“God, when have we had the time? It’s been all drama and fucking since your heat,” he said, smiling so much that his eyes made little crescents.

“But I’ll show you the whole damn file later. You can come to the studio some time, if you want, and see how it’s done.”

“I’d like that,” Chanyeol said.
“Then it’s a date.”

It was fun to have Minseok fuss with his hair and barge into his closet to boss him around about what to wear, putting together an outfit that he never would’ve thought of – his nice skinny jeans, a non-raggedy t-shirt with an artsy print, and a jacket. It was fun to watch him fuss with his own hair, styling it into something smoother and less louche than what he’d worn all day, but that looked good with his creamy linen shirt and blue jacket.

“What’s this?” Minseok asked, sniffing at the scent-enhancing cologne bottle. “I can’t smell it.”

“It’s a scent enhancer.”

“You wore this when you took us to dinner,” he said, voice low.

“Yeah.”

Minseok examined the bottle.

“I haven’t seen this before.”

“I get it from, uh, where I buy heat supplies?”

Chanyeol suddenly remembered the dildo on his closet shelf with the really huge knot, and was torn in half whether he wanted to surreptitiously bury in the dumpster outside or present it for use.

Regardless, Minseok’s eyebrows bounced around a little, and his mouth contracted into a sweet little kissable bud.

“On one hand, I want to ask you detailed questions about said heat supplies and that store. On the other hand, I never want to know whether my baby sister shops there.”

Given that he got the shop information from omega camp, Chanyeol knew that answer.

“Better not ask,” he said.

Minseok nodded.

“Does this work on betas?”

“No idea.”

Just to be on the safe – or foolhardy – side, they both put on a little. After a couple minutes, it became clear that the enhancer did work on betas. Chanyeol found himself rubbing his face up against Minseok neck, humming.

It didn’t help that when Min pushed him gently back, it was to hand him several necklaces, all of them some variety of thin black leather cords with silver accents either strung on or dangling from.

Chanyeol put them on. And if he’d told anybody that doing so didn’t give him a breathless little thrill, he’d have been a fucking liar.

By the time they were done getting ready, Minseok looked as gorgeous as he ever did, if slightly less dangerous than usual, with white hair and wearing a lot of pale linen with blue and silver earrings hanging from his ears. Chanyeol felt like he passed muster, too, in an outfit cooler than he usually wore, with fancy red hair.
Jongdae, though. Chanyeol opened the door to his knock and heard Minseok exhale behind him. It wasn’t just the black skinnies and the pointy shoes. It was also the deep blue shirt, the black jacket and the hair brushed over his forehead, almost hiding his eyes. Alpha radiated off him, and Chanyeol regretted for a minute agreeing to this date business, when they could’ve been smarter about it and gone straight to bed.

Jongdae walked up to Minseok and wrapped his hand around Min’s jaw.

“Love,” he said, voice raspy with alpha-ness, “two moons.”

Which didn’t make any sense on its own but made even less sense when Minseok sagged and his mouth dropped open.

“Jongdae.”

Minseok hugged him, and Chanyeol could see how Jongdae went stiff with surprise when he burrowed his face against Min’s neck, then relaxed and grasped him tight.

“I’m sorry, babe,” Minseok murmured. “What was too much?”

“You left me alone,” Jongdae mumbled against Min’s neck.

Minseok hugged him for a little bit more, smoothing his fingers down the back of Jongdae’s neck and murmuring apologies. Chanyeol was reminded (again) how much he wanted to be in on that softness stuff. Even if thinking that was a little unfair to Minseok and all the snuggling the two of them did.

“Why do you smell like a whole meal?” Jongdae asked eventually.

Minseok laughed.

“I’m nothing. Go scent that omega of ours.”

This was a really nice development, because Jongdae gave Min one brief kiss, then slid over and put his arms around Chanyeol, who very gladly bent down to make with the hugging.

“Jesus,” Jongdae rumbled at him. “You’re wearing that stuff again, I love it.”

He licked under Chanyeol’s ear. Excellent.

“If that scent booster works on betas,” Jongdae mused, after opening the door for them both with a flourish and herding them down the stairs, “think it’d work for me too?”

“No way,” Chanyeol said. “I keep wanting to flop on the floor and present my neck as it is. If you used that stuff, it’d probably trigger an off-season heat.”

“Really?” Jongdae mused, like it wasn’t a horrible idea.

Minseok snickered.

“That’d be a great excuse to not have to spend three days with my father at Chuseok.”

Chanyeol glared and got nothing but a flirty smile for his efforts.

Unlike Jongdae, who very obviously enjoyed being in the car with them, if his exaggerated inhaling was any indication, Chanyeol was annoyed to sit in the back, so far away from them both. Of course,
he had attended way too many car wrecks to give in to his wish to unbuckle himself and lean forward.

“So, can I ask?” he said when he thought he might bust something if he didn’t.

Jongdae looked at him in the rear-view mirror.

“You can always ask.”

Well, there was a whole other thing he had to just hope was true.

“What’s ‘two moons’?”

They both laughed.

“That’s the stop-fucking-with-me code,” Minseok said.

He reached over and rubbed Jongdae’s arm.

“Why didn’t you come over sooner, babe?”

“It took that long for my dumb alpha brain to stop freaking out about people ogling our Channie and then having to shove around with a bunch of strange knuckleheads and know what I was so mad about. By the time I figured myself out, it was time to pull out the black skinnies and uncomfortable shoes to try to make myself look worthy of my hot harem.”

But he had seemed so calm.

“You were freaked out?” Chanyeol asked.

“Dude, yes,” Jongdae said. “I spent all day trying to keep my inner asshole under wraps. The only reason I didn’t cause a scene during your photoshoot was because I literally couldn’t decide whether I wanted to start a fight or fuck you on that pile of hoses in front of everybody.”

Minseok laughed while Chanyeol had to withstand a mental image that was way, way too vivid.

“Thank you for your restraint,” he said.

At least that made Jongdae laugh, too.

“Shit, when he looked over at us with that expression on his face, even I would’ve jumped right in with you for the public fucking,” Minseok said.

“That’s what he looked like when I got home from work last night,” Jongdae said with a burr in his voice.

Minseok turned around and looked in the back seat, one eyebrow raised.

“You told me to greet him well,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok grinned.

“Except, you know, naked and hard,” Jongdae added.

“Even better,” Min said, looking Chanyeol up and down.

“But why ‘two moons’?” Chanyeol asked, before Kim “troublemaker” Minseok could turn the
conversation into something that would mean he had a hard-on just around the time they had to get out of the car.

Minseok had the audacity to wink, like he could tell what Chanyeol was doing, while Jongdae groaned.

“It’s from Jongdae’s rock-star days,” Min said.

“Lots of people are in stupid bands in college,” Jongdae whined.

“Yes, babe. But how many of them are in thrash metal bands that sing exclusively about the bad old werewolf days?”

Jongdae made a noise like his soul was trying to strangle him from the inside.

Chanyeol, meanwhile, was delighted.

“I was eighteen! I thought it was deep!” Jongdae yelled.

“Right. Especially the fake-fur wolf hats.”

By that point, the only thing holding Chanyeol upright was the seat belt.

“Sure, I could tell you hated it by the way you were always putting your dick up my ass.”

“I’ll admit that I was a fan of the mesh shirt,” Minseok said.

Jongdae continued with the groaning action.

“I was the drummer in a prog-rock band,” Chanyeol said eventually, wiping his eyes and steeling himself for the punchline.

“See?” Minseok said. “That’s barely embarrassing at all.”

“And I was the baritone in a barbershop quartet.”

They howled the rest of the way to the restaurant, while Chanyeol made a mental note to find where his mom had hidden that DVD and melt it. But it was great to laugh with them, after all the whiplash of the day. And it was terrific to walk across the underground parking lot with them, Jongdae’s arm around his waist and Minseok holding his other hand.

It was so comfortable that Chanyeol couldn’t muster more than a sniff of derision when they got on the elevator with an older couple and the man narrowed his eyes and sneered at their interlaced hands. He felt Minseok shift – Min’s murder face was in full force. The man glowered at him, and then the elevator was flooded with the scent of rain-soaked ground, overlaid with the acrid scent of anger.

Chanyeol immediately felt the urge to hunch over and back into the corner of the elevator, to let his alpha take care of everything. But as a semi-rational person of more than average size, instead he squared up next to Minseok at Jongdae’s back. The lady looked at them both, pressed her lips to together tightly, and hung onto her husband’s arm.

“Do you have a problem,” Jongdae said, with so much alpha in his voice that Chanyeol’s dick twitched.

“No, alpha,” the man said, hovering in front of his wife and sounding unhappy, but staring at the
The remaining minute or so that the elevator took seemed like a month, while Jongdae stared the guy down, growling, and the man remained the barest minimum of submissive required to keep things from escalating. Chanyeol was going cross-eyed from the scent and the adrenaline.

Finally the doors opened, and Jongdae barged out first, shaking his head as soon as he stepped into the clear air of the restaurant entryway. Minseok grasped Chanyeol’s elbow and pulled gently so they followed him out. Jongdae’s voice was still so authoritative that the hostess dropped her eyes and muttered “yes, alpha” when he gave his name, then led them to their table almost bent over.

Jongdae was glowering, but he held out a chair for each of them. Chanyeol was fairly certain that was a lifetime first for him. And the restaurant was lovely – he immediately wanted to bring his mom to it, just to see how nice the deck was where they were seated, looking out over tidy neighborhoods, with dim orange lights, as if it were lit by candlelight. Even better, the couple from the elevator was nowhere in sight. The air quality wasn’t bad, given how hot the day had been, and with the sun dropping below the horizon, it was already cooler.

“Oh, love?” Minseok asked softly.

“Yeah.”

Chanyeol, having practically grown up in a restaurant, dove into the menu right away, noting that the food trended toward western, which meant he had to bring his mom here to compare. And:

“I see why you brought me here,” he said with a grin.

Each dish had a suggested wine pairing, and a few even had wine flights of three small glasses each listed alongside. His education was apparently beginning.

“You mean, aside from this being one of his favorite places?” Minseok asked.

“My lack of wine knowledge is apparently embarrassing,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae glared at him through artfully mussed hair; Chanyeol squeezed his hand and was pleased when Jongdae didn’t let him draw his own hand back.

“Let’s wine and dine this cute firefighter, then,” Minseok said. “Maybe he’ll let us get in his pants later.”

“Maybe,” Chanyeol said, trying to sound skeptical but unable to keep the laugh out of his voice.

The combined charm assault of both of his boyfriends had Chanyeol’s face hurting by the end of dinner, just from smiling so much. Talking about wine made Jongdae forget that he was a grumpy alpha on a hair trigger from having his dominance questioned more than once in the same day: he scooted his chair closer and planned out Chanyeol’s drink pairings like a general going into battle. Chanyeol didn’t know wine, but he did know food, and they both asked a hundred questions about his opinions and how every dish compared with his mom’s food. They passed their plates around to one another as if they’d been out on a dozen dinner dates (Jongdae squawked once, saying that Chanyeol’s cabernet would overwhelm Minseok’s sole, until Min handed over his white wine with a wry smile).

And amid all that were countless little lingering looks and brief touches. Jongdae, on his right, kept reaching over to run one finger next to Chanyeol’s bracelets. Each time was a reminder of how weirdly light his arm had felt not to wear them, how Minseok and Jongdae’s presence had blocked
out the discomfort of all that attention focused on him, and then afterward, how they had taken him aside and sat with him until he was calm and comfortable, without once suggesting that he was being ridiculous or taking too long.

“We need to bring you out on more dates if it’s going to make you look this happy, Chan,” Minseok said when their dinner plates had been cleared and they were waiting for dessert.

Chanyeol was distracted by the way Minseok’s fingers played with the stem of his glass, and the way his bottom lip seemed to cling briefly to the glass after he drank.

“He told me that he dated a guy once who wouldn’t be seen in public with him,” Jongdae said.

It didn’t quite ruin the moment, because Minseok’s murder face was even sexier when pulled out in Chanyeol’s defense.

“It seems a shame that your previous dating experience appears to have been a tour of the stupidest men in South Korea,” Minseok said, one eyebrow throwing off enough scorn to have knocked half of Chanyeol’s exes right over.

He wasn’t going to argue about the guy in college, who had in fact not been the sharpest cleaver in the block, on top of being vain about appearances. And anyway, the worst one had been neither stupid nor Korean.

“They weren’t all terrible,” he said. “I mean, not every beta has Min’s fortitude, when it comes to a large omega in heat.”

“Wimps,” Minseok said, waving one hand.

“And I dated an extremely nice omega who was probably way too good for me.”

“Let’s avoid his neighborhood,” Jongdae said with a little bit of growl going. “I wouldn’t want to beat up a nice omega, but I totally would.”

Chanyeol could even laugh at that, because nobody would ever want to beat up Jongin. It would be like being mean to a plush bear.

“No worries,” he said. “He met an alpha even smaller and grumpier than you, and they moved to France.”

“I’m not grumpy,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol and Minseok were still laughing their dessert arrived.

There wasn’t much Jongdae could do with a slice of cake or Chanyeol could do with a tiny fruit tart, but Minseok turned eating his flan into a soft-core porn experience. Chanyeol was a little jealous of the attention that little spoon got, even knowing he was likely to get the same treatment sooner rather than later.

Jongdae must’ve had a similar reaction, because when they got back to the car, he crowded Minseok up against the car door and tipped his head back to kiss his throat.

“I’m curious,” Jongdae said, shoving his thigh between Minseok’s legs so that Min inhaled sharply. “Did you think I wouldn’t notice that you put a bunch of necklaces on Chanyeol that I gave to you?”

“I thought you’d appreciate the gesture of possession,” Minseok rasped.
Chanyeol flashed hot. Jongdae smiled, so that Chanyeol could see when he bit down on Minseok’s neck. Minseok hissed and arched into it.

“I do,” Jongdae said.

He kept his fingers on Minseok’s chin when he lifted his head, holding Min’s face still.

“Sit in the back with Channie,” he said. “I want you both panting by the time we get home.”

He reached over to open the back door and nodded for Chanyeol to get in.

Chanyeol knew it was super unsafe, and under any other circumstances he totally would’ve had a whole lecture ready to give on the topic, except that the sight of the two of them, and the beautiful resonance of Jongdae’s voice, had him nearly panting already.

He did buckle himself in, and, when Minseok straddled him, looped the shoulder belt across Min’s back (barely better than nothing, but still). Minseok tilted his head.

“Don’t make me talk about work,” Chanyeol said, already pulling the other side of Min’s neck to his mouth.

Jongdae must’ve both driven slowly and taken the long way around, because Chanyeol and Minseok had plenty of time to ramp each other up, Minseok rolling those agile hips and worming his hands up under Chanyeol’s shirt, Chanyeol winding his fist in Min’s hair and pulling him until he arched back, applying teeth to those beautiful collarbones and tilting his hips upward when Minseok hummed in the back of his throat. He barely noticed that they arrived back at their building, too busy letting Minseok try to take his mouth over, until Jongdae opened the door.

Thankfully there was no one in the elevator from the parking garage this time to sneer at his and Min’s visible erections, or the way Chanyeol pressed Minseok against the wall to kiss him some more. Possibly the security staff got an eyeful, but Chanyeol couldn’t find it in himself to care. He was too busy pulling Minseok’s body against his and letting Min kiss him with his mouth wide open.

“Well done,” Jongdae murmured.

But he pushed them away when they got inside the apartment, slipping off those stupidly attractive shoes and staring at them with a sharp-edged grin. He grabbed one wrist each and pulled them to the bedroom.

“Bed,” Jongdae said, pushing each of them forward. “Open each other up.”

Did he even have any coherent thoughts left? Chanyeol felt like he was nothing but nerve endings: he was hands, moving over Minseok’s body; he was a mouth, covering Minseok’s lips. He was a tongue to lick, he was need.

They didn’t even get fully undressed. Chanyeol still had his t-shirt on, and Minseok his unbuttoned shirt and socks, when each of them was already knuckle deep in the other, Jongdae beside them, still dressed, lube bottle in his hands and his face alight with desire. He knelt over them, whispering encouragement and praise, while Chanyeol and Minseok worked one another open, their breath gradually sharpening into moans, until Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s hand on his wrist, pulling his hand out of and away from Minseok.

He wouldn’t complain, because the next minute he was pressed up against Jongdae’s now-bare back, kissing his nape, one arm reached all the way around them both to hold Minseok’s shoulder while they wrapped themselves together and he heard the soft sounds of them kissing. Chanyeol could feel
Jongdae’s hand moving and hear Minseok’s quickening breath. He reached down, and Jongdae laughed when his hand curled around Jongdae’s dick.

“Don’t even think it, Channie,” he said.

And in a flash, Chanyeol was on his back, with Minseok kneeling astride him while Jongdae pushed his face up against Chanyeol’s neck. Chanyeol watched Jongdae smile down while one hand moved over Min’s back.

“Hold onto him, Chan.”

Chanyeol put his arms around Minseok’s back, holding tight when Min tipped forward with a low groan as Jongdae pushed inside him.

“I’ve got you,” Chanyeol said, and Minseok’s mouth moved under his ear, warm and eager.

Chanyeol watched Jongdae run his hands over Min’s back and legs, smile widening as Minseok started to shift restlessly. Jongdae winked at him.

“Something you want, love?” he asked.

Minseok growled into Chanyeol’s ear.

“I want you to fucking move.”

He did, laughing, and Chanyeol arched up, so that Minseok’s body slid more closely against his. Minseok wound both hands into Chanyeol’s hair, pulling hard enough to sting, if not quite to hurt, kissing him hard. It was so good, and so far from enough, to feel Min moving and be surrounded by his scent, to see Jongdae grinning and the muscles shift in his torso as he thrust, to feel Minseok’s mouth up under his ear again. Chanyeol drew his blunt nails down Min’s back, and Minseok arched up with a hiss.

“Beautiful,” Jongdae said, and went harder. “This what you wanted, love?”

“Yes.”

“Hips up,” Jongdae said, and grinned when Minseok shifted, then his eyes rolled back and he groaned through clenched teeth.

Chanyeol held Min tight, mouthed at his shoulder. His heart was pounding, and he couldn’t believe how freaking hot it was, when technically nobody was actually doing anything to him.

“Didn’t our Chan look amazing today?” Jongdae asked, looking Chanyeol in the eye with so much heat in his gaze that Chanyeol had to take a deep breath.

“So beautiful,” Min said in his ear, a hitch in his voice.

“You talk him into putting that scent stuff on, Min?”

“Yes.”

“Got a head full of him now, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

Chanyeol figured that it was not outside the realm of possibility that he was actually going to come
just from this. Maybe they had a point with this talking stuff.

“Head full of your omega and ass full of your alpha, Min.”

Jongdae rammed hard, and Minseok gave a choked-off cry.

“Help him come, Chan.”

Chanyeol reached down.

“Fuck,” Minseok gritted, and Jongdae laughed.

“I could feel you shaking, earlier,” Jongdae said. “I could feel how angry you were that people were staring at your omega.”

Minseok made a low sound in the back of his throat.

“You think I don’t know, love?”

Wait, know what?

Jongdae hummed, leaning in to wrap one arm around Minseok’s chest. Chanyeol had never been so excellently squished in his life, even if it did make an awkwardly tight space in which to try to bring Min off.

“A little more, Chan,” Jongdae murmured, smiling when Minseok made another low sound and started to tremble, bucking into Chanyeol’s fist.

Everything was so sweaty and warm, all three of them breathing harshly and Min and Jongdae moving almost but not quite together, Chanyeol drawing his hand up and down Min’s dick, fast and steady. Jongdae grinned, then grinned wider and wider still, and that mouth full of too many teeth sank into Minseok’s shoulder. Minseok gave a hoarse shout, and then Chanyeol’s shoulder was full of teeth too.

When it wasn’t accompanied by an orgasm, getting bitten hurt like a son of a bitch. Chanyeol gritted his teeth and tried to concentrate on keeping his hand in motion for the couple of seconds it took for Minseok to come all over them both. He felt Jongdae’s hand in his hair.

“Enough,” Min whispered, and kissed him when he stilled his hand.

Min lifted his head and swiped his thumbs under Chanyeol’s eyes.

“Channie. Okay, sweetness?”

He tilted his hips.

“You seem to have lost your enthusiasm.”

On one hand, without an excess of endorphins, his shoulder hurt like crazy. On the other hand, Minseok had given him another mating scar. Minseok – without even the assistance of pheromones or alpha brain.

“I’m good,” he said, and by the time he was done kissing Min, his enthusiasm was perking back up again.

By a little while later, which time they had spent kissing one another in a pile of soft murmurs and
various bodily fluids, Chanyeol was achingly hard again, with two of Jongdae’s fingers inside him and Minseok curled around his head at the top of the bed, one hand rubbing his chest.

“Can’t believe I get to have both of you,” Jongdae said, rolling on a condom and sliding in so slowly that the burn hardly registered, Chanyeol was that glad to finally be getting some direct action.

Jongdae hauled Chanyeol’s legs up and held them around his waist – the ridiculous excess of leg made it a little awkward, until Jongdae started to really move, and then Chanyeol had no space in his brain to worry about how it looked. It felt too good, and they both kept telling him how beautiful he was, kept saying “my Channie” and “our omega.” Minseok’s lips on his cheek, and hand on his chest, Jongdae moving inside him, staring down as if he never wanted to look at anything else.

“God,” Chanyeol said, sounding almost as desperate as he felt.

Jongdae smiled.

“You ready to come, Channie?”

Minseok hummed in his ear.

“Please.”

“Thank god,” Jongdae said, wrapping one hand around his dick. “I thought there was no way I was going to hold out long enough.”

“Because he fucked me so well,” Minseok murmured.

“Did you like that, Channie? Holding Min while I fucked him?”

Their insistence that he have brain power left over to talk in the middle of sex was crazy-making.

“Yes.”

“So hot, being able to look down at you both.”

Jongdae let go of his legs and leaned in, looking fierce and gorgeous despite his red face and dripping hair.

“Harder,” Chanyeol gasped.

Jongdae obliged, with hand and hips both. Every stroke hit him hard straight in the prostate; he kept trying to thrash his head, but Minseok had a firm hold on his chin.

“Eyes open, baby,” he said softly. “Watch our alpha fuck you.”

So he saw it again: that grin that went wide and then too wide, but this time he was coming when fangs entered him, and Jongdae was too, with Minseok’s gentle laugh in his ear, and it didn’t hurt at all.
Maybe they had worn out all their capacity for drama recently – definitely all of Jongdae’s innate alpha crabbiness had been used up, because they spent Sunday like a trio of sappy dweebs. Jongdae’s early morning perkiness was tempered by a sweet, smiling cuddliness and tender little kisses to all the wounded shoulders in the room.

They went to the usual brunch place (Chanyeol had to grin that he now had a ‘usual’ brunch place, Baek would be so proud) and wandered for a long while afterward, brushing hands and bumping shoulders as they wove in and out of shops. In the swanky clothing boutique, Minseok thoroughly felt up his ass. He got distracted by fancy beers in the liquor store and finally found Minseok and Jongdae kissing behind a cardboard standup of an idol advertising Japanese whisky. They spent almost an hour messing around in a toy store, Minseok rolling his eyes while Chanyeol and Jongdae caused a ruckus worthy of a couple of eleven-year-olds. That was a total victory, in that Chanyeol only broke (and subsequently bought) one toy, and he took the opportunity to cop a feel while shoving Jongdae off a beanbag chair.

Their rambles took them near a burger place Chanyeol liked, and they only made him frown for like two minutes before they agreed to let him buy lunch. When Chanyeol woke up from the subsequent nap, Jongdae was curled up on his chest and Minseok was up on one elbow, smiling with his eyes and playing gently with his hair.

Chanyeol couldn’t read the expression on Min’s face, but it made his breath catch in his throat and made him want to ask questions whose answers would hurt if they were the wrong ones. He blinked slowly, like he was still sleepy, and closed his eyes while he leaned into Minseok’s hand. And tried not to sigh too much when Minseok leaned in to kiss his temple.

He lay there fretting himself into a circle about his dumb tangle of feelings until Jongdae woke up, demanding first kisses and then snacks. Well, and then, after snacks, more kisses, how terrible. The combined force of cute and annoying was enough to allow Chanyeol to shove his emoting back down into the background, where it belonged.

They watched more episodes of *Complete Love*, including a hilarious and cringey scene where the omega lady went into heat at work and the beta guy was all kind and heroic, swooping in from out of nowhere, throwing his coat over her head, and running home with her – whereupon she thanked him and shut the door in his face. When the alpha guy showed up a few minutes later, breathing hard with an obvious courting-gift box in his hand, and the two of them stood in the hallway looking consternated, Chanyeol thought he would break something laughing.

“Thank god you’re too stubborn to be put off by a little thing like a locked door,” Minseok snickered.

“Right?” Jongdae said.

He stuck his hand down Chanyeol’s shorts like he was trying to make some kind of point, which was negated by Chanyeol leaning over to squash him flat and suck on his neck a little.

“You’re so much trouble,” Jongdae said in a tone that sounded more like admiration than complaint, then shrieked when Chanyeol blew a raspberry under his ear.

“You know, he’s extremely ticklish,” Minseok said, which Chanyeol did *not* know, so the next few minutes after that were very loud and highly satisfying, until Jongdae wriggled his way free and ran
to the kitchen to curse at them both extensively.

Jongdae was still grumbling back by the wine rack with his bottom lip poked out when Minseok suggested that it was time to start dinner anyway, so Chanyeol got to chase Dae around the kitchen island until they trapped him between them and kissed on him until he yelled some more. It was great. It was great to poke around with Min in their fridge and put together a nice little meal, chopping side by side while Jongdae fussed and flirted. Great to listen to Jongdae’s little wine lecture, even though it seemed dumb to expect wine to taste like blackberries.

“And you get to hang around together all day tomorrow, it’s so unfair,” Jongdae groused over dinner.

Oh boy.

“I actually have lunch plans?” Chanyeol said.

They both tilted their heads to the side, in a gesture of cuteness that should not have been allowed.

“With, um, Yixing?”

And there was the cringe he’d been dreading.

“Well, great,” Jongdae said eventually. “I guess we’d better have a bunch more sex tonight, since by tomorrow you’ll hate me.”

That wasn’t quite the reaction Chanyeol had been expecting. It did, however, seem like it warranted throwing a napkin at Jongdae, which he did.

“Nothing Xing says to me is gonna make me hate you,” he said.

“You say that,” Jongdae said, gesturing with his chopsticks like they were pointers. “But you don’t even know the level of dickitude he could tell you about.”

“Or you could tell Channie ahead of time, to prepare him,” Minseok said to his bowl of rice in a light, conversational tone.

“I was a super dumbhead!”

Chanyeol tried to imagine Yixing using the phrase ‘super dumbhead’ and failed. He texted Baekhyun.

“Super dumbhead? are you eight years old, who talks like that?” Baek texted back.

Minseok laughed when Chanyeol showed them his phone. Jongdae glared.

But it definitely made a weird moment.

“Are you really worried?” Chanyeol asked when there had been too much silence for comfort.

Jongdae stared at the table, but he reached out did that thing with his finger and the courting bracelets, and as usual, it gave Chanyeol a little thrill.

“You’ve always said he’s a good person,” Minseok said gently.

Jongdae nodded.
“I’m not – awesome at talking about stuff,” he said. “But if you have any questions about stuff Yixing tells you, I’ll, uh, try to not. Be all. Closed off, or whatever.”

Chanyeol found himself unable to decide whether he was deeply moved or ready to laugh.

“Aw,” Minseok said, planting his chin in his palm. “That was almost emotionally aware, babe.”

Jongdae made a face, and Min smiled and fluttered his eyelashes, so Chanyeol felt allowed to laugh a little.

“It’s funny how you clam up about your feelings, when about any other topic I can never get you to shut up,” Minseok mused.

“Why are you picking on me? I gave you a nice bite and everything!”

“Because you’re cute when you complain.”

Jongdae looked at Chanyeol as if for help, but no luck. He really was cute when he complained. And when he pouted. And Chanyeol was firmly in Jongdae’s camp when it came to talking about feelings, so the cute pouting was a great distraction.

“You keep poking that bottom lip out and somebody’s gonna have to do something about it,” he said.

Jongdae’s eyes crinkled, and his bottom lip slid out even further.

That of course meant that Chanyeol had to lean over and bite it, and then soothe the bite with his tongue, and then find more room than was available between the table and the sofa, so he dragged Jongdae around to the front and they rolled around a little, until Chanyeol was on his back and Jongdae was sucking on the hollow under his right collarbone in a way that would definitely leave a mark.

After an excellent length of time during which he lay on the floor with Jongdae moving hands and mouth over his torso, Minseok said,

“Up.”

Jongdae raised his head; they both looked over. Minseok had his arms spread on the back of the sofa, and he was staring down through that silver-white hair.

“Chan on the sofa,” he said. “Jongdae on your knees.”

Chanyeol felt light-headed with desire, made worse when Jongdae grinned at him, tongue caught between his teeth. He rolled up off the floor and stumbled to the sofa, where Minseok attacked his mouth, Jongdae set about trying to apply another hickey, this time to his thigh, and Chanyeol felt his brain dissolve completely into goo.

“What do you think, sweetness?” Minseok asked, drawing back just far enough to speak but still so close that his lips moved against the side of Chanyeol’s mouth. “Shall I fuck Dae while he sucks you off?”

Chanyeol felt Jongdae grin against his leg.

“Yes.”

Why did he never feel jealous when they were making out like he did when they were being soft
with each other? Chanyeol didn’t know – only that when Minseok tugged Jongdae’s head up and they kissed, both of them partly on top of him, all it did was feed his wanting, and he ran his hands over as much of them as he could reach. He gladly helped Jongdae get his clothes off, held him up and kissed his mouth, his neck, while he knelt over Chanyeol’s lap and Minseok worked him open. He gladly felt Jongdae’s hands unzip his shorts and wrap both hands around his already-hard dick.

“Ah, yeah,” Jongdae breathed, arching down a little while Minseok smiled and kissed his shoulder.

Both of them so gorgeous. Chanyeol tilted his hips up into Jongdae’s fist, leaned over to catch the warmth of Min’s mouth. Jongdae rubbed his face against the side of Chanyeol’s head, his breath sounding harsh in Chanyeol’s ear. Minseok’s shoulder moved abruptly; Jongdae cried out and tossed his head. Minseok bit down on Chanyeol’s lip, and he could feel the smile in it.


Jongdae did as he was told, jumping on Chanyeol’s dick like he was starving for it while Minseok paid more attention to Chanyeol’s mouth.

“God,” Chanyeol said, gasping, with Minseok’s fist in his hair.

Minseok grinned. Jongdae licked up the underside of his cock, and Chanyeol groaned.

“You watch, Channie,” Minseok said.

He slid down and kissed along Jongdae’s back, hands covering where his mouth didn’t. Jongdae made little sounds in his throat while his mouth moved up and down, and Chanyeol curled his toes against the wood floor, trying to find a place to focus, to not come yet, to not lose himself.

There was so much to watch: Jongdae’s dark head moving, Minseok’s pale hands against the gold skin of Jongdae’s back. Minseok’s small smile as he lined up, the way he bit his lip as he thrust forward.

There was so much to feel: the heat of Jongdae’s mouth on his dick, suction and wet; Jongdae’s fingers, one hand pumping him, the other cupping his balls. And that wasn’t even getting into all the wobbly stuff going on in his chest, watching the expression on Minseok’s face as he gripped Jongdae’s hips and moved, much less when he looked up to stare into Chanyeol’s eyes.

It was hard to remember to watch – Chanyeol wanted to close his eyes and tip his head back, to concentrate on how it felt, having Jongdae’s mouth working him over. But on the other hand, the line of Jongdae’s back was so beautiful. And anyone would want to watch Minseok, the way his hands moved over Jongdae’s skin, and the way he would bite his lip and toss his head. The way he was nearly silent, but it was obvious how much he loved moving inside Jongdae, from the expression on his face and the color in his cheeks.

Jongdae’s fingers drove up into the space behind his balls; Chanyeol looked down, and Jongdae was staring up at him, mouth stretched over his dick while he moved, until he pulled back and Chanyeol watched him lick a long stripe up the back, grinning. Chanyeol wished he could pull Jongdae up to kiss him, but then Minseok smacked hard against him, and Jongdae’s eyes rolled back briefly before he dove back in, lips tight and tongue busy so that Chanyeol moaned aloud.

Minseok slapped Jongdae’s ass once, making Jongdae groan in a way that vibrated right on the head of Chanyeol’s dick. When Jongdae looked up again, Chanyeol grasped his hair tight and said,

“I’m gonna come, Dae.”
Jongdae blinked slowly at him, smiled with his eyes, and sucked hard, his hand moving fast.

“Come, Channie,” Minseok said, his voice hoarse. “Let us hear you.”

He moved, and Jongdae shoved up against him, his neck arched and his hand grasping tight. Chanyeol had to work hard not to pull Jongdae’s hair. Dae changed his angle so he took Chanyeol’s dick farther in, one hand moving faster, the other now with fingers dug into Chanyeol’s thigh. Jongdae hollowed out his cheeks, and he pulled the orgasm out of Chanyeol – it rushed hard out from his center so that Chanyeol shouted with it, fighting not to arch up off the sofa, his head thrown back. He felt like he was pouring into Jongdae’s mouth, everything in him given up.

And even after, Jongdae had his face pressed up against Chanyeol’s belly, breath hitching while Minseok moved in him, his lips warm and teeth too blunt to hurt above his hip while Chanyeol ran his fingers through Jongdae’s hair, over his nape and shoulders. Chanyeol looked over at Minseok, who dipped his chin.

“Now you?” Chanyeol asked.

Minseok smiled.

“You want me to come, Chan?’”

“Want to see you.”

Minseok blinked slowly.

“So watch me, sweetness. This is for you.”

Chanyeol gripped Jongdae’s shoulders, watching while Minseok slapped hard against Jongdae’s ass, his expression fierce and beautiful, until he arched his head back, mouth open, a deep note low in his throat. And when he was done, he hauled Jongdae, still panting, up into Chanyeol’s lap, so that he came yelling in Chanyeol’s arms, his cock in Minseok’s mouth.

Every time, they made Chanyeol feel like he had fallen to pieces in the best possible way. Would his feet ever feel solid under him again? He was dizzy all the time. And at the moment, the only thing that steadied him was to hold them both as close as he could, fill his head with the scent of rain and mint and tell himself that this was the endorphins talking.

“It occurs to me,” Minseok said a few minutes later, “that we keep defiling the hell out of this sofa with only a wipe down after. I think I’m grossed out.”

Jongdae rolled his eyes up at Chanyeol.

“I’m not done with my afterglow yet,” he whined.

“Sorry, babe,” Minseok said with a grin, rubbing Jongdae’s chest.

It probably was gross, if Chanyeol had let himself think about it, but even sweaty and sticky, he was too content to worry about a little thing like hygiene - until the topic of a shower was raised, and of course he was interested in squeezing under the water with his two favorite naked bodies.

Sadly, the next thing they had to do was clean up from dinner, and not lie around smooching some more. Terrible. Especially when he handed a glass that needed drying to Jongdae, who dropped it.

The glass shattered dramatically. Chanyeol looked down, saw red welling out of Jongdae’s foot, and
went into automatic work mode, hauling him up and stepping wide to the left, far out of the shatter zone.

“What?” Jongdae said, then “ouch.”

“Where’s your first-aid kit?”

Jongdae stared at him.

“There are – bandages under the bathroom sink, I think?”

Bandages under the sink. What the hell.

Minseok handed Jongdae a paper towel.

“You’re bleeding all over the floor, babe, I’ll go get them.”

Jongdae sat down and started blotting at the long cut across the top of his foot. Chanyeol was professionally offended. He knelt, folded the paper towel into a pad, and pressed down.

“Ow, Channie!”

“Hold. This,” Chanyeol growled, “and don’t let up the pressure.”

When he got back from his apartment with a proper fucking first-aid kit, Minseok was sweeping the kitchen with his eyebrows up in the ionosphere, and Jongdae was sitting in the same spot on the floor, lips pursed.

His own eyebrows levitated when Chanyeol knelt down, popped the kit open, and snapped a couple of nitrile gloves onto his hands. He knew they were laughing at him while he used the light on his phone to check the cut for any pieces of glass (and found one, thank you very much). But for pity’s sake. Glass was a mess, and nobody ever cleaned wounds properly on their feet, he had seen infections like they wouldn’t believe.

Jongdae hissed and complained throughout the entire wound-cleaning experience, making a face every time Chanyeol glared at him.

“It’s totally fine,” he said, actually trying to pull his actual foot away when Chanyeol was digging out the butterfly bandages.

“If you don’t shut up and behave, I’m giving you stitches,” Chanyeol said. It didn’t need stitches, but come on.

Jongdae shut up.

And then of course, the minute Chanyeol pulled him up off the floor, he had to bust out with,

“You’re so bossy. I’m kinda turned on right now.”

“Right?” Minseok said behind them, and then laughed.

Jerks.

Very cute, very dumb jerks.
Chapter 14

Very cute, very dumb, very jerkish jerks with the world’s stupidest workout schedule. Chanyeol refused to go to the gym with them, but he had to wake up anyhow to threaten Jongdae with a non-fun variety of physical harm if he didn’t clean his foot, rebandage it, and wear clean socks post-workout.

“Jesus, okay!” Jongdae squeaked. “What do I have to do, send photographic proof?”

A glimmer of hope.

“Yes.”

“Oh my god, you’re adorable,” Minseok said.

And even though Chanyeol was groggy and grumpy and not feeling anything near adorable at 5:10 in the morning, he couldn’t very well refuse Minseok angling around for a kiss like that. Turning that down would just be mean.

Just as they were all leaving, Jongdae tugged on his shirt.

“Hey, I know you go to work tonight,” he said, his voice sounding husky. “But. You’ll be here for dinner, right?”

For a second, Chanyeol reeled, because it hadn’t occurred to him to think anything else. He’d just assumed that he would meet up with Min after lunch and hang out –

“I didn’t realize there was any question of that,” Minseok said.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said. “I mean, that’s what I was planning?”

“Okay. Okay, good,” Jongdae said, staring at the floor but holding onto Chanyeol’s wrist.

This was enough weirdness that Chanyeol wasn’t able to go back to sleep afterward. It made for a long morning, during which he distracted himself from any inconvenience like thinking by coaxing his rusty fingers into some guitar practice and texting with his mom about what side dishes to make at the fire house. Jongdae sent the required proof of wound-cleaning, along with a cascade of rude gifs.

The bus dropped him off in front of the hospital at 11:20; he texted Xing and headed to the cafeteria. He had eaten there dozens of times, usually with Baekhyun, trying to snag a little time with Yixing, or when he had had to accompany a medical call to the hospital for whatever reason. It was bland institutional food in a bland institutional setting overlaid by hospital smell: not his favorite. Not conducive to calm, sensible thought.

Knowing Xing’s schedule, he’d brought his book with him. Volume 10 of Hell’s Heat was low on the freaky sex but filled with melodrama, with the two main characters separated by a group of evil magicians and fighting to find one another, the omega demon about to go into heat. He figured volume 11 was going to be nothing but porn. It kind of made him want to read faster.

When Yixing sat down across from him, only 20 minutes late, Chanyeol had been absorbed enough in the book that his lunch had gone cold, but at least he hadn’t been fretting.

Yixing, as ever, looked exhausted. Chanyeol knew he and Baek both had plenty of vacation time
saved up and talked in circles about tropical resorts all the time, but neither one of them ever seemed to be willing to actually commit to taking the time off. Workaholics in love: it was a terrible combination.

“Hey, Yeollie,” Yixing said after he was done peering at Chanyeol for long enough to be uncomfortable.

“Hey.”

Yixing stared at him some more, then smiled, bringing out those dimples that had knocked Baekhyun on his ass in 2 seconds flat.

“You look worried.”

He was less so, in the face of Xing’s gentle smile.

“I am, a little,” he said. “Not as worried as Jongdae, though.”

Yixing cocked his head to the side.

“Why would he be worried?”

That was a very Yixing expression, and a very Yixing question. Chanyeol knew that Yixing was one of the steadiest people alive. And one of the things he’d always liked best about Xing was that his job showed him some of the very worst of which people were capable, but he was still an optimist.

“He thinks you’re going to tell me a bunch of terrible stuff that makes me hate him.”

Yixing put his spoon down.

“But you already know the terrible part.”

Chanyeol allowed himself a moment to slump. He hadn’t even realized that he had been that worried too.

“I mean, I kind of figured?” he said. “I couldn’t imagine how you would’ve stayed with him if he was really so awful, and what would be worse than leaving you like that?”

“What did he tell you I’d say?”

“He never said. Just that I would probably hate him after you and I talked.”

Yixing frowned.

“So he thinks I’m an asshole.”

“No! He told me you’re one of the best guys in the world. Even Minseok said he has always said you’re a good person.”

Yixing narrowed his eyes.

“Ah. He’s still really dramatic, then, I guess.”

And Chanyeol had to laugh.
“He’s an alpha, I don’t think he can help that part.”

That made Yixing grin.

“My Baekkie says you seem really happy.”

Chanyeol felt himself blush again, but he had to nod.

“It’s weird, though, isn’t it Yeol? I certainly never thought I’d see him again, much less sitting on my own sofa holding your hand. I think I didn’t respond very well.”

“God, Xing, you didn’t punch him in the face, I think you did just fine.”

Yixing reached over and squeezed Chanyeol’s hand.

“You know I love you, Chanyeol. You’re Baekhyun’s family, and Baek is my family, so you’re my family too. You know that, right? Can I ask you some questions? They might sound weird, and I don’t want to intrude, I really don’t, Yeollie, but it would make me feel so much better to ask.”

Chanyeol smiled and rubbed Xing’s forearm. Yixing was so good, and so warm, that he had never even been able to feel jealous – he was too glad that his best friend was in such good hands.

“Of course you can ask.”

He asked a bunch of questions: slowly at first, little things about how Jongdae acted, each one prefaced by a story that gave Chanyeol an impression of younger Jongdae as more volatile, so busy with school that he was both really protective of his time and occasionally super cranky with exhaustion, and prone to going standoffish at weird times.

This was maybe what Jongdae had worried about, hearing the frustration in Yixing’s voice even years later. But Chanyeol put it in the context of Jongdae whispering up against his neck, how he hadn’t wanted to move on from Min, and Chanyeol felt sad for that broken-hearted kid. Whatever he was feeling for the present alpha - well, this just made more of it, and he packed that right away to deal with … later.

“I don’t mean to sound like it was all bad, Yeollie. We had a lot of fun together, too. He could be so hilarious sometimes. That’s why it was hard that he always had so little time for me. And why it was really confusing when he’d shut down whenever I thought we were starting to really get close. But if he got back together with his ex, I guess that makes sense. He was really messed up about that guy.”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Sucked for you, though.”

“It did. Even though I know that was a long time ago, and that I’m much happier with Baek than I ever was with - with Jongdae.”

He peered at Chanyeol’s face like he was looking for something.

“Is he like that with you, at all, Yeollie? Push you away when it gets hard?”

Chanyeol remembered Jongdae’s halting speech about ‘not being closed off or whatever’ and had to smile.

“No.”
“And the other one, the beta. He’s nice to you too?”

“Minseok is wonderful,” Chanyeol said with perfect confidence.

“Only one more weird question,” Yixing said. “Have you actually seen where they live?”

Chanyeol nearly inhaled his rice.

“Uh, yes?”

“Okay, because that was always very strange. I never once saw J.D.’s dorm, and he never actually spent the whole night at my place, so I don’t know if that’s something you’ve been worried about…”

“I’ve been practically living at their place since my heat.”

Yixing’s eyes went wide.

“Oh,” he said. “Oh, things must be moving pretty fast, I guess.”

That this made Chanyeol suddenly aware of the scabbed-up state of both shoulders must’ve shown on his face, because Yixing’s eyes flicked down to where Chanyeol was playing with his bracelets and he said,

“What.”

With all the blood in his body concentrated in his cheeks and ears, Chanyeol glanced around to make sure no one was looking, then rolled his t-shirt sleeve up over his shoulder. Yixing leaned in and stared. When he sat back, he looked upset.

“Is that three separate marks already?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Yeollie. What does - what’s his name again? Minwoo? Think about this?”

“Minseok,” Chanyeol said, and rolled up his other sleeve.

Whatever Yixing was about to say looked like something Chanyeol didn’t want to hear, but Yixing’s pager went off, buzzing so loudly that it moved across the table. Xing looked at it and stood up, in the familiar posture of an emergency services professional about to run.

“Go on, I’ll take your tray,” Chanyeol said.

Yixing nodded, but after only a few steps, he turned back and caught Chanyeol up in a tight hug.

“I just worry,” Xing said in his ear. “That’s all, it’s just strange. We’ll talk more later, okay? I’ll try not to fret. Just be happy, Yeollie. That’s all that matters.”

He sprinted toward the emergency room, leaving Chanyeol to clean up and ponder.

Before he got too wrapped up in his pondering, he leaned against the bus stop shelter and texted the group chat:

"Some alphas worry too much."

"This is true," from Minseok immediately after.
It wasn’t until Chanyeol was climbing onto the bus that his phone buzzed with what turned out to be a whole cascade of yellow hearts from Jongdae.

The errand he had to run took longer than anticipated: Minseok met him at the door with a kiss and wide-eyed curiosity about the bags in his hands. Chanyeol was seated on the floor in front of the sofa (which was covered by a sheet) unpacking when Jongdae arrived. Chanyeol thought he might’ve been a little early.

“Is Channie?” he asked.

“Living room floor,” Minseok said from the kitchen.

Chanyeol didn’t miss Jongdae’s sigh when he came around to see. Not that he let that deter him from the mission at hand, maintaining his glare and pointing.

“Sit,” he said. “Foot.”

“Not on the sofa!” Min yelled. “I spent all afternoon cleaning it.”

Jongdae rolled his eyes.

“Not that I don’t love being double-teamed, but – “

“Sit,” Chanyeol repeated. “Foot.”

Jongdae sat on the floor, eyebrows quirked, and presented his foot for inspection. The morning’s bandaging job was – adequate. Chanyeol cleaned the cut again anyway.

“Clean socks.”

“What is all this stuff?”

“Clean. Socks.”

Jongdae bent his head like he was presenting his neck and fluttered his eyelashes.

“Yes, omega,” he simpered.

Chanyeol smacked him in the arm.

By the time Jongdae returned, in lounge wear with the most ridiculous little Piglet socks on his feet, Chanyeol was clearing up his mess and carrying the two tackle boxes to the kitchen.

“I appreciate your dedication to our health, but I hardly think we each need our own first-aid kit,” Jongdae remarked.

Chanyeol gazed at him.

“One’s for the house and one’s for the car.”

“You need a first-aid kit for the car? Why?”

Chanyeol sought refuge in looking upon their ceiling, which was still and solid and didn’t ask dumb questions.

“I guess we need a first-aid kit for the car, babe.”
“I guess so,” Minseok laughed.

But they leaned in and actually paid attention while Chanyeol walked them through the contents of each kit. Maybe he went a little bit overboard – activated charcoal tablets were probably not necessary in a household without small children prone to eating cleaning products – but he was a professional, he had standards to maintain.

“And if we don’t ever have a wreck in the middle of the night,” Jongdae said, shaking the glow sticks from the car kit, “we can just have an impromptu rave!”

“Or use the space blanket at Halloween and dress as a roasted sweet potato,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol growled at them, but they just laughed, because they were awful. Very cute, and very awful.

Minseok relented first, and hugged him.

“This is lovely of you, Channie, thank you. Dae will put this one in the car when he takes the trash out later.”

“Dae will,” Jongdae said.

So that was all right. They talked about a lot of nothing over dinner, until Chanyeol was glancing obsessively at the clock, trying to make sure he wouldn’t be late.

“I’ll walk down with you,” Jongdae said.

Minseok stood with Chanyeol at the door, kissing on him sweetly while Jongdae gathered up the trash.

“Thursday night, right?” Min murmured.

“Yeah.”

He watched them walk down the hall, that silver hair falling into his eyes and a small smile on his lips. Chanyeol had to shake himself when he and Jongdae got on the elevator. Jongdae laughed and bumped him with one shoulder.

“Why don’t I drive you?” Jongdae said after tossing the trash bag into the bin. “I know it’s just a few blocks, but I don’t mind.”

Just a few blocks, but a couple more minutes – he’d take it. Chanyeol nodded.

Jongdae put the first-aid kit in the trunk, but waited until they were in motion before he asked,

“Are we okay, Chan? Was there anything Yixing said that you want to ask me about?”

Chanyeol remembered how perplexed Xing had looked at the very idea that he’d try to turn Chanyeol against them.

“What are you so afraid he would tell me, Jongdae?”

Jongdae sighed, and stared at the steering wheel long enough that a couple of opportunities to turn out of the parking garage went by.

“It’s just. I worked really hard to keep him at arm’s length, I guess. I didn’t realize I was doing it, I
just knew I was tied up in knots all the time. Now I can see how unfair I was, halfway dating him like that, and it makes me feel like a jerk all over again.”

Man, if this thing lasted, Chanyeol could see how that needed to be a long-ass conversation some day: him getting those details from Jongdae, and telling a few stories of his own. 'Arm’s length' and 'halfway dating' sounded like his whole dating history. And he wasn’t ready for any deep emotional examinations, but he already knew the answer to the question he was going to ask.

“Are you keeping me at arm’s length?”

Jongdae took almost a full minute before he grinned.

“No, I don’t think I am.”

“Good,” Chanyeol said. “Wouldn’t work anyhow, my arms are way longer than yours.”

It was nice to pull into the station’s driveway with Jongdae laughing.

“Thanks for that, Channie,” Jongdae murmured, pulling Chanyeol in to kiss him, warm and soft.

Maybe it wasn’t so easy as all that, but it made a good note to leave things on, watching Jongdae pull away before Chanyeol hitched up his backpack and went to work.
Chapter 15

Work, however, started out on the worst possible note.

“So can you tell me why my honey called me in a panic just before I left to inform me that if you end up divorced, abandoned, and pregnant, you’re moving in with us and we’re helping raise your kids?” Baekhyun asked. “Totally true, by the way, I’m just wondering why the topic came up.”

Chanyeol was not even 10% through processing this question before Sehun barged in and crowded up against him, sniffing his neck. Chanyeol didn’t generally like to spend a lot of time up close and personal with Sehun, who smelled like a hot summer wind in the country, warm and green and occasionally inspiring work-inappropriate ideas. But at the moment, nice as it was, that scent did absolutely nothing for him.

Huh.

Still. It was his personal space, and Sehun was definitely up in it.

“You’re not pregnant,” Sehun said, glaring.

“I for sure am not. I’m not even positive what’s going on here.”

“Okay, as long as you didn’t run off and get married over the weekend, because as your best friend, I would be pissed to be left out of that.”

“The fuck, Baekhyun.”

“Not to mention, if Yeollie ended up abandoned and pregnant, I would help raise his kids, so they would have a good alpha influence. You and Yixing could be the uncles I guess,” Sehun said.

Chanyeol wondered what was happening to his friends and coworkers and whether it was contagious.

“A of all, there’s no such thing as a ‘good alpha influence,’ Sehun, you’re all terrible, no matter how many knots you have. B of all, I have known Chanyeol since we both had our baby teeth, you are no way no how taking over sad Yeol duty. He’s been crying on my shoulder his whole life, and my shoulder’s the one he’s gonna cry on until he breathes his last wheezy breath.”

“I’m not sad,” Chanyeol said.

“Excuse me,” Sehun said, “You’re gonna fight the nine hundred ramped-up alphas who’d come sniffing after this guy every day when he’s waddling around the size of a hose truck, carrying fifteen pups in his belly? Sure thing, beta man, I’ve seen your arms, you might as well hit somebody with a boiled dumpling.”

Fifteen pups, what the fuck.

“I am not – “ Chanyeol said.

“Just because Donghae showed you how to use the weight room and you’re finally able to bench press more than four grams does not make you an action hero, Oh Sehun. I’ve known you since you were a damn probie, and you’ve got no business horning in on my nieces and nephews.”

“For fuck’s sake, I am not – “ Chanyeol said.
“Shut up, Chanyeol,” they both yelled.

He shut up. He listened to them argue about who would hypothetically provide a better family environment for hypothetically abandoned kids that he totally planned never to have, and he wished for the sweet embrace of death.

“I’m still neither pregnant nor married,” he said at one point, not that either of them paid any attention.

The worst of it was, they were both standing between him and the door, so unless he was willing to shove both of them aside, he was stuck listening to them having some sort of episode from another reality for approximately ever.

“Also,” Sehun said, whirling around and sticking one long, bony finger in Chanyeol’s face, “You need to totally get over yourself. Minseok is not gonna divorce you. Jongdae is for sure not gonna divorce you.”

Chanyeol waved his arms around.

“I am not fucking married! We’ve barely been dating for a god damn month! What are you even talking about?”

Sehun looked at him through narrowed eyes for a long moment.

“You’re stupid,” he said.

Chanyeol shoved him.

“You’re the one who’s stupid.”

Sehun shrugged.

“I don’t even know what the fuck is going on here,” Chanyeol said.

Sehun stared at him, then tossed his head and turned away.

“For what it’s worth,” he said, jabbing one finger at Baekhyun on the way out, “Yixing will be an excellent parent.”

“Hey,” Baekhyun yelled after him, “the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

Baekhyun stared at the doorway while Chanyeol tried to determine whether he had entered a different dimension: a dimension that he was N E V E R going to tell his boyfriends about. Baekhyun put his hands on his hips.

“So you’re telling me that this is just one of those things where Xing’s super tired at the end of a shift and got himself into a worry spiral and said something dumb?”

“I guess?”

“Ugh, fine,” Baek said. “I hate it when he does that.”

Being left alone in the bunk room didn’t really comfort Chanyeol at all, or explain anything about what the hell had just happened, but at least it was quieter.
A little later, when Chanyeol was trying to create some semblance of normality in the kitchen by turning the photo shoot’s many leftover side dishes into tasty pancakes, Taeil sidled up to him.

“I heard you let them put you in the calendar,” he said.

“Yeah.”

Taeil nibbled on a piece of vegetable pancake, then shivered.

“I don’t think I could stand that many people staring at me,” he said.

“I didn’t really think about it beforehand,” Chanyeol said. “Sure came rushing back all at once, though.”

Taeil nodded.

“Only takes one time realizing you’re the only omega in the room to put you off crowds forever.”

Which – yeah. Chanyeol’s college clubbing days had been very short-lived. And his bad experiences had mostly just ended in having busted his knuckles open on some alpha’s face, not anything worse.

“ Heard your boyfriends were super nice about it, though.”

Chanyeol nodded around the warmth that bloomed in his chest like the best kind of crackling little campfire.

“My girlfriend is pissed that you’re living out Complete Love,” Taeil said, grinning. “That’s like her favorite drama ever. She keeps telling me that we need to find ourselves a beta.”

Chanyeol laughed.

“From what I’ve heard about lady alphas, you probably should, just to get a break sometimes.”

Taeil put his hands over his mouth and laughed silently.

“I’m the only person alive who actually appreciates our work schedule. I get to rest for three days every week,” he said, then turned bright red and ducked his head.

Such a nice, cute, normal omega.

Chanyeol flicked a dish towel at him and sent Taeil away bearing a plate full of pancake for the common room.

Joonmyun wandered in later to show off his excellence: not only did he start washing dishes, but he also handed Chanyeol a little slip of paper.

“Hey, I meant to give this to Jongdae on Saturday, would you mind passing it along? It’s the information for my wine-of-the-month club.”

Chanyeol looked at the web address.

“Your … what?”

His mega nerdy monthly shipment of bottles of wine with educational materials, apparently. Joonie got so excited about it that he bounced on the balls of his feet.
“I am not going to pass this along,” Chanyeol said. “Because his birthday is coming up, and this is perfect. Joon, you’re officially my number one favorite coworker for this entire shift.”

Joonmyun grinned and bumped his shoulder.

For all three days, they ran around like upset chickens, from one call to another. In and among all the clean-up that remained from the weekend and the number of people who were so frantic to get in one last summer barbecue that they set their own back yards on fire or got way too drunk and fell off their own porches and busted their heads open, Chanyeol was able to set up the wine club thing for Jongdae, lose a bunch of games of Words with Friends to Minseok, and carry on a disjointed conversation with Yixing, who wouldn’t stop apologizing.

“I hadn’t slept for thirty-six hours, Yeollie, I’m so sorry, it just popped out of my mouth, I don’t really think that’s going to happen to you.”

“It’s okay, Xing.”

“But you know if it does, Baekkie and I will be there for you.”

Jeez. The call went around in a circle like that for twenty minutes, before Baekhyun took the phone away and yelled at Xing to go sleep.

It was weird, and it kind of made him want yell at Baekhyun, but he couldn’t decide what exactly he wanted to yell at Baekhyun about, so he just sat on the bubbling discomfort behind his sternum and tried to focus instead on his guitar, his workout, feeding his coworkers, or doing his damn job – whatever was right in front of him at the moment.

So the text Minseok sent to the group chat Thursday mid-morning – nothing too racy, just himself in the bathroom mirror, messing with his hair, but biting his lip and shirtless – was a very welcome distraction.

“you are evil,” Jongdae wrote.

And gosh, it sure was a coincidence that Chanyeol had to take so long in the shower after their next call, and that his phone was just water-resistant enough for a selca of his own. Technically it was a photo he could’ve shown his mom, from the shoulders up, holding his hair out of his face under the water.

Still inspired a thumbs-up emoji from Minseok and a key smash from Jongdae.

The result of this was two small, handsome boyfriends climbing Chanyeol like a tree the minute he walked in their front door on Thursday night and a really excellent tangle of hands and mouths with orgasms for everybody, followed by yawning over bowls of soybean paste stew.

“Just stay here, Chan, it’s fine,” Minseok whispered to him in the morning, both of them nuzzling up against his neck before they slipped out for their dumb workout.

He was still in (their) bed when Min returned. His shift had been so busy that he was tired all the way down to his marrow, so he was resistant to Minseok’s gentle efforts to get him up. When he finally awoke for real, his head was pillowed on Minseok’s leg, and Min was reading, one hand tangled in his hair. Chanyeol wrapped his arms around and buried his face in Minseok’s hip. He figured he’d be perfectly happy to stay like that for at least 8 years.

Sadly, the need to pee and then consume coffee only allowed about 15 more minutes of it, but Minseok let him loll around doing mostly nothing all day. Min was busy doing random chores
around their apartment; in his brief awake moments, Chanyeol followed Min around just to be close to him, which definitely slowed Min’s progress getting stuff done, but he didn’t seem to mind.

By the time Jongdae got home, Minseok was off to the studio and Chanyeol had slept away all his exhaustion and was ready to bounce off the walls. If he’d been at the station, he would’ve chased Baekhyun or Sehun around. It was the kind of mood that was the reason why Baek pushed their coffee table way off to the side on game nights, so Chanyeol wouldn’t have to buy them a third replacement table. He wanted space to stretch out in. He wanted to move and not care about who was looking at him.

Jongdae found him draped with his head hanging down over the back of their sofa, almost touching the floor.

“What are you doing?” he laughed.

“I’m bored.”


Chanyeol himself slide all the way over onto the floor and grinned when it made Jongdae laugh again.

“Let’s go hit baseballs,” Chanyeol said. “Or – “

Wow, an idea that he hadn’t had in ages.

“Do you like bowling?”

Jongdae wrinkled his nose.

“I am probably the worst bowler in the country, but we can go do that if you want. You’ll definitely win.”

“You can’t be that terrible.”

“I assure you, I can.”

Chanyeol curled himself into a circle around Jongdae’s legs and hoped his facial expression was the cute he was going for and not weird-looking.

“But it could be fun, right?”

“I already said we could go, dummy,” Jongdae said, bending down to tug on his hair.

He definitely looked dubious a few minutes later when Chanyeol dragged him next door and pulled a bowling bag out of the front closet.

“You have all your own stuff?”

Chanyeol rifled through the bag to make sure everything was there.

“Yeah,” he said. “A few years ago I was in a league.”

“Well, I hope you enjoy crushing the weak.”
Over pizza (for which Jongdae had an apparently bottomless desire), Chanyeol answered a hundred questions about the league.

“Yeah, all omegas. It was nice. I’ve never done a lot of that omega-only stuff, but the bowling league was fun. I liked being able to just relax and quit worrying about those kinds of things.”

Jongdae tilted his head to the side. With his cheeks distended by pizza and his lips pursed, he was so cute that Chanyeol kept having to remind himself to blink.

“What kinds of things?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“Just. You know. People being rude.”

Jongdae frowned.

“I mean. I don’t get messed with too much I guess, I’m too tall, but some of those little teeny girls practically couldn’t go anywhere on their own. League night was when we could all just quit looking over our shoulders.”

By now, Jongdae was scowling into his beer glass.

“I wish I didn’t know exactly what you’re talking about, Chan. It’s so crappy that people act like that.”

“That’s where I met Jongin,” Chanyeol said, feeling wistful, and then feeling bad about feeling wistful about an ex-boyfriend when his present boyfriend was sitting right there.

“He was a terrible bowler, just awful. But he and I were the only two people in the league over a hundred and seventy centimeters, so we would escort all the smalls to their cars at the end of the night.”

“Why’d you give it up?”

It was better to have a question to answer than to look at Jongdae’s expression. His voice didn’t sound angry, though.

“Jongin left for France, and it didn’t seem fun anymore. And the guy I dated after that – “

‘Do I look like bowling is my style?’ he remembered. ‘Sorry if I’m not into stuff that’s totally lame.’

And,

‘You already have that crappy work schedule and now you want to take an extra evening to hang out with a bunch of girls? Are you actually in this, Chanyeol, or am I the only one putting in any effort here?’

Oh boy, that was not a conversation to get into. The only thing that would come from it would be an evening of his getting drunk and crying, and not some actual damn fun.

“– was not super nice to me,” he said finally.

“Park Chanyeol,” Jongdae growled, “I am telling you right now, if I start acting shitty to you, please kick my damn ass.”
Chanyeol blinked at him.

“That’s if Min doesn’t get to it first,” Jongdae added.

Chanyeol shook off the memory pretty well, and walking into the bowling alley cleared everything away. The smell of floor wax and fried food, the noise, and the horrible fluorescent lights made him grin and grab Jongdae’s hand to pull him to the shoe counter.

Jongdae wrinkled his nose at the ugly shoes.

“Good thing I have on clean socks to protect my terrible foot wound from stranger germs,” he said, and elbowed Chanyeol in the side.

“That thing’s not healed up yet? Maybe I should’ve given you stitches.”

“Just for that, the first round’s on you.”

It was just what he wanted. They got beers and snacks and settled into a lane down at the end, away from all the shrieking groups of teenagers at the lanes closest to the game room. Chanyeol didn’t particularly like the look of the team of giant dudes closest to them, but they seemed pretty focused on their game.

Jongdae tried to tease him about his wrist brace – unsuccessfully, because it looked like an Iron Man gauntlet and was therefore impervious to any insults, especially from anybody lame enough to try to make an argument in favor of Green Lantern as the coolest superhero, geez.

Sadly, he was just as terrible at bowling as he had said. But he didn’t seem to mind, so they had fun anyway, Jongdae cheering every time Chanyeol got a spare or a strike and laughing with his hands on his stomach every time he himself got a gutter ball. It had been years since he’d bowled, but Chanyeol’s body remembered the slide and stretch of it, and the pleasure of that sound when the ball hit just right and all the pins fell over. He and Jongdae grinned at each other and high-fived, hugged and slapped each other’s butts. The only thing that kept it from being perfect was Minseok’s absence.

“This is fun, Channie,” Jongdae said at one point, grinning up at him, just before he rolled another gutter ball that made Chanyeol laugh.

Chanyeol tried to correct his form, but really it was just an excuse to put his hands on Jongdae, to lean close together and feel the way their closeness stirred up desire low in his belly. It was all different – the way he wanted Minseok versus the way he wanted Jongdae versus the way he wanted them together. Maybe he needed to puzzle through that and figure out what it meant.

Or maybe it was okay to just feel it and hope for the best.

Jongdae’s eyes flicked down to his mouth, and his smile went a little more hungry.

“Another beer, another game?” Jongdae murmured. “Then go home and play something else.”

Chanyeol had to shake himself all over when he stood straight.

“Nah, this is on me,” he said, waving Jongdae away while he turned toward the bar. “If I’m going to crush the weak, I ought to at least pay for your drinks.”

“You’re a terrible person,” Jongdae shouted at his back, then laughed.
One of the guys from the team of boulders a few lanes over was also waiting at the bar. Chanyeol avoided his eye in the hopes of dampening any conversation.

Damn.

“Lucky man,” the guy said. “That’s one cute little – “

He stopped, and Chanyeol looked over before he could stop himself. The guy was staring at his right wrist. Chanyeol grimaced and dropped his arm.

“Wait,” the guy said, and stepped closer. “Wait, you’re the omega?”

Fuck.

“Look at you,” the guy said, examining Chanyeol like he was a piece of meat and stepping closer still.

“Back off.”

The guy grinned, which did nothing to help his ugly face, and then Chanyeol could smell him. He supposed it was possible that someone somewhere would find the scent of old swamp water attractive, but it sure as hell wasn’t him.

“Feisty. Looks like you need somebody to teach you how to submit.”

It was such bullshit. He hated it. This was the crap that had kept him from doing stuff he liked for years, and it was so stupid.

“Won’t fucking be you.”

Just like his body instinctively remembered how to bowl, it remembered how to soften his knees and ground his back foot in preparation for a punch. This one was a way less pleasant thing to remember.

The guy stepped forward again.

“I fucking said back off,” Chanyeol snarled.

A baseball bat slammed onto the bar between them. Chanyeol jumped backwards, his heart racing so fast that he could hear it in his own ears and his mouth feeling too big for itself.

“This is a public damn place where grown-ass adults don’t pester omegas,” the bartender snarled. “Keep it up and you’re banned.”

The alpha opened his mouth, and the bartender whipped around to stare at Chanyeol.

“Your tab’s covered, sir, sorry about this.”

She laid the tip of the bat against the alpha’s chest.

“Don’t push me, one protest and you’re out of here.”

The rest of the guy’s team was headed over; one more word and Chanyeol would be the one throwing punches and getting banned, and just – just no.

Jongdae had missed the whole thing, coming back from the bathroom just as Chanyeol was flinging all his crap into the bowling bag.
“Chanyeol, what’s -?”

“We’re leaving.”

He didn’t protest and followed Chanyeol to the shoe counter. They’d have to pass the bar on the way out, where that whole crowd of assholes was still standing around, the bartender looking pissed. Chanyeol grabbed Jongdae’s wrist and started walking, eyes on the door.

“Fucking unnatural – “ the jerkwad said when they passed.

Chanyeol looked over at the whole crowd of them and let out a full-blown snarl. He felt Jongdae stiffen up, tightened his hold, and literally dragged Jongdae outside, not stopping until he had flung himself into the passenger seat of their car.

The fifteen or so seconds it took for Jongdae to go around to the driver’s side and climb in were just enough for Chanyeol to realize that his hands were shaking.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said in a soft voice, reaching over to curl his fingers over Chanyeol’s wrist and pulling gently until Chanyeol let his arm drop enough for Jongdae to take his hand. “What happened?”

Chanyeol could feel that if he tried to talk about the lump of fury in his throat, it wouldn’t be anything but curses and shouting and the desire to go back in there and break some faces open. He shook his head.

“You want to go home?”

He nodded.

It was nice the way Jongdae held his hand the whole drive back, his thumb stroking back and forth. Nice, but ineffectual. It had been years since anybody got up on him like that. ‘Teach you to submit,’ what an asshole. Fucking narrow-minded shits, and the way those tiny omegas from his league had used to cry about it sometimes, that they couldn’t even go to the damn grocery store without somebody acting like their bodies weren’t even their own and scaring the hell out of them.

He could smell how upset Jongdae was, and it just made him growl more. They’d been having fun, dammit, and that fucking jackass had felt like it was his right to just barrel in and ruin everything. Standing so close that Chanyeol had been able to feel his body heat, and his awful scent, the way he had licked his gross lips.

He didn’t wait for Jongdae when they parked. He needed to move, or he’d burst out of his own skin. All that bottled-up urge to hit something was still crawling through him. He stalked over and punched the button for the elevator. He figured (correctly) that Jongdae would catch up, felt Jongdae’s gaze on him while he glared at the control panel.

“Chan,” he said when they were behind the locked apartment door.

Behind that locked door, where it was safe, and there was nothing that needed hitting, even though Chanyeol was still shaking with anger, and he hardly knew what he was doing when he shoved Jongdae hard against the wall and crowded against him, holding him there.

“I’m not weak,” he snarled.

“You are not,” Jongdae murmured, his eyes half-closed and lowered.
“I’m my own goddamn person.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t fucking need to submit to anybody.”

“No.”

He opened his mouth and let Chanyeol kiss him hard, made a sound in the back of his throat when Chanyeol grabbed his hair and pulled his head back to get deeper. He didn’t protest when Chanyeol turned him around and pinned his wrists to the wall above his head. Chanyeol could hear himself growling over the rush of blood in his ears and the stream of curses in his brain. He didn’t care. He yanked Jongdae’s belt off and tossed it behind him. He wanted to bite. He wanted to take, and Jongdae kept making those small, breathy noises. Chanyeol couldn’t even tell whether they were making him more turned on or more furious, it all felt like the same thing.

He had his teeth set in Jongdae’s shoulder and his hand shoved down Jongdae’s pants when the door opened behind them and Minseok drawled,

“Well, what’s this nice view?”

And it hit Chanyeol like a bucket of ice water dumped on his head.

He was treating Jongdae like that asshole would’ve treated him.

He was.

Shit.

“Sorry,” he said, and let go, stepped back.

Jongdae put his palms against the wall and bent his head a little.

“I’m sorry,” Chanyeol repeated. “Sorry.”

“Chan,” Jongdae said, muffled by the way he still stood against the wall.

“I’m sorry!”

He brushed past Minseok with his “what?” and didn’t even bother with his shoes, running to his own apartment and slamming the door behind him.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

I am dead of Love Shot and shall be henceforth posting as ghost from the Realms Beyond

(I think Trauma is a better song, tho)

Park Chanyeol, horrible fucking person, lay on his horrible fucking sofa and fucking cried like a fucking dope.

He couldn’t believe himself. He couldn’t believe how awful he had been - to Jongdae, who had never been anything but good to him despite all the ways things could’ve gone wrong, given how they had met. And his thanks was for Chanyeol to fucking assault him.

Someone knocked on his door: both of them, evidently, given the two voices calling for him to open it. Chanyeol put a pillow over his head and curled up to cry harder and hate himself more.

He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been so angry. But all week his presentation had been thrown in his face in a way that it hadn’t for years, between the photo shoot, the bowling alley, and that ridiculous fucking conversation with Baekhyun and Sehun. It was so stupid, he hated it.

And he had taken all of that and been terrible. To his boyfriend. To his alpha.

His alpha. Jongdae.

God.

Chanyeol’s phone buzzed in his pocket. He threw it on the floor, clutched the pillow tighter around his head when they banged on the door again.

Yeah, maybe he was being melodramatic and dumb. That’s what people expected from omegas, right? Maybe he should be an emotional mess for a while. Do what everybody expected and see how they liked it.

Maybe he should just take this being an asshole thing and run with it. Maybe that would be easier than all this not knowing what the hell he was doing all the time.

Sure.

He could never hold onto that wild, petulant stubbornness. He cried himself out, with its eternal accompaniment of feeling like a jerk. He was an adult. He knew he had to open the door at some point, go to their apartment, and apologize. Hope against hope that Jongdae would forgive him and, if not, deal with the consequences.

It sucked from beginning to end. But he had to do it, or actually be an asshole for real.

There was a weird, quiet little tinkle at the door, and soft voices outside. Chanyeol strode over and opened it before he could overthink.
Minseok and Jongdae were kneeling, Jongdae with his phone in his hands, Minseok with his hands raised, holding a chopstick in one hand and a hairpin in the other.

“Are you – picking my front door lock?”

“It seemed less rude than kicking the door in again?” Jongdae said.

“I’m really frustrated,” Minseok said. “This seems like a skill set I should already have.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Chanyeol said.

But he let them in.

Of course he let them in.

He let them in, but he retreated from Minseok’s outstretched arm and sat back down on his sofa with his hands tucked under his thighs.

Minseok sat on the sofa. Jongdae did not. Chanyeol couldn’t even look at them.

“I’m so sorry,” he said.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said. “Sorry for fucking what, exactly?”

Chanyeol gaped at him. Was he crazy? What did that even mean, sorry for what?

“I didn’t - I could’ve hurt you. I probably did hurt you,” he said.

“What? Channie, we were making out, we’ve done that a hundred times, why are you so freaked out right now? Why wouldn’t you open the damn door? Why have you been fucking crying?”

This was all so weird, why was he acting like nothing was wrong?

“No, you don’t. What? Are your wrists okay? Did I -?”

“Dude, my wrists are fine, but you’re freaking me out.”

Minseok laid his hand on Chanyeol’s arm. And, oh, he felt even worse to flinch, but he couldn’t help it.

“Please don’t touch me.”

Fuck, he was going to cry again. Especially if Min was going to look so hurt like that.

“Channie,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol shook his head.

“I’m sorry,” he said again.

Jongdae’s eyes were so wide. Chanyeol had never seen him so upset, and it was all his own fault. He had fucked up so bad, he couldn’t believe they were even here still talking to him.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said, “I know this sounds crazy, but you’re totally scaring me. Please tell me that we are not breaking up right now.”

That did make him start to cry again. *Was* that what was going on? He deserved it, for sure.
“Whoa, no, hard stop,” Minseok said.

The sharpness of his voice cut through even Chanyeol’s misery.

“Breaking up? What kind of bullshit is that? Nobody’s making any kind of decisions about anything until you both tell me exactly what the fuck is going on.”

“I have no idea,” Jongdae said.

Which was such crap, Chanyeol couldn’t even believe it. What was Jongdae playing at? Chanyeol laughed, and heard how ugly and sad it sounded.

“Dude,” Jongdae said.

He sat on the coffee table, not close enough to touch but close enough that Chanyeol could smell how upset he was. So he knew - he knew all this business of Jongdae saying he didn’t know what was going on was a lie.

“We had a really fun night,” Jongdae said. “He took me bowling, it was hilarious. And then I came back from the bathroom and he was. This. Some ugly fucker at the bar tried to pull some shit on our way out, I don’t even know. Channie, you were so angry you couldn’t even speak, what happened?”

This pretending was bullshit.

“Tell him the rest,” Chanyeol said.

“Shit, Chan, what’s there to tell? You were mad, and then I thought we were having a little hot bleed-off-the-aggression sex, and the next thing I knew you were freaking out.”

What the fuck.

“Stop lying,” he said.

Jongdae reeled.

“What?”

“I can smell how upset you are, Jongdae, why are you pretending that you’re not?”

“Dude, I’m upset because you’re freaking out, what the hell? Why do you keep acting like I should be mad at you?”

“Stop lying, you couldn’t even hold yourself upright when I let you go.”

“Uh, yeah, because I was about ten seconds away from coming, I was trying to re-engage my damn brain and figure out what the hell was going on.”

This was - how was this conversation even going this way?

“I threw you up against the wall like you were a doll!”

“Channie,” Minseok said gently. “He likes that.”

Chanyeol couldn’t take being near them and relocated to the other side of the room. He put his arms around himself, which didn’t help with anything.
Because here was the problem: they were giving him the benefit of the doubt for being a good person.

“At the time, I didn’t care whether you liked it,” he said.

“Oh,” Jongdae said, like it had been punched out of him.

So that was that.

“Fuck,” Minseok said with so much vehemence that Chanyeol turned to look.

He had both hands in his hair and a look on his face almost as miserable as Chanyeol felt.

“Fuck, what have we been doing? We should’ve been having so many conversations, I know better,” Minseok said.

So yeah.

This was going to be it, wasn’t it?

He’d fucked it up, just like he knew he would.

“Please come sit down, Channie,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol shook his head. He tried not to look when Jongdae walked over to stand in front of him, except that Jongdae waited, and Chanyeol couldn’t resist forever.

Jongdae held out his arms.

“You didn’t hurt me, look.”

Jongdae’s wrists were unmarked. Chanyeol took a shaky breath.

“Come sit down, Chan. Please.”

He sat, for lack of any better idea. Minseok scooted closer, and he didn’t know whether he wanted to flinch away again or lean into Min’s arms.

Jongdae reached over from his seat back on the coffee table and rested his fingers on Chanyeol’s knee. He liked that hand so much – small but well-proportioned, with that crazy-ass thumb, perpetually bent backward like Jongdae was born to give a thumbs-up to the world.

Chanyeol was glad he hadn’t hurt that hand.

“There wasn’t a single second in there where I felt unsafe,” Jongdae said quietly.

And then Chanyeol had to stare at his face, because how? But he didn’t see anything insincere in Jongdae’s expression. One corner of Jongdae’s mouth quirked up into its usual curve.

“I’m still an alpha,” he said. “Even if you are actually stronger than me, which is doubtful, I guarantee I fight dirtier than you. If I’d have wanted to get away from you, I would’ve. If I had wanted to say no, I would’ve. You know that, Channie, you’ve seen me do it.”

How was it that something intended to make him feel better could make him feel so much worse? Chanyeol could feel his mouth starting to wobble, and he tried to curl in on himself, to hold back all the stupidity that wanted to break out of him again, he was tired of crying.
Jongdae grasped his knee, and his hand was warm.

"I also know very well how crappy it feels after your anger’s gotten the best of you."

And that was just too much. Too much kindness when he’d been expecting hurt, too much understanding when he’d expected accusation. He sobbed again, and Minseok grabbed him around the shoulders.

“No one is fucking breaking up today, you hear me?” he said, sounding pissed but looking damp around his own eyes, which just set Chanyeol off harder.

Minseok pulled him in close, but just briefly, because Jongdae climbed on top of the pile at that point, and then it was absolutely imperative that Chanyeol get his nose up under Jongdae’s ear – not that scenting him did anything but make Chanyeol cry more, at the moment. He kept apologizing, and they both burrowed up against him, hands on his neck, in his hair, and murmured nonsense at him until he quieted.

“This place reeks of upset so much that even I can smell it,” Minseok said once Chanyeol had caught his breath. “What do you think about going next door? Or if you want to stay here, can we open a window or something?”

For a couple of heartbeats, Chanyeol thought about asking them to leave him alone, just to have a minute to think through everything. Jongdae must have read his mind, though, saying,

“But in the same place, okay? I feel like I need to keep looking at you right now.”

Which, okay. He nodded. He held onto Minseok’s hand while he went to wash his face and change his shirt. He drank the glass of water Jongdae brought him and let them lead him back to their place, where Minseok was right – it didn’t have that atmosphere of misery about it, and he took a deep breath.

For the next little while, the only time when one of them wasn’t touching him was when Minseok wrapped Jongdae up in a tight embrace, one hand on the back of his head. Chanyeol watched them, too tired to work up any envy, and when he saw Jongdae’s hand clutch Minseok’s shirt, he stepped over and put his arms around them both, set his nose at the junction where their heads rested together, and breathed in.

“Okay,” Minseok said, after a nice long pause but way before Chanyeol was ready to let go. “Let’s take this back up lying down.”

Chanyeol was numb with exhaustion, and the dumb way he would always get set off by nothing once he started crying meant that every couple of minutes he had to bite his lip so it wouldn’t start trembling again. Every time his breath sounded shaky, whichever one of them was holding his hand would squeeze it hard – it still seemed so unlikely, that they weren’t angry. That they didn’t blame him. He kept expecting all of it to turn around, for them to finally shout at him. Not pull him into bed and lie on top of him like they thought he might otherwise run away.

(Even if he might otherwise have run away.)

“You never said what happened at the bowling alley,” Minseok said when the three of them were twined together in the dark.

It was easier to say it to the darkness, without having to see anyone looking at him. Even though he could feel their hands on him, each one a solid point that he could focus on. Even though, once he got to the part about the guy standing too close, he could feel in his arm the consistent growl
rumbling from Jongdae’s chest.

“He said someone ought to teach me how to submit,”

and that made Minseok growl too, both of them snarling on his behalf, which make things super wobbly again in the area of his mouth and eyes. It also opened up a damn floodgate of stuff he had never said aloud, not even to Baekhyun – stuff about people staring at him, about the time an alpha grabbed his arm on the freaking bus and tried to put a bracelet on it. About how long it had been since he went anywhere but work, home, Baek’s place, or his mom’s restaurant, just because it was easier to only go to places where he knew nobody would fuck with him.

“Chan,” Minseok said. “Oh, sweetness, why would you do that to yourself?”

“I just – “

He realized he was about to say, ‘I’m not supposed to get angry,’ and how totally dumb that would sound aloud.

Which was. Jesus, he knew exactly who had taught him that, and it was so stupid, he was an idiot.

“I’ve been in a lot of fights too,” he said finally.

Jongdae’s growl deepened, and his hand tightened around Chanyeol’s neck.

“Lots of alphas – mostly guys – think I seem like a challenge,” he said. “A big omega, not willing to fall to my knees at the first sign of dominance.”

How nice would it have been, all those times when he was younger, to have had a couple of people willing to hold onto him like this and make murder faces on his behalf?

“It’s been a long time, though,” Chanyeol said. “I’d forgotten what it feels like. To be ready to fight.”

This was the barest tip of an iceberg of shit that he had barely admitted to himself, much less considered talking about to anybody. How did he even get here, in the dark, with Minseok’s mouth pressed up against his temple and Jongdae growling, spilling things he had worked so hard to ignore?

“I gotta move,” Jongdae said.

He rolled up out of bed in a cloud of angry pheromones; Chanyeol started to go after him, but stopped at the touch of Minseok’s hand on his chest.

“Give him a few minutes,” Minseok said. “It’s okay, he’s not mad at you.”

Minseok tucked Chanyeol’s head up under his ear. In the dark, with Min’s hands rubbing circles on his back and Min’s scent in his nose, Chanyeol could even believe that Jongdae was rattling around in the living room angry for, not at him. They listened to Jongdae pacing and growling, and Chanyeol pulled Minseok closer so their legs tangled together. It was unfortunate that in the general upset they’d all put on pajamas.

The shower turned on, and Minseok laughed under his breath, kissed the top of Chanyeol’s head.

“He’ll roll his eyes if you bring it up, but Dae’s always crabby this time of year. He hates having to stay with his family for Chuseok, and he usually ruts within the month afterward. Try to believe me
that he’s not usually this all over the place.”

Chanyeol had to snort at that – if for no other reason than to brush past having to think about Jongdae’s rut.

“What’s my excuse, then?”

Minseok smiled up against the side of his face.

“Of course I flatter myself that it’s because we keep you off balance with the force of our wooing you.”

How was that for a completely terrifying comment? Because it was totally true.

The shower shut off.

“I’m going to be serious for a minute,” Minseok said. “I know it’s beyond late, and we can talk about it later, I just want to say it.”

He tangled his fingers in Chanyeol’s hair.

“I notice that you just go along with us a lot, whether it’s sex or how we spend our time. And that’s fine if that’s how you like it. But if you’re tamping yourself down to keep from causing friction, that’s no good, Chanyeol. This is only going to work if you’re a full and equal voice.”

He kissed Chanyeol’s cheek.

“I want you to be a full and equal voice. Okay, sweetness?”

Easier said than done. But no effort at all to lean in and cover Minseok’s lips with his own as a way to say that he would try.

Jongdae slipped into bed behind them, and when Chanyeol turned over to grab him, he was glad that at least one of them had given up on the whole clothing thing.

“Nope, I’m talking first,” Jongdae said when Chanyeol opened his mouth. “I should’ve worked harder to find out what was wrong instead of going straight to horny. I’m sorry.”

What could he say to that? Anything would probably just set him off crying again, so Chanyeol elected to snuggle up instead, then sigh when Minseok pressed against his back and they squeezed him in a really nice way.

“You want to know the terrible thing, Channie? Now Min’s gonna make us talk about our feelings and shit.”

“Correct,” Min said up against Chanyeol’s nape, sounding wry. “But I suppose you get a pass tonight, since it’s so late.”

“A little after two,” Jongdae said.

“Ugh.”

“Also,” Jongdae said, and pinched Chanyeol’s back. “You totally owe me an orgasm.”

Chanyeol told himself that being a pain in the ass was just an alpha’s natural state, and Jongdae couldn’t help it.
It was dumb o’clock in the morning (though still well past dawn) when Jongdae peeled himself out of the tangle. Chanyeol halfway registered the pressure of a hand on his shoulder, and warmth pressed briefly against the corner of his mouth.

“Going for a run,” Jongdae whispered, and Minseok gave a sleepy hum.

Jongdae wasn’t so soft later, when he banged through the front door, making Chanyeol leap hallway out of his own skin and Minseok curse.

“Where’s my lazy harem?” he yelled.

“Jackass,” Minseok muttered.

“Why are you still sleeping?” Jongdae said from the bedroom door. “We’re in the prime of life, you can’t take one late night without collapsing?”

“Argh, shut up,” Minseok groaned, rolling over to smash his face up against Chanyeol’s ribs.

“Nope,” Jongdae said, sounding way too cheerful for – anything.

Chanyeol pulled Minseok close and put his other arm over his eyes.

“I have donuts,” Jongdae sang.

Chanyeol uncovered one eye. Jongdae was grinning, looking all mussed and sweaty and unfairly gorgeous.

“And I have iced coffees,” he said, placing one against Chanyeol’s neck.

This made a terrible chain of flinching, shouting, and having to actually fucking wake up.

“Why’d you do that?” Chanyeol complained, wiping condensation off his neck.

“Because it’s hilarious,” Jongdae said, grinning. “And if I did it to Min, he’d tear my pubic hair out.”

“Only if I was trying to let you off easy,” Minseok grumbled.

By the time Jongdae got out of the shower, Minseok and Chanyeol were far enough into their coffees and the box of donuts that they were willing let him live. Well: Min was willing to let him live. Chanyeol was so relieved to see him being obnoxious and perky that he was willing to forgive Jongdae all manner of noise.

“How are you, Channie?”

His eyes felt so swollen that it took effort to hold them open, and he had a headache stabbing him right between his eyebrows. However, Jongdae asked this while he was hugging Chanyeol, lipping at the skin under his ear, which definitely influenced the answer.

“Better.”
Jongdae didn’t even ask Minseok, just nosed up under his ear, going “mmm? mmm?” until Minseok snorted and said,

“I’m fine, quit getting between me and my carbs.”

Jongdae rummaged through the box of donuts and stuffed half a chocolate-frosted into his mouth.

“Babe, what the heck. You haven’t eaten the blueberry yet, it’s your favorite,” he said, speaking around a cheek puffed out with donut.

Chanyeol had not previously been aware that cuteness was a headache remedy. But watching Jongdae break the blueberry donut into pieces and feed it to Minseok, while Min very obviously fought not to grin at him, cleared most of Chanyeol’s head pain right away.

“Channie, I didn’t know what kind you like, you need to tell me for next time.”

“I mean, any donut is a good donut?”

When that sentence was halfway out of his mouth, Chanyeol realized how inappropriate it was in light of the conversation they had just had not even ten hours earlier. Given the way that both of his boyfriends pressed their lips together and narrowed their eyes, they agreed.

“I like cake donuts, unfrosted, with cinnamon sugar,” he said.

Jongdae laughed, and Minseok grinned.

It was nice.

“Min never met a blueberry baked good he didn’t like,” Jongdae said, “and I think about the only thing not improved by chocolate is sushi.”

Chanyeol shuddered at that thought. It was such a nice reminder, that they were still at the beginning part, still learning what everybody liked and was like. He felt a little less chagrined by his behavior. Even knowing that he had a ton of uncomfortable thinking to do and a bunch of serious conversations coming up.

“Let’s go do something,” Minseok said.

“What? You’re not going to make us sit around and reveal our intimate feelings?”

Minseok rolled his eyes at Jongdae.

“I am. But we can’t do that all day. And I want to walk. I feel like moving around will help me get my head together.”

Chanyeol nodded his enthusiasm.

“Like what?” Jongdae asked.

Minseok smiled.

“Oh crap, it’s gonna be boring,” Jongdae said.

“I haven’t been to the art museum in forever.”

Jongdae groaned, and Minseok pursed his lips.
“Appreciation of beauty is necessary for the human soul, Kim Jongdae.”

“I live with you,” Jongdae said. “What the hell more beauty do I need?”

“Nice try,” Minseok said.

“I mean, it’s a fair point,” Chanyeol said, and grinned that the fake-grumpy facial expression got turned in his direction.

It was too bad that Min was slightly too far away to lean over and kiss.

“But I’d totally be up for that,” he added.

“What? Boo!”

“Sorry,” Chanyeol shrugged. “I figure Min has some very sexy lectures about, like, symbolism and color theory.”

“I absolutely do,” Minseok said.

“Ugh, fine.”

Not that Jongdae seemed to have any real objection, if his bouncing and chatter on the way to the subway were any indication.

“Oh,” Jongdae said when they boarded the train. “Oh, I see what’s going on here. You’re gonna take Channie to the boring vase section.”

“Of course I’m taking him to the boring vase section. Don’t you plan to come with?”

“Uh, yes. You know I love a boring vase.”

So that was obviously a euphemism for something, but they both refused to tell him what.

He had figured that the art museum would be dim and quiet, with lots of empty spaces – not crowded with families and groups of teenagers. Less than 18 hours out from an unpleasant experience out in public, Chanyeol balked briefly when the area to buy tickets was full of people.

Jongdae grabbed his hand, and Minseok’s arm went immediately around his waist.

“Nobody’s drunk here,” Minseok murmured. “Nobody’s looking to impress anyone.”

That made sense. It took him a few minutes to feel it, but that made a lot of sense. It was okay. The line moved quickly, and once they had the little stickers granting them entry, the space inside the museum was big enough that it seemed like fewer people.

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He didn’t really know anything about art, but he knew that he liked the sound of Minseok’s voice, so Chanyeol tried to rustle up a brain cell and ask smart questions, just to watch Min frown and nod and wave his hands while he talked about cultural context and painting technique and stuff like that. In the modern wing, Chanyeol got interested in one sculpture that mostly looked like a giant pile of garbage, and it was fun to stalk around the thing in circles while Minseok pointed out how it was put together, all the barely visible wires that held things balanced just so.

After the first few minutes, Chanyeol didn’t think once about the people around them. He had no idea whether anybody was staring at him or not.
He did notice when Minseok looked at him sidelong, stuck his hands in his pockets, and tossed his head toward the stairs. Jongdae went “ha” and patted Chanyeol on the back.

The downstairs floor seemed to be mostly decorative arts: furniture and tapestries and a bunch of other junk that Chanyeol could imagine his mom wanting to stare at. Next to this was a section of endless vases, jars, tea caddies, and other assorted super boring stuff that didn’t seem to be a euphemism for anything.

Except that Minseok slipped off next to one case of celadon ware, jogged right, then disappeared. Chanyeol followed him into a tiny alcove with plain walls, no art in it, just a small space that the three of them could fit in if they squeezed in very close together.

“What is this?” Chanyeol asked.

“This is the best makeout spot in the museum,” Minseok said, and demonstrated.

Chanyeol had definitely never had anybody’s tongue in his mouth in an art museum before – especially not when a whole different person had their hand in the back pocket of his jeans, kneading his ass. It was ridiculous and awesome to be piled on top of one another in that cramped space, kissing and groping until they were all red-faced.

“How do you know this is the best makeout spot in the museum?” he asked at one point.

“Lots and lots of experimentation,” Jongdae said with a grin.

“The aquarium’s even better,” Minseok said.

“And it’s possible that someone you know might have given someone else you know a blowjob at the Lotte World Folk Museum,” Jongdae said. “Um, more than once.”

Chanyeol had to squeeze them for a bit, he was so impressed.

They were perhaps not model museum-goers after that. Wandering through the abstract art halls, Jongdae leaned over casually in front of one bewildering painting and said,

“Obviously, this one is all about dicks.”

That in and of itself was enough to send Chanyeol into quiet hysterics, except that Minseok was totally outraged and tried to make a case for what the painting was really about. But Jongdae put on a super funny, nasal voice and kept talking about “the generative urge” and “the paintbrush as pulsing shaft of creation,” until Chanyeol was practically choking and Minseok had one hand over his face.

“Oh my god,” Minseok said after about the sixth one like that, “you’re so awful, I can’t even take it.”

He dragged Jongdae outside and beat on his arm a little bit, until Jongdae wrapped him up in a bear hug.

“Eyyyy, you love me.”

“That has no bearing on the fact that you’re completely awful.”

“It was funny,” Jongdae sang.

“I make no admissions.”

“It was super funny,” Jongdae sang.
“You’ll get nothing out of me, Kim Jongdae.”

“Because you love dicks and they’re hilarious,” Jongdae sang, louder than was polite out in the museum courtyard.

Minseok sagged, and Chanyeol thought his heart would burst right out of his chest, he couldn’t even believe that two people even existed in the world like this, much less wanted to date him. He wrapped his arms around them both.

“Yay,” Jongdae said.

That finally made Min laugh.

“Ugh, I can’t take you anywhere,” he said, taking Jongdae’s face and kissing him. “Alphas. What a pain.”

“We make up for it with our excellent generative urges,” Jongdae said.

That earned him more hitting, but he didn’t seem to mind. To be fair, it was accompanied by more kisses.

They wandered back around to the gift shop and puttered around for a while, playing with the kaleidoscopes and moldable sand and stuff. They had a large jewelry section; Chanyeol saw a pin his mom would like and poked around until he also found a pair of earrings that would go with his sister’s favorite winter coat. When he turned to go pay, Jongdae was standing behind him, looking pensive with a bracelet in his hands.

“Would it be weird to give you another one?” he asked.

It was a super old-fashioned cuff-style courting bracelet, brown leather with a design he recognized: 13 silver beads, spaced slightly irregularly, a representation of the full moons of the year from a famous archaeological site. Very old, very primal, but still cool-looking.

And his alpha wanted to put it on him – but also, his alpha asked.

“I’ll wear it,” Chanyeol said. “On my left arm, maybe.”

Oof, he really did like Jongdae’s smile. Even better than he liked the brush of Jongdae’s fingers doing the clasp on his arm after they paid. He liked how Minseok put one arm around his waist and hummed approval, too.

They found a bunch of food trucks parked near the museum and fanned out, regrouping on a bench to pass around their various food purchases and bask in the early autumn sunshine.

“Did that work to make you feel a little more positive about getting out and about?” Minseok asked.

It was so obvious, now that Min had said it aloud.

“That’s a sneaky one,” he said to Jongdae, who smiled wide.

“He’s great, right?”

“Yes.”

Slightly less great, maybe, when it turned out that Minseok had to go to the studio and break up their nice afternoon. Chanyeol joined Jongdae in a "boo."
“It’s just for a couple of hours,” Minseok laughed. “Count it as further reprieve before you have to talk about your feelings.”

When they parted ways at the subway, Minseok took one of their hands each.

“I’m begging you, try not to have any big emotional crises, okay? I’ll be home before dinner, surely you can manage that long without me.”

“We will make our best attempt,” Chanyeol said, trying for maximum fake solemnity and earning a smile and a kiss.

Chanyeol thought they did all right, though he suspected Jongdae wouldn’t have agreed. The minute Chanyeol sat on their sofa, Jongdae pushed him over and wiggled around on top of him for a bit, with loud little kisses.

“Doing okay, Channie?”

“Yeah.”

Jongdae pressed his face up against Chanyeol’s neck and went limp.

“Oof, I really did think for a second that we were breaking up yesterday. Scared the shit out of me.”

Chanyeol hugged him.

“I mean, I’m still a little surprised that you weren’t mad at me.”

Jongdae lifted his head, and though his expression was serious, his eyes looked warm.

“No, Chanyeol. Only worried about you.”

God damn, the way they made his heart flop around in his chest.

“Now see, you keep looking at me like that, all I want to do is kiss you,” Jongdae said.

“Oh no.”

“Right?”

So they worked on that for a little while.

“I really appreciate your philosophy of nice, long makeouts,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae lifted his mouth from Chanyeol’s chest and grinned.

“Min trained me well. Man, when I was younger, I used to practically cry with frustration for how long he drew things out.”

Chanyeol squeezed the ass cheek in his hand and raised one eyebrow.

“When you were younger, huh?”

“Dude. You haven’t seen anything yet. He is a master of torture. You wait. Someday he’ll make you wait so long that you black out when you come.”
Jongdae laughed.

“Don’t look so intimidated! It’s actually awesome.”

Chanyeol was very happily making a close oral examination of Jongdae’s neck when the fingers in his hair tightened briefly.

“Hey, I just had a genius idea. Let’s watch *Receptive Partner* and get all worked up so we attack Min the minute he walks through the door.”

Well gosh.

“That is genius.”

“Told you.”

It didn’t quite go that way. For sure, the first scene was just like Minseok had said, with a ridiculously handsome, huge blond guy walking naked out of the sea, and Chanyeol could see the point that that was sufficient inspiration. But about ten minutes in, he pushed Jongdae off his lap.

“Hold on, I want to hear what they’re saying.”

“Someone’s talking?” Jongdae murmured, trying to get back to Chanyeol’s shoulder.

Chanyeol put his hand on Jongdae’s chest.

“Wait, this seems important.”

Maybe it was a little ridiculous that, when held at arm’s length, Jongdae literally couldn’t reach him, but he kept trying to get in front of Chanyeol’s face, and Chanyeol was trying to pay attention.

By the time Minseok arrived home, just at the end of the movie, Jongdae had given up – possibly on living, given how still and quiet he was, lying face down on the floor.

“What in the world?” Minseok said.

Jongdae supplied proof of life by making a strangled sound.

“Is that *Receptive Partner*?” Minseok asked. “I feel like I recognize that terrible music.”

Chanyeol couldn’t even believe the missed possibilities the previous 90 or so minutes represented.

“It has a plot!” he shouted.

Jongdae made that sound again.

“What?” Minseok laughed.

“I mean, not a *good* plot, but there’s an actual fucking story going on there! With, like, social commentary on alpha-omega dynamics!”

“There is?”

“How have I never seen that before?”

“The whole thing,” Jongdae groaned to the floorboards. “He watched the whole thing. We still have all our clothes on, and he watched the whole god damn thing.”
Minseok laughed. A *lot*. It gave Chanyeol the time he needed to cross his arms over his chest and pout about all the important shit – like actual decent porn with an actual freaking story going on among all the boning – that his supposed “friends” had never bothered to tell him about.

He might have to kill Baekhyun.

Or maybe just maim him lightly, so as to not make Xing sad.

“How *have* you not seen that before?” Jongdae asked, lifting his face up off the floor finally. “It’s like ten years old.”

Chanyeol waved his hand.

“I had a strict beta porn-only policy,” he said.

“Okay, first,” Jongdae said.

He got up and kissed Minseok.

“How was the ice, babe? Want a drink?”

“Polished and delivered. A very nice-looking lucky carp if I do say so myself, and yes.”

“Chan?”

Chanyeol nodded and held out his arms, wishing for Min to come over for a kiss and a snuggle. Wish granted, yay.

Jongdae brought over three glasses, with a wine bottle tucked under his arm and a bag of crab snacks in his other hand.

“Well damn, I guess you should be proud, love, I’m about to ask Chanyeol a feelings question.”

Uh oh.

“Well done,” Minseok said, lifting his now-full glass in a toast.

“So why beta porn only? There’s gotta be a specific reason for that.”


“So like. I presented when I was sixteen. And I didn’t know any other male omegas, right? There was one upperclassman at school, but I didn’t know him then. And there aren’t any omegas at all in my family. And I wasn’t really out yet? So I didn’t have anybody to warn me about what I’d find when I went looking for porn.”

They both flinched.

“Yeah. It was, um, really rapey. A few times finding that kind of stuff and I was done. Baekhyun tried a couple times back then to convince me to keep trying to find different stuff, but, you know.”

“Why risk it just to get off?” Jongdae asked.

“Yes.”

“That sucks, man. There’s a lot of alpha porn just as bad.”
Chanyeol nodded. He’d seen just enough of that to know. Yuck.

“Okay, but this one,” he said. “How do they fake the knots?”


Maybe it was different for alphas, but Chanyeol couldn’t imagine the circumstances under which he would actually want to induce a fake heat.

“Your face!” Jongdae laughed. “You look so grossed out.”

He wiggled around and laid his head on Chanyeol’s knee.

“You didn’t like my knot, Channie?” he asked in a teasing tone.

“I liked it fine in context!”

“In context,” Jongdae said, laughing. “How is somebody who’s such a beast in bed such a prude out of it?”

Whoa, hey now, what?

“I’m a beast?”

“Also, fine? What the fuck is that? Fine. My knot is awesome.”

“You two are better than TV,” Minseok said.

“Well duh,” Jongdae said. “Kissing the TV would just be weird.”

The affection in Minseok’s gaze when he gazed at Jongdae was so warm and happy. Chanyeol, for a minute, seized up, but his fingers brushed up against his new bracelet, and then Minseok turned to him, and his smile didn’t change at all.

Wow.

Okay.

Wow.

He was really glad Min announced a need for kisses and food. They cooked dinner and were sitting cozily together when Minseok asked,

“So Channie, have we been too rough with you?”

They both stared at him, very obviously willing to wait forever for an answer, so he was stuck.

“No?”

And then, given their facial response to the question mark that he totally should’ve anticipated,

“No. No, I have no complaints.”

It was good, how relieved they looked. Chanyeol hated this kind of conversation, they were always so awkward and weird, but he liked that response.
“Then what was the issue last night, sweetness? Do you not like being the one to be rough?”

And that was also incorrect. He remembered having Minseok in his lap, pulling him in close, one hand on the back of his neck. A cherished fantasy, way back in his mind, that he felt too weird to ask for, involved Jongdae making him *work* to top.

Not mean. He had no interest in mean. But not necessarily gentle. He shook his head.

“It was: I was too angry. I wasn’t – thinking about Jongdae.”

Jongdae scooted over close and bumped his shoulder.

“I’ll remember,” he said. “I mean, I’ll try to remember. I’m sorry I didn’t see that you were in an ugly place, Chan.”

Chanyeol had to hang his head for a minute, to give himself space to hide. Regret still roiled in him, now mixed with a weird sense, of relief and surprise that this was a thing for talking about and working through, instead of for shouting and breaking up. He reached for Jongdae’s hand and got twined fingers and a tight squeeze.

“It was weird, right? Talk about mixed signals. I keep forgetting how new this is. Don’t you, babe? It all feels so comfortable.”

Minseok leaned in too, so that they bracketed him.

“It does. You too, sweetness?”

Chanyeol nodded, eyes still down.

“We’ll figure it out,” Minseok said. “At some point you need to tell us all about why you’re so afraid of yourself, and I’ll tell you all about my deep-seated insecurities, but we’ll get there.”

His what now?

“Deep-seated insecurities?”

Jongdae laughed.

“Thanks for sounding so gobsmacked, it’s the best thing for him.”

Chanyeol looked down at the flush on Minseok’s cheeks and the scowl on his face. It made the usual chest-region flip-flopping, and of course he had to lean down and nibble on that bottom lip a little, until Minseok smiled.

“I hate talking about this stuff,” he said.

“Too bad,” Jongdae said, worming his hand down the back of Chanyeol’s jeans. “Because I’m going to talk my face off if that’s what it takes for you to throw me against the wall and growl at me like that again.”

Chanyeol rolled his eyes down at Minseok, who smiled at him.

“You’re terrible,” Chanyeol said.

“Oh sure, I’m the worst ever for thinking it’s stupid hot when my giant omega goes all dominant,” Jongdae said.
“He does like to manhandled on a regular basis,” Minseok said.

“I’m not averse to being made to cry,” Jongdae said.

“The list of stuff you’re not averse to is, like mine, much shorter than the reverse.”

Chanyeol watched them grin at each other, then lean across in front of his chest and kiss. He remembered a comment from his heat, all of a sudden, when he told Jongdae his safeword: “the only things you won’t do involve non-seminal bodily fluids.”

Which was not exactly a narrow set of possibilities.

“Are you guys - into kinky stuff?”

Of course they laughed at that. Because of course they did.

“Not really,” Minseok said. “Too time-consuming. Though occasionally Jongdae is an extremely naughty boy and requires a spanking.”

That was a surprisingly affecting mental image.

“Not very often,” Jongdae said, holding his hands up and laughing. “But when I’m in the mood for it, it’s great.”

“Just think about the mark Chan’s ginormous hand’ll leave on your ass,” Minseok said.

Jongdae blushed as red as a stoplight.

“I may be in the mood for that sooner than anticipated,” he said. “Hope it doesn’t coincide with your semi-annual need to be tied up and teased until you cry, or Channie won’t know what to do with himself.”

Chanyeol was pretty sure that was calculated to make him gawp. It worked.

“A man’s allowed his moods,” Minseok said with a shrug that belied the smile crinkled at the corner of each eye.

“Especially when the moods are great,” Jongdae said. “One time, I looked over and he was on his hands and knees by the sofa with a rope in his mouth.”

Minseok leaned back against the sofa, hands behind his head, looking as cool as one of his pieces of ice. Chanyeol tried to work up a recoil or a tiny bit of horror but instead found the whole thought of it hot.

“You guys just don’t have any hang-ups about sex at all, do you?”

Jongdae shrugged.

“Who the fuck’s gonna judge?” Minseok said.

His voice was low and gravely, and his eyes as cold as Chanyeol had ever seen.

“I am already a disappointment,” he said. “My family’s disappointed in my choice of profession. Jongdae’s family is disappointed that a degenerate male beta like me could corrupt their precious alpha son. Fine artists think I’m bullshit for carving up ice. I will be god damned before I let anybody judge me for any fucking thing I do in my own bed. I know Jongdae won’t do it. And I don’t think
you will either, Channie. That’s good enough for me.”

On one hand, Chanyeol wanted to pull anybody who made Minseok feel bad into about 14 pieces and burn the pieces to charcoal. On the other hand, he wanted to pull Minseok into the kind of hug that would block out the rest of the world. On a nonexistent third hand, he was knocked completely over by the thought that maybe he wasn’t the only person in the world to have a few weird things going on in the inside that might screw things up.

Of course, having that thought out loud in his brain made it sound ludicrous. Of course he wasn’t the only one in the world with hang-ups and hurts.

He needed to think a lot. And talk to Baekhyun.

“We’re on your schedule now, Channie,” Minseok said, poking him with one toe. “If you need some time to think, or if you need to talk some more, you just say so.”

“Not that we don’t want to jump into bed with you every second,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol wondered how he was even supposed to breathe, in the face of statements like that.

“I want,” he said.

And Jongdae climbed onto him, bore him down to the floor, and kissed him.

“What do you want?”

Chanyeol remembered the expression on his face, when he had shoved Jongdae up against the wall, and Minseok’s quiet “he likes that.” He did want. He wanted and wanted. He hooked his leg around Jongdae’s and flipped them both over.

“Oh,” Jongdae said.

If he gave it any thought, it would be weird to say it aloud. But feeling his hips pressed against Jongdae’s, seeing the pink in Jongdae’s cheeks, and knowing that Minseok was watching made it simple to say.

“I want to fuck you,” he said.

Jongdae smiled.

“While Min fucks me.”

“Oh, yes,” Minseok said.

Jongdae pulled him down and kissed him.

Chapter End Notes

Shout-outs to:

- the commenters pointing out how Jongdae & Chanyeol always get into a dramatic mess when Min isn’t around
- the decorative arts section of the Art Institute of Chicago, which has several excellent
I encourage anyone interested to explore the more boring sections of one's local museums, which in my experience, are where the makeout spots are. Notably, I have found these in the decorative arts section, where there are those really old-fashioned taxidermy tableaux, the geology section (which is dumb, because that is not a *boring* section), and at the back of the stuffy still-life section.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Squeaking in under the wire in my own personal time zone with a New Year's chapter of no plot, only smut.

Wishing you much happiness in the new year, dear ones.

Just because he’d gotten caught up in unexpected plot didn’t mean Chanyeol had been unaffected by nearly two hours of good-looking, well-endowed dudes getting it on in *Receptive Partner*. It tangled in his mind with the thrill of fighting to stay quiet while they kissed and groped each other in the museum, with the mental image of Minseok holding a rope and wearing nothing but his filthy grin, and, underneath his anger, how freaking hot it had been to shove up against Jongdae, the noises he had made.

But he could also still feel the inner chill from that moment when he felt like he had fucked everything up beyond repair. He thought it was probably on Jongdae’s mind too, from the way Jongdae gazed at him, let Chanyeol lead him back, tip him onto their bed, and peel his shirt off; and from the way Jongdae pulled his head down so that Chanyeol got his nose full of Jongdae’s scent.

He felt the pull of his omega nature, wanting to go soft, to roll over and let Jongdae take the lead – and the satisfaction of denying that when he spread his hand wide and wrapped it around Jongdae’s ribs, pushed his hips forward, and sucked hard at the skin between the two freckles that bracketed Jongdae’s collarbone. Jongdae arched up against him and tugged at his hair.

“‘You said I owe you an orgasm,’” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae grinned wide. Chanyeol looked back toward Minseok, who leaned against the doorway, arms crossed with his wineglass in his hand, chin dipped low so that he stared at them through his silver-white hair. Chanyeol watched the way Minseok’s eyes followed his hand as it moved up and down Jongdae’s torso, the way his tongue touched the rim of his wineglass briefly before he drank when Chanyeol cupped his hand between Jongdae’s legs.

“How many orgasms do you think I owe him, Min?”

Minseok smiled and slouched against the doorway.

“Oh, I think at least three.”

Chanyeol remembered to pitch his voice lower.

“Three,” he said. “Sounds good to me. One with my hand, one in my mouth, and one on my cock.”

“Jesus,” Jongdae hissed, wriggling out of his now-unzipped jeans while Minseok gave a low laugh.

“Why are you so far away?” Chanyeol rumbled, then licked his hand.

Minseok gave a sharp grin and dropped his eyes to watch Chanyeol grasp Jongdae’s dick.
“I’ll stay here until he comes.”

Jongdae whined, and his fingers clutched at Chanyeol’s nape. Chanyeol turned his head to bite Jongdae’s thumb. He pulled quick and light with his hand until Jongdae growled,

“Come on, fucking kiss me, Chanyeol.”

Which of course he did, smiling at the way Jongdae opened wide in a sloppy, hungry kiss, squirming when Chanyeol tightened his fist. Chanyeol slid to the side so Minseok could see – at which point Jongdae tried to cheat, shoving his thigh between Chanyeol’s legs. So of course Chanyeol had to retaliate by pumping his hand faster and bending down to lick at one nipple. Jongdae cursed.

Chanyeol looked up to see Minseok standing utterly still, still leaned against the door, except for the way his teeth dug into his bottom lip. And even from a couple of meters away, Chanyeol could see that the structural integrity of Min’s fly was being threatened by his erection.

He lifted his head a little so Minseok could see his tongue while he worked at Jongdae’s chest. He pulled his hand up so that the calluses at the top of his palm dragged over the head of Jongdae’s dick, getting all slicked up with pre-come and making Jongdae hiss and jerk his hips. Minseok shifted and bared his teeth. Chanyeol resumed his tight, quick rhythm.

“Look at Min,” Chanyeol said in Jongdae’s ear.

Jongdae opened his eyes, licked his lips when he glanced over.

“Look at how hard he is,” Chanyeol added, in and around tracing all the curves of Jongdae’s ear with his tongue.

Jongdae shifted and moaned softly.

“He’s not gonna bring us that until you come, Dae.”

Minseok grinned.

Chanyeol was annoyed suddenly by all the clothes he still had on. The tension of Jongdae’s scent in his head making him feel liquid and pliant warred with his eagerness to get inside Jongdae and pound him senseless. He wanted Minseok to keep watching – and he wanted Min’s hands on and in him. His right bicep burned a little from working Jongdae. He wanted to feel the weight of Jongdae’s dick in his mouth and for Minseok to stop being so goddamn far away, but they had set up all these stupid parameters.

He rolled up to straddle Jongdae’s thighs and add his other hand to the mix so they could get a fucking move on.

“Quit holding out on me, alpha,” he said.

And how nice that Jongdae was a weirdo alpha who would occasionally do as he was told, because he bucked up into Chanyeol’s fist, grabbed the headboard behind him, and went stiff, coming all over his belly and Chanyeol’s hand with a shout.

“Good job,” Chanyeol grinned down at him when Jongdae opened his eyes.

“Indeed,” Minseok said.

He stepped forward and knelt by the bed to kiss Jongdae. Chanyeol watched from where he was,
stroking Jongdae slowly a couple of times just watch Dae twitch.

“What a beautiful show, sweetness,” Min said when he stood up. “You made it a struggle for me to stick to my plan to just watch.”

“Good,” Chanyeol grinned.

Minseok lifted one eyebrow and took a sip of wine. When he leaned in with a kiss, his mouth was still full of it – Chanyeol flinched his surprise but had nowhere to go: Min’s hand held the back of his neck too firmly, and he couldn’t swallow all of it, so wine ran down his face and neck.

Oh no, then Min climbed onto the bed and sucked it all back off of him, just terrible, he definitely wasn’t breathing heavy or anything after that. Especially not with the way it was followed by the mysterious disappearance of the wineglass and finally Min’s hands all over him, until they were both shirtless, kneeling over Jongdae. After they broke apart, Chanyeol ran his hands down Minseok’s back one more time, just because the muscles felt so good under his palms.

“Nice,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol looked down, and Jongdae had the wineglass in one hand, the other arm curled behind his head while he watched them. Minseok tugged at Chanyeol’s waistband.

“More.”

The only other person Chanyeol had ever been with who liked to just kiss and make out as much as he did had been Jongin – and as great as that had been, it was all so tender and soft that sometimes Chanyeol had gotten a little frustrated with the pace. But these two – with their filthy, busy tongues and roaming hands – Chanyeol could hardly believe that he had lucked into their bed. If only he could stop emoting all over them, it’d be close to perfect.

“Stop thinking,” Minseok said, and pressed the heel of his hand against Chanyeol’s crotch until he groaned.

“Too many clothes,” Jongdae said.

Min kept his hand where it was, curling his fingers, and stared down at Jongdae.

“That’s a fine thing to say from someone who owes Channie two more orgasms.”

Chanyeol didn’t know what those red ears, tilted eyebrows, and flared nostrils meant, exactly, but it was a highly flattering look on Dae.

Chanyeol, meanwhile, was thinking about the warmth of Minseok’s hand pressed against him and about how far his hands reached around Min’s waist. About that bulge at the front of Min’s jeans, and how that would be inside him, not anywhere soon enough.

He put his mouth up under Minseok’s chin, scraped his teeth down Min’s neck and cupped his ass.

“Behind his earlobe,” Jongdae said. “Suck hard there.”

Chanyeol did as he was told, and Minseok arched against him with a breathy laugh.

“Unfair,” he said, low and amused, into Chanyeol’s hair.

“Like you don’t play me like a guitar,” Chanyeol said.
Minseok kissed him, deep and demanding.

“Your eagerness is one of your best qualities,” he said, then licked Chanyeol’s chin.

Jongdae laughed under his breath. He shifted, and when Chanyeol looked down, it was clear that round two had arrived.

Minseok smirked, squeezed his hand so that Chanyeol moaned a little, then leaned away. Chanyeol would’ve complained, except that Min was reaching for the bedside drawer and the necessary things within.

“Get up on the pillows, babe,” Minseok said.

When everybody was naked and lube and condoms were within easy reach, Chanyeol was delighted to discover Minseok settling down next to him.

“Fuck me,” Jongdae said.

“Eventually,” Chanyeol said, leaning in to suck while Minseok licked up one side of Jongdae’s cock.

As it turned out, sucking a dick in tandem was super fun. Chanyeol had never done it before, but it never felt awkward, even when he poked Minseok in the chin or Min’s thumb got in his mouth. A couple of times, they knocked their heads together, which they solved with laughing, sloppy kisses. Jongdae kept up a steady stream of curses and declarations about how hot they both were, squirming and tugging at one or the other’s hair.

“Do you have any idea how fucking good this looks?”

Chanyeol, at that moment watching Minseok lick Jongdae’s cock like candy from close up, had a pretty good idea, and agreed. It looked even better when he rolled his fingers and Jongdae tossed his head.

“Fuck, Chan, god.”

They worked him with their mouths until there weren’t any more coherent sentences coming out of Jongdae’s mouth, just harsh breaths and the occasional “fuck” or “please.”

“What a good idea you had, Channie,” Minseok said, kissing him like he was trying to taste Jongdae’s skin in his mouth. “This is really fun.”

He put his mouth to the soft skin at the hinge of Jongdae’s hip, working it hard enough that Jongdae cried out and arched – or maybe because that was Chanyeol had swallowed as much cock as he could take and was sucking hard. Either way, orgasm number 2 was even louder than the first one, Chanyeol and Minseok each holding down one hip while Jongdae thrashed and sobbed.

Chanyeol lov – really liked how soft and snuggly Jongdae was after he came, smiling at them both, pulling each of their faces to his to kiss them gently, stroking their faces when Chanyeol and Minseok kissed each other.

He – really liked – curling up against Jongdae’s side and pulling him close. Really liked how Minseok made a production of climbing over both of them that consisted of wandering hands and mouth. Chanyeol got a brief handful of dick and a swift nip to his upper arm.

Then everything was all warmth and slickness, Jongdae’s lips up under his jaw while Chanyeol moved one finger slowly inside him, Minseok’s fingers in his hair and teasing his ass, then slipping
in. All the sweet, hot nonsense they murmured to one another, the salt of Jongdae’s sweat on his tongue and the warmth of Minseok’s body pressed against his back. Each time he felt Jongdae relax against his fingers was a reminder to relax against Minseok’s.

“Good?” he murmured at one point.

Jongdae licked his bottom lip, canted his hips down, and huffed a little laugh.

“So good, Channie,” he rasped. “Is our Min opening you up well?”

Considering that he thought he might die if he didn’t come some time in the next half hour?

Chanyeol took a second to focus in on the slide of Min’s finger in and out of his ass and Minseok’s hand curved over his shoulder. He curled his own fingers and felt Jongdae squeeze, heard him sigh.

“It’s not enough,” he said.

Minseok laughed into his back, licked his shoulder blade.

“Give me another one,” Jongdae said.

Another finger for Jongdae, another finger for Chanyeol, Minseok pressed up close. Mint and rain, warmth and wet, Jongdae’s harsh breath and Minseok’s soft hum. Minseok hit him straight in the good spot, and Chanyeol shuddered.

“Tell me he’s ready, Min,” Jongdae said.

Ironic, given that he wasn’t, but Chanyeol thought Jongdae could take another finger, which inspired a lovely, musical moan.

“You want me inside you, Channie?” Minseok murmured.

Only for about the past hour.

“Yes.”

Jongdae grabbed his shoulder and kissed him hard.

“I’m done waiting,” he said.

Okay, then.

It took a couple minutes of arranging, to get Jongdae face down with his hips up on a pillow, Chanyeol nearly laughing with relief to finally get up in there, at a low angle pressed against Dae’s back so that Min could kneel behind him.

Any capacity Chanyeol had to think was destroyed by the sensation of hot pressure around his dick at the same time that he got filled up by Minseok. All his nerves seemed focused in the same place, and when Minseok drove into him, driving him into Jongdae, Chanyeol felt helpless in a way he didn’t think possible, it was so good, like he was a bridge from Min’s pleasure to Dae’s, and all he had to do was allow and feel it.

Of course, because it was Minseok, it didn’t go quickly. It was all long, slow strokes. It was “tell me how that feels” and “you take me so well.” It was Jongdae hiccupping underneath him and worming one hand in to work himself.
“How does he feel, love?” Minseok asked.

Jongdae groaned and arched his back up so that Chanyeol somehow found his way even deeper in.

“You know all about it,” Jongdae breathed. “Harder, Channie, I can feel it in my fucking lungs, my god.”

Chanyeol moved, and Minseok moved with him, skin slapping hard against skin. Min’s fingers dug into his shoulders. It was too much for him to last, filling and filled up, the slide of Jongdae’s ass against his dick and the thrust of Min inside him. Way before he wanted, Chanyeol felt himself going taut and whiting out with pleasure. He vaguely heard himself give a broken-voiced shout, and then Jongdae tensed around him, and he was gone into pure bliss.

The two of them lay sweaty and flat afterward, Minseok still sliding in and out of Chanyeol’s ass for the couple of minutes it took before he gripped Chanyeol’s hips hard and curled in with a moan.

“So fucking good,” Minseok whispered into his shoulder a few minutes later.

After all the bullshit they’d gone through recently? Chanyeol kissed the back of Jongdae’s neck and twined his fingers with Minseok’s.

Very fucking good indeed.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

CONTENT WARNING: This chapter contains a description of a bad traffic accident. It's not gory or detailed, but there are mentions of injury and death, so please be gentle with yourself if you're sensitive reading about these topics.

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Three orgasms was evidently enough to make Jongdae’s cuddliness last through until morning, because instead of yelling their ears off from the moment he woke up, he sat at the counter with his chin on his hands, mooning at Chanyeol and Minseok while they cooked breakfast. Any time either of them got within arm’s reach, he would tug at them until they leaned in for a kiss.

It was a good day: a few errands, a lot of cuddling. Chanyeol could feel his brain working overtime in the background, chewing on stuff. Probably all this emotional stuff, even though none of it was close enough to the surface that he could articulate it. He just felt quiet.

“Doing okay, Chan?” Minseok asked when they’d been piled on the sofa for long enough that Jongdae had fallen asleep with his face mashed against Min’s side (approximately 6 minutes).

Chanyeol ran his hand down the arm Jongdae had thrown over his lap. He leaned his head over to rest against Min’s.

“I’m good,” he said. “Just thinking.”

“Anything you want to say?”

“No.”

“S’no good to keep shit secret,” Jongdae mumbled.

Chanyeol watched Minseok smile and scratch behind Jongdae’s ear. He curled his hand over Jongdae’s, and Jongdae squeezed his fingers.

“I’m not keeping secrets,” he said. “Just not quite ready to talk yet.”

“Okay, sweetness,” Minseok said after a pause, and kissed the top of his head.

“It was just a lot,” Chanyeol said many hours later, when they were getting ready for bed. “This weekend. Lots of good stuff. Just. You know.”


Minseok choked on his toothpaste.

Chanyeol rolled up out of bed with them in the morning for their dumb gym visit, sadly knowing that sometimes a good workout shoved enough extra blood into his brain to make him temporarily
smarter. The nosy lady alpha was at the desk again; Jongdae took one look at her and attached himself to Chanyeol like a burr, with Minseok wearing a wry little smile in the background. Not that it wasn’t nice to have Dae help him rack up all his weights and spot him. Not that he didn’t enjoy the way that Dae kept practically feeling him up every 5 minutes. It didn’t inspire any epiphanies, but it was a decent workout.

Even better, once he and Min got home, they used up all the hot water getting each other off, Minseok fucking between his thighs, coming with a fierce groan and his hands in Chanyeol’s hair, then dropping to his knees to suck Chanyeol off. Afterward, Chanyeol followed Min around in a bit of a daze. The day was quiet and domestic – they went grocery shopping and spent the afternoon making side dishes. Minseok let Chanyeol take over the music, grinning every time one song reminded Chanyeol of another and he’d run over to change the playlist, once tapping the pause button with his nose, because his hands were covered in marinade.

“Will we ever get to listen to you play, Channie?”

Chanyeol felt his ears go hot.

“I mean. You said you could hear me through the walls,” he said.

Minseok scowled at him.

“I guess, at some point,” Chanyeol mumbled.

And it was stupid, because he played and sang with guys at the station all the time. Except that they were all playing together, so it wasn’t like having an audience, and he didn’t give a shit whether his coworkers thought he was any good. It was a bit different with boyfriends.

“Okay,” Min said, and dropped the subject.

Chanyeol took a moment to wonder whether he was actually perfect. Evidence was piling up in favor.

Jongdae came home wearing his glasses and a deep blue shirt-and-tie combo that made Chanyeol’s mouth dry. So it seemed only logical that he should be a helpful boyfriend and assist with the removal of such nice clothes. Even if that resulted in Jongdae being naked, oops.

“Now what are we gonna do?” Jongdae said. “I have this growing problem.”

“I see that.”

In the interest of transparency, Chanyeol figured it was best to haul Jongdae into the living room and blow him on the sofa, so that Minseok could at least watch from the kitchen.

It was a pretty excellent way to end his off-work shift.

He arrived at the station the next morning with a tote bag full of side dishes and, it seemed, an Expression on his face, because Baekhyun took one look at him and said,

“What.”

So after the shift change, the morning meeting, and an equipment check, they headed up to the roof for a little quiet.
“What happened,” Baekhyun asked in a flat tone.

The day was cloudy, with a gusty breeze that had a little edge of chill to it, promising that summer was truly over. Chanyeol watched the clouds marching across the sky and thought about how to begin. He knew that once they got started, Baek would make it easy to keep talking. But it was hard to start. He always found it hard to start – which, okay. How about there, then?

“How many times did I ignore you when you tried to tell me that I was turning into a hermit?”

Baekhyun’s eyes widened, and then he laughed a little.

“How many times,” he said. “By the time you stopped being so sad, it was like you were already in the habit of just being alone all the time.”

Chanyeol chewed on that thought for a moment. He remembered just what Baek was talking about, how broken-hearted he had been, how small he had felt – while at the same feeling all the time like he was too big and too loud and too much, and it was impossible to make himself small enough, no matter how hard he tried. And how all of that had made him retreat from the world, into things that were predictable and quiet, with soft edges that couldn’t hurt him.

“I think I let myself get kinda fucked up,” he said, squeezing the words out through the tightness in his throat.

“Let yourself?” Baekhyun said, sounding outraged.

He straddled Chanyeol’s legs, grabbed him by the ears, and shook Chanyeol’s head.

“Of course you got fucked up, Yeollie, you spent over a year dating a gaslighting, manipulative shitbag. And don’t tell me it was your fault, because I spent enough time with He Who Must Not Be Named that I’m convinced that asshole got off on making you feel bad about yourself. He tore you down on purpose because it fucking amused him. If I ever see him, I’ll bite his goddamn head clean off.”

This attitude on the part of his best friend was news to Chanyeol.

“You – what?”

“Look, dude,” Baekhyun said, shaking him by the ears again. “I kept my mouth shut because you were so in love you couldn’t hear it, and I needed to be around when the shit hit the fan. And then the shit hit the fan, and you didn’t need to hear it because you were too broken. But that asswipe was bad news from the minute you met him, I hate his guts.”

“Please let go of my ears.”

Baek did, and rolled off of him, but he still wore that stubborn, angry look on his face. Chanyeol wanted to hug him for it. He also wanted to slug him for not saying anything earlier. Even worse, he knew he was going to have to sift through some carefully-packed-away memories to find out whether Baekhyun was right.

Still,

“He Who Must Not Be Named?” he said.

Baek rolled his eyes.
“Saying his name aloud probably summons him from whatever demonic realm he rules.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

“Yeah, and?”

They sat for a minute while Chanyeol processed, Baekhyun leaned against his shoulder.

“Did you fight with them?” Baek asked finally.

“Not – really,” Chanyeol said. “It’s more like. I found out I don’t trust myself?”

Baekhyun poked him in a way that made clear more details were required. So Chanyeol told him about bowling, and the gross alpha, and everything that happened after.

“Aw, shit, Yeol,” Baekhyun said when Chanyeol was done, squeezing his shoulders and rubbing his head against Chanyeol’s face. “Yeollie. You poor dumbass, that sounds awful. I’m really glad they didn’t let you get away with turning that into a big thing.”

He hummed.

“Don’t know that I’m glad you didn’t deck that alpha, though.”

Chanyeol snorted.

“Hey. How bad did it scare you when they came in and made you talk about relationship stuff instead of letting you go all broody and run away?”

Sometimes Chanyeol regretted having a best friend who had known him since before he knew the entire alphabet.

“Well, I guess that glare is my answer,” Baekhyun laughed.

And the thing was, he had started this conversation with Baekhyun on purpose, because as much as he hated all this talking stuff, Chanyeol knew he had to adult up and do it anyway. He sighed.

This was Baekhyun, who knew him better than anyone.

“I really, really like them, Baek.”

It was so scary to say that out loud, even if Baekhyun’s response was a gentle smile.

“That’s good, Yeollie.”

He almost said “is it?” – even though he knew it was. That was the scary part.

“What if they don’t?” was what he did say, hardly meaning to.

Baekhyun took his hand.

“I haven’t seen you guys together much,” he said, “because I guess you’re always too busy fucking all the time to let your best friend gather any vital reconnaissance. But I think they do, Yeol.”

Also the scary part.

He nodded.
“Question,” Baek said. “If you broke up now – not because of drama, but just because you all decided that it wasn’t working out – you’d be mega sad, right?”

Chanyeol nodded again. The thought made him ache. It sounded awful.

“But would you be broken? Like you were before?”

Chanyeol tried to picture it, not being able to be with them anymore. Jongdae’s sad expression and Minseok with wet eyes, one last hug. Maybe even moving apartments, so he wouldn’t have to see them anymore. But he couldn’t see himself trying to make himself smaller again because of it. He couldn’t imagine that either of them would say the kinds of things that would pull him to pieces. He would hurt, and cry, and miss the shit out of them.

And then eventually he would remember that he’d been their “hot neighbor” and how much fun they had on dates. He’d remember all the quiet talks, and how he liked reading books at the same time. He’d remember how he could make two gorgeous dudes hazy with lust at once. And he’d be able to take that forward and date somebody else.

“I wouldn’t,” he said.

“You would not,” Baekhyun said.

“Because they aren’t assholes.”

Baekhyun grinned.

“Exactly.”

Super fucking scary. But also – kind of great.

“Okay, I gotta think,” Chanyeol said.

“Of course you do,” Baek said. “See you up here again in approximately three more weeks.”

Chanyeol never understood why Baekhyun would tease him like that, when Chanyeol knew how much Baek hated when Chanyeol squeezed the back of his knee or flicked his ear. Or, as it turned out, both.

They wandered downstairs just in time to suit up and drive off at high speed to a high-end bag shop that had a tree fall through the front window. Then it was an old man having a stroke. Then a kitchen fire in a restaurant so decrepit that Chanyeol was afraid he got food poisoning just from standing inside. Then a heart attack, then an old lady who fell and hit her head, then a smoke alarm at a school that turned out to be a prank pull. They were in and out of the station all day and half the night, sleeping in half-hour snatches until a stretch of quiet between dawn and mid-morning, when not even Joonmyun could stay awake to answer the phone and the whole station sacked out for a blissful 3 hours.

Then the alarm bell rang, and they ran out again, this time to a sad little house in a shabby neighborhood where the granny fired up her charcoal heater for the first time in the season and burned her own house down around her. She was a tiny omega at least 80 years old, folded in half with age, with nobody taking care of her. It was horrifying. She held onto Chanyeol’s hand with both of hers from her ambulance gurney and begged him to comb through the ashes for her cat. Of course he said he would, even though he knew there wouldn’t be anything to find.
And if that wasn’t bad enough, over the course of the afternoon a front moved in, bringing a blustery rain that made everyone at the station clench their jaws, waiting for the shoe to drop. Bad rain always meant the same thing. Bad rain at rush hour meant the same thing amplified: in this instance, a heavy truck going down across four lanes of traffic and another dozen vehicles piled up behind it in various states of destruction, including a bus.

It was one of those wrecks that was why they carried snow shovels in their trucks and that proved a very upsetting point about the need for seat belts. The kind that meant half the station would be having nightmares for the next month. Leeteuk, as the senior on shift, sent everybody fanning out to look into cars and try to find the most critical problems, carrying the blue tarps to drape over cars where time had already run out for the occupants, so there was no rush. Chanyeol found one of those right away, and then a second after Sehun bolted past him, shoving the tarp into his arms on the way to grab fire suppressant canisters for the bus, leaking gas and hydraulic fluid next to a downed, sparking power line.

They triaged the worst injuries. Chanyeol and Baekhyun took one sedan, with both occupants unconscious and pinned by the crushed-in dashboard. The driver was in the worse shape of the two, her skin the color of somebody who was bleeding badly somewhere. The passenger woke up halfway through their cutting the door off and started screaming, pulling at his trapped legs to try to get to the driver and unable to listen to them asking him to let them work.

Chanyeol helped Baek set up the hydraulic ram that would push the dash away from the driver and went around to try to calm the passenger. He fought Chanyeol, cursing at him and growling. The sound of the ram startled the man briefly, as did the creak of metal as it started to push the steering column away from the driver’s abdomen. Chanyeol held onto the guy, just in case.

Just in case it was one of those terrible times when the only thing holding a person together was being crushed – which this was. The ram worked, the steering column moved, and the woman died.

“Fuck,” Baekhyun said.

The passenger went into a full alpha berserk. His fist caught Chanyeol across the face, and the only thing preventing the man from hauling himself out of the car on two broken legs and pure adrenaline to beat Chanyeol to a pulp was the fact that he was still trapped by his side of the dashboard. Chanyeol put up with the pummeling and tried to keep the guy from making his injuries too much worse until an EMT with a syringe full of sedative could get close enough to jab the guy.

“You okay?” the EMT asked when the passenger sagged in his seat, tears and drool dripping off his face.

Chanyeol shook his head back and forth.

“Don’t have any teeth rattling,” he said.

The EMT squeezed his arm. They freed the alpha from the car, and Chanyeol put his arm around Baekhyun’s shoulders briefly before they hustled to the next vehicle and the next tragedy. Another person died under his hands, and there was a lot more crying, screaming, and bleeding on the part of other victims. They successfully cut a couple of people out of vehicles and got them into ambulances. Several of the less-injured people grabbed him and wept into his coat – Sehun peeled a couple of them off of him, and the EMT from earlier a couple more.

It was several hours of pure awfulness, even knowing that they saved a bunch of lives. It was hard to explain that sometimes the saving part was really terrible. The end of bad scenes could help – the plain physical labor of hosing the street clean, helping hook cars to tow trucks, and shoveling bits of
glass and metal to the shoulder of the road. That made a space for them to calm down. A little. Chanyeol still found himself repeatedly wiping his face dry of tears with one filthy hand. He huddled close to Joonie in the quiet cab of the truck on the way back to station. C team had arrived for their shift in the interim; by the time A and B were done showering, C team had piled the kitchen table with food. Chanyeol had trouble picking anything up. His hands kept shaking, as if even that very hot, very long shower hadn’t been able to warm him up.

Baekhyun sat next to him, curled over his phone, looking miserable. Joonmyun, Leeteuk, and Taeyong huddled together in the corner. Donghae had one arm around Sehun, who was eating with a kind of grim steadiness that Chanyeol knew meant he was trying to keep himself from crying or hitting something.

Joonie clapped Taeyong on the arm. He had a brief conversation with Donghae, who nodded and left with Sehun. He knelt by Chanyeol.

“Go home, Yeollie,” he said.

“What? I’m on shift, I can’t – “

“You live five minutes away, and C team’s fresh. Go hug your boyfriends and sleep in your own bed. You’ve done enough today, come back in the morning.”

Chanyeol pressed his lips hard together to stop the flood that almost overwhelmed him and surely would’ve come out in tears. He nodded.

“You want to go with him, Baek?” Joonie asked.

Baekhyun shook his head.

“Yixing’s coming here for a bit. If that’s okay.”

“Yeah, of course,” Joonmyun said. “Just don’t fuck anywhere you’ll get caught.”

Baekhyun snorted.

“What about you?” Chanyeol asked.

Joonie gave him a tired, sweet smile.

“I’m going home too. I’m gonna sit in the bath and probably cry for a while, and then get as much sleep as I can on a proper foam mattress with decent-threadcount sheets.”

Chanyeol hugged him and didn’t miss the little hitch in Joonie’s breath when Chanyeol whispered his thanks.

He walked home in the cold rain, and he hadn’t worn a warm enough jacket that morning, so he arrived at their building soaked to the skin and shivering. The darkness had allowed his brain to replay the whole wreck all over again, and he could barely breathe from how tight his chest felt. It was all he could do to climb the stairs and lean against their doorframe while he knocked.
Jongdae answered the door, wearing sweatpants and a too-big, ratty thermal, with a pair of chunky glasses and his hair sticking up like he had been grabbing at it. He looked so beautiful. Chanyeol started to cry right where he was standing.

“Channie! My god, your face! What’s wrong, are you hurt? What is it?”

He pulled Chanyeol inside and patted him down while Chanyeol stood with his head bent, weeping like a little kid and unable to stop himself. He’d forgotten that his face probably looked like he’d been in a bar fight.

“Channie. Baby, come on. What happened?”

He put his warm hands on Chanyeol’s wet, freezing cheeks and made Chanyeol look at him.

“Who did this to you? Are you hurt?”

Chanyeol shook his head, and Jongdae’s shoulders lowered in relief.

“Is somebody else hurt? Is – is Baekhyun all right?”

Chanyeol nodded. Jongdae’s thumbs stroked his cheeks. Chanyeol closed his eyes and sighed into that feather-light warmth.

“Today was really bad,” he choked out.

“Oh, Chan,” Jongdae said.

He pulled Chanyeol into a hug, with a complete disregard for the fact that Chanyeol was soaking wet, and held onto him until Chanyeol was able to at least stop sobbing aloud. Even if that made more obvious how much he was shivering.

“Come on, baby, you’re freezing,” Jongdae said.

He kissed Chanyeol on the side of his mouth that didn’t have a split lip and pulled him further into their apartment. The coffee table was covered in papers, some of which looked like blueprints. Well, crap.

“You’re busy,” he said.

Jongdae gave him a sour look.

“Chanyeol, don’t be dumb. You’re way more important than work I brought home just because I knew Min would be out tonight.”

That set Chanyeol’s eyes off again. But he let Jongdae lead him into the bathroom and sat down on the side of the tub so Dae could rub at his head with a towel while the tub filled.

“Come on, clothes off,” he said when there was enough water in the tub that Chanyeol would at least be partially submerged.

The water was blistering hot, and Chanyeol was too busy hissing at it to smile over the way Jongdae held his arm and hand to steady him into the tub. He watched his toes turn red and possibly start to
boil away while Jongdae rolled the towel up like a bolster, then leaned on it when Jongdae pushed him gently back.

“Okay? Not too hot?”

It was about 500 degrees too hot, but the sting felt good. Chanyeol shook his head.

“Jesus, your face,” Jongdae said, his fingers gentle over Chanyeol’s eye and cheek. “Do you want ice for it or anything?”

“No.”

Jongdae wouldn’t stop touching him; it made a good thing to focus on. He could lean back against the towel and cook in the hot water without any upsetting pictures in his head, as long as Jongdae’s hands were on him.

After he shut the water off, Jongdae stayed for a little longer, still stroking Chanyeol’s face and shoulders. Chanyeol could see him trying to be all surreptitious, checking to make sure there weren’t any other bruises or hurts. Some huge, choking emotion rolled through Chanyeol; he leaned over to rest his head against Jongdae’s arm.

“You getting warmer yet, Channie? I can go get your pajamas.”

Out of the tub would mean more of himself pressed up against Jongdae.

“Yeah.”

Okay.”

Jongdae kissed his cheek. By the time he came back, Chanyeol was out of the tub and mostly dry, already more cooled down than he wanted.

“Channie, you’re as red as a crab,” Jongdae said, smiling a little. “Get dressed, I’m gonna call Min and make you some tea, okay?”

Chanyeol kept having to blink back another dumb rush of weeping – it was actually nice to have a second alone to try to gather himself. But he didn’t linger over pulling his PJs on, and he found Jongdae in the kitchen, typing on his phone.

“He didn’t answer. Probably has on his big dumb ear protectors and the chainsaw going. I texted him.”

Chanyeol let Jongdae fuss around him, making tea and blowing on it when it was too hot, grabbing a blanket out of a cabinet and tucking it thoroughly around them both after he had arranged them each to his liking on the sofa. It still wasn’t quite what Chanyeol wanted, given that he wasn’t pressed against every possible inch of Dae, but he obediently drank his ginger tea, trying to let the warmth of it seep into him. But mostly what helped was Jongdae’s fingers carding through his hair, and the way Dae lifted the mug from his hands the second it was empty, rolling them over and down so that Chanyeol was finally folded inside his arms, face up against his neck.

“This okay, Channie? What do you need right now?”

Chanyeol inhaled deeply, trying to chase away all the scents of asphalt, gasoline, blood, and metal with Jongdae’s scent of wet earth. He felt when it hooked into his brain, from the way his body relaxed. Jongdae’s arms tightened behind his back.
“There you go,” he said. “You don’t smell as upset anymore.”

Chanyeol snuggled in, careful to tilt the sore side of his face away from any possibility of squashing. He made himself notice that there was no hesitation in Jongdae’s hands rubbing his back, no impatient sigh in Jongdae’s breath.

“What do you want to talk about it?”

Chanyeol shook his head.

After a while his brain tried to restart the whole replay thing, the sound of the man screaming and the sensation of a fist connecting with his cheek.

“Tell me about your work project,” he murmured into Jongdae’s neck.

“It’s really boring.”

“Tell me every tedious detail.”

Jongdae kissed his forehead - Chanyeol could feel his smile - and launched into a lecture. Chanyeol understood very little of it, something about heat efficiency, or maybe heat transfer lowering efficiency. But the hands on his back and Jongdae’s voice were enough to keep his memories at bay for the moment.

Jongdae had been talking for a while when his phone buzzed.

“Hey,” he said into it. “Yeah, he’s still here. I think you should come home. I think we’d both be really glad to see you, love.”

That made the lump reappear in Chanyeol’s throat. But he reached up and grasped Jongdae’s wrist.

“What is it, baby?”

“Tell him to drive really, really safely.”

For a couple of seconds, Jongdae was completely still.

“Chan,” he said, and rested his cheek against the top of Chanyeol’s head.

“Did you hear that? Yeah, thank you. See you soon.”

Jongdae settled back in the second he put the phone down. Chanyeol couldn’t imagine anything better at the moment, but he was also starting to feel kind of bad. He had no idea how long they’d been lying there, but it was definitely not a short period of time.

“Just a little more,” he said.

“You think I got someplace else to be?” Jongdae said.

He pushed at Chanyeol’s shoulder with two fingers until Chanyeol rolled into his back, then laid those two fingers on his cheek.

“You think I’ve got any place I’d rather be? You’re both my boyfriend and my omega, Chanyeol,” Jongdae said. “Two compelling reasons why I want to be right here.”

Chanyeol stared up at Jongdae’s soft expression. This was the same thing as the way Jongdae was
always clowning around, trying to make them laugh: the soft, quiet side of that generosity. The thing Chanyeol had been thinking he was jealous about not getting. Here it was, waiting for just the moment when he needed it. And, he saw suddenly, ruefully, not even for the first time.

“I’m still such a fan of this red hair,” Jongdae said, tugging a lock down over Chanyeol’s forehead, then combing it back again.

“When’s the last time you ate anything, Channie?”

Those two shaky bites afterward at the station didn’t count.

“Um, maybe - lunchtime? Breakfast?”

“Want me to fix you something? Would that make you feel a little more solid?”

It probably would, but that would mean having to let go and lying there cold by himself. He clutched at Jongdae’s shirt and shook his head.

“Maybe when Min gets here? That way you’ll have him to hang onto.”

“Okay.”

Chanyeol closed his eyes, just to concentrate on the sensation of Jongdae’s fingers on his face, Jongdae’s lips at the side of his mouth, on his forehead.

“Over here,” Jongdae said when they heard Minseok slip in the door.

Chanyeol kind of wished he hadn’t opened his eyes to see Min’s expression, taking in the bruises on his face. But Jongdae’s hand tightened against his head, and he leaned into it while Minseok looked up, then nodded at whatever he saw in Jongdae’s face.

“Sorry it took me so long to get here,” Min said, kneeling down and putting one hand on Chanyeol’s chest.

“Traffic was brutal. Everyone was driving like they’d never seen rain before.”

Chanyeol grimaced, then flinched at the soreness in his face.

“The news on the radio said there’d been a really terrible wreck between here and the river,” Minseok said. “Was that your bad day, sweetness?”

Chanyeol nodded, tried to blink back the way all those images rushed back.

“They said there were multiple fatalities.” Minseok’s voice was as gentle as the hand rubbing Chanyeol’s chest.

Chanyeol nodded again. He expected for his weeping to restart, and to get tears in his ears, which was the worst. But the way they leaned over him, hands on his neck and chest, lips on his crown and cheek - they made it possible for him to breathe a little bit, to stay calm.

“Here, take over for a minute, he said he hasn’t eaten all day,” Jongdae said.

“Gladly.”

This was infinitely better than other bad work days. Usually that meant various coworkers sitting on top of one another on the sofas in the common room, overeating, and ignoring people trying to hide
their emotional crises in the shower. Followed by getting off-shift to go out and get drunk enough that half his off time was taken up by hangover recovery.

No wonder his mated colleagues always seemed to deal with stuff better.

Wait.

“Oh, hey, sweetness, I’ve got you,” Minseok said, holding him tight.

If he focused on it, that nice beta scent could calm him down even if the nice beta was part of what caused the freak-out. And not long after that, Jongdae called him over to eat.

“I figured you didn’t want anything too hard to chew,” Jongdae said, setting bowls of soup and rice down next to a plate with a vegetable pancake on it – only burned a tiny bit on one edge.

“And a demonstration that I’m not *completely* useless.”

A hot bath, snuggling, and jokes: way, way better than the usual.

“Not completely,” Chanyeol said.

He turned down the offer of a glass of wine, since he had to go back to the station first thing in the morning. Once he started eating, his body remembered that it was starving, and when he finished shoveling food into his face at a high rate of speed, Min and Dae were talking quietly to each other about their respective days, Minseok’s hand still moving in slow circles on Chanyeol’s lower back.

“Better?”

“Much, thanks.”

Jongdae’s small, tender smile was in its own way just as nice as the bright grin he usually wore.

“Let’s see your face.”

The coolness of Minseok’s fingers felt great on the hot bruises.

“What happened?”

Chanyeol stared at the window looking out over their balcony, where rain continued to patter against the glass in the dark.

“We were trying to cut an alpha’s mate out of one car,” he said. “She died.”

Being sandwiched between two boyfriends was incredibly helpful in terms of keeping from falling apart again.

“I’m sorry,” Jongdae whispered to the back of his neck, as if he were responsible for it somehow.

“He was berserking with grief,” Chanyeol said. “I get it, I’ll be okay.”

His face did make it a little awkward later on, though, trying to find a comfortable sleeping position. Mostly because he was finally calm enough and so tired that everything hurt, and his body kept jerking with overfatigue. He woke up three times overnight from dreams about the wreck. Each time one or both of the world’s best boyfriends woke up with him and played with his hair or rubbed his chest until he went back to sleep.
“You’re perfect,” Chanyeol told Jongdae in the shower in the morning, hugging him close.

“That’s provably wrong on a daily basis,” Jongdae said, laughter in his voice. “But I’m glad I could help, Channie.”

He made Chanyeol sit on the floor to wash his hair, which so far showed exactly zero signs of ever getting old, ever.

“I don’t think I could take it, having bad days that bad on a regular basis, and knowing they’re going to happen again. That’s a kind of bravery I don’t have,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol leaned against Jongdae’s hip and held onto his ankle for a minute, until he was ordered to lean back and rinse.

He arrived back at the station feeling like he could actually face the day, after all that comforting, decent sleep, a properly lotioned-up back, and the sweetness of kissing a very groggy Minseok.

“Hold on, I’ll come around,” Jongdae said, pulling the car into the station’s driveway.

“I can open a car door.”

“I’m coming around to hug you, and you have no say in the matter, so don’t even try to be a jerk about it.”

Chanyeol grinned. He let Jongdae open the car door for him and very happily leaned into the hug. Standing up out of it, they found Yixing standing next to them, not quite scowling.

“Hey, Xing.”

“Uh,” Jongdae said. “Hi? Is, um – Baekhyun all right?”

Yixing tilted his head to the side and gazed at Jongdae for just slightly longer than was comfortable.

“I think so,” he said finally. “It helps to have somebody to hold onto for a while, after a day like that.”

Jongdae put his arm back around Chanyeol’s waist and squeezed him a little. Yixing watched.

“It does,” Chanyeol said.

“Yixing, I know I’m a terrible person to ask, but would you look at Chanyeol’s face? Just to make sure he’s not seriously injured?”

Yixing’s surprise was almost funny.

“Why does that make you terrible, J – Jongdae?”

“I’ve got no business asking you for favors,” Jongdae muttered.

“I’ll check, if Chanyeol says it’s okay.”

“I mean, I’m pretty sure I’m fine, but sure.”

Yixing prodded his bruises gently, but enough to make him hiss, while Jongdae squeezed his hand halfway off.
“I don’t think he has any fractures,” Yixing said when he stepped back.

“Oh. Okay, good, thanks.”

The relief in Jongdae’s voice was — adorable, really. Yixing narrowed his eyes, then said,

“Excuse me, I forgot to tell Baekhyun something,”

turned on his heel, and went back inside.

“Oops, I think I just set you up for a feelings talk.”

Chanyeol laughed and hugged his high-quality alpha boyfriend.

“It’s okay. I’ll just take it out on you later.”

Jongdae scrunched up his face.

“By making me talk about my feelings?”

“No, with sex, stupid.”

“That’s a relief.”

Yixing was waiting just inside the door, with Baekhyun tucked up against his shoulder, looking tired but steady on his feet.

“You stayed with them last night?”

Yixing never wasted time on preliminaries.

“Yeah. They were absolutely great.”

Yixing nodded.

“Good. I really do think your face is fine, by the way, even though it’s obvious that you haven’t iced it enough.”

He grasped Chanyeol’s bicep.

“I’m glad he was there for you, Yeollie.”

“Me too.”

Bakehyun hugged Yixing.

“Look at my honey, being so good.”

Yixing rolled his eyes.

“This is really awkward!”

But if he’d let Baekhyun tease him all the way out the door, things couldn’t be too bad.

“It’s like treatment for a phobia,” Baekhyun said after Xing left. “We’ll keep giving the two of them
small doses of each other until they get over the horror.”

Chanyeol laughed and put up with Baek bossing him into getting an ice pack for his face.

They had their delayed shift-change meeting once Joonmyun and Sehun arrived, both of them also looking better than expected.

“Donghae’s couch is super comfortable,” Sehun said, stretching and staring at Joonmyun. “You know, for a couch.”

Chanyeol stepped on Baekhyun’s foot so he wouldn’t say anything about the flush that appeared on Joonie’s face.

C team had been busy with their own car wrecks throughout the night, though nothing so bad as the big one. But the weather cleared over the course of the day, and the rest of the shift was easy. He got a text on Thursday evening asking whether he minded going to brunch with a couple of Minseok and Jongdae’s friends. It felt like ticking off another mark on the boyfriend list: he was happy to agree.

They texted the group chat a lot for the rest of his shift, obviously checking up on him.

Chanyeol supposed that after the amount of freaking out he’d done in the past week, he probably needed checking up on. Additionally, he really liked it. He even liked the way Baek teased him about it and kept trying to steal his phone to make suggestive comments in the group chat and/or add himself to it.

Minseok and Jongdae were both at work when he got done on Friday morning, so Chanyeol refamiliarized himself with his own apartment and his guitar, then spent the afternoon getting yelled at by his mom for his face over a table full of food. She was so mad that she called his sister in for reinforcements, which was terrific.

“I’m not going to come yell at him for doing his job,” Chanyeol’s dad said over the phone when also called in to fuss.

“Oh, you’re no help,” Chanyeol’s mom groused as she hung up. “What did your boyfriends have to say about this?”

Yoora gave him the Big Sister Eyebrow. Sadly for her, Chanyeol was used to Minseok now, and her glare had nothing on his.

“Their concern for my welfare involved a lot less lecturing,” he said.

That was enough to guilt his mom out of fussing mode, and she hugged him.

“I just worry about my big, handsome son.”

“I’m fine,” he mumbled.

“Doubtful,” Yoora said. “Good thing you have a couple of theoretically capable adults looking out for you now.”

So all in all, it was exactly what he had expected – a little fussing, a lot of coddling, and two big bags of food to take home with him afterward. It was later than he had expected, and the bags were large enough that he took a cab home, fielding about 30 texts from Jongdae about how awesome he was for bringing home dinner.
“Door’s unlocked just come in,” the last one read.

He walked in the front door to see Minseok on the sofa, head bent, and Jongdae standing arms crossed in front of two bottles of wine, like he was giving them an exam.

“Hey.”

“Don’t bother Min, The Artist Is At Work,” Jongdae said with a grin.

Minseok looked over his shoulder and nodded. Chanyeol tried to tiptoe over to the island and unpack the food as quietly as possible, under the challenge that he had a Jongdae to deal with. Ultimately, his only recourse was to make sure Jongdae’s mouth was too busy for chatting.

The sacrifices he made.

Finally, Min said “okay” and called him over. The table had a set of tiny pliers strewn across it, and a box with a bunch of little dividers holding bits of metal. Minseok handed him a necklace.

“This is – for me?”

“Of course.”

It was three black leather thongs, gathered at the back into one clasp that had a small length of chain hanging from it, a little black stone bead at the end. Off the front hung a piece of metal shaped like a lick of fire, flat but with three different colors of metal, like they’d been smashed together somehow. The center part was kind of a mottled blue, sort of like the blue of a hot flame, the center part shiny silver, and the outer part also silver, but matte.

“Did you make this?”

Minseok nodded, not quite meeting Chanyeol’s eyes. On the inside, Chanyeol was yelling. On the outside, he tried to not be too much of a dork.

He turned the flame over and saw his name stamped in Hanja, and a small mark kind of like a snowflake. Not yelling became significantly more difficult.

“Whoa,” Chanyeol said. “How’d you know the Hanja for ‘chan’ in my name means cold?”

“Oh!” Minseok said. “I. Uh. Didn’t.”

And Chanyeol had to sit down, because cool customer murder beta Kim Minseok was blushing and Chanyeol thought he might perish from the adorableness. He smiled so widely that his face hurt again.

“It’s for you, isn’t it?” Jongdae screeched. “You’re the cold!”

Minseok turned an even deeper red and scowled at the coffee table. He did, however, nod a tiny bit. Chanyeol’s brain filled up with mushy songs. He leaned over and kept pushing until he had smashed Minseok over on his side and could get his face up against Min’s neck.

“It’s beautiful,” he murmured among little kisses. “I love love love it.”

And Minseok smiled, put his arms around Chanyeol’s shoulders and squeezed. He put the necklace around Chanyeol’s neck, where the lick of flame hung precisely in the notch between his collarbones. Chanyeol shivered a little when Minseok’s fingers skated down the chain at the back.
“Fucking god, I have the cutest harem in the damn world,” Jongdae said.

“Quit calling us your harem,” Minseok growled.

Jongdae bowed slightly.

“In the esteemed words of the ancestors,” he said, “make me.”
Minseok made Jongdae shut up the same way Chanyeol had earlier, via putting a tongue in his mouth – fun for everybody. Chanyeol couldn’t stop smiling and touching either his necklace or Minseok.

It was all so nice that Chanyeol kept having to shake his head from disbelief – all the compliments about his mom’s food (again), how Jongdae made sure to ask whether the conversation with Yixing went, and Minseok asking about how the other members of B team were faring. After dinner, Minseok made up an ice pack for his face, and they maneuvered him for maximum cuddling, with his head in Jongdae’s lap and Minseok lying against his front.

Blissful.

So blissful, in fact, that he fell asleep. They lost a few perfection points for not waking him up until they were both also ready to sleep.

More perfection points got lost in the morning, when instead of a morning fuck, Jongdae announced his intention to go run.

“Don’t scowl at me, Channie. It’s in everybody’s best interest for me to work off some energy before we go to breakfast with another alpha.”

Chanyeol extruded his bottom lip to maximum pout.

“I can think of a bunch of different better ways to work off some energy.”

Jongdae laughed and rubbed his head against the non-bruised side of Chanyeol’s face.

“Sorry, Channie, me being all clingy and gooey is not going to help matters.”

“It’d be kind of a shitty thing to do my ex-boyfriends,” Minseok said.

Which, uh, okay, it would’ve been helpful if someone had said to him earlier that it was those particular friends.

In the interest of staving off an anxiety attack, Chanyeol joined them on the run. As before, he pelted around the track and passed them several times, but everybody knew it was coming, so nobody was bothered by it.

He was pretty freaked out again by the time they dressed up and arrived at the significantly fancier brunch place than their usual. Though it had been nice to sit and let Minseok pat concealer lightly over his face, the necessity of doing so and the fact that all that touching wasn’t a prelude to getting
From a distance, Chanyeol couldn’t even tell which one was the alpha: the shorter one had an easy stance and was dressed like he was on his way to a luxury basketball game, but he had a sweet-looking face. The taller one looked slightly feline and dangerous, but he was wearing multiple varieties of animal print. Both of them wore kind of a lot of jewelry, including numerous earrings, with more sparkle by far on the taller one.

The sparkly one approached first.

“My goodness, Minmin ge,” he said in a deep purr, looking Chanyeol up and down, “who’s this tall drink of water?”

He took Chanyeol’s hand and kissed his knuckles. Chanyeol tried not to flinch.

Minmin ge?

“Channie, this is Huang Zitao. Tao, This is Park Chanyeol,” Minseok said. “And he’s no fan of aggressive alphas.”

Zitao blinked rapidly and stood up out of his slouch, letting Chanyeol’s hand go.

“Oh,” he said.

“He’s also older than you,” Minseok said, laughter in his tone.

“Oooooh,” Zitao said, giving a pretty smile and saying in a low voice, “well, hello ge, I am so glad to meet you.”

He ruined the effect by turning to the other guy.

“Gege, look at this big, pretty omega our Minmin got!”

And then,

“Oh, don’t glare at me Daedae ge, you know I’m all howl and no bite, I would never threaten your pack.”

“You’re such a mess,” the other guy laughed, straightening Zitao’s collar. “What do I even see in you?”

“I’m very beautiful naked,” Zitao said.

The guy snorted.

“Unfortunately true.”

He hugged Minseok.

“Hey, Min. Hey, Jongdae.”

He held out his hand to Chanyeol.

“Luhan.”
They sat, and Zitao made a whole speech about the necessity of champagne for a proper brunch, so that’s what everyone ordered.

“I used to think the whole champagne thing was bullshit,” Luhan said, leaning in. “And now it feels weird when I go out to breakfast for work and everyone’s drinking coffee.”

“Oh, what do you do?”

“Elementary school Phys Ed teacher, otherwise known as failed football player,” he said lightly. Then he rolled his eyes toward Minseok.

“Ulsan is killing me, man.”

“Right? Can we switch out some of the players for your kids? They couldn’t be worse.”

“That’s for sure,” Luhan laughed. They both gave the standard response of sounding impressed and then having no idea how to respond when Chanyeol told them about his job. Zitao gestured grandly with both ringed hands.

“I’m the head buyer for a luxury brand importer. Thank god so many people want so much fancy, name-brand junk.”

“Even if they didn’t, you’d keep yourself in business,” Minseok said, making Zitao grin.

“There are reasons why I love my job very much, and they are buyer’s discounts and sample sales.”

Then he scowled.

“I’ve got a new team leader trying to ruin everything for me, though. He thinks he hung the sun in the sky with his own two hands, despite having the most bougie taste imaginable, ugh. Min ge, if I call you up panicking in the middle of the day, you’ll meet me at the butcher shop and help me dispose of the body, right?”

“Of course,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol sneaked glances to either side of him, to see his boyfriends’ reaction to Zitao’s performance. Minseok kept smiling at Luhan, and several times Jongdae very obviously stuffed food in his mouth in lieu of making a smart comment.

“Here, switch places,” Luhan said when there was a lull. “Time for the omegas to conference.”

It was nice - and Luhan definitely noticed - how Minseok held Chanyeol’s chair for him when they moved. It had been a really long time since Chanyeol chatted with an omega other than Taeil at work. He happily moved his chair closer, and Luhan linked their arms together.

“Are you enjoying the show my Taozi’s putting on?” he murmured.

Chanyeol grinned.

“I wondered about that.”

Things did seem calmer at the other end of the table suddenly, Zitao leaning in and nodding at something Jongdae said.
“He just wants you to like him,” Luhan said. “To make Minnie happy.”

The little shadow of sadness on Luhan’s face made it difficult for Chanyeol to know where to look.

“Look, I know I’ve got no right to say it, but I don’t give a shit. You break Min’s heart, I’ll tear you to pieces with my bare hands.”

Chanyeol looked at him, hard eyes in that delicate face. He remembered Min saying “odd beta out,” and annoyance flashed through him. But it wasn’t like he didn’t get it.

“If I break Min’s heart, I’ll deserve it,” he said.

Luhan flinched. But then he squeezed Chanyeol’s arm.

“Okay, man,” he said, looking sad again.

Chanyeol rubbed Luhan’s forearm.

“He hasn’t told me a lot about you. But he was really clear about how much he cares for you.”

Luhan gazed at him with a closed-off expression.

“That was nice of you,” he said finally.

Chanyeol figured he would stick with nice and not point out that it was easy to be magnanimous when he was the one currently inhabiting Minseok’s bed, instead of the one who gave it up.

Luhan shook himself, then reached over to down the rest of his glass of champagne. Zitao refilled it immediately, barely looking, but it made Luhan blink at him and smile.

“Sorry,” Luhan said. “I don’t mean to be a jerk. I’m just a little jealous, I know it’s stupid.”

“I get it.”

Minseok looked over, glanced at their linked arms, and smiled in a way that made Chanyeol feel light-headed.

“How are you even dealing with that white hair?” Luhan asked.

“It has given him the power to evaporate my clothes right off.”

Luhan laughed aloud, which made Zitao turn and grin at them.

“How’d you guys even meet this cute ge?”

Oh boy.

“Well,” Min drawled. “One omega left his window open during his heat, one alpha let his dick take over running things, and I had to go supervise.”

There was a long period of silence before the two of them howled with laughter, Luhan hanging onto Chanyeol’s arm like it was saving his life.

“Oh god, what a recipe for disaster!”

“And yet not,” Jongdae said. “Now I have a harem and the two best meet-cute stories ever. I totally win at life.”
“You must’ve saved the country in your past life for this to have worked out.”

“I’m saying.”

“Hold on,” Luhan said. “Chanyeol is the tall hot neighbor?”

“Yup,” Minseok said, while Chanyeol felt his ears heat up to a thousand degrees.

“Nice,” Luhan said, and squeezed Chanyeol’s arm again.

Except that Chanyeol was close enough to hear the little sigh that followed it, and to see the muscle twitch in Luhan’s cheek.

“You’re not – unhappy, are you?” Chanyeol asked quietly, lacing their fingers together.

Luhan looked surprised.

“Un-? Oh no. I’m sorry, I’m just being moody. My heat’s not far off, and Taotao’s been working a lot lately, I’m just pissy. He’s really good to me, actually. Spoils me rotten. Plus, he’s super high maintenance, so that keeps me busy,” Luhan said, grinning.

Then his smile went soft and fond.

“And you know how it is. He just – smells like home.”

Did Chanyeol know that? If he knew that, did he want to know it? This was all so new. And this was the modern age, not like back in the day when people decided their mates in one sniff.

“Chan?” Luhan murmured.

“What are you two whispering about over there?” Zitao called out, glaring at their clasped hands.

Luhan squeezed Chanyeol’s fingers.

“The way you’re so mean and won’t take me to Hawaii.”

Zitao went all wide-eyed and dramatic, waving his hands around so his rings flashed. Chanyeol noticed the one plain band on his left hand, out of place among all the bling. But Luhan wore its match.

“Gege, why would you say that? Of course I’ll take you, just as soon as things slow down a little at work!”

Luhan and Minseok both laughed, which made Zitao slouch in his chair and glower.

“In other words, never,” Luhan said.

But he let go of Chanyeol and slid over to sit next to his alpha, petting Zitao’s hair and smiling at his pout.

“I can’t go now, that asshole would have me importing mom jeans and jelly bracelets if I let him have the run of the place.”

“Just tell Minnie to fire up the meat grinder and take care of him,” Luhan said. “Baby needs a tan.”

The way that Luhan made himself smaller and angled his chin into Zitao’s sudden grip, and the
intensity of their stares at one another, made Chanyeol regret that he was sitting alone at the end of the table. Lucky for him, Minseok and Jongdae shifted around to make space for him in the middle, Jongdae holding his hand and Minseok curling one hand over his thigh under the table.

The moment broke, and it was a nice, easy breakfast after that, everyone trying to out-joke the others. While they were leaving, Luhan pulled Chanyeol down and murmured into his ear.

“I know we made a mess of it, but if you ever need to talk about this three-people stuff, just ask Min for my number, okay? I’m happy to listen.”

It was all so nice, but a lot to think about. Chanyeol required an extended hugging session when they got home.

“I’m glad you liked them, Channie,” Minseok said, his voice muffled, given that he was smashed under Chanyeol on the sofa at the time.

“What I like best is how they’re not currently dating you, so Jongdae and I are.”

Minseok pinched him.

“Hey that’s my favorite part too.” Jongdae shouted from across the room.

Despite lying still, trying to squash Minseok like a panini, the inside of Chanyeol’s head spiraled with too much to think about: that conversation with Baek; how unhesitatingly great both of them had been when he needed them, especially Jongdae; that old omega lady with nobody caring for her; the violence of the alpha’s grief in the car; that Luhan was willing to let Chanyeol see his regret and affection for Minseok.

And then the way they had stared at each other, the indentations Zitao’s fingers made in Luhan’s skin, grasping his chin, and the way Luhan had smiled a little.

The phrase ”he smells like home.”

They watched another episode of Complete Love – the omega lady emerged from her heat as cool as water kimchi, ignoring the alpha guy’s attempt to hand her a courting gift so pointedly that Jongdae fell on the floor from laughing. In the next scene, she hid in a bathroom stall, rubbing her bare wrist. Chanyeol’s hand went immediately to his own bracelets.

The more he toyed with the bracelets, the more the metal and leather dragged across the inside of his wrist. The cuff on his other wrist was a noticeable weight, the silver beads warming under the stroke of his thumb. And any time he moved his head, he could feel Minseok’s necklace resting at the base of his throat. If his turned his head just the right way, the pendant would shift, a metal edge sliding across the thin, tender skin there, that sensitive hollow that was perfectly sized for a mouth.

Chanyeol looked over, and Jongdae was leaning against Minseok’s legs, one hand wrapped around Min’s calf. Minseok’s fingers were in his hair.

A memory from his heat, abrupt: Jongdae’s fingers moving across his jaw, “I’m going to take care of you, and Min’ll take care of us both.”

Had Jongdae’s fingers dug into his chin like Zitao’s had, holding his face still? Chanyeol couldn’t remember.
Didn’t care.

He wandered back as if he were going to the bathroom. Movement quieted his mind: instead, he could feel every millimeter of skin. Just the action of pulling the blankets down on their bed (neatly, the way Min liked) and setting the pillows to one side was enough to make him partially hard. He lined condoms and lube neatly in a row at the head of the bed. He undressed slowly, folding his clothes into a tidy pile that he set on the dresser.

He left the bracelets on each wrist, the necklace around his neck. He lay on the bed and let his hands wander over himself.

This was as good a game as that day waiting for Jongdae on the sofa. How long would it take for them to miss him? How worked up would he be by then?

It wasn’t long - no surprise - but because he spent that time replaying highlights from all the times they’d slept together but not touching his dick, he felt ready to catch fire. The memory of fucking deep into Jongdae with his hand wrapped around the back of Dae’s head. His fingers in Min’s mouth and Minseok’s cock heavy in his mouth.

“Where’d Channie get to?” Chanyeol heard from the living room, Jongdae’s resonant question and Minseok’s quiet response.

He shifted on the bed, alight with wanting. The two of them.

The two of them.

Jongdae was the one who came looking. Of course: the impatient alpha, his head appearing around the door sill, eyebrows shooting upward.

“Shit,” he said, his voice gravelly, and his hand grasped the door frame tightly. “Babe! You need to come here.”

Chanyeol spread his hand across his own chest. Minseok didn’t make him wait long, sidling up behind Jongdae, a slow grin breaking across his face. Minseok, the steady beta who kept them grounded.

And himself: who could hold them both together, take them both together. He was big enough for that. Strong enough for that.

But still omega.

Chanyeol touched his necklace, then raised his arms slowly behind him to grasp the headboard, hands apart so all of his bracelets would show. If Minseok and Jongdae stared at him any harder, he thought he might evaporate under the heat of their gazes. He stretched himself diagonally across their bed and licked his lips, widened his eyes and arched his back just a little.

“Please take care of me,” he said, deep but softly.

Jongdae went from zero to naked in an eyeblink, with a growl behind that curled, sharp-edged smile. Before he made it to the bed, Minseok stopped him, pulled him around into a hungry kiss. Chanyeol heard himself whine, watching the way they leaned together, Minseok’s hand gripping the back of Jongdae’s neck, Jongdae’s arm around Min’s waist.

“Slow down,” Minseok said when he let go of Jongdae’s mouth. “Channie wants us to take care of him. We should take good care.”
And oh, the smiles they both wore, so fierce and beautiful. Chanyeol felt molten. He chewed his bottom lip when Minseok whispered in Jongdae’s ear, the way Jongdae’s grin sharpened at it, the way he tipped his head back and gave a small laugh when Min sucked at his neck.

“Chan,” Minseok said, his voice low and hoarse, while he climbed onto the bed.

Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s hand wrap around his ankle, followed by the heat of Jongdae’s mouth on his lower leg.

“Sweetness.”

One mouth on his leg, moving upward; one mouth on his neck, moving down.

He tried to move one arm down to touch Min, but Minseok pressed it back.

“Patience,” Minseok murmured to the underside of his jaw. “In a little while, I’m going to hold you while Jongdae fucks you. Is that something you want?”

One eyebrow went up in response to his nod.

“Yes.”

Minseok’s hand was so cool against the sore side of his face. Jongdae’s mouth was so hot at his knee.

“You know what I’d like to see, Chan?” Minseok asked, dipping his head down to nip at Chanyeol’s chest.

Chanyeol could feel his heart pounding, and he grasped the headboard harder, his breath high in his chest.

“I’d like to see you come untouched.”

Jongdae laughed, low and dirty, and bit down on the inside of Chanyeol’s thigh. He gave a choked-off shout.

“I’d like that,” Jongdae said. “See him come all over you, babe.”

Chanyeol watched them grin at each other, Minseok still fully clothed, his hand spread on Chanyeol’s chest, and Jongdae naked between his legs, mouth shiny and hair mussed.

“You know I hate to be a mess,” Minseok said coolly, as if he wasn’t currently grinding his erection against Chanyeol’s hip. “Who’s going to clean that up?”

Jongdae licked the head of Chanyeol’s cock, mouth wide open.

“I will,” he said.

“Fuck,” Chanyeol said.

“Mmm, yes,” Minseok said, then pinched Chanyeol’s nipple hard, which just compounded the fact that Jongdae was now sucking hard on his inner thigh.

Chanyeol had a minute where thinking was just not possible. It was difficult enough not to launch himself up off the bed.
“I think I’ll fuck you after that,” Minseok continued. “Maybe the way we did it the first time you had me after your heat, Channie, do you remember? I’ll fuck you while Dae sucks you off.”

Chanyeol whimpered. He could see it in his mind. Except that he’d only come untouched outside his heat like twice, ever.

“What if I don’t?” he gasped out.

Although, for shit’s sake, he felt like he was 90% there already, and nobody had even kissed him yet.

“Oh ye of little faith,” Jongdae said, sounding alpha enough to make Chanyeol’s belly clench.

Or maybe that was because of the thing Jongdae was doing to Chanyeol’s balls with his hand. Either way, maybe 92% there.

The sheer amount of teasing drove Chanyeol out of his damn mind. Every time he said “can you just,” or “please, somebody,” one of them would bite down or suck somewhere – emphatically neither his mouth nor his dick – and he’d be left gasping and groaning. The headboard developed a pronounced creak from the way he kept pulling at it.

Jongdae got one finger up in him, and the only thing that had changed was that Minseok finally had his shirt off. He squirmed at the relief of it, which wasn’t anywhere near enough, especially given the way that Min was leaving yet another hickey on his abdomen.

He felt Minseok’s hand slide down, a brief shock of cold, and then Minseok slipped a finger in.

Chanyeol opened his eyes and looked down at them, kissing each other hard and messy. Their hands moved in unison. Chanyeol pulled out every swear he’d ever learned, and possibly made a few new ones up. They both smiled, and Jongdae moved his mouth down Minseok’s neck until Min moaned.

They opened him up together, which felt so weird, like there was too much going on in his ass, but it was also super freaking good, and just the thought of how hot it must look made Chanyeol’s toes curl: both of them with their fingers in him, the way he could feel them hold hands and twist at the same time.

“I think we’re good here,” Minseok said (finally), leaving him empty and past aching, into some quivering state of desperation where all Chanyeol could do was lie there panting, twitching, and waiting.

He watched Minseok stand and step out of his jeans. He watched Jongdae bite his lip, arched up into Jongdae’s hands sliding up his torso until their faces were close. Chanyeol tried to lean up for a kiss, but Jongdae leaned back. Chanyeol watched Min roll a condom onto him, watched Jongdae’s cock twitch and his face go briefly slack.

When that was done, Jongdae placed his hand on Chanyeol’s neck, fingers curled in to press but not dug in.

God, when he spoke, he was so close that Chanyeol could feel Jongdae’s lips move against his own, and still nobody was kissing him.

“Are you ready for me?” Jongdae rumbled, low and alpha.

“Yes,” Chanyeol whispered.

“My omega,” Jongdae growled, then bit Chanyeol’s bottom lip. “Turn over.”
Chanyeol turned over into Minseok’s arms. He let Jongdae pull him up onto his knees and sobbed aloud when Jongdae entered him, with Min’s hands holding his face.

“I’m gonna move, Chan.”

“Please. Please, Dae, please.”

At the first slap of flesh on flesh, Minseok kissed him around his groan. Min’s tongue took over his mouth, Min’s teeth pulled at his lips. Min’s arms kept him braced, so that Jongdae slammed into him without any give, over and over.

“Put your arms down if you want, sweetness,” Minseok whispered after 30 seconds, or an hour, or a month – Chanyeol could hardly tell.

He bent his arms and wound his fingers in Minseok’s hair, kissed him some more, moaned into Min’s mouth. Jongdae dragged his blunt nails down Chanyeol’s back, and he squirmed at the overload of sensation.

“Fuck,” Jongdae whispered.

“Channie,” Minseok said, sucking on his bottom lip, licking into his mouth, fingers pressed into the hollow under his ear. “Sweetness. Be good and come for Jongdae, hm?”

He wanted to. He had to, the only way anybody was ever going to touch him was to come, he ached for it.

“Alpha,” he gasped.

“Yeah,” Jongdae said, picking up the pace, alpha in his voice. “Come for your alpha, Chan.”

Chanyeol tilted his hips up and back slightly, and on the next thrust, he sobbed aloud when Jongdae hit him in just the right spot.

“There you go,” Jongdae growled.

Minseok laughed and swallowed Chanyeol’s groan.

Jongdae’s hands held him still, so he couldn’t squirm away from that relentless drag over his prostate, over and over. And the sound of their skin smacking together, Jongdae’s curses and breathy little laugh. His fingers dug into Chanyeol’s hips, and Minseok’s fingers dug into his shoulders. Minseok’s goddamn mouth.

He came. He couldn’t get any leverage to move, so all he could do was beat his fist into the mattress and bury his face in the crook of Minseok’s neck while he shuddered and shouted, squeezing hard around Jongdae, who pounded into him, then said,

“Oh. Yeah, okay,”

and leaned over his back to growl through his own orgasm.

For fuck’s sake, there was untouched and then there was untouched. It was like they had super powers. Of fucking.

“You did so well,” Minseok murmured while Chanyeol tried to find his way back to reality.

Jongdae pulled away, tipped Chanyeol over, and finally kissed him too – slow and dirty, hands
roving over him. Most of him. Still not his dick.

But, god. Just watching Minseok dip his fingers into the come on his chest and lick them clean was enough to make desire lash through Chanyeol all over again, even though he’d hardly caught his breath. And then he got to watch Jongdae crawl all over Min, slowly licking him clean. There were little bites in there, too, and moments when Jongdae leaned over to clutch his fist in Chanyeol’s hair, and Chanyeol could taste himself in Dae’s mouth. There were Jongdae’s hands, as busy as his mouth, and Minseok arching up, hissing through his teeth and cursing. Sometimes turning his head to stare at Chanyeol with eyes that burned so hot that Chanyeol had to roll over to kiss him or risk burning up.

He pressed up close against them, he couldn’t bear being even a millimeter away, his fingers on Minseok’s face, until they both turned their heads and his finger was between their mouths and he could feel them kissing each other, a spark that ran through him like electricity.

“Are you ready for me, sweetness?” Minseok asked in a rough voice when they broke apart.

“Yes.”

Chanyeol held onto the headboard again, this time in front of his face. He watched Jongdae’s grin, sliding down the bed under him, gropping the whole way, and shivered at Minseok’s gentle testing of his readiness, then the steady pump of several fingers in him.

Anybody else might’ve laughed at the high-pitched, strangled sound that Chanyeol made when Min’s dick stretched him back open, and then Jongdae’s lips closed around him. But Jongdae hummed approval – that felt even better, fuck – and Minseok laughed a little and drew his fingers down Chanyeol’s back. He wasn’t quite hard again yet, though Jongdae solved that issue quickly with his excellent mouth.

Already stretched and sensitive, he was strung out on pleasure: Minseok drove it into him, and Jongdae drew it out. Chanyeol had to cross his arms on the headboard and lean down on them, unable to hold himself up anymore, unable to do anything but feel that slide and suck, then cry out, his voice going hoarse.

“Doing so well, Channie,” Minseok said.

Jongdae hummed.

Chanyeol groaned. His thighs were shaking, less with effort than with the growing edge of sensation that was almost painful.

Jongdae drew his mouth off with a filthy, wet sound, though his hand continued to move.

“We’ve just about got him there, babe.”

And damn if they didn’t work him that much faster, that much deeper, Minseok holding hard onto his waist and Jongdae trying to suck out his fucking soul, until Chanyeol was sobbing up against his forearms with each pull, each thrust. His orgasm caught him by surprise, even after all of that, whipping through him hard. He dug his toes into the mattress, and somehow they hung onto him even though he tried to raise his hips up while he shuddered and gritted his teeth, that same strangled sound tearing up his throat.

“Ah, yes, Chan, so good,” Min groaned, his hips stuttering.

Jongdae’s mouth went soft around him, and he made a low sound, his tongue still working Chanyeol
slowly; then Jongdae bucked upward, his breath hot on Chanyeol’s oversensitive cock. He laughed, then wormed his way up until he was level with Chanyeol’s face. He reached up and held onto Chanyeol’s face.

“Chan,” Minseok said. “Yeah, my Channie.”

“Min looks so gorgeous when he comes,” Jongdae murmured.

“Yes.”
Chapter 22

Afterward was just as terrific: Jongdae disappeared briefly, only to return with warm towels for a wipe down accompanied by kisses and praise. Minseok kept cupping Chanyeol’s cheek with one hand, his thumb sliding cool across Chanyeol’s face. And they cuddled up together under the blankets, Chanyeol in the center.

He lay with his arms around Min, feeling happily tired and slightly achy in all the right places. He had one leg slung across Minseok’s body, and Jongdae kept nuzzling into the back of his neck and idly teasing little patterns on his chest.

“So good to me,” Chanyeol mumbled into Min’s hair.

Jongdae gave a dirty little chuckle, and Minseok tipped his mouth up to kiss under Chanyeol’s ear.

“You make that easy.”

Jongdae hummed agreement.

Chanyeol thought he would probably glad to stay there forever. Unfortunately, it was not to be.

“I’m starving,” Jongdae whined to the back of his neck way too few minutes later.

Minseok’s wry little expression was so adorable, Chanyeol was required to lean down and kiss him. That gave him the fortitude to roll over and squish his pesky alpha.

“Get off!”

Minseok climbed up to lie on Chanyeol’s back. From Chanyeol’s perspective: great.

"I knew you two would eventually either abandon me or take me out,” Jongdae wheezed. “I just didn’t think it would be so soon.”

Chanyeol wriggled, to intensify the punishment. Jongdae tried to yell, but it came out more like a muffled grunt.

“Well,” Minseok mused, his chin on Chanyeol’s shoulder. “I guess it’s true we haven’t tried every single configuration of three-way sex yet.”

“See? You need me.” Jongdae rasped from the bottom of the pile.

"I guess,” Chanyeol mumbled into his hair, and slid off.

The wiggling hadn’t been squeezed out of him, sadly: Jongdae rolled around and batted his dumb eyelashes until he was able to herd them out of bed and into the shower, carrying on a one-person negotiation with himself about what to eat for dinner.

“Babe,” Minseok said at one point, trying to stem the word-tsunami, “why not pizza and PJs?”

Jongdae grabbed him around the waist – which was nice, because it gave Chanyeol room to finally get enough of himself under the shower head to actually rinse off.

“I wanna go out,” Jongdae said. “I want to sit somewhere, and eat something delicious, and drink wine, and let people stare and be jealous of my hot harem.”
Alphas. Such weirdos.

He had to go to his own apartment for warmer clothes – autumn was setting in for sure. Chanyeol would rather have climbed back in bed to pull the blankets up to his face and watch Minseok and Jongdae get dressed, with the way they teased each other, their little touches, how Min would fuss with Jongdae’s hair.

But no. He went to his own apartment. He’d forgotten to turn the heat on, having only been there for a few hours on a sunny morning recently, and the place was freezing. Chanyeol realized how little lived-in it looked, with his ugly furniture and no artwork hanging on the walls. The only sign of life was the pile of mail balanced precariously on the table by the door. Really, the only things he cared about there were his clothes, his gaming system, and his guitar. It was a place to live, not a home. He’d thought of the station as his home.

Before.

Chanyeol shook himself and went looking for a sweater. He heard the door open, but Jongdae still scared the crap out of him, popping up behind him and saying,

“This place doesn’t even smell like you anymore.”

Chanyeol waited for his breathing to return to normal before he turned around.

“My house smells like you.”

Jongdae said this with his arms crossed and the kind of smug satisfaction on his face that only an alpha could pull off – and even then, it was still really annoying.

He was wearing dark, admirably tight jeans with a deep red turtleneck sweater, and he looked literally good enough to literally eat.

That smug expression wouldn’t do.

Chanyeol lunged for him, grabbed him around the waist, and slung him onto the bed, climbing on top of him. Who could ever tire of kissing this alpha? He was all eagerness, his tongue hot and busy in Chanyeol’s mouth, his body arching up until they were pressed together.

And then, when Chanyeol drew his head back, Jongdae’s smile was so bright, his fingers still warm against the back of Chanyeol’s neck.

“Now my bed smells like you, at least,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae laughed.

He rummaged through Chanyeol’s sweaters, choosing a pale grey one with red and blue bands on one sleeve – a knockoff of some fancy American brand that Yoora had bought him that he’d never worn because it was so nice.

“And you guys make fun of me for wanting to show you off,” Jongdae said, putting his hands up underneath the sweater. “Want to go see what outfit Min picked out to make us thirsty?”

“Hell yes.”

It was slim black pants and a fawn-colored v-neck that showed the inner edges of his collarbones, with the necklaces he had loaned to Chanyeol on their last date. Chanyeol took a moment to wonder
for the five thousandth time what in the world two dudes this hot wanted with him. Then he shifted his weight and felt how his ass was still tender. He moved his hand to his own chest to press his fingers against a spot where he knew Minseok had left a bite mark. He pressed down, and felt the sting of it.

“Dinner,” Jongdae said. “I’m gonna fucking starve to death on my feet.”

It was amazing how much sushi Jongdae could put away. And the way that he would occasionally sing to a piece of raw fish about how delicious it was before he ate it made Chanyeol want to turn inside out, it was so cute. The fondness of Minseok’s smile made it easy to indulge Jongdae’s weirdo alpha behaviors – feeding both of them, rolling up Chanyeol’s sweater sleeves so his bracelets would show. Chanyeol got a long, earnest speech about white wine versus red, and something about “minerality,” as if wine was supposed to taste like rocks.

That said, it did taste really good with all the different kinds of seafood.

“Are you even listening?” Jongdae asked, laughing.

Chanyeol shrugged and opened his mouth in the hope that Jongdae would be distracted and put a piece of sushi in it. In that, he was successful.

It was comfortable. It was fun – Jongdae spoiling them so obviously that even the waitstaff noticed, smiling at them all indulgently, bringing oranges with sweet soy sauce to the table at the end of dinner as an unexpected treat. Chanyeol peeled sections out and fed them to Min and Dae – both of them flushed pink and smiled at him, licked the sauce off his thumb.

He was a little tipsy by the time they left, after sharing two bottles of wine, with Jongdae’s arm around his waist. He still felt full and sleepy when they got home, sitting on the sofa with Jongdae in the middle, radiating head-of-the-pack satisfaction, one arm around Min and his fingers tracing the edges of Chanyeol’s cuff.

“Did we take good enough care of you, Channie?” he murmured.

Chanyeol twined their fingers together. He was still loose and happy from all the sex, plus a little drunk, which left no space in his head to fret that he was being too soft or weird.

“Yeah,” he said, burrowing his head up against Jongdae’s.

It was cold overnight, and the two of them acted like Chanyeol was the only warmth for a kilometer around in their sleep, such that he woke up grinning, with Jongdae’s hair in his mouth and somebody’s hand cupping his junk – he didn’t even know whose. He couldn’t stop hugging them all morning, to the point that Minseok banished him from the kitchen while he was cooking eggs.

He had let himself ask and take. And they had given, and given some more, and not once tried to make him feel small. They had let him feel omega without requiring him to also feel less.

“You look happy this morning, Channie,” Jongdae said, one hand in his hair

His mouth tasted of coffee.

Minseok caught him toying with his necklace and smiled at him, leaned in to kiss Chanyeol’s neck softly, just above the pendant.

It was rainy in the morning, so they let themselves laze around in their PJs, under a blanket, drinking enough coffee for an army. But the weather cleared enough in the afternoon that Min was the restless
one for a change, frowning over his phone, typing furiously.

“Everything okay?” Jongdae asked.

“Family dinner at seven-thirty on Sunday,” he said, then looked up to gaze at Chanyeol with his eyebrows drawn together. “Are you sure you don’t mind going with me, Chan?”

“Of course not.”

Minseok watched him for a moment, then nodded and typed some more. Chanyeol pulled out his phone and texted with his mom and sister for a bit, setting things up for Saturday.

“Of course we said we’d be flexible, but a little more warning would’ve been nice,” his mom wrote.

Chanyeol made a note to buy her some of that really fancy face cream she liked. He typed out many lines of apology. But he knew it would take about 30 seconds before she was ready to adopt Minseok forever, so it’d be fine.

“Five on Saturday?”

“Of course,” Minseok said. “What does your dad like? Something he likes to drink, maybe?”

Chanyeol grinned.

“Bring him a bottle of Irish whisky and you’ll be his new best friend.”

“Done,” Min said, answering his smile.

Jongdae had cleaned up the coffee things during this exchange, so it wasn’t until he threw himself onto the end of the couch that Chanyeol noticed his frown, accompanied by a waft of upset alpha.

“Do you need to go shopping for anything, babe?” Min asked him.

“No,” Jongdae said with a croak.

Chanyeol hadn’t realized that all the comments about Dae hating Chuseok were quite so serious. Like, annoying, a little, but not actually something that would make Jongdae close himself off so tightly that it was as if he was surrounded by a thunderstorm.

“At least you’ll have one point of amusement,” Minseok said. “What kind of ridiculous courting gift do you think your father bought for Channie’s family?”

There was a thing that had never happened to him ever. People still gave family courting gifts? What did they think was going on here?

And why did Jongdae glare at Min like that, then cut his eyes away to stare at the floor.

Why would he look that horrified, unless.

Oh.

Chanyeol found it necessary to lean away. He thought seriously about leaving.

“You haven’t told them. About me,” he said.

And his stupid voice sounded like he was going to cry.
Not that he was going to cry. He was as cold and hollow on the inside as a bronze statue.

“I – “ Jongdae said.

But that was all he said.

“Kim Jongdae,” Minseok growled.

He put his arm around Chanyeol’s waist and pulled, tucking Chanyeol’s head up against his neck.

God, then Chanyeol did think he might be able to work up some tears. Instead, he leaned closer into Minseok’s arms and made himself breathe. He knew Min’s scent would calm him down. Eventually.

“What the fuck, Jongdae, explain yourself.”

Jongdae’s groan was muffled, like maybe he had his hands over his face.

“It’s not. Fuck, I’m not trying to be an asshole here.”

“Then what. The hell,” Minseok gritted.

Chanyeol kept breathing, wound one fist into the neck of Min’s sweatshirt. The smell of mint was his lifeline, and he clung to it as a reminder that it was okay to stay where he was, he didn’t need to run away.

“Channie,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol tried not to flinch away from the hand on his back, with imperfect success, and Jongdae whined. It was the kind of sound that made the omega in him want to fling himself over, bury his head up against Jongdae, and apologize a hundred times.

Because the omega in him was sometimes a self-sacrificing idiot.

“Channie, I’m sorry. I don’t mean it like – “

This was followed by a pause, and Chanyeol could imagine what was coming next, because he had heard it so many times, god dammit. All the reasons why he was an embarrassment. And Jongdae knew it.

“Don’t mean it like what?” he asked, sitting up and turning around so swiftly that Jongdae flinched back. “You tell me what it doesn’t mean, that you’ve been calling me your omega this whole time, but you never mentioned me to your family?”

Minseok laid one hand, firm and solid and grounding, in the center of his back. It was probably the only thing keeping him upright.

It would definitely be the only thing keeping him upright in the face of the alpha tantrum to come. Except that Jongdae just looked – really sad.

He reached for Chanyeol’s hands. Chanyeol pulled his away. Jongdae lowered his eyes, nodded.

“I was trying to do you a favor,” he said. “Obviously, I fucked up.”

“What the hell kind of favor?”
Jongdae flapped his arms in clear frustration. The hand on Chanyeol’s back twitched.

“If they knew about you, they’d expect you to be there. Every minute. Mostly in the kitchen with my mom and sister-in-law. I wanted you to be able to spend time with your family, Channie. This is – this is such a good thing we have going here, right? But it’s still new, Chan. You haven’t signed up for my father’s lectures on an omega’s place. You shouldn’t have to put up with that shit. I’m not trying to hide you. I’m not – I swear I’m not like your exes. You know I’m not. It’s not you that there’s anything wrong with.”

Minseok, Actual Angel, moved to sit on the coffee table between the two of them, holding one of each of their hands.

“How the hell could your dad make me spend the entire holiday at his house? I’m a grown adult.”

Minseok squeezed his hand, and Jongdae gave him a weary glare.

“He couldn’t. But he could sure at hell make my every waking minute miserable all weekend long with a bunch of crap about how I need to assert my place.”

That sounded – terrible.

“Including your birthday,” Min said.

Jongdae tipped his head back and groaned.

“Aw fuck, that’s right.”

“So when will you tell them?” Minseok asked.

His glance at Chanyeol had something in it that said “pay attention.”

“I thought? At the end of the holiday? If I tell them right away, he’ll expect Channie to drop everything and come rushing over. Chan, I know it sounds so shitty. It’s just all these expectations. And if he gets it up his nose that you’re a troublemaker, you’ll never be able to convince him otherwise. I just. I wanted to make things easier for you. That’s all. I swear, Chanyeol.”

Chanyeol ran all this through his mind, watching Minseok’s thumb stroke his hand so he wouldn’t have to stare at Jongdae’s stricken expression. Dae certainly made his family sound awful. Drop everything and come running? Give up the entire holiday with his family just because he was omega? They needed to come forward in time about 200 years.

Truth be told, he was so relieved that it wasn’t the same old thing he had heard from other boyfriends that he could almost laugh. If he pushed himself a little, he could probably go straight to okay. He didn’t really want to push himself, though.

“For a smart guy, you’re a stupid asshole,” he said.

Minseok snorted. Jongdae nodded.

“I definitely am. I’m really sorry, Chanyeol. I should’ve, uh.”

“Said something? Asked Channie what he’d actually like you to do? Trusted either one, preferably both, of your lovers enough to treat us like adults with sensible opinions?” Minseok offered up.

Chanyeol squeezed his hand in gratitude.
“God,” Jongdae said, head hanging again. “I’m the stupidest of stupid assholes.”

“Pretty much,” Chanyeol said.

“Will you forgive me?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“Yeah.”

But he leaned away from Jongdae’s outstretched hand.

“I don’t want you touching me right now, though.”

No matter how true this was, he felt kind of bad about what saying that did to Jongdae’s face.

“I’m going next door to shoot things on screens,” he said.

Jongdae nodded sadly at the floor.

“You can come too, if you want.”

Minseok squeezed his hand hard for that one.

Jongdae behaved, not even trying to brush up against him while they moved apartments. Chanyeol kept a tight hold on Minseok’s hand for ballast. He figured that if he were being too much of a petty jerk, Min would tell him.

He only had two controllers, but Min settled onto Chanyeol’s sofa with his phone already out, presumably to obliterate the unwary with his ridiculous vocabulary. He signed into Destiny and found Baekhyun online (of course).

“Excuse me, do I know you?”

“Carnally,” Chanyeol said.

Okay, maybe that was a little too petty, if Min’s eyebrow was to be believed. Baekhyun cackled.

“Damn, are we bringing up the bad old days of desperation?”

“Please no,” Jongdae said into the headset, setting Baek off into more laughter.

“Jongdae! What did you do to bring out Yeollie’s snotball tendencies?”

“I was a jackass.”

Chanyeol approved of the way he so readily admitted it.

“Oh, well, you are an alpha after all, you can’t really help that,” Baek said.

“Thanks,” Jongdae grumbled.

“Shut up and shoot something,” Chanyeol said.

Half an hour of shooting things was enough to make Chanyeol start to thaw a little on the forgiveness front. Running a successful mission helped too. Jongdae was no gamer, but he had quick hands and was careful to follow directions. The three of them talked a bunch of shit at each other.
Chanyeol caught himself laughing at how Baekhyun and Jongdae played off one another on a spiral of crude jokes like a couple of middle school kids.

He scooted over closer to Jongdae, until their knees were lightly touching. Jongdae took a shaky breath, missed a critical shot, and got killed.

Baekhyun yelled the whole way back to the respawn point.

After another half-hour, Chanyeol’s butt was starting to fall asleep, and he figured he was pretty well over his snit. He and Jongdae kept bumping shoulders as they wiggled around. The back of Chanyeol’s throat ached for Jongdae’s scent. The whole right side of his body felt tingly, his alpha beside him and calm, even though they hadn’t officially made up yet.

“The fuck, Yeol, pay attention,” Baekhyun barked.

Jongdae veered left, following his character on the screen, so that his elbow dragged across Chanyeol’s thigh.

Chanyeol threw down his controller and turned, bearing Jongdae down to the floor.

“What? What the hell happened, did you glitch?” Baekhyun said into his ear.

Chanyeol put his nose under Jongdae’s ear and inhaled hard. That good, clean petrichor scent swept through him. The muscles in the back of his neck relaxed. Jongdae wrapped one hand around the back of Chanyeol’s head and dipped his own nose down. The sound he made was either a sad laugh or a slightly dirty sob.

“What the hell,” Baekhyun grumbled in the headset. “If you guys fuck while on chat, I will literally never forgive you.”

Chanyeol lifted his head to roll his eyes at Jongdae. He wasn’t ready for kissing yet, but he touched their noses together, and Jongdae smoothed the back of his head.

“You should be so lucky, asshole,” Jongdae said, and Baekhyun flooded the chat with rude sounds.
In the interest of Baekhyun’s character stats (and preventing any excuse for Baek to dig his knuckles into the tender spot on top of Chanyeol’s head later), they finished out the mission, sitting close enough together that they kept tangling elbows.

“That’s better,” Minseok said when Chanyeol had signed off.

“I am really sorry, though,” Jongdae said.

He wrinkled his nose at Chanyeol’s “good.”

Chanyeol made Jongdae suffer some more back over at their place, grabbing Minseok to make out a little bit, until Min pushed him away with a shake of his head.

“Behave, Channie,” he murmured.

Chanyeol didn’t take it too seriously – Min's hand was still down the back of his waistband at the time. But he let Minseok go at the promise of sujebi for the chilly night. He sat at the kitchen island and watched Jongdae open wine, the way his eyes were lowered but his eyebrows were doing that thing where they lifted in the center. The way his hand lingered on Minseok’s back when he placed a full glass next to the stove.

He wasn’t surprised when Jongdae stepped in closer than was necessary to set a glass next to him. Jongdae leaned in, and Chanyeol turned his head aside.

“Come on, Channie,” Jongdae murmured against his cheek. “Let me kiss you, Chan, please.”

Minseok looked back over his shoulder and met Chanyeol’s eye with a wry glance.

So okay, maybe it was time to relent. It was definitely easy to turn his head and catch Jongdae’s lips with his own, let Jongdae kiss him with a rare sweetness, hands cupping his face. It was even easier to tilt his face, pull Jongdae closer, and turn that sweetness into something harder, more insistent.

“Min,” Jongdae gasped a few minutes later, when Chanyeol let him have a second to breathe.

“Go ahead,” Minseok said. “But where I can see.”

Easy enough to walk Dae backward toward the sofa and strip his shirt off, run both hands over his freckled skin. Easier still to shove his sweats down. To undress, staring at how Jongdae lay on the sofa, already hard, restless and chewing his bottom lip. The easiest thing in the world to crouch over him and dive back into that eager mouth.

“What do you want?” Chanyeol rumbled while he licked at the soft spot under Jongdae’s ear.

The scent in his head was working its magic as usual, lighting him up with desire and satisfaction. Jongdae hummed and ran his hands down Chanyeol’s back, cupped his ass.

“You’d better fuck the nonsense out of me,” he said.

Chanyeol felt everything become okay all at once, like placing the last piece in a puzzle. He raised
his head and met Jongdae’s grin with one of his own.

“Not sure that’s possible.”

Jongdae laughed and smacked his ass.

“Is that gonna stop you from trying?”

“It is not.”

Minseok was smiling at them when Chanyeol reached for the stuff in the side table. It was slightly hilarious to be on the sofa, gradually putting a greater proportion of his hand into Jongdae’s ass while Minseok stood over in the kitchen kneading dough for noodles. But Chanyeol thought he could see a flush in Min’s cheeks, and a couple of times he caught Minseok staring through his white bangs, dough forgotten.

And anyway, Jongdae was his loud, demanding self, warm under and around Chanyeol’s hands. Chanyeol reached out to feel the curve of ribs under his hand when Jongdae arched up. He watched the way Jongdae’s eyes rolled back briefly and he gave a half-laughing groan when Chanyeol stroked his dick.

“Quit teasing me, come on.”

He hauled Jongdae’s legs up to rest against his chest, slid into him. He heard Minseok make a low sound while Jongdae exhaled hard. Min was watching them again. Still. Chanyeol grinned.

“Hands on yourself,” he said.

Jongdae fumbled with the lube bottle, cursing. He tried to writhe against Chanyeol’s stillness, which felt so awesome that Chanyeol couldn’t help bucking in response, which only made Jongdae have even more trouble with the bottle cap. Chanyeol sneaked a glance, and Minseok was smirking at him over the rim of his wineglass.

“It’s okay, I don’t mind waiting all day.”

“You fucking won’t, asshole,” Jongdae said, finally getting the cap open and pouring some over his fingers.

Chanyeol had to smile down at him, no matter how annoyed (and horny) Jongdae looked at the moment. The only other person he’d ever been balls-deep in and comfortable enough to make jokes was Baekhyun.

Maybe he wouldn’t mention that at the moment. Or ever.

“Asshole?” Chanyeol said. “I don’t think my asshole is the one we’re worried about right now.”

Minseok laughed.

“Chaaaaaaaaniiiee,” Jongdae whined, which turned into a sharp cry when Chanyeol tightened his grip on Jongdae’s legs and started to move.

He didn’t want to draw things out. This was an apology, and forgiveness, and reestablishing contact. He wanted to drive himself into Jongdae, come in him, and leave their argument in the past. He fucked Jongdae, his pace fast, grasping Dae’s legs to pound in him hard. Jongdae’s grip on his own cock was just as hard, just as quick, his other hand clutching at Chanyeol’s forearm.
Oh, it was good – pressure and warmth, Jongdae looking so beautiful under him, Minseok watching. The way Jongdae’s face darkened and he started to hold his breath a little told Chanyeol that he was close. He liked knowing that. He liked turning to bite down on Jongdae’s calf (despite the surprising amount of leg hair), and how it made Jongdae gasp and fuck into his own fist.

“Show me,” he said. “Show Min.”

There was a long, musical wail as Jongdae spurted all over his own chest. Chanyeol tried to keep his eyes open and watch, but Jongdae squeezed him so tightly that he tipped over too, all in a rush, grinding into Jongdae’s ass with his own moan.

They smiled at each other after, both panting. Chanyeol let Jongdae put his legs down and wrapped his hands as far as they would go around Jongdae’s slim hips.

“Feel any less nonsensical?”

Jongdae laughed. Chanyeol, still inside him, enjoyed the jiggling.

“Come here, Jongdae,” Minseok called out in his super-husky sex voice.

Jongdae grinned and gave himself a quick swipe with his shirt once Chanyeol set him free. Chanyeol turned the shirt inside out and had his own short wipe-down, watching Jongdae’s admirable and delicious ass cross the room. He watched Minseok kiss Dae, his hand firm against Jongdae’s jaw. By the time Chanyeol stood up, Min had his hand on Jongdae’s shoulder, pushing down. By the time Chanyeol made it to the kitchen island, Jongdae was on his knees, hands working at Min’s fly.

Minseok looked so beautiful, his torso curved while he smiled down at Jongdae, one hand in Dae’s hair while Jongdae blew him. And Jongdae, sharp cheekbones even more pronounced while he sucked, so eager, blinking up.

“Fuck, babe, that’s so good,” Minseok said. “Love you, Dae.”

Chanyeol went to Min, walking up behind to wrap his arms around Min’s chest. Minseok leaned back against him; Chanyeol braced his feet, took some of Min’s weight. Jongdae hummed his approval, which made Minseok groan. Chanyeol held Min until he arched up on his toes, gripping Chanyeol’s forearms tight, and cried out. Chanyeol looked down and watched Jongdae grip Minseok’s hips and swallow what Min gave him.

“Go clean yourselves up,” Minseok said just long enough later for everyone to have caught his breath and have a little bit of a cuddle. “But don’t take more than ten minutes. If you wait long enough that my noodles get mushy, I’ll be pissed.”

“Are we okay, Chan?” Jongdae asked in the shower.

Chanyeol cupped Jongdae’s chin in his hands and leaned in to kiss his cheek.

“I’m going to trust that you know what’s best where your own family’s concerned.”

“Chanyeol.”

Jongdae hugged him close.

“Just – tell me these things, okay?”

He felt Jongdae’s nails scratch a little at the back of his neck.
“I will if you will.”

“Deal,” Chanyeol said.

“Okay. Now sit down and let me wash your hair, we’re running out of time before we get our asses kicked.”

They emerged clean and pajama-ed in time to not get their asses kicked, but to set the table and dish up the soup and rice while Minseok went for his own clean-up. It was so cozy to sit down together post-coital and comfortable.

“Oh, you put sweet potatoes in yours,” Chanyeol said. “My mom never does, but I love sweet potatoes.”

Throughout the rest of the meal, every time Jongdae found a piece of sweet potato in his bowl, he transferred it to Chanyeol’s. Chanyeol blushed at Minseok’s smile and tried not to make too big a deal out of it.

There was a non-nosy beta at the gym in the morning, so Jongdae was able to get in a proper workout without feeling the need to assign himself to Chanyeol guard duty.

“Oh, Channie?” Minseok asked after they had dropped Jongdae off, reaching for Chanyeol’s hand.

“Better than.”

The silence for the next few blocks was perfectly comfortable, but Chanyeol wasn’t surprised that there was more.

“I can’t tell you what it means to me that you didn’t try to run away,” Min said.

He didn’t have an answer for that one, because of the sudden lump in his throat, so Chanyeol merely nodded and squeezed Minseok’s hand.

He had plenty of time to think about it all day – Minseok had a bunch of carving orders for the holiday and a short week in which to complete them. Chanyeol had a domestic day in his own apartment, so distracted by recent memories of fucking and getting fucked, not to mention Outbreaks of Feelings, that he kept forgetting what he was doing halfway through doing it.

And then Jongdae interrupted his and Minseok’s nice, grounding session of reading on the sofa by arriving home (1) wearing a suit with a turtleneck and not looking like a jerk, holding (2) flowers, and (3) a jewelry box.

Because they were never going to let him feel like the earth was solid under his feet ever again, thanks.

“My boss let me know about twenty different ways that I am still a stupid jerkface, and it’s a shame I can’t apply my engineering smarts to my personal life, and also this is the second bouquet I bought because she said the first one was ugly,” he said, holding out the flowers.

Minseok laughed.

“Amber is a woman of discerning taste,” he said.

“Well yeah,” Jongdae said. “She loves you.”
The flowers were gorgeous, all autumn colors and dark greenery.

“I’ll put those in a vase,” Min said, freeing up Chanyeol’s hands for the box.

Inside was an ear cuff, silver with a swirled design etched into it.

It was a lot of jewelry, in a short period of time with not so many relationship discussions.

“Okay, Channie?”

He nodded. Jongdae sat down to pluck the cuff from its little pillow and slide it onto Chanyeol’s ear. His fingers trailed back down until he stroked Chanyeol’s earlobe.

“How come you never pierced your ears for anybody?”

Sitting this close, with Jongdae’s fingers on him and the slight pinch on his ear, Chanyeol didn’t mind saying it.

“The only person I was with long enough to consider it I met after I started firefighting. I always figured healing earlobes would get fucked up from wearing my oxygen mask.”

Only one of the ways in which his job had been a point of contention.

“Oh,” Jongdae said. “That makes perfect sense.”

Chanyeol felt the world reel a little bit more.

“Damn, I guess maybe I’ll start buying you belly chains and shit like that,” Jongdae said, waggling his eyebrows and either ruining the moment or saving Chanyeol from embarrassing mush, he wasn’t sure which.

“But we’re okay, right?” Jongdae asked later.

Which was stupid, because they’d had a really nice evening with a lot of lazy kissing, and when they went to bed, Chanyeol took the vase of flowers with him and set it where he would be able to see it when he woke up. Therefore, in the face of such dumbness, he put his arms around Jongdae and squeezed until he heard a literal squeak (and a mildly concerning spinal crack).

“We’re fucking okay!” he said.

“Excuse me, we fuck great,” Minseok said.

Chapter End Notes

If I had known this thing was going to be epic fantasy novel--sized, I might not have sent kaisoo off to France in the first chapter.
Chapter 24

Of course they pulled out maximum cute before his work shift: Minseok got home first, shivering from a day spent first at the butcher shop, then at the studio, then a windy commute. Chanyeol very bravely endured ice-cold hands under his hoodie with only a moderate amount of yelling.

And then Jongdae came in to stomp around complaining at volume.

“ Practically a week,” he groused, hanging onto Chanyeol’s arm and getting in the way of putting dinner on the table.

“You might forget what I look like,” Chanyeol said.

“Right?”

Chanyeol sat down, and Jongdae practically sat on his lap, appearing to not mind that he almost got his eye poked out by the back end of a chopstick.

“So unfair,” Jongdae grumbled to his dinner. “You guys are gonna go have fun, and Chanyeol’s mom is going to love Min, so he’ll always be her favorite, and Min’s whole family will be too intimidated by Channie’s height to make any snarky comments, and you’ll probably have sex like twenty-five times, and I’ll be stuck helping my mom with the dishes.”

“You love doing the dishes with your mom, it makes you feel helpful,” Minseok said.

“That’s not the point!”

“Babe. Do you need me to fuck you every night between now and Friday? Because I will do that for you.”

Jongdae nodded around his extended bottom lip.

“You’re a giver,” Chanyeol said to Min.

“I’ll even send you pictures.”

They both insisted on getting in the car to drive him the whole 2 minutes to work, and Chanyeol thought he might hurt something in his face from smiling so much.

“I’ll see you Saturday midday?” Minseok asked.

Chanyeol nodded while Jongdae went “boooooooo,” then put his tongue in Jongdae’s mouth for a bit to stop the complaining.

The evening meeting was even more rambunctious than usual, as everyone jockeyed for their favorite family Chuseok dishes to make it on the menu for the week. Chanyeol mostly sat back and waited for everybody to decide so he could organize the grocery list.

“I guess you must’ve worked everything out, seeing as how you walked in here looking like the cat that got the cream and wearing new bling on the side of your head,” Baekhyun said in the truck on the way to the grocery store.

Chanyeol fingered the place where the cuff had sat on his ear. It, Min’s necklace, and the cuff bracelet were stored in his locker for the duration of his shift. Chanyeol’s face had burned under
Sehun’s gaze, watching him take them off.

“Yeah,” he said. “It wasn’t a big thing. We talked it out.”

Baekhyun kicked his ankle and laughed.

“Listen to you, ‘we talked it out,’ like you haven’t just leveled up in relationships.”

“Shut up.”

Baek leaned over and mugged up at Chanyeol.

“Aw, Yeollie. You’re growing so fast!”

“Shut up.”

The week of Chuseok was always frantic: regulars were missing, having put in for days off a year ahead of time (Joonmyun); everybody was in a mood to celebrate; and there were a million calls. Grannies had heart attacks trying to cook infinite dishes for family members they hadn’t seen in ages, people who rarely cooked tried to burn their houses down or faces off, and everybody desperate to buy last-minute gifts or avoid holiday traffic ended up rear-ending one another in droves. Chanyeol spent an entire afternoon consoling a small omega man who burned his own stove to a crisp and was convinced that his orphaned nieces would arrive from Pyeongyang and immediately disown him, even after he finally reached them on the phone and they cried all over speakerphone at his distress.

He was really hoping that the weekend with his family and Min would feature at least one really long nap.

But in between rushing around, he enjoyed cooking even more than usual. Making family favorites meant lots of smiles every time he called out that something was ready. It was a pleasure to talk shit with Yesung and Leeteuk while they turned out a really beautiful short-rib braise. And after the thing with the upset omega, Baek and Sehun crowded him into the kitchen to make fritters and settle down.

They got to talking about Dae’s family, a little. Chanyeol hadn’t wanted to give up details that might piss Jongdae off, but Baekhyun knew how to catch him in a vulnerable spot and make him spill all his secrets. It sucked, because Baek had no secrets. He’d happily discuss his latest orgasm and current ear wax situation with even the person standing next to him at the convenience store.

“Noble impulse, shittily executed,” Baek said at the end of Chanyeol’s explanation.

“Yeah, that’s where I eventually got.”

“Except,” Sehun said.

They watched him spoon the meat filling into perilla leaves and hand them to Baekhyun for dunking in egg batter. He had his thinking face on. It took four fritters before he spoke again.

“You know alphas don’t really … get along with each other, right? Like.”

Another two fritters.

“Like. I love my granddad,” he said. “I seriously love him. But even then, sometimes I still want to punch him in the face, just because I can’t stand the smell of him.”

Chanyeol could see in Baekhyun’s glance that he had no idea where this was going, either. They
waited through another six fritters.

“It’s just. If Jongdae and his dad don’t even really like each other that much. They won’t ever be able to see anything good about each other. Too busy being caught up in all the shit inside their own noses.”

Chanyeol turned this over in his mind a couple of times.

“Oh Sehun,” Baekhyun said. “Did you just say something wise and helpful?”

Sehun had a potent glare.

“Fuck off.”

“Don’t you drive him off, Baekhyun, this is a three-person job. If you tease Hunnie into leaving, I’m going to recruit Leeteuk and ask him about the station’s finances.”

Baekhyun mostly behaved after that. His horror of accounting was profound.

“I’m going to try to remember that, Hunnie,” Chanyeol said later, when he finally caught Sehun in a quiet corner. “Thanks for telling me.”

Sehun, being allergic to sincerity, nodded and ran off.

The biggest problem of that particular work shift was Kim Minseok’s wickedness, which was worse than Chanyeol had even expected. Not only did he post numerous compromising photos in the group chat each evening, but on Thursday night Chanyeol also received a 12-minute audio file in which Jongdae was either screwed out of his mind or killed. There was extensive begging. He kind of wanted to hear that in person.

Chanyeol couldn’t decide which was worse: the level of complete paranoia that one of his coworkers would snatch his phone out of his hand when it was unlocked and actually see the photos (which he planned to keep forever), or the fact that they arrived each night just in time to leave him lying in the bunk room, surrounded by his coworkers, with an aching erection.

The picture on Friday afternoon was of Jongdae lying on his stomach, his ass bright red, thighs streaked with come, bite marks all over his back, and a new mating scar trickling blood down one shoulder.

Chanyeol thought he might die of arousal. He was so happy that a two-alarm fire broke out in a banquet hall, just to cool things down a little.

Getting the one day he was required to be at work during the holiday out of the way at the beginning always sounded like a luxury, but those extra 18 hours were brutal. Chanyeol dragged himself home on Saturday afternoon so tired that his eyes felt sandy.

Minseok answered their door with dark brown hair, considerably shorter than it had been on Tuesday, falling at an angle across his forehead from a side part and shaved close around the sides.

“Have you ever had a stupid haircut in your entire life?” Chanyeol blurted.

Min gave him a gummy, delighted grin.

“I was kind of afraid my guy took a little too much off the sides,” he said.

“No,” Chanyeol said.
He dumped his backpack on the floor and pulled Minseok close enough to curl his hand over that soft, short hair at the back of Min’s neck.

“You look fucking amazing,” he said. “I mean, you always look fucking amazing, this is just a new variety.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere,” Minseok purred, molding himself up against Chanyeol’s body.

“I’m hoping.”

Then he yawned. The romance.

But Min laughed.

He didn’t get his nap, or his makeout session: Yoora texted that she was on her way to get him about 10 seconds later, and a full 3 hours earlier than he’d been planning on.

“Too bad, you want sister taxi services, this is the time you get.”

“Go ahead,” Minseok said. “I have to run a couple of sculptures out to clients last minute. Let your mom have you to herself for a little while before I show up.”

Chanyeol counted: in the time between he started and Yoora texted that she was out front, he got in 37 kisses, and Minseok was literally giggling at him.

Yoora bitched at him anyhow, because Chanyeol realized that he was wearing grungy old locker clothes and made her wait while he ran back upstairs to grab stuff from his apartment. They bickered comfortably all the way to their parents’ house. She surprised him halfway out of existence when she pulled into the driveway, though.

“Nice to see you wearing some proper jewelry for once in your dating life.”

So that was a hell of a thing. And his mom even touched the ear cuff once after she hugged him, with her lips pursed a little.

Showered and changed into some less horrible clothes, Chanyeol took one look at his mom and sister conspiring about world domination or whatever in the kitchen and veered toward the living room to sit with his dad. Some foreign baseball game was on the TV, which meant that Dad was only about 20% awake. Chanyeol sat beside his father and settled in for his own doze.

He woke up when Yoora clattered into the room, probably for that express purpose. By that point, the cooking was in full swing, and he let his mom tie a dumb-looking apron around his waist before she put him to work.

“You can’t let me wear a less stupid-looking one?”

“With your Minseok showing up soon? No, I don’t think so, Yeollie. I think it’s more important to find out whether your boyfriend thinks cartoon lobsters are funny.”

“Since you seemed to like them humorless and zero fun in the past,” Yoora put in.

Chanyeol stuck his tongue out at his sister.

“On the rare occasions that we were allowed to meet them,” his mom said.

Chanyeol groaned.
He was so happy when Minseok finally arrived to save him from all this teasing that he didn’t even care about the way Min laughed at the sight of the apron.

“The lobsters match your hair,” he said, and kissed the cheek that Chanyeol leaned down.

He wouldn’t let Chanyeol take any of the items filling his arms. He winked and stepped past through the doorway.

Chanyeol was entirely unsurprised that it took Min about 3 minutes to charm his family into adoration. He handed a huge bouquet to Chanyeol’s mom.

“Eomonim, of course anyone as handsome as our Channie would have such a lovely mom.”

So there was his mom conquered.

A bouquet only slightly smaller went to Yoora, with

“Noona. I truly look forward to hearing all the very worst stories.”

Horrible, effective, and expected.

Then Minseok bowed low and handed his dad a bag, with,

“Abeonim, thank you so much for letting me intrude on your family celebration.”

Dad’s grin when he pulled the bottle of Irish whisky from the bag was bright.

“Let’s crack this open and toast Chanyeol’s boyfriend,” Dad said.

“I’ll get glasses,” Mom said.

They trooped out of the room, not even bothering to hide their winks.

“You’re a dangerous man, Kim Minseok.”

Min touched his face.

“No,” he said, “just invested in making a good first impression.”

He pulled something from the pocket of his jacket and showed it to Chanyeol: a small sprig of some kind of evergreen with a tiny orange flower in the center. Minseok pinned it to Chanyeol’s sweater, patted his chest.

If Chanyeol could’ve spoken at the time, he would’ve suggested that perhaps it was himself that Min was a danger to. Instead, he hugged Minseok hard, then took his jacket and hung it up in the coat closet.

It was a lovely day. As usual, Chanyeol helped in the kitchen, but he could hear his dad and Minseok talking in the living room, low voices and a couple of times a soft laugh. When preparations quieted down a little, his mom handed him a plate of rice cakes.

“Go take these to the Byuns,” she said. “Give us a chance to gossip behind your back.”

Chanyeol rolled his eyes, but he grabbed Minseok, and they walked hand in hand four doors down. There was a crowd of Byun cousins running around. Baekhyun’s mom took the rice cakes with a kiss to his cheek and shook Minseok’s hand like he was a long-lost friend, then sent them to the back
"Hey, look at this! Dad, hyung, uncle Jeon, this is Yeollie’s awesome boyfriend Minseok!"
Baekhyun yelled.

“And Yeollie,” Chanyeol said.

“Yeah, but you’re old news, who cares.”

They passed Minseok around with handshakes and all the dumb small talk everyone always had to get out of the way first. Right about the time Baekhyun’s dad and uncle started in on the offers of liquor, Minseok unleashed a charm cascade about “not annoying the in-laws on first meeting” that made Chanyeol’s ears burst into flame and all the Byuns shout with their signature high-pitched cackle, but it was successful in prying them loose.

“Whew,” Minseok said when they were halfway back to his house.

Chanyeol laughed.

“Yeah, Baek comes by his volume naturally. Not that they aren’t great.”

Min squeezed his hand.

“They obviously are.”

Up against his parents’ back door was a little covered area, sheltered from the wind and not visible by anybody more than a couple meters away. Chanyeol had spent a lot of quiet moments there, catching his breath before going inside to talk about hard days, breakups, bad news.

It was so much nicer to crowd Minseok into the corner, feel how their bodies made a warm space, safe from the wind and pressed together. To see Min tilt his chin up, his smile more in his eyes than his mouth, and to taste the shadow of whisky on his tongue.

“Ah, Channie,” Minseok whispered up against his lips. “As happy as I am to be here, it’s torture not to be able to kiss you whenever I want.”

If the weather had been any warmer at all, Chanyeol would’ve dropped to his knees right there by his parents’ back door. As it was, he could only pull Min close up against him and growl, “Ugh, you make me crazy.”

“Oh, really?” Minseok said, leaning his head back and grinning. “Thanks for the positive performance review.”

The good thing about that was that it meant they were both laughing when they went back inside.

“That might be the shortest time recorded before the Byuns let you go on Chuseok, Channie. We didn’t even have time to burn any fritters,” his mom said.

“Eomonim, they’re lovely people, but they have nothing on you,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol’s mom laughed and smacked him with a dish towel.

“You’re a horrible flirt,” she said.

“He is,” Chanyeol agreed.
“They really are lovely,” Minseok added to Yoora. “Though having met Baekhyun before, I should’ve known to bring earplugs.”

It was spooky, the way Minseok worked his family like puppets. They ate it up with a spoon.

Of course, he ate it up too – both the way Min flirted with his family and the way Min flirted with him.

Visits out of the way, they settled in to eat, chat, and play games. Dad was delighted to opt out of Go-Stop to let Min play, though he rolled his eyes and crouched down on the mat with them later when Yoora announced that she “needed a minute.” She huddled in the corner of the living room, texting furiously.


Ammunition. Excellent.

Dinner was long and loud. The Irish whisky was mostly gone by the time they were all too full to move, picking half-heartedly at tangerines. Chanyeol was leaning against Minseok’s arm, holding his hand, totally content. Other than missing Jongdae.

“It’s late, Yeollie,” his mom said. “Why don’t you two just stay? We’ll have a nice breakfast in the morning.”

Chanyeol looked at Min, who nodded. In the bustle of finding extra blankets and a clean toothbrush, Chanyeol’s dad took him aside.

“I like how he looks at you, Yeol,” he said. “Even better, I like that you’re yourself around him.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

That opening was pretty great, and it meant he wasn’t surprised when his mom cornered him in the hallway and shoved a pile of blankets and a pillow into his arms.

“Now you take the floor, Chanyeol, you give Minseok the bed, you hear me?”

“Duh, Mom.”

She patted his arm.

“He’s really lovely, son.”

Chanyeol kissed her cheek.

Yoora waited until Minseok was in the bathroom to barge in and hiss,

“Don’t you two wake me up by being gross, Chanyeol.”

“Noona!”

She made the “I’m watching you” gesture and stalked back out, brushing past Minseok with a bright smile and a wish for his good sleep.

“What was that?”

“Sisterly threats,” Chanyeol said.
“Ah. I’m well familiar.”

He pulled out a t-shirt for Min to sleep in and came back from washing up to find Minseok standing in the middle of the room wearing it. He may as well have been wearing a tent.

“I don’t know whether this is hilarious or embarrassing,” Minseok said, plucking at the shirt, which hung down almost all the way to his knees.

“So adorable is not an option?”

Minseok glared at him.

“You know,” Chanyeol said, trying to banish that glare by taking Min into his arms, “my mom was very clear that I have to give you the bed and sleep on the floor.”

“Oh no, that won’t do. I don’t want to be that far away from you, Channie.”

Stuffing into his narrow childhood bed together should’ve been obnoxious, but it was so nice to wrap around Min that he couldn’t bring himself to care.

“Today was great, Channie,” Minseok murmured into his neck. “Your family’s great. I’m so glad that you invited me.”

“My dad said he likes the way you look at me.”

Minseok laughed a little, and Chanyeol felt Min’s fingers in the hair on the back of his head.

“I like the way you look at me, sweetness, so I guess we’re even.”

Chanyeol breathed in Minseok’s scent, smoothed his hands down Min’s compact muscles. Realized how difficult it would be to heed Yoora’s warning.

“You’re really terrible,” he whispered. “All those pictures. You know there are fifteen beds in the bunk room? Most of them full and I’d be lying there, so hard it hurt.”

Minseok laughed and shifted against him.

“You want me to be sorry, sweetness? Because I’m not.”

“They’re the hottest things I’ve ever seen,” Chanyeol whispered.

“We missed you, though,” Minseok murmured against his neck.

Fuck.

“Getting frisky, sweetness?” Minseok whispered, moving again. “Want me to go down on you in your teenage bed, suck you off?”

Chanyeol hoped his groan was quiet enough that Yoora wouldn’t start banging on the wall.

“I don’t think I can trust myself to be quiet.”

Minseok laughed, low and dirty.

“It feels like it’s been forever, Min.”

“We’ll make up for it tomorrow, Channie.”
Chapter 25

Minseok wasn’t in the bed in the morning – Chanyeol found him downstairs with wet hair, back in his dress slacks and another one of Chanyeol’s t-shirts: a Dragonball Z one, and possibly from middle school. Chanyeol tried not to laugh.

He accepted a cup of coffee, and they had a quiet breakfast. Yoora made a small speech, complete with hair-tossing, about the great night’s sleep she had. Chanyeol tried to kick her under the table, but she used her dumb noona powers to evade him. She elbowed him while they were doing the dishes.

“Quit it, you’ve done nothing but pick on me,” he complained.

“Yeah,” Yoora said. “I can, because you’re actually happy enough to take it. It’s great.”

He stared at her, and she grinned.

“I don’t like mushy speeches, so just pretend I said a bunch of stuff about how great Minseok is and how you seem really happy and I’ll kick his butt if that turns otherwise, okay, baby brother?”

“Okay.”

He and Min were on the road by 10:00, the back seat piled up with side dishes and rice cakes, and even his dad hugged Minseok goodbye.

“You come back soon and bring that alpha of yours,” his mom said.

“I hope we’ll see you so often that you get tired of us,” Min said, making Chanyeol feel warm enough to heat an entire apartment building.

Chanyeol slouched down in the car seat and exhaled.

“That was really nice, Chan,” Min said.

“It was. And now I would like to go home, and get off, and have a nap, if that’s okay with you.” Minseok laughed.

“We might want to call Jongdae somewhere in there, but that sounds great.”

They tried to call Jongdae, but got no answer, so they sent a bunch of doofy messages to the group chat, wishing him a happy birthday, along with a selca of the two of them making a hand-heart together. After that, Min gazed at him with so much affection in his expression that even Chanyeol couldn’t pretend it wasn’t there.

“So you want to get off,” Minseok said, crowding up against him and putting hands in his back pockets. “Any opinions on how you’d like to do that?”

“Let’s maybe take off yesterday’s clothes and see what happens.”

Which was: lying tangled up on the bed, kissing slowly. Minseok ran his hands up and down Chanyeol’s bare torso.

“I do enjoy all this real estate,” he said, then leaned down to suck at one of the faded hickeys on
Chanyeol’s belly.

Chanyeol arced up and hissed at the sting of it. His own hands moved over Minseok’s flank, cupped the curve of his ass.

“Just touch me,” he said. “Just make me come, Min.”

Basic but good: their hands on each other, kissing around their panting breaths. Minseok’s tongue in his mouth, hot on his neck, Min’s hands working his cock. His own hand stroking Min with a tight grip, until pleasure pooled low and flashed outward and he groaned onto Min’s neck.

“There you go, my sweetness,” Minseok gasped, “yeah, there you are.”

And he stretched long, spilling hot over Chanyeol’s hand.

Minseok even let them lie in the mess for a bit after, kissing and getting stuck together by dried come.

“What are we onto now, a nap?” Minseok asked with a smile.

“Not yet. I want to look at you some more.”

Chanyeol combed the fingers of his non-sticky hand through Min’s newly dark hair.

“This for your family?” he asked. “Would they have been weird about the white hair?”

“Yeah.”

“Do I need to dye mine? Do we have time?”

“Would you do that?”

Chanyeol kissed him.

“I mean, my roots are already terrible and it’s going kind of orange. I was gonna have to do something about it soon anyhow.”

Minseok rolled him over on his back and sucked his bottom lip.

“You don’t have to, Chan.”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“I know. But I’m supposed to waltz in and shut everybody up, right? So I ought to look respectable.”

Minseok’s crooked grin was so bright that it gave Chanyeol a genius idea.

“Should I wear my formal uniform?”

Minseok blinked.

“Your – what?”

“I mean, I wouldn’t wear all the super fancy stuff like the gloves and sash that I’d wear for a funeral, but the uniform itself looks pretty good.”

“Channie,” Minseok said, his voice deep. “Please wear your uniform.”
Chanyeol grinned.

There was a bit of running around – cleaning up, and Minseok going to the store for decent hair dye while Chanyeol dug his uniform from the back of his closet and ironed it. Given how long it had taken to get him blond and then red, he was surprised by how little time (and horrible smell) it took to achieve black hair. They even had time for that nap.

He would’ve freaked out a lot more about the prospect of meeting Minseok’s family, except that it involved Minseok in a suit: a whole 3-piece suit, dark grey, with a silver shirt, a pocket square, and a damn pocket watch with a chain going across the vest. Chanyeol was rooted to the spot, staring like a jerk. He was so glad to be wearing his uniform, which his mom had paid to have properly tailored, and not the suit he had bought last year for his cousin’s wedding, which fit in the shoulders and hung loose everywhere else.

“What the hell, Chanyeol,” Minseok growled at him. “You look fucking delicious.”

“Uh, same,” Chanyeol said.

He took a picture of Min and posted it to the group chat. Minseok took a picture of him and did the same. Ten minutes into their car ride, Chanyeol’s phone buzzed.

“Fuck you both,” Jongdae wrote.

“Which will happen the second I get home,” just after.

“Poor Dae,” Min said when Chanyeol read them out. “I get to take that thing off of you and fuck you today. Or have you fuck me. I haven’t decided yet.”

The sound Chanyeol made was definitely too low-pitched to be a giggle. Definitely.

The dinner was in the fanciest banquet hall Chanyeol had ever seen. He spent a few seconds straightening his uniform jacket and ensuring that his shoes hadn’t gotten scuffed somehow in the car. He made sure his hat was at the right angle.

“You look wonderful, Channie,” Minseok said, taking his hand. “And don’t worry about learning anybody’s name, I know there are way too many.”

It was difficult to remain intimidated once they went inside. Minseok had an enormous family, obviously – the hall was full of people.

Very tiny people.

Chanyeol looked out over a sea of black and grey heads. Once he thought he saw someone who might hit eye level, but it turned out to be a waiter. Otherwise, there didn’t seem to be a single person in the room who came up past his shoulder. Minseok was one of the tallest ones of the bunch.

He clenched his jaw to keep himself from smiling and squeezed Min’s fingers. Some of the tension ran out of him.

They made their way slowly through the crowd. Chanyeol bowed and smiled and shook hands with Minseok’s apparently endless supply of aunts, uncles, and cousins. He didn’t see anyone under the age of 15 or so. All the men wore dark suits with somber ties, and if the women were a little more colorful, they all seemed to wear the same variety of knee-length, conservative dress, with pearls and low heels. A room filled to the brim with sober, respectable betas. It smelled like a garden center, and the hum of conversation was low.
All the uncles and aunts blinked up at his height, took in his uniform, and said something like “oh, government work is so reliable” or “a civil servant, how nice.” A couple of them stepped back abruptly, as if they thought he might hit them with his head when he bowed. It was hilarious.

One auntie – wearing colored pearls, so obviously one of the family reprobates – squeaked, “but what about your engineer alpha?” at Min, then burbled about Complete Love when she found out that Dae was merely with his family. That exchange inspired Minseok to flag down a waiter and grab a champagne flute for each of them.

“I guess we need to finish that fucking thing,” he murmured.

“Oppa!” sounded out behind them, and Minseok visibly relaxed.

“Channie,” he said, smiling. “Channie, here’s my sister, Minjoo.”

Chanyeol turned around and had to take a minute. Wow, they really did live in a romantic comedy.

She only came up to Minseok’s shoulder, with a thin frame and Min’s heart-shaped face surrounded by long hair. The same pretty, feline eyes. He recognized her immediately. From omega camp. And if her eyebrows worked like Minseok’s did, she recognized him too.

Minjoo had been one of the campers assigned to him to help out with their heats the year he was a peer mentor, when he was still working the whole gay-versus-bi thing out with himself. They’d been fine and had fun, but she had really put the nail in that coffin. Er. By nailing her.

Now that he thought about it, she was so much like Minseok: easily annoyed and reserved, but underneath so soft and affectionate. She had followed him around all summer, and it had taken some doing to gently convince her that she didn’t need his contact information. The next summer, he had been a counselor with only his own heat to worry about from a practical standpoint, and she had pretended he didn’t exist.

“Oh gosh,” he said with a bow. “What a small world, right? I’m not a bit surprised that you turned out so pretty.”

It occurred to Chanyeol that maybe it wasn’t so much that Minseok was a murder beta as he was a murder Kim, given the way Minjoo was glaring at him.

“You know each other?” Minseok asked.

“From summer camp. But Minjoo might not remember me,” he said.

She relaxed just a little bit.

“You’re a couple years younger than me, right? I was probably only memorable for being the giant, gangly counselor.”

Minjoo’s expression stopped being murdery, and he thought that twitch in her cheek might be a held-back smile.

“Tall was enough to make you memorable,” she said.

Chanyeol smiled.

“That’s – surprising,” Minseok said. “What are the chances?”

“Pretty high. There’s only one omega summer camp on the peninsula,” Minjoo said.
“Right.”

Minseok looked back and forth between the two of them, skepticism clear on his face. Chanyeol struggled to maintain his very blandest smile.

“Where’s Taejoon?” Minseok asked finally.

“Back here, with Mother and Father.”

At least walking side by side, Minseok couldn’t examine his face anymore, which gave Chanyeol a little room to melt down on the inside. He must absolutely not spare a single thought for one instant of memories about Minjoo’s heat. Ever. For the rest of his life.

Taejoon turned out to be Minjoo’s boyfriend – another beta, very handsome, who greeted Chanyeol with a warm smile. Minseok’s parents were solemn and reserved, though his mother took Chanyeol’s hand in both her own and patted it.

“A firefighter,” Minseok’s father said. “Isn’t that perhaps a bit dangerous?”

“On occasion, yes it is, sir.”

“Necessary, though,” Taejoon said.

“Of course, of course. And an excellent pension program. Make your way up the ladder, and you might find yourself in politics some day, even.”

Chanyeol could feel Minseok go stiff beside him and see Minjoo shake her head at him slightly.

“I suppose that’s true,” he said. “Though I’ve always thought I’ll probably try for a spot teaching at the academy when it’s time to leave the field. I didn’t have any omega instructors, I think maybe it could be useful.”

“Oh, I like that,” Minjoo said.

“That’s a lovely idea, Chanyeol,” Minseok said. “You’d be a terrific teacher.”

“Unless you’re busy raising a family, of course.”

“Mother,” Minseok said.

“Oh, I know, early days,” his mother said. “But one can never tell.”

“People do like politicians to have a stable family life,” his father said.

“Did you know that Great-Grandfather made it this year?” Minjoo asked, loudly enough that Chanyeol startled.

“Ah, yes,” Minseok’s father said. “You’d better go greet him, who knows how soon he might need to be taken home.”

Minjoo took Minseok’s arm while they made their way through the rest of the crowd.

“I was desperate to be a firefighter when I was a pup,” Taejoon said.

Taejoon towered over all the Kims, so Chanyeol barely had to look down to grin at him.
“Come to my station any time and I’ll let you sit in the truck,” he said.

Taejoon laughed.

“He’ll probably actually take you up on that,” Minjoo said over her shoulder.

“Just don’t tell their parents that I have a sense of humor or adventure,” Taejoon muttered. “I’ve worked really hard to seem appropriately boring.”

“Oh god, I’m doomed,” Chanyeol said.

“Nah, they’ll just chalk it up your being omega,” Taejoon said. “As long as you never go into heat in the middle of a dinner party, they’ll consider you a credit to your presentation.”

Chanyeol barely had time to trip over his own feet before Minjoo whipped her tiny fist back into Taejoon’s belly.


“I know it.”

Their great-grandfather was so old that he was bent over, making him seem even smaller than the rest of them.

“Bright moon,” the old man said, craning his head. “Seokkie, are you sure this isn’t three omegas stacked on top of one another?”

“Come on now, Granddad,” Minseok said gently.

“Aish, times are different from my day. Back then people kept their omegas locked away from danger. I guess you don’t have to worry about that too much, do you, my boy?”

“Granddad,” Minseok said, a little sharper.

“I can take care of myself when I need to, Grandfather,” Chanyeol said.

“I’m sure, I’m sure. And you striding around in here in that uniform, I bet half my grandchildren can’t keep their mouths closed for shock,” the old man cackled.

He patted Chanyeol’s arm.

“You’re a big, fine boy, Jinyoung,” Great-Grandfather said. “Lean down here and let this old man scent you.”

On the inside, Chanyeol joined in the dramatic cringing that went on around him, but he couldn’t find it in himself to be rude to somebody halfway as old as the sun. So he bent down, and bent down some more, and put up with the cold, unfamiliar nose pressed up under his ear. Great-Grandfather himself smelled like a jar of dried parsley that had sat in the back of the spice cupboard for a couple of decades too long.

It was a lot of closeness from a total stranger. A mouth he didn’t want that close to his neck.

“Ha!” the old man barked, reaching out to slap Minseok’s forearm. “No wonder you like him, Seokkie. You’ll be racing your sister to see which one of you gives me a great-great-grandpup first, the way this one smells like candy!”
“We still have a bunch of uncles to greet,” Minseok said in a raspy voice.

“Yes yes, go do your duty. You’re a good boy, Seokkie. You take care of this nice omega like that nice Daehyun takes care of our Joojoo girl.”

“Right,” Minjoo said.

She kissed his cheek, then rolled her eyes in Chanyeol’s direction when she stood up.

“There’s a table of hors-d’oeuvres over by the other wall,” Taejoon said.

“Is there liquor there?” Chanyeol asked.

“Lots of it.”

“Oh god, Channie,” Minseok said when they each had another glass of champagne in hand.

He had let Chanyeol stand against the wall and put himself between Chanyeol and the crowd. Chanyeol wanted to kiss him for the rest of time.

“I’m so, so sorry, that was one disaster after another.”

“It’s fine, Min.”

“It’s not fine, I can’t believe – really, any of that. god, I’m so appalled.”

There was plenty of being appalled to go around, but none of it was Minseok’s fault. Or Minjoo’s, or Taejoon’s.

“Our present company’s pretty great.”

Taejoon grinned.

“He thinks I’m great,” he said to Minjoo.

She elbowed him.

“Yes, fine, you’re so charming, you’re saving the day, we’re all very grateful.”

“She sounds like she’s being sarcastic, but she actually means it,” Taejoon said, partially covering his mouth like he was pretending to tell a secret.

“Your self-preservation instinct is non-existent,” Minseok said.

But his shoulders were no longer up around his chin, and he reached over to hold Chanyeol’s hand, his body blocking anyone from seeing.

“You okay, Channie?” he murmured.

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m a little freaked out, but it’s fine.”

“You sure? You sure you’re okay? What can I do, Chan?”

“Min.”

He squeezed Minseok’s fingers.
“You can hold my glass while I go splash some water on my face.”

Minseok nodded unhappily.

“I’m serious. I’m just going to go take a second, but I’m fine, Min. Everything’s fine, don’t worry.”

Chanyeol washed off the strange old-man scent and breathed in the chilly, sterile air of the bathroom. It was good to be alone for a minute.

“Min’s family is intense,” he texted to Jongdae, and then felt bad about it, in case he was interrupting and in case Minseok would be upset to know about it.

But Jongdae called him right away.

“You okay, Channie?”

Just the sound of Jongdae’s voice settled him.

“Yeah,” he said. “Yeah, I’m okay. It’ll all be funny, I think, later on when I’m not being stared at by an ocean of people at chest height in expensive suits.”

Jongdae laughed.

“I know. There are so many of them. And they all have such sticks up their asses, it’s a wonder you don’t get handed a timetable scheduled out in five-minute increments when you go in to dinner.”

“Thanks for that,” Chanyeol said, laughing.

“I know he’s really happy you’re there, Chan.”

“You holding up all right?”

“Oh sure,” Jongdae said, so breezily that Chanyeol figured it was a lie. “My mom’s trying to spoil me rotten for my birthday, at least.”

“And then when you get home, it’s our turn.”

“You have no idea how much I’m looking forward to that.”

Back out in the crowd, it was time to head in for dinner, which was better in that there were only a few relatives sitting in the immediate vicinity to talk at him about pensions, which of them knew the Chief (all of them, apparently), and wasn’t he an impressive example of his presentation, taking such a dangerous job like that, of course he would be Minseok’s type.

Chanyeol kind of thought that last part might be an insult, but he smiled and talked about civic responsibility and pushed under-seasoned food around on his plate for all six courses. At least they’d seated him next to Minseok: they twined their ankles together under the table in desperation during the whole meal.

When everyone rose to mingle over after-dinner drinks and sweets, he excused himself again. This time, Minjoo caught him in the hallway outside the bathroom.

“If you tell my brother about camp, no one will ever find your body,” she said.
In his opinion, perfectly reasonable.

“What happens at omega camp stays at omega camp,” he said.

She tried to hold her glare, but ended up laughing.

“You just don’t want me telling any stories on you,” she said.

“One hundred percent true.”

“Chanyeol,” she said, “can you even believe this? How did you end up dating my brother? I don’t know whether I want to laugh, or cry, or jump off the roof.”

She was smiling when she said it, though.

“Or – and I’m just throwing this out there – we could leave the necessary educational experiences of young omegas far in the past where they belong and pretend that we just met today.”

“Deal,” Minjoo said.

They crossed pinkies and touched their thumbs together to seal it.

She leaned against the wall and crossed her arms.

“When Oppa called me up a couple of months ago and apologized and said it was because he’d met an omega who helped him get it, I guess I should’ve figured it was you.”

Chanyeol laughed, incredulous.

“What does that mean?”

“You were always good at explaining stuff. Helping people see your point of view.”

Chanyeol remembered all of his unhappy breakups and shook his head.

“That’s definitely not true.”

“Well,” she said, “you certainly turned me down so kindly back in the day that I didn’t even bother scratching out all the hearts I’d drawn around your name in my journal.”

She grinned at his shock.

“And then you went and got Oppa to apologize to me. So maybe you’re just good at explaining stuff to Kims.”

He laughed.

“Maybe so.”

She stepped close and fiddled with the collar of his uniform.

“Oppa tell you to wear this so our uncles would get up off his ass about his job?”

“Pretty much,” Chanyeol grinned.

“I hate it,” she said, patting the collar and stepping back. “It gives me a very vivid mental image of what he’s going to do to you when you get home, and that grosses me out.”
Chanyeol laughed, and they walked back to the hall arm in arm.

When he returned, it took him a minute to locate Minseok in the crowd. He’d been pinned by his father and a couple of uncles, who looked to be mid-lecture when Chanyeol walked up to them, if the miserable expression on Min’s face was any indication. Chanyeol stood up straight and did his best to loom and look official.

“Oh, you haven’t met my uncle Jihyuk yet,” Minseok said. “Where’s auntie? Shouldn’t Chanyeol meet her too?”

The lecture party had broken up by the time those introductions were done. Chanyeol squeezed Min’s elbow and felt him sigh.

Not long after that, they did their round of bows and goodbyes. Minseok’s mother gave Chanyeol a hug that involved almost zero actual touching, and his father said,

“Yes, a delight to meet you. Minseok looks very well, you’re a true credit,”

and shook his hand.

Minjoo and Taejoon joined them in waiting for the valets to fetch their cars. Those goodbye hugs were genuine, at least. Once his sister had driven away, Minseok turned to Chanyeol with one eyebrow raised.

“You definitely knew each other at camp,” he said. “She was acting weird when I introduced you.”

Because of course Chanyeol just had to be attracted to smart people.

“Are you ever happy to unexpectedly see somebody who knew you during your awkward years?”

“Bold of you to assume I had any awkward years,” Min said, though he didn’t look convinced.

“But okay,” he added after a pause.

Chanyeol was so glad to throw himself into the passenger seat of the car and shut the door.

“Well,” Minseok said as they drove out, “that was.”

“It was awful!” Chanyeol shouted.

Min laughed.

“It really was, wasn’t it? God, was there even any oxygen in the room?”

“If your family tries to railroad me into a career in politics, we are running off to Fiji to live barefoot on the beach, Kim Minseok.”

“Deal.”

Minseok loosened his tie.

“Jesus, I can’t believe Granddad! And my father, ‘a true credit,’ I am so sorry, Channie, they were all just horrible.”

They stopped at a red light, and Chanyeol watched Min hang his head forward and exhale hard. He put his hand on Minseok’s leg. Min looked over, his eyes shadowed under the streetlights shining in.
“How’d you avoid becoming that way?”

The light turned green; Min smiled.

“Stubbornness,” he said. “And Minjoo. I was so happy when she was born, it was like my mother had given me the best present in the world. I think they meant it to give me a sense of responsibility when they told me it would always be my job to look out for her, but all I heard was that here was this tiny pup that I was allowed to love as much as I wanted to.”

Warmth made Minseok’s voice deeper. Chanyeol leaned sideways against the seat and watched Min smile at the past.

“It was a little weird when we were older, of course. When she presented omega, of course she didn’t want to talk about that shit with me. And by then I was in high school, so I was busy trying to keep my class rank high enough that my parents would allow me to keep taking art and playing football. I guess we would’ve drifted apart a little anyhow.”

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said. “And I gather from my experience that to a family full of betas, omega seems really – messy.”

Minseok laughed.

“Yes. Such an embarrassing amount of emotion, too, as far as my family’s concerned. We were just starting to get close again when I picked that fight with Taejoon. I don’t know how long we would’ve been stubborn at each other if you hadn’t shown me that I was being stupid, Channie.”

Chanyeol squeezed his knee.

“How in the world did you pick a fight with that guy? He seems like such a sweetheart.”

“Oh, he is,” Minseok said. “Just turns out that he’s almost as protective of Minjoo as I am, so when I flipped out, thinking he had upset her, he flipped out because at that point, I was upsetting her. I’m lucky there, too. Once Joo made it clear I was forgiven, he acted like it never happened.”

“Good.”

“Yeah, Channie. All told, it is good. Even if my father’s going to decide that you need to run for president and my great-grandfather tried to molest you.”

Chanyeol had to laugh.

“Even if.”
Chanyeol kept his hand on Minseok’s leg for the rest of the drive: of course that turned his thoughts to matters not family-related. Min’s grin got wider, the higher Chanyeol’s hand crept.

“Will we take pictures?” he asked, trying to sound merely curious.

Minseok gave a shaky “ha.”

“Dae would like that, if you’re willing.”

Chanyeol traced an idle pattern on Min’s thigh as they pulled into the parking lot.

“I’m willing.”

Anticipation made Chanyeol’s tongue feel too big for his mouth, as Minseok opened the car door to hand him out and they walked hand in hand through the parking lot. Min stepped away in the elevator, smiling up at him.

“Lean against the wall.”

He pulled out his phone. Chanyeol felt himself flush hot. Minseok showed him the photo – he had his hands in his pockets, smiling down at the floor, his body curved against the wall, looking tall and broad-shouldered in his uniform, his newly dark hair mussed. Min posted it to the group chat.

“So handsome,” Min said, tracing one finger down his cheek.

Chanyeol shook himself.

Inside their door, Minseok backed away from him, phone held out, smiling.

“Unbutton your jacket.”

Okay. So that was how he wanted to play it.

Chanyeol stalked toward Minseok, unbuttoning the double-breasted jacket with one hand. Stopped when Min held out the phone, the photo showing him with a filthy grin on his face.

Minseok backed down the hallway, eyebrow arched, still grinning. Chanyeol followed.

“Your turn,” Min rasped as he backed through the bedroom door.

In the photo, Chanyeol caught him tugging at his tie, chin raised so the line of his neck was on display, biting his lip.
They stood on opposite sides of the bedroom, each stripping slowly, which had no business being half as sexy as it was. But the way in which Minseok stared at him, hardly blinking, his fingers moving unhurriedly over his clothes: it stole Chanyeol’s breath right out of him. He tried to match Min’s deliberate pace as he undressed. Watched Minseok’s eyes follow his fingers as he unbuttoned his shirt. Watched the lines of Min’s arms, the curve of his shoulder, as he pulled his own shirt off and dropped it to the floor.

When Chanyeol tugged his undershirt over his head, Minseok said, “enough.”

They met in the center: Chanyeol wrapping one arm around Minseok’s waist and pulling up, Min pressing against Chanyeol and pulling his head down. He wanted Minseok’s mouth more than he wanted air, wanted to feel the muscles of Min’s back shift under his hand. Wanted that tongue twining against his own, those fingers against his neck.

“Lie down, sweetness,” Minseok murmured when Chanyeol moved his mouth to the line of Min’s jaw.

He did as he was told, snapping a photo of Minseok crawling over him and posting it. Min straddled him, grinding their erections against one another through the obnoxious barrier of clothing, making Chanyeol gasp and reach for him.

With their chests pressed together, Minseok’s forearms on either side of his head, Chanyeol thought he could split in half between contentment and wanting. He tilted his chin up for a kiss, and Minseok turned his head, with a low laugh in the back of his throat, so that Chanyeol’s lips met his cheek.

“Chan,” Min said.

He rubbed his face against Chanyeol’s face and neck.

“It was so good to have you next to me tonight.”

Chanyeol tipped his head back so that Minseok could better get to his lower neck and shoulders. No part of him objected to Min marking him with that scent of mint. He wanted that gesture of belonging.

Minseok kissed him just above the flame-shaped pendant.

“You looked so gorgeous.”

Whereas Min himself, his face smiling down, looked more beautiful than almost anything he’d ever seen. Chanyeol rolled them over and made sure Minseok was too busy to talk for a bit – though he heard the click of the phone camera twice. The second time, he tweaked Minseok’s nipple. It was meant to be punishment, but the body roll that followed slid their bodies together so nicely that it felt like a reward.

When his mouth was moving along that wonderful shoulder, Minseok groaned,

“Open me up, sweetness. Edge me until I’m begging.”

Fuck. Chanyeol shuddered, bit down, rutted against Minseok.

But no. He had to collect himself. Min wanted him. Wanted it drawn out. Chanyeol took a slow breath and willed himself to relax.

He raised up on his forearms, grinding his hips in circles. Smiled at the way Minseok inhaled
sharply, eyebrows drawn together, then made a small, choked sound when Chanyeol grabbed his hair and pulled. He hummed when Chanyeol kissed down his neck, hissed and squirmed when Chanyeol took his time sucking a dark mark under Min’s collarbone.

Chanyeol kept wanting to smile, every time he made Minseok twitch or gasp. He did smile when he cupped his hand hard over Min’s dick and Min dropped his phone onto the bed. He kept his hand there, rubbing Min’s rock-hard length, until Minseok started to pant and clutch at his shoulders.

Chanyeol sat up, moved his hand away to rest on Minseok’s stomach, and laughed when Minseok bared his teeth.

“Fuck,” Min said. “Fuck, I asked for this.”

“You did.”

Chanyeol leaned down to kiss him – softly, with teasing little nips, until Minseok’s breath quieted and a hand curved around the back of his neck.

“Any word from our missing friend?”

Minseok smiled and trailed his fingers down the outside of Chanyeol’s ear so delicately that it tickled. The light from the phone highlighted the angles of Min’s face and the darkness of his eyes.

“He’s seen them all. No reply, though.”

Chanyeol took the phone. He straddled Minseok’s hips again and took a photo of his hand splayed across Min’s abdomen. He peeled the rest of Min’s clothes off of him, sent a photo of his hand wrapped around Minseok’s dick.

Both photos got the little “read” check mark underneath immediately.

“He’s watching,” Chanyeol said.

It kept him distracted from the ache between his own legs, stroking Minseok and watching on the phone screen for a good time to take a picture, seeing those little check marks appear and thinking of Jongdae at his parents’ house, phone held up to his face in the dark, maybe biting his lip, maybe jacking himself. Chanyeol moved his hand fast enough to make a blur as the camera tried to focus.

“Fuck,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol caught him on video – only about 12 seconds, but with Min bucking upward, gasping, “Stop, stop, Chan, not yet, I –“ and “argh, fuck” when Chanyeol took his hand away.

He sent a picture of himself licking the web of skin between his thumb and forefinger.

“I hope you have an unlimited data plan,” he said.

Min huffed a short laugh.

Just to be awful, he brought Minseok close with his hand again, quickly and before Minseok had had time to calm down. He looked rumpled and irritated in that photo, his face shiny with sweat. Then Chanyeol handed the phone back, because he was about to be sticky and need both hands.

Fully naked himself and with supplies in reach, Chanyeol settled between Minseok’s legs. He took his time licking and sucking at Min’s cock, making a show of it with an open-mouthed smile, his
tongue pressed against the head, when he saw the camera pointed at him. It was a moment of triumph when he sucked hard enough to make Minseok drop the phone a second time.

Only a couple of minutes after that, Min was squirming again, starting to protest in short gasps. Chanyeol pulled off and laid his cheek against Minseok’s thigh. He tried not to make it obvious that he was watching. The second Minseok took a proper breath, Chanyeol ran teasing fingers across his rim. Min twitched his hips and cursed. Chanyeol used the lightest of touches, his other hand a loose circle around Min’s dick, his mouth soft, tonguing the head. If he had started with this, Minseok probably could’ve lasted half an hour with it. But it wasn’t long before Min writhed a little, and Chanyeol got his first “please.”

“What please, beta?” Chanyeol murmured, lips against that firm, hot skin.

Minseok groaned – Chanyeol would’ve worried, because it sounded so frustrated, but Minseok’s fingers wound into his hair, and he heard the camera again.

“Please put one of those gorgeous fucking fingers in me, Chanyeol,” Minseok growled, and tugged at his hair.

He did, sliding it slowly in and out, his other hand wrapped around Min’s hip, mouthing his length. He kept it slow and perfectly steady – the kind of thing that he’d be hating by now, burning with frustration – until Minseok growled again,

“Fuck, come on.”

Chanyeol bit down on the skin just above dark hair. Minseok shuddered. He drew his finger out, and Min whined.

“That doesn’t sound like begging to me.”

Murder face was even worse (i.e., scarier/sexier) in a dimly lit room, when Minseok’s hair was tousled and his face flushed, his muscles tight with tension. He glowered at Chanyeol, then went loose and rolled his eyes in a smile.

“Please, Channie,” he said, pitching his voice low and drawing out the vowels. “Give me more, sweetness.”

Chanyeol gave him two fingers, but he kept that same slow, obnoxious pace, which made Min laugh: up until the point when Chanyeol dipped his head and sucked hard at his cock, whereupon Minseok cursed again and tried to arch down onto Chanyeol’s hand.

Chanyeol made him beg twice for the third finger and left a sizeable mouth-shaped bruise on the inside of his thigh for good measure. After that, he stopped trying to tease. His own dick had been leaking onto the bed for what felt like a year by that point. His skin crawled with want. He drove his hand up hard, with a twist at the end.

“Fuck, Chan!”

He took that as encouragement and worked Min’s ass hard, watching how Minseok couldn’t keep still anymore, how he tossed his head back and forth, phone forgotten in his hand.

“Another, Channie, god. Give – please, ah, fuck, yeah like that.”

Now that they were getting to the endgame, Chanyeol noticed that he was trembling.
“You want me inside you, Min?”

Minseok moaned. Chanyeol curled his fingers, and the moan broke up into gasps.

“You want me to fuck you, Minseok?”

Min’s eyes snapped open, and he grabbed Chanyeol’s hair again.

“Let me ride you.”

Like he was going to turn that down, ever. But:

“What’s that?”

Minseok gave a frustrated snarl.

“Please let me fucking ride you, Chanyeol.”

He couldn’t help grinning.

“Okay.”

Not that Min didn’t wipe that smile right off his face by sinking down on him in one stroke the minute the condom went on. They both moaned, and Chanyeol thought his heart might beat its way straight out of his chest.

Minseok leaned in and kissed him, rough, biting his lip and the fingers of one hand digging into his neck. Chanyeol quivered against the urge to rut upward into Min’s warmth. He thumbed one nipple and felt Minseok twitch against him.

“Get the phone, Channie.”

Chanyeol’s sticky hands fumbled with it, but he got the photo of Minseok up on his knees, his abs clenched, hand circling himself and head bent low, with the shadowed outline of Chanyeol’s dick disappearing between his legs. He hovered there, making Chanyeol crazy, teasing the tip of his cock with that tight little rim, until Chanyeol sent the photo.

Then Min slammed down and rolled against him, and Chanyeol couldn’t even have said what a phone was. He was too busy feeling that taut body move between his hands, feeling the slide against his cock. He could smell mint and the sweet overlay of the lube, the salt of their mingled sweat. He pulled Minseok to him and mouthed at his throat.

“Let me,” he mumbled, pushing Minseok’s hand away and taking over, both hands stacked atop one another so that Min thrust fully into his grip every time he raised up.

“Shit, Chan, squeeze tighter,” he gasped.

Chanyeol felt Min’s ass clench around him, and the world started to white out at the edges. He tightened his grip. Min’s fingers dug into his shoulders, and he bounced faster, tossed his head.

“Are you close, Channie? Please tell me you’re close, Chan, I can’t – fuck, it’s too good, please.”

Through the blur of his incoming orgasm, Chanyeol registered how adorable it was that Minseok was still begging.

“Come, Min.”
He added a little twist with one hand, and Minseok arched his back. He squeezed again, and Chanyeol almost erupted.

“Want you to come in me, Channie.”

“I will.”

“Then I –“

Fuck, Min’s whole body went rigid as he shuddered into Chanyeol’s hands, silent but with his mouth wide open. Chanyeol’s groan turned into a whine as he tried to hold it together enough to keep his hands tight about Minseok’s dick while his own hips jerked upward and he came in a series of waves that crashed through him, one after another until he couldn’t even fucking see.

He melted afterward, slumping back against the headboard, and Minseok collapsed onto him.

“That what just what I wanted,” Min said, nuzzling against Chanyeol’s jaw.

His brain hadn’t reengaged yet, so the best Chanyeol could do to register his satisfaction at having done a good job was more kissing. Minseok didn’t seem to mind.

After a few minutes, Chanyeol managed a weird-angled photo of Minseok’s head bowed onto his shoulder. Following more sloppy kisses and Min grimacing as he lifted off Chanyeol, they managed one last picture – the two of them looking blissed-out, arms around each other.

And then, when they stumbled back from washing up to fall into the freshly changed sheets, they found a single text from Jongdae, under all those photos:

“I’ll be home tomorrow around 1:30.”
Chapter 27

There was a lot to do before their 1:30 alpha return: all the clothes strewn everywhere to be picked up and folded, birthday gifts to be wrapped, a cake to be procured, and all while Minseok and Chanyeol were in zombie sap mode from their full weekend followed by a late night of high-quality sexing. Chanyeol tried to fit himself into Minseok’s lap while they were drinking coffee, which didn’t work at all. Having to settle for snuggling up side by side under a blanket with their legs tangled together hardly bad, though.

All of their good-morning texts went unanswered.

The closer it got to lunchtime with neither of their phones buzzing, the less frequently Minseok smiled, and the more his eyebrows tilted toward the center. He kept drawing the ribbons on the birthday gifts through his fingers. Chanyeol’s well-worn worry gears started spinning.

“What’s wrong?”

Minseok leaned his head against Chanyeol’s arm.

“Just hoping Dae’s weekend wasn’t too bad,” he said.

This of course made Chanyeol go broody, too, with an extra terrific overlay of guilt for having mostly had a great holiday. By 1:15 they were both literally just standing by the sofa together, Chanyeol twitching with nervous energy.

And the traffic gods must’ve taken pity on them, because it was only a few minutes after that when they heard Jongdae’s key in the door. He had shadows under his eyes, and his hair was ruffled in a way that looked like he’d been clutching at it. There was no trace of his habitual smile.

He dropped his bag, sighed heavily, and very nearly ran across the room.

“Oh, love,” Minseok murmured when Jongdae put his arms around them both, pulling so their arms touched and burying his face there, like he was trying to block out the light.

Chanyeol could smell Jongdae’s upset – and though his brain tried to tell him to hang back, let Jongdae’s actual mate go first, his body moved for him, bending down and craning his head to put his neck near Jongdae’s nose. Jongdae turned his head and inhaled, made a miserable little sound. Chanyeol felt Minseok move, and then Jongdae turned, pressed his face up hard against Chanyeol’s neck, his fists clenched around Chanyeol’s sweater in the back and Min’s arms around them both.

Chanyeol rubbed Dae’s back for a couple of minutes, then let go enough for Jongdae to rotate and get his face pressed up against Minseok. Then it was Chanyeol’s turn to squeeze them both tight. He kissed the back of Jongdae’s head. Eventually the sourness of upset eased a little.

“Come on,” Minseok said.

He pulled Jongdae by the wrist down the hallway. Chanyeol would’ve followed anyway, but it made his heart jump around when Jongdae took his hand.

“Shirts off.”

There was nothing sexy about Min’s statement – he said it after pulling off his own, while tugging the covers down on the bed. He arranged them in the bed, Jongdae in the middle, then pulled the
covers up over all their heads.

Because he was a freaking genius. After a few minutes, the warmth of their bodies in that enclosed space would trap their scents together, making a safe little nest-like territory. Chanyeol snuggled up against Jongdae’s back, one hand curled over the top of his head and the other stroking his belly. Minseok rested one hand against Jongdae’s face.

Soon, Chanyeol was fighting yawns, between the warmth and the way their combined scents made his body go limp, the omega in him wanting to nuzzle and kiss – how nice that Jongdae’s head was right there in front of his to make that possible. The pong of upset had dissipated, and finally Jongdae sighed, shifting so that he pressed against Chanyeol’s chest and held Minseok closer.

“I’m so pissed,” he said. “The two of you last night with those photos. I came so hard my damn ears rang. I was so ready to come home today and make you both scream my name, and then my – fucking – father.”

Chanyeol pressed his hand more firmly against the top of Jongdae’s head.

“Tell us, babe,” Minseok said.

Jongdae exhaled again.

“It was just what I thought. I waited until this morning to tell him about Chanyeol, and he lost his shit. As usual, I do alpha all wrong by allowing a mere omega to run around the city for Chuseok, instead of presenting himself for inspection and approval. I don’t have a proper sense of hierarchy. I’m ashamed of myself, as proved by the way I tried to hide Chanyeol from him. And of course because I’ve spent so much time – excuse me, wasted so much time – listening to crazy beta ideas, I’ve forgotten how to assert my dominance, I’m a weakling and an embarrassment to my presentation, blah blah blah, fuck.”

“Ah, yes,” Minseok said. “I was in the middle of receiving a lecture about how surely, now that I’ve met Channie, I can see the foolishness of my ways and realize that it’s time to settle into a responsible career and properly represent the family. If he hadn’t interrupted, my uncles would probably still be talking.”

“Shit, Min,” Jongdae said, hugging him tight.

Chanyeol, meanwhile, was in an absolute corkscrew of guilt.

“I’m so sorry,” he said.

“Uh. Sorry for what?” Jongdae asked.

“If you guys hadn’t met me, you wouldn’t have had to put up with all that stuff.”

Minseok glared over at him from across Jongdae’s bare shoulder.

“That’s your takeaway from this conversation? What the fuck, Channie, how is it your fault?”

“I mean –“

Jongdae reached back and smacked his thigh.

“No way, cut it out with the ‘I mean’s, Chanyeol. My father has been an asshole my whole life, and Minseok’s family has been too respectable to be any fun for – what?”
“Four or five generations, easy,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol tried to protest and got an alpha elbow dug into his ribs for his trouble.

“I feel bad,” he whined finally, under the onslaught of Min’s glare and Jongdae’s huffing.

“You should feel bad about one thing, Channie.”

Minseok looked at Jongdae with his lips pursed.

“His family is terrific.”

“Aw fuck, really?”

Minseok nodded.

Jongdae shook his head.

“You’re a jerk, Park Chanyeol. How dare you show us up like that.”

He didn’t even know how to respond: especially given that Jongdae’s tone had a weird quaver in it, like he was genuinely upset.

A silence stretched out a little more than was comfortable.

“I was so mad I walked the whole way to the train station,” Jongdae said.

“Babe. Isn’t that like two kilometers?” Minseok asked.

Jongdae shifted. Chanyeol watched alarm flash across Minseok’s face.

“Babe?”

“Min,” Jongdae groaned.

He clutched at Minseok’s shoulder and ducked his head.

“Min, he asked me when I was kicking you out.”

What the fuck.

Chanyeol’s own growl was pretty loud, but not enough to drown out Minseok’s. Jongdae made a low, unhappy sound.

Chanyeol shifted to let Min roll Jongdae onto his back. Minseok hovered over him, one hand wrapped around Jongdae’s jaw.

“Hyung,” Jongdae whispered.

Chanyeol curled close around them at that miserable little whisper. Their warm, dark space smelled of upset again, and Jongdae’s breath was unsteady.

“No,” Minseok said, his voice deep and quiet. “No, love.”

“Min.”

Minseok kissed him with a fierceness that contrasted his quiet voice.
“This isn’t his pack, Dae. He’s not in charge here.”

“Hyung.”

“This is your house, Jongdae.”

“I would never.”

“I know, my love.”

“I love you, Min.”

Chanyeol’s heart ached, watching them, hearing the misery in Jongdae’s voice. He had no idea what to do, how to help, but one thing was for damn sure: he was staying right where he was, trying to touch as much of them both as he could, trying to be a barrier between the two of them and their hurts.

Minseok looked up from their kiss, his solemn expression clear even in the low light. He moved his hand to twine his fingers with Chanyeol’s in Jongdae’s hair. Chanyeol exhaled with the weight of all of it and put his lips against Jongdae’s head.

“Min.”

“You’re home now,” Minseok murmured.

He moved, one thigh pressed between Jongdae’s legs, one hand in Chanyeol’s. Jongdae gasped and arched, a whine in the back of his throat. The scent of arousal started to overcome that of upset.

“This is your house,” Minseok said.

He ground against Jongdae’s hips, and Jongdae kissed him like he was desperate for air.

“We’re here, just us,” Chanyeol whispered.

He hoped it was okay. He didn’t think he was intruding, but he didn’t know for sure, and what if - Jongdae made a low sound and clutched Minseok’s shoulders while Min continued to grind against him. He jerked upward, cried out softly, and Minseok bent his head to kiss Jongdae’s neck.

“God,” Jongdae said, “Min, Channie, god.”

And their dark nest smelled of them and sex, Jongdae breathing hard. Minseok kissed his neck until Jongdae’s fingers eased their grip.

“Are you here with us now?” Minseok asked.

Jongdae nodded.

“How about you let Chanyeol greet you properly.”

Jongdae rolled over and reached for him. Chanyeol’s breath caught on itself briefly; then he cupped Jongdae’s cheek and kissed him. There was no room for teasing or delicacy. Chanyeol opened wide and licked deep into Jongdae’s mouth. It was messy and inelegant, but so was the tangle in his heart, sorrow and desire and worry and affection. Jongdae kissed him back just as sloppy, the two of them clicking teeth and knocking their noses together. It was perfect anyhow, and when they stopped, Jongdae tilted Chanyeol’s head so they pressed their foreheads together, still breathing the same air.
Chanyeol let one hand slide down to cup between Jongdae’s legs, not minding the stickiness, and smiled to himself when Dae twitched. Minseok slid up close and laid his lips against Jongdae’s temple.

“I never get tired of watching you kiss each other,” he said.

“Same,” Chanyeol and Jongdae said at the same time.

And Jongdae was able to laugh.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Every time it comes up when they’re cursing, I think: the theological implications of Werewolf Jesus are really something, aren't they?

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It was funny, a few minutes later, when they emerged from the bed, watching Jongdae’s grimaces as he peeled off his sticky jeans.

“I can’t believe you made me come in my pants like a teenager, blech.”

Minseok tossed his hair and winked.

“You guys go ahead, I’ll straighten up,” Chanyeol said.

He watched them walk hand in hand to go shower, one hand held to his chest to keep his heart from leaping out. There was no evidence of crunchiness on the sheets, so he merely remade the bed, picked up their shirts, and brought Jongdae’s bag from its spot by the door. It was better than trying to think through everything.

“Nice work with that hickey on Min’s thigh,” Jongdae said from the doorway. “He leave you any good ones?”

Chanyeol took a moment to appreciate the view of his naked alpha squeezing water out of his hair with a towel.

“Nope,” he said. “He had me doing all the work. ‘Edge me until I’m begging’ were my orders.”

Jongdae grinned.

“Damn. Why you gotta be so hot, babe?” he asked over his shoulder.

“It’s my natural state.”

All those times when people had wanted him to feel and act small and shy. Here it was, unfolding in Chanyeol while he watched them banter, but he could see how it was mostly a front, both of them trying to reestablish normalcy even though their eyes were serious and their smiles a little tentative around the edges.

And they let him see it. Neither one of them cut his eyes over, as if Chanyeol’s presence made them nervous.

Oof.

He held out his arms, and Jongdae sat next to him, let Chanyeol work on his hair until it was no longer dripping, then wrap the towel around him like a trap and kiss on the side of his face.

“Somebody’s feeling mushy,” Dae said.
But his tone sounded happy.

“Get used to it,” Min said. “We’re spoiling you rotten today, remember?”

“Isn’t that supposed to involve blowjobs and pizza?”

“Of course it is. And cuddling.”

“Yuck.”

Minseok leaned in and rubbed his face against Jongdae’s jaw.

“You’re a liar, Kim Jongdae.”

The configuration they got into on the sofa was superior: Chanyeol sitting sideways, with Jongdae leaning back between his legs and Minseok curled against Dae’s chest. He could tilt his head down to press his lips against Jongdae’s hair. He could reach around to place one hand on Min’s neck. He was warm, with both of their scents around him, and watching Minseok’s thumb stroke Jongdae’s cheek made a soft, gooey feeling in his chest. They had snacks, drinks, a blanket, and the TV remote. As far as Chanyeol was concerned, they could stay right where they were until the very moment he had to go back to work.

“You should talk to your mom,” Minseok said after a few minutes.

Jongdae tried to stiffen, but Chanyeol squeezed and Minseok gazed up with his “you know I’m right” expression, so his resistance was pointless.

“I did,” he said eventually. “She called while I was on the train. She said the same kind of stuff she always does, that he lets his alpha run away with him, that he’d never actually cut me off from her. And I just – I hate it that she always takes his side.”

“He’s her mate, love,” Minseok said.

Jongdae gave a frustrated groan.

“But you’re mates, too,” Chanyeol said. “How could your father possibly think you’d ever kick Min out?”

Oh wow, they both went all awkward.

“We’ve never – formally registered?” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol busted out with “why the hell not??” before he could stop himself.

Minseok’s was the only face he could see, and Min’s cringe was acute.

“It just seemed easier,” Minseok said finally. “We wanted to avoid the uproar.”

“Mostly on my side,” Jongdae said. “I don’t think I could bear it if he never let me see my mom again.”

“I don’t think I could bear it if I were the cause of your never being able to see your mom again,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol definitely had to lean forward and hug the crap out of both of them for that one, because what a bunch of bullshit. Was it wrong of him to be relieved that he wasn’t the only one with issues?
Between their families and his tragic dating history, it was a wonder they were all able to function half as well as they did.

“So I guess start preparing yourself for all the fun, Channie,” Jongdae said with a sigh. “I flat out refused to take you to meet them until after I rut, but I won’t be able to put it off for long after that.”

Minseok rubbed his chest.

“That’s part of this too, right? How are you feeling? When do you think it’ll be?”

“Soon.”

Chanyeol found himself still unwilling to deal with the reality of anybody’s rut, much less (a) Jongdae’s and (b) soon. Time for distraction.

“It’ll be fine,” he said. “As long as you don’t have any grandfathers around to sexually harass me.”

Jongdae sat up straight and said,

“What.”

Minseok, meanwhile, put one hand over his face and groaned Chanyeol’s name.

It made for a great change of subject, though, Minseok trying to turn himself inside out with embarrassment while Chanyeol told the story.

“His great-grandfather? The one so old you’d break his hip if you exhale too hard on him?” Jongdae said.

“About waist-high on me?”

“Isn’t that true of like three-quarters of Min’s family?”

“Hey!”

“Lucky for me, Great-Grandfather was the only one who’d do something as tacky as scenting a strange omega in public, or I might’ve thrown my back out.”

It was great to talk up how awesome Minseok had been, taking care of him, while making the whole scenting thing and all those conversations about Chanyeol’s hypothetical future political career as funny as he could. Minseok’s cheeks turned pink, and Jongdae hugged him close, both of them smiling for real.

Minseok took it forward by talking about his visit to Chanyeol’s family, making Jongdae’s eyebrows waggle with his description of the two of them squeezing into Chanyeol’s little bed.

“And if the many childhood photos are to be believed, Channie never met an animal he didn’t like.”

“True!” Chanyeol said.

“I’m registering my objection to ferrets right now,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol gasped dramatically.

“You didn’t like the pictures of me and Mister Noodle? I loved Mister Noodle! I cried so much when he died.”
“Mister Noodle!” Jongdae shouted.

“They’re basically rats, Chanyeol.”

“First of all, they are way more closely related to otters, and second, rats make wonderful pets, they’re super affectionate, and – “

“No rats or rat-like creatures,” Minseok said, with a strong application of murder face.

“God, I’m glad to be home,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol couldn’t even be sad about the pet obstacle thrown in front of him – he was too proud of the smiles on their faces and the way Jongdae leaned against his chest.

His boyfriends.

Jongdae hissed and pulled one foot into his lap, rubbing the sole.

“Cramp.”

“I can’t believe your sister-in-law didn’t make your brother at least go catch up to you and drive you to the train,” Minseok said.

“Are you kidding? They lit out first thing this morning. Hyung’s ability to sense impending drama is his superpower. Aish, my feet are killing me.”

And there was another thing Chanyeol could do to help. He pushed Jongdae off him (amid high-volume protest). Coming back with the lotion bottle, he found Dae and Min twined around one another on the sofa, not even kissing, just holding onto each other, foreheads pressed together.

He didn’t even feel jealous about it. There wasn’t any room for envy – he was too full up with affection and the simple pleasure of looking at them. Wasn’t that a nice development.

Chanyeol sat and pulled one of Jongdae’s feet into his lap, stripped the sock off, lotioned up his hands, and ran his thumbs firmly up the center of the sole.

“Channie what are hhhnnnnnnngggggguh.”

Minseok grinned into Jongdae’s hair. He stayed where he was, playing with Dae’s hair and stroking his back while Chanyeol rubbed his feet. Jongdae made a series of filthy-sounding noises that eventually trailed off into sleepy grunts and then silence.

Min extricated himself and came over to lay a tender little kiss on Chanyeol’s mouth.

“Not as nice as getting our asses wrecked, but probably more on the order of what Dae needed at the moment,” he said.

“I didn’t wreck your ass enough last night?” Chanyeol asked, smiling up.

Minseok’s hands, as ever, were so cool on his cheeks.

“You know you did.”

Chanyeol nuzzled into Minseok’s hand.

“You didn’t say. About the lecture.”
Minseok sat on his legs.

“It’s nothing I haven’t heard infinite times before, Chan. I had more important things on my mind.”

“Now see, when you give me a dirty smile like that, it makes me want to believe you.”

Minseok pinched him, then slapped his arm when Chanyeol gave a small yelp and Jongdae shifted at the other end of the sofa.

Dae’s nap didn’t last long. But when he rolled over and looked at them – Min sitting on the floor with Chanyeol’s legs hooked down over his shoulders, both of them reading *Hell’s Heat*, his smile was soft and warm.

It was all softness for a while after that. They ordered pizza and sat around the table bumping elbows and feeding one another choice bites while a repeat of a holiday music show went unnoticed in the background. After dinner, Minseok brought over the cake and they sang to Jongdae while he grinned and ducked his head. Minseok’s singing voice was burred but sweet, and Chanyeol had the thought that maybe he needed to get over feeling shy and start thinking about some damn duets.

“Hold on,” Jongdae said when Chanyeol piled the gifts on the table. “My mom sent you guys some stuff.”

The two packages Jongdae brought out from the bedroom were wrapped the old-fashioned way in cloth – one oblong and tied in a fancy knot, the other square and tied messily. The oblong one was for Minseok.

“Oh great, I look forward to her citron tea every year,” he said, unwrapping it with a smile. “You know how much I love this stuff.”

“I think you’re the only person she makes it for, now,” Jongdae said, rubbing Min’s arm. “I have no idea what yours is, Channie, she practically threw it at me when I was stomping out the door.”

Chanyeol untied the loose knot to find a jewelry box, very plain in tooled dark brown leather and obviously both old and well cared-for.

“Oh,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol ran his fingers over the leather of the lid, indented in the shape of pine trees. The box was empty, but that didn’t matter. The box was the thing. From one omega to another, a jewelry box meant a hope for it to be filled up: a long relationship, its happiness demonstrated by pieces of jewelry.

“That was my grandfather’s,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol didn’t miss the waver in Dae’s voice. But then, his eyes had been filling up with tears anyhow, just at the gesture. He didn’t have any omegas in his family: nobody to give him a jewelry box. He had always kept his jewelry in a metal bowl he’d bought during college.

For Jongdae’s mother to give him one – and an heirloom, at that – it was a lot.

“Channie,” Jongdae said, and thumbed the tears away from under his eyes.

“She really is the sweetest person alive,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol leaned against Jongdae for a minute, his hands still on the jewelry box. He thought about
Luhan managing Zitao out of his grumpy moment, and about Minjoo’s efficiency in escaping awkwardness. He thought about all the fires, medical emergencies, and car wrecks where he had quietly, gently, stubbornly convinced people of all presentations to do what he wanted, whether it was climb down a ladder with him, wear an oxygen mask, or just get out of the way.

Jongdae’s mom had taken the time to make homemade citron tea for Minseok. She had given him an omega’s gift from her own family. He decided to take those as signs of solidarity. And in the face of two omegas, one of them his mate, there was no way Jongdae’s dad stood a single chance.

“You’ll have to give me her address so I can send a thank-you note,” he said.

Jongdae blinked at him. Minseok was briefly busy with his phone.

“Done,” Min said, and Chanyeol’s phone buzzed in his pocket.

So that was great.

Chanyeol held the box in his lap while Jongdae opened his birthday presents: a dark green sweater and a pale yellow dress shirt from Minseok, along with a coffee-table book of super close-up photos of electronics that made Jongdae grin and immediately hunch over paging through it, which made Minseok laugh and take it away from him.

“You have to open Chanyeol’s present too,” he said.

“Wow, what? Chan, this is cool!” he said, pulling out the 27-year-old bottle of wine.

Chanyeol was going purely on the advice of the beta woman at the wine shop. If it sucked, he would definitely blame her.

“That’s not the good part,” he said, pointing to the card.

Jongdae made cute faces and high-pitched noises over all the stuff about the wine-of-the-month club.

“We’ve lost him to reading materials,” Minseok said with a fond little smile a few minutes later.

He did spend quite a while shoveling cake into his face while he read everything about the wine club twice and buried his face in the art book. Minseok scooted over next to Chanyeol to look at the jewelry box.

“This is beautifully made,” he said after examining it.

“It’s really – do you know about this? About one omega giving another one a jewelry box?”

Minseok shook his head.

“It’s a wish,” Chanyeol said. “That your relationship will last long enough and be happy enough for it to get filled up.”

“Oh,” Minseok said, sounding breathy.

He laid his hand on Chanyeol’s cheek. Chanyeol didn’t think he was imagining the way Min’s eyes shone.

“Is that true?” Jongdae asked with a croak.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said. “And for it to be from her own omega parent, too. It’s. It’s about the
loveliest thing she could’ve done.”

Minseok put his arm around Chanyeol’s waist and rubbed his face against Chanyeol’s shoulder. Jongdae looked at them both for a moment, his eyes wide. Then he crawled over and knocked them (slowly) onto their backs, lying on top of them both.

“You’re both magic,” he said. “You’ve taken the shittiest day possible and somehow made it awesome.”

“And we haven’t even gotten to the blow jobs yet,” Minseok said.

“Right?”

Jongdae lasted almost a full minute before he wiggled on them and sang,

“So who’s gonna suck my diiiiiiiick?”

“Why do we like him, again?” Chanyeol asked.

“Unfortunately, he’s very cute,” Minseok said.

Sadly true. He was remarkably cute when they pinned him and each worked on a side of his neck, squirming until his laughing protests turned into heavy breathing and his hands tangled in their hair.

Chanyeol was happy to follow Min’s lead on spoiling Jongdae rotten, as it seemed that their pervert-artist had a whole plan worked out. This involved:

First, Minseok sucking his dick while he lay across Chanyeol’s legs with Chanyeol’s fingers in him. Kind of difficult from a kissing standpoint, but highly enjoyable, what with the way Jongdae writhed around, only ever getting out half a word at a time and not knowing what to do with his hands. Bonus: Minseok’s lips stretched around him, the sight of Min’s tongue lapping at the head, and his really impressive ability to swallow Dae to the root and stay there for a bit, working his throat. It almost looked as good as it felt, in Chanyeol’s humble opinion.

Second, Chanyeol sucking his dick while Minseok got fingers in his ass. Chanyeol considered it a matter of pride to provide quality fellatio even while evil persons tried to distract him by pressing fingers into his prostate, but if Jongdae’s continued inability to form a complete sentence was any sign, he did okay, even though he kept having to pull off to catch his breath and/or curse. Anyhow, moaning mid-suck was something everybody liked.

Third, Jongdae sandwich. Minseok was never going to have a break from cleaning their poor sofa. He bent Chanyeol over the arm – and it was about 17-alarm hot to watch Minseok guide Jongdae’s dick inside him, Jesus – then took up his spot behind Dae, who was almost literally cross-eyed by that point and couldn’t stay on his own feet. Chanyeol got a crick in his neck trying to crane around to watch the muscles in Minseok’s legs, the grin on his face, and Jongdae’s eyes rolling back in his head, his hair flopping over his forehead. The neck cramp at least kept Chanyeol from coming too soon, even though the whole thing was so ridiculously hot. Jongdae tried to help him out but lost it when he came first, wailing and trying to hang onto Chanyeol’s shoulders. After that he was pretty much only capable of lying heavily on Chanyeol’s back, sliding back and forth and making a little noise with each of Minseok’s thrusts. Minseok laughed and slammed faster. Chanyeol took himself in hand, and when he went over,
squeezing hard around Jongdae and doing something terrible to the side of the sofa, Dae sobbed and almost slid off to the side, between all the sweat and his being too fucked-out for his arms to work. That made Min laugh again, so the two of them got fucked for about another month, until Chanyeol was almost as in sad a shape as Dae and even his toes were so sweaty that he couldn’t grip the floor and they both just flopped around sobbing and squeaking until Minseok finally smacked one hand in the center of Jongdae’s back and groaned his way through what sounded like an orgasm worthy of all that effort. All three of them and the surrounding area were a complete mess. It was awesome.

“Happy birthday,” Minseok said a little while later.

It was unfair that he was the one who caught his breath first, since he’d done all the work.


Which was a 5-star review, right?
Sorry for the delay! My excuse is that I was at the Red Velvet concert last night. It was so much fun, they were excellent.

I'll try to get back on my Wednesday-Sunday posting schedule as soon as I can. Thank you for your patience, friends.

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With Jongdae and Minseok both at work, Chanyeol lazed about on Tuesday, playing Destiny with Baek for a while so they could gossip about whose mom stuffed them more full. Baekhyun was extremely stubborn in refusing to believe that Chanyeol and Minseok had NOT had sex in his childhood bed.

Also, Chanyeol demonstrated extreme bravery by continuing his guitar practice until the song was over, even though Minseok returned home halfway through it.

“I don’t know that one,” Minseok said when Chanyeol set his guitar aside. “Who is it?”

“It’s old,” Chanyeol said. “Foo Fighters, from America. Sounds better on electric guitar.”

“Sounded pretty good to me.”

Chanyeol made a face to try to stave off his blush.

“You’re biased.”

“Maybe,” Minseok said, and laughed.

But he came back from changing clothes wearing a pensive expression.

“Channie,” he said. “I know you and Dae are both trying to avoid it, but we can’t anymore. He’s going to rut any time, and we have to be ready.”

Chanyeol tried really hard, but he couldn’t contain his entire flinch.

“Are you sure, uh, me?” Chanyeol said.

Being, of course, a well-educated, intelligent safety professional.

Minseok tilted his head to the side, wearing an expression that suggested less than perfect confidence in that intelligence. Which was fair.

“Of course, dummy,” he said.

Which. Okay. Sure. No problem. Just a rut, alphas had them every year. Just a whole period of concentrated alpha-ness all at one time, no big deal. Who cared about enhanced fertility and possessiveness and hour-long orgasms and lots of teeth. Sure! No big deal.
“I’ve, um, never,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok blinked a couple of times, and a soft smile curved across his face – a smile that told Chanyeol he shouldn’t worry. Min sat next to him, one hand rubbing little circles on his lower back.

“Never had an alpha in rut, sweetness?”

Chanyeol shook his head.

“It’s not so different from heat,” Minseok said. “There’s the same kind of single-mindedness.”

That was good to know. Heat, he could deal with. They’d had a lot of fun during his heat. If it really wasn’t so different from that. Though of course it had to be. Heat was all about melting and receiving and wanting. How could it possibly be the same?

“You look like you’ve been pole-axed,” Min said.

He rubbed Chanyeol’s back a little more.

“He gets super bossy, you know,” he mused. “You’ll probably love it.”

Would he? Chanyeol had a sudden memory of Jongdae’s voice growling low and soft in his ear, and he shivered.

“And of course, I’ll be grateful not to have my ass be so sore afterward that I have to sleep on my stomach for a week,” Minseok added.

That mental image at least made Chanyeol laugh, which he figured was the point.

“You know I like to be a helper,” he said.

Min smirked.

“Still. You need to let work know, sweetness,” he said gently after a minute.

Chanyeol dialed the phone before he could overthink it, and Sehun answered.

“What the hell are you doing there?” he asked.

“I was bored,” Sehun said. “So I came in to answer the phones. What do you want.”

“I need you to put a note in the schedule,” Chanyeol said.

Then his tongue seized up on him. Because: was this allowed? Was this a thing? Of course he got time off for his heats – that was legally mandated, and even if it wasn’t, it’s not like he was capable of working – but how did he call in for this? He couldn’t even remember the policy. Was he allowed to call out for his boyfriend’s rut? Was that officially official enough to count?

“Are you still there?” Sehun asked.

He looked over at Minseok, whose quirked-up mouth suggested that he could hear the mental conundrum in Chanyeol’s mind. Min took the phone.

“Hello, this is Chanyeol’s beta mate,” he said.

Hold on, his WHAT.
The universe tilted sideways on its axis.

“Oh, hi, Sehunnie, why are you at the station? Ah, I see.”

HIS?

BETA?

WHAT?

??!!??

“I’m not sure, it seems as if his brain decided to do a hard reboot,” Minseok said. “Anyway, we were calling because his alpha mate is about to rut soon. Jongdae, yes.”

Whoa, whoa, whoa, HIS ALPHA WHAT?

What the fuck.

“Two or three days, usually. Yes, I figured that too, so maybe tack on a few extra? Five at the most. But of course he’ll call if it’s fewer. Oh no, not for a few days, maybe a week. Yes. Yes, of course, Sehunnie. Thank you.”

Chanyeol listened to all this through a haze like bad feedback from an amplifier. Minseok looked so calm, which was impossible, because the whole world had gone all wobbly.

Minseok set his phone down.

“Chan, what’s blowing your mind?”

After a period of strenuous mental work, Chanyeol was able to croak,

“Mate?”

Minseok’s eyebrows shot upward.

“Obviously,” he said. “What else did you think we were doing here?”

Was that a rhetorical question? Did he want it to be a rhetorical question? If it wasn’t, how the hell was Chanyeol supposed to know the answer to it? He knew all about the dumb, squishy stuff that had been going on in his own brain since about 2 seconds after Jongdae burst through his front door, but how the hell was he supposed to know that…? Mates?

What?

They’d been together for years, wasn’t this just?

Wasn’t he just waiting for the door to shut, and having to pick up all the pieces of himself all over again?

“Hey,” Minseok said, scooting closer, his hand on Chanyeol’s forearm and his voice quiet.
“Hey, Chanyeol. What’s this?”


And then Minseok looked sad, and Chanyeol hated himself a little.

“Do you not want to be our mate, sweetness?” Minseok asked, too quietly, his eyes on Chanyeol’s chest.

“No!” Chanyeol said, and then realized what he’d said, and amended with “I mean, yes! I just. I thought.”

Minseok’s lips twitched, and at least he met Chanyeol’s eye. His thumb moved against Chanyeol’s arm.

“Did you think we were just playing with you, Chan?”

“You guys have been together forever,” he said.

Minseok grasped his arm, firm and comforting.

“And now we’re with you.”

“But – “

He brought the murder face out.

“Don’t argue with me about how I feel, Chanyeol.”

Well, and here finally Chanyeol could say something helplessly idiotic but maybe useful.

“You haven’t actually said how you feel,” he muttered.

The way that Min’s eyes widened and his mouth dropped open was (a) unbelievably cute and (b) really affirming, given the conversation at hand.

“Fuck me,” he said. “I’m an asshole.”

Chanyeol let Min push him onto his back. Between the cursing and Minseok climbing on top of him so their faces were close together, he already felt a lot better.

“For starters,” Minseok said, “you are the hottest of hot firefighter boyfriends.”

Chanyeol had the terrible urge to quip about how Sehun would disagree, but thankfully Minseok kissed him, so his mouth was too busy to bust out with something stupid.

“And I love how you don’t even think about it,” Minseok said when his mouth was free.

“You wander around acting as if you’re some giant doof, and you don’t even see how people’s eyes follow you, how captivating you are.”

Chanyeol smiled until his cheeks hurt.

“I love how you do know it,” he said. “You’re the hottest beta alive.”

“One must face reality,” Minseok said.
After a statement like that, Chanyeol expected one of those classic Minseok kisses that attempted to cause brain injury via lack of oxygen. What he got instead was so tender and soft that he couldn’t help going limp into the sofa cushions.

“I love how much you want to help people,” Min said.

“I love how you take care of everyone,” Chanyeol said.

He hoped it wasn’t possible to actually die of sweetness, because he wanted this to last forever.

“I love how excited you get about things,” Minseok said.

“I love how football makes you grumpy.”

“Hey!”

Minseok pulled on his hair a little and bit his lip for that one. Such a terrible punishment, oh no.

They lay together for a long time, murmuring sweet stuff at one another and kissing lazily. Half the things Minseok told him were so silly that they would’ve made Chanyeol cringe, except for all those kisses, Min’s hands on his face, and those repetitions of the word “love,” but in a form that was possible to believe, because it was always attached to something solid and specific. He thought his heart might choke him, it felt so big.

“What the hell is this?” Jongdae asked when he came home, leaning over the back of the sofa to grin at them.

“We’re having feelings,” Minseok said, smiling down at Chanyeol.

“Gross,” Jongdae said.

“Making romantic declarations.”

“Even worse!”

Jongdae climbed over the back of the sofa and fell on them, ruining all the nice softness with his bony elbows and knees and his damn wiggling, until Chanyeol had his arms full of boyfriends, at which point he couldn’t complain anymore.

“Why are we being disgusting?” Jongdae asked.

“Channie freaked out when I called him our mate.”

Jongdae scoffed.

“What the hell else is this supposed to be?” he said.

Chanyeol stared at the ceiling until the situation with his tear ducts felt a little less precarious. He must’ve taken a longer than Jongdae approved of, because Dae put his hand around Chanyeol’s neck – but softly.

“Omega,” he said.

Chanyeol looked at him and the sharp question in his eyes.

“That is what we’re doing here, isn’t it?”
The whole thing opened wide inside Chanyeol: that he could have this without worrying about when it would end. Of course he wasn’t about to want to formalize anything on the basis of one afternoon’s conversation, but they were both here, telling him that this thing among them was real for them, too. That they wanted it to be real.

He tried to see it: never another solo heat. Settling into a life together, with its outbreaks of drama and long, snuggly afternoons. Trusting it. Trusting them. Letting go of the tendril of fear that still tangled around his heart and allowing himself to simply fall for them.

They lay on his chest, watching him. Not pressuring him to answer, because like Minseok had said, he was supposed to be an equal voice. But at the same time, he knew they wouldn’t let him get away with hedging his way out of that answer.

He looked at Jongdae, all the gorgeous angles of his face. His loud laugh and stupid crude humor. His willingness to play along when Chanyeol got silly, and his straightforward, eager desire. His easy charisma, and even the way that was undercut by his worry when he felt like he’d been wrong. The way he watched them both, always greedy for them but never greedy at their expense.

And Minseok – his double-sided beauty, that fierce masculinity that flipped over into cuteness the second he smiled. His patience, and the way he never hid his affection. His filthy mind and the way he could seemingly do everything well. His persistence at always making them stay open and honest with one another and themselves.

Looking into Minseok’s warm eyes, with Jongdae’s hand still steady on his neck, Chanyeol thought he could do it: keep on falling for them.

“Yes,” he said.

He was almost overwhelmed by the way that Jongdae’s thumb stroked his chin and Minseok’s smile shone like the sun, but he was able to get the rest of it out,

“My mates.”

“Yay!” Jongdae yelled.

Which was nice, because it forestalled any weeping on Chanyeol’s part, and there was a lot of really awkward smile-kissing that was totally great, even when Minseok kneed him lightly in the junk amid the rolling around.

“Babe, be careful, we need that for later,” Jongdae said, and Min hit him.

Chanyeol was only successful in convincing him not to open the 27-year-old birthday wine because he was headed to work in the morning and could only have one glass. But it was nice that Jongdae thought it was an evening worth celebrating. They continually bumped against one another, kissing.

“Proposition,” Jongdae said at one point. “We go to the gym Thursday instead so we can drive Chan to work tomorrow.”

“Accepted,” Minseok said.

“You guys. It’s literally a two-minute drive,” Chanyeol said.

“Counter proposal: kissing.” Jongdae said.

It wasn’t like he had an argument against that.
“Are you sure about this mate thing?” Chanyeol asked at one point, burrowing his head up under Jongdae’s chin, despite the things he had to do to his spine to get that low.

“One hundred and sixty-four percent sure,” Jongdae said, then,

“No! Wait! One hundred and sixty-nine percent sure! Six hundred and ninety-six percent sure! Nine hundred and sixty-nine percent sure! Guys. Let’s do that later.”

Minseok cackled to his dinner.

“I never thought I’d be grateful that you’re a stubborn, nosy bastard easily led around by his dick,” Minseok said later, his mouth moving over Jongdae’s neck. “And yet without it, we wouldn’t have our Channie right now.”

Jongdae’s hand wormed its way deeper down the front of Chanyeol’s pants.

“Thank god my stupid hormones are good for something,” he said.

Chanyeol sucked on Min’s earlobe and enjoyed the resulting wriggle.

“I really think I should get some credit for being an irresponsible dumbass with a big mouth,” he said.

“Granted,” Minseok said.

“I love your big mouth,” Jongdae said, trying to look solemn and failing completely. “So much of my dick fits in it.”

“One of his best qualities,” Minseok said.

“And the way he gives head like it’s his sworn vocation,” Jongdae said.

“I do enjoy sucking cock,” Chanyeol said.

The hand in his pants squeezed him in just the right way, so the next thing he said after that was more like a cross between “shit” and “fuck” with a multisyllabic moan in the middle.

Did it really make any difference, that they had all used the word “mate”? Technically just a word – not even really much different from “boyfriend.” It was more of a legal term than any declaration of feeling. People signed short-term mating contracts all the time, to symbolically merge families together, or surrogacy agreements with couples who couldn’t bear pups but didn’t want to adopt. Not like the old days, when mating meant a permanent lifetime thing, omegas giving up their family name to belong to their alphas.

Hell, he even had an aunt and uncle who had been signing a new, limited mating contract every 5 years since he was in elementary school. But he was pretty sure that was just an excuse to hold a party every time.

And yet. Chanyeol didn’t think he was making up the way they both kept smiling at him, or the way Jongdae laid his face against Chanyeol’s jaw, hand curling around the other side, and sounded happy, humming his name.

He for sure didn’t imagine when Minseok said, “my sweetness,” and Jongdae said, “excuse me, that’s our sweetness,” and Minseok growled that he should come up with his own damn nickname.

Of course, he didn’t have any mental room to ponder all that stuff, once they got going. Having a
dick in one’s mouth, and one’s dick in someone else’s mouth at the same time, wasn’t great for higher intellectual thought. Awesome as it was.

It was funny, the three of them rolling around in the bed, trying to figure out how they were going to configure things, and then everybody trying to deal with the fact that one member of the blowjob circle had legs significantly longer than the other two. That gave Chanyeol A Moment, for sure, thinking about how often they laughed with each other in bed, and how hot that was, in a way so different from anything he had experienced before.

Then Jongdae sucked hard and pressed two fingers up behind Chanyeol’s balls, and he stopped thinking about stuff for a while. He focused instead on the weight of Min’s dick in his mouth, that hot flesh moving over his tongue and sliding through his fist. He hollowed his cheeks, and Minseok bucked, made a low sound that made Jongdae moan too and the rhythm of his mouth briefly falter.

Chanyeol tried to focus, to work Min’s cock so he’d come first. He pulled out every trick he knew with his tongue and let one hand drift back to tease Minseok’s rim until Min bucked into his mouth and he had to work his fist to keep from choking. He heard Minseok exhale hard through his nose, and then Jongdae hummed over his dick, adding a new layer of difficulty to the proceedings.

Minseok won. He had the advantage of no gag reflex plus working Jongdae, whom he knew best and who had an alpha’s hair orgasm trigger. Jongdae’s mouth loosened around Chanyeol, and he moaned while MINseok laughed in the back of his throat. The pause in stimulation let Chanyeol redouble his efforts. He sucked hard and pumped his hand fast. Minseok’s laugh lengthened out into a moan, and the bitter salt of him filled Chanyeol’s mouth.

“You brat,” Jongdae panted after a minute.

He pushed Chanyeol onto his back.

“Lovely, horrible brat,” Minseok agreed.

Both of them together, licking and sucking at him, kissing each other while both their hands worked him at once, was too much to hold out on for long. And anyway, they were his mates, right? What they wanted was for him to come, and who was he to deny them? Better to let it rise up out of him, to spill into Jongdae’s warm mouth and Minseok’s tight hand, and call out their names.
It was weirdly not-weird, but instead quiet and comfortable, to wake up and all get ready together in the morning. Chanyeol and Minseok got to stand with their heads hanging low over their toothbrushes while Jongdae serenaded them awake from the shower: the tune of the previous summer’s big pop hit but with lyrics about ass-fucking. It was very Jongdae. Minseok buttoned up Jongdae’s new yellow dress shirt for him, which gave Chanyeol a conniption of cute. Maybe that’s what made him feel brave.

He needed bravery, staring at the beautiful jewelry box with an ugly memory in his head:

“If you’re not going to fucking wear it, what’s the use of my giving you jewelry, Chanyeol? It’s just a waste of my time and money.”

Not that he thought he’d hear anything like that, from either of their mouths. But he didn’t want to cause any smiles to disappear, either.

He also really, really, really didn’t want any of his jewelry to wind up as a hostage in a stupid firehouse prank. Taeil’s girlfriend had almost straight-up murdered half the A team just a few months earlier for taking one of his necklaces and passing it around so much that they lost it for 3 days, and Taeil had refused to speak to any of them about anything not work-related for weeks afterward.

“So, uh, I can’t really wear most of my jewelry on shift?” he said. “Would you guys mind if I left it here for safekeeping?”

“Eh?” Minseok said.

They both squinted at him.

“I mean, I don’t want you to think I don’t appreciate all of it, it’s just. I thought.”

“I don’t know, Chanyeol,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol’s lungs threatened to fall out of him.

“That’d mean that the first thing we have to do every time we see you is put our jewelry on you.”

Um, what?

Jongdae turned to Min.

“Babe, what are the odds of that leading straight to fucking?”

“Five to two,” Minseok said.

Jongdae shrugged.

“Your choice, man. You want to take the risk of us going cross-eyed and shoving body parts up your ass the minute you walk in the door, go ahead.”

Chanyeol glared at them.

“Can we put some kind of moratorium on terrible jokes before dawn?”
“Good luck with that,” Minseok said.

It was nice not to have to lug his guitar the whole way, and even nicer to smooch a bit in the car in the driveway.

Until the latter was ruined by the world’s most terrible best friend.

“Hey,” Baekhyun yelled, banging frantically on the window with both hands and startling all three of them so badly that Chanyeol knocked his head painfully against Minseok’s.

“Not that I don’t enjoy the view, but I’m totally prepared to cite all three of you for public indecency,” he bellowed, grinning.

“Please go kill him,” Jongdae muttered.

“On it,” Chanyeol said, followed by two brief, final kisses.

He caught Baek right in the gut with the narrow end of his guitar case. It was a moment of triumph.

“You look even sappier than usual,” Baekhyun said after the morning meeting.

“They, um. Called me their mate.”

When Baekhyun smiled really wide, his mouth made a rectangle. For almost his whole life, Chanyeol had thought of rectangles as the happiest shape.

“Well gosh, who could’ve seen that coming?” Baek said, but his voice was so soft that the tease didn’t sting. “How in the world did you finally get there?”

“I really, really hate to tell you this,” Chanyeol said, “but I guess it turns out that it is actually helpful to, like, talk about feelings in an adult manner.”

Baekhyun, being terrible, pretended to faint. Chanyeol felt it was an appropriate response to step on him. Baekhyun disagreed, loudly, for about 20 minutes.

What was weird was the way Sehun kept stalking him around the station, giving him A Look. Chanyeol had known Sehun long enough to realize that his resting facial expression of “I disapprove of you and everything you do generally” was an inaccurate representation of his thoughts (usually), but having it directed at oneself for 2 hours straight of a morning was enough to make a person paranoid.

“What?” he asked finally.

“I need to talk to you.”

“Okay.”

Sehun rolled his eyes.

“I’ve been trying to get you to go up on the roof all morning. Why the hell does that work with Baekhyun but not me?”

“Because we’ve known each other since we were kids and basically can read each other’s minds?”
“Gross. I don’t know which one of your minds I’d want to read less.”

“I hope you’re not about to ask me for a favor, because that just made the odds of my saying yes significantly lower.”

Sehun huffed and dragged him up onto the roof by the wrist.

“It’s fucking cold up here, Sehun, this better be important.”

Sehun sat cross-legged in front of him, their knees touching, and grabbed his shins. Chanyeol felt about 90 internal alarms go off.

“What do you know about ruts?”


“Quit blushing and answer the question, Chanyeol. If you’ve never been involved in one, there’s stuff you should know.”

Make that about 900 internal alarms.

“Oh, why?”

Sehun smacked one leg.

“Because you’re my friend, asshole, and Jongdae seems like a really decent guy. I don’t want you to misinterpret something and have stuff get fucked up, it’s been nice to see you happy.”

That was – not what he had been expecting.

“Misinterpret?”

Sehun shook his head.

“Don’t freak out, dude, it’s not that bad. Maybe I’m just worrying, it’s just. Like, I know you – don’t love it when people get really alpha.”

All those alarms were dampened by a rush of affection. He was definitely going to tell Minseok about this conversation.

“Listen,” Sehun said, “one thing you have to remember. No matter what, no matter how many teeth come out or how much growling is going on, he absolutely does not want to hurt you, ever. Don’t ever be scared about that. He is clearly not that kind of alpha.”

Chanyeol tried to imagine a scenario in which he was worried about Jongdae hurting him, and was glad to not be able to. Though that comment definitely increased his nervousness about this whole rut thing.

“I’m serious. He may try to throw you around a little, but if you don’t like it, one whine will shut that right down. Okay?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“But also,” Sehun said.

He flushed as red as one of their trucks, and his fingers dug into Chanyeol’s shin.
“Most of us, um. Really like to be made to – uh. Work for it, a little. Especially at the beginning. Not like in a violent way, just. Does that make sense?”

Chanyeol felt his ears get so hot that he knew he was just as red. How many times had he thought fondly of a bit of a wrestling match with Jongdae? A lot. He nodded.

“I don’t know how much of a difference it’ll make for it to be three of you,” Sehun continued. “But it’s like – all your focus narrows down to one point. So he won’t want you to go anywhere he can’t see you, or preferably be touching you. That’s where the growling and stuff comes from, right? It sounds terrible to put it this way, but he’ll be thinking you’re his territory, sort of. So he’ll worry if he can’t see you.”

And that was like what Minseok had said, “single-mindedness.” He could work with that.

“And for god’s sake, go to the clinic and get a shot, Chanyeol. You know this’ll probably trigger a heat, and then you’ll both be out of your minds, and it’s not fair to ask Minseok to be responsible for making sure you two always remember to use condoms.”

“Fuck,” Chanyeol said, feeling cold.

“Yeah. Go today, if Joonmyun will let you. It’ll make you smell weird for a couple of days, and none of us around here need to be sniffing around you anyway, might as well get it over with so you smell normal when you go home.”

“I’ll ask,” he said.

He accepted Sehun’s hand up, then pulled him into a hug that made Sehun squeak with surprise.

“That’s really helpful, Sehunnie. Thank you.”

He said, “ugh, get off me,” but Chanyeol didn’t miss the tiny smile on his face as Sehun escaped down the stairway.

Joonmyun not only agreed immediately but even drove him over to the clinic to save time. Chanyeol told him about the success of the wine-of-the-month club, and talking happily about that took him all the way to the clinic and into an exam room without having time to get nervous. He didn’t mind needles, but the thought of latex barrier—free sex seemed like a whole new step into deep waters.

“My, um, mate’s going to rut really soon,” he said to the nurse practitioner.

The word felt so weird in his mouth.

“Will I be okay?”

She put a bandage over the injection spot and patted his arm.

“Earlier’s always better,” she said, “but as long as they let you have four or five days for this to kick in, you should be covered with no worries. If you’re concerned, you can always come in for emergency contraception afterward.”

Which of course he knew, and had instructed lots of young omega campers about, but it was nice to hear a refresher in a measured beta voice.

And yeah, he took the lollipop, because adult life was hard enough without forgoing free treats. He even took one for Joonie to thank him for the ride.
The shift was pretty quiet, a consequence of the holiday being just over. The group chat was busy with sappy little messages that kept making Chanyeol’s face ache from smiling, no matter how much Baekhyun teased him. New declarations of feeling made no dent in Min’s ruthlessness when it came to Words with Friends, however.

On Friday, he returned from a little afternoon fire in a real estate office (old microwave + off-code wiring = small boom) to find Minseok hanging out in the kitchen with Mark and Taeyong. Chanyeol wanted to rush over and smash his face up against Min’s neck, but settled for hanging onto his arm a little. He definitely liked the way Min’s eyes took in his gear. The t-shirt was pretty tight.

Minseok chatted easily with his coworkers for a few minutes, not seeming to mind the way Baek and Sehun mooned at him – Chanyeol took care of minding it and fondly imagined stomping on their kneecaps. But before Chanyeol had time to work up too much irritation, Min made a pretty statement about not wanting to get between them and their post-fire showers, and Chanyeol walked him out.

“Got something for you,” he said when they were relatively alone by the door.

He pulled a key ring out of his pocket. Chanyeol heard an internal burst of angel choirs.

“I’m playing basketball with Lu on Saturday. They need a fourth for a game with that team leader Taozi was complaining about. I gather we smols are supposed to obliterate Tao and his fellow tol in the service of providing a much-needed alpha ego adjustment. But I thought that if Dae’s out running, you might want to be able to get into our place. And frankly, we should’ve made a key for you ages ago, Channie.”

Chanyeol couldn’t hold back the hugging. But when he pulled away, Minseok had quizzical eyebrows. He laid one hand on Chanyeol’s forehead.

“You smell a little off, sweetness. Are you coming down with something?”

Chanyeol felt himself blush.

“I, um. Went and got a shot. So we don’t have to worry so much during Dae’s rut.”

Minseok’s eyes went wide, and he slumped, one hand on his chest.

“Shit, Channie, I didn’t even think of that. That’s such a relief, what a good idea.”

He touched Chanyeol’s face.

“Are you doing okay with it? Not too worried?”

Chanyeol shook his head.

“Sehun talked to me a little. That helped.”

Minseok grinned.

“I like that pup.”

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

I tip my hat to those of you who saw this coming. It's been fun reading y'all talking about it!

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Their apartment was empty when Chanyeol used his !!key!! to get inside on Saturday morning. He had spent enough time alone in their space that opening the door was really the only weird part. He laughed at himself a little for even trying to make it awkward.

And if Jongdae was running, then there was no use in his taking a shower, right? Might as well conserve water and shower together, in the interest of saving a precious resource. So Chanyeol made coffee and wandered around a bit, stretching out the kinks of a work shift. He dozed a little in front of the TV and noodled around on his guitar.

When he started to get bored and restless, Chanyeol went to their room to look in the jewelry box. He would definitely wait for them to put his jewelry back on him – the thought of it made him shiver – but he still wanted to look at it. He shook his wrist so the courting bracelets moved against his skin. Maybe he’d work himself up again, be ready when Jongdae got home, open himself up nice and slow. It had been a while since he fingered himself.

There were new things in the box.

Chanyeol exhaled hard, surprise and desire flashing through him.

One was a triangle in heavy-gauge silver, he thought an anti-tragus cuff that would nestle in the hollow of his ear, big enough to be a noticeable weight, even if he took off the chain that dangled from it, a sharp-looking silver oblong hanging at the bottom. He didn’t know how they kept managing to pick jewelry that he would never think to choose for himself but that he wanted the minute he saw it.

Which of them was this from? He couldn’t wait to wear it.

The other was a black hoop that didn’t quite make a full circle – one of those little things with springs on the inside that you could wear all kinds of places, though they were marketed for young omegas who wanted jewelry without putting precipitous holes in their ears. Chanyeol had bought and lost an infinite number of the cheap versions of these over the years.

It’d been so long since he had worn one of those rings that he tried it on, only feeling a little guilty when he heard the door open just as he was wiggling it into place. He called out a hello and felt the ring pull when he grinned at Jongdae’s happy shout.

“Channie!” he said, sliding in front of the doorway, “I’m glad you weren’t – “

His eyes zeroed in on the center of Chanyeol’s bottom lip.

“Oh, you fucker,” he said, about half an octave lower than the previous statement. “That’s where
you want to wear it?"

Chanyeol found himself backed up against the bathroom wall, squeezed in between a cabinet and the towel rack, with a sweaty alpha mate pressed up against him, licking at the lip ring and shoving one hand down the waistband of his track pants.

“Couldn’t wait for me to put that on you?” Jongdae murmured against his mouth.

Chanyeol took Jongdae’s ass in both hands and pulled him up close.

“I’ll apologize if you want,” he rumbled, dragging his bottom lip along Jongdae’s jaw.

“Is your apology gonna take the form of putting that on me?”

Chanyeol laughed and was not sorry to find himself shortly thereafter on his knees in the shower, sliding his bottom lip along the underside of Jongdae’s cock, looking up at the water spilling down over Dae’s shoulders and dripping through his hair, off his chin, while he watched Chanyeol suck him off.

“Thank you for my new jewelry, I love it,” he said not long after that, up against Dae’s ear with Dae’s hands working him, the last three words with a stutter as he came.

“I see how you are,” Jongdae said while he washed Chanyeol’s hair. “As usual, performing a useful public service by making sure I don’t lose my shit out at brunch with two other alphas.”

“Is that what I did? And here I thought I was just sucking my alpha mate’s delicious cock.”

Jongdae’s hands paused in their excellent scrubbing of his scalp.

“Fuck, Chan.”

“Don’t stop scrubbing.”

Jongdae laughed.

“You’re nice to let me do this all the time, Channie.”

“Nice? Are you kidding, I plan to never wash my own hair again.”

Jongdae shook his head, but leaned down for another kiss.

He seemed out of sorts, though – the smile kept dropping off his face. But he buckled the cuff bracelet around Chanyeol’s left wrist and set the small silver one on his ear with soft fingers, one brushing against the lip ring.

“I’m all right,” he said in answer to Chanyeol’s question. “Just restless today. I didn’t sleep great, I guess.”

They drove over to a fancy park in a fancy neighborhood. Chanyeol had to grin – of course Zitao wouldn’t play basketball outside like a barbarian. The field house was super swanky, with the same waxed-wood smell as a bowling alley, and Chanyeol’s eyes immediately found Minseok, standing by a set of bleachers grinning at Luhan and wiping his face with a towel.

It was sweet the way Luhan hugged him hello – after letting Min do so first, of course. Minseok’s smile went sharp at the sight of Chanyeol’s mouth.
“How’d the ego adjustment go?”

Luhan rolled his eyes.

“How poor baby doesn’t like *me*, I can tell you that. I don’t know what was harder on his poor fee-fees, that I’m an omega who’s better at basketball than he is, or that I’m his boss’s mate, so he couldn’t even snarl at me.”

“Asshole, huh?” Jongdae said.

“Oh, he can be very agreeable when he puts in an effort,” Minseok said. “It’s just that he stopped putting in an effort the instant we started beating them.”

“Brunch is going to be *so* much fun,” Luhan groaned.

Between Minseok looking all sporty and sweaty and Chanyeol’s lip ring, Jongdae seemed to be having a hard time keeping his brain in working order. Chanyeol had just stepped back from a wandering hand with the intention of being obnoxious when he heard his name.

“Chanyeol?”

It was amazing, hearing his name in a voice he used to think he wanted to hear. Realizing that he had never wanted to hear it again. Realizing how different his name sounded when Minseok or Jongdae said it.

He turned around.

Chanyeol was out of the habit of looking up at anyone, but for a second, he found himself automatically going into a slouch, to make himself smaller, make more space for Kris to be alpha. He saw Kris’s eyes go narrow, and his heartbeat skyrocketed. He knew that expression well, and what accompanied it.

Chanyeol lowered his head, and his left hand curled over his right wrist.

That is, his left hand curled over two courting bracelets.

Two courting bracelets, and a vivid memory of Jongdae up in his face, saying “I will not *have* this business of you making yourself small.”

As opposed to, for example, “oh no, sweetheart. You don’t get to talk back to me, that’s not how this works.”

Which wasn’t anything like an equal voice. The equal voice he currently had.

Chanyeol went through an entire grief cycle in an eyblink. What the hell kind of bullshit had he been putting himself through? This was the guy he’d been hurting himself over for the past couple of years?

He had a fucking *mullet*.

Chanyeol stood up straight and shook his hair out of his face.

Kris’s eyes raked over him. Chanyeol saw him take in the jewelry and laugh to himself. It was a familiar expression, that thin-lipped smile and shoulder hitch. In his experience, it was usually followed by something mean.
Chanyeol could feel the habit in him, that was well-trained to wait for that mean comment and let it hurt him, then fall all over himself apologizing. Except that Kris had left for China literally without telling him beforehand, had sent “I wasn’t feeling it anymore” via goddamn text, so why the hell should he get to say anything, ever?

Chanyeol stared at him. This was the alpha in need of ego adjustment? This was Zitao’s troublesome team leader with terrible bougie taste?

He could almost laugh – because of course that’s who Kris was. They were caught up in Minseok and Jongdae’s romantic comedy now, so of course this kind of coincidence was going to fucking happen. Unreal.

“Still full of yourself, I see,” Kris said.

Chanyeol squinted. Past Chanyeol would’ve folded in half and apologized about 60 times already. Current Chanyeol wondered how it was possible to seem full of oneself without fucking saying anything.

Baekhyun would be so proud of him.

And then he did laugh, because the phrase “he who must not be named” popped into his head, and really. Fuck this guy. He turned away.

Kris grabbed his wrist.

“The hell you think you’re doing, turning your back on an alpha?” he said.

And oh, Chanyeol had hated being angry at the bowling alley. He had been ashamed of the way that chill violence had blossomed up out of his guts and taken over everything in him until the world seemed pale and static buzzed in his ears and his body itched to move. But at the moment? He wasn’t a bit sorry to look down at that huge hand around his arm, then up into those mocking eyes, and snarl.

Once upon a time, he had loved that hand, had thought it comforting, the way that hand could wrap around the back of his head.

But he remembered that expression on Kris’s face, too, the angry smile. For one held breath, it took everything in Chanyeol not to quail at it.

Because he also remembered how that look had been accompanied a few times by a fist in his hair, by that hand twisting his arm behind his back until he submitted. And always, always, there was a whole speech about all the ways he should know better, did everything wrong. That deep voice, low and sad-sounding, listing off all his inadequacies, and “get down, Chanyeol, you know I can’t let you think this okay.” Violent things said in a gentle tone.

He wouldn’t do it now. Wouldn’t drop to his knees for this alpha. He had already been on his knees for an alpha today, and there hadn’t been anything there but safety and joy.

He growled again, watched Kris’s eyebrows lift, finally felt his hand let go.

And there was Jongdae, standing next to him.

“Why don’t you tell me why the fuck you’re touching my mate?” Jongdae asked, his voice cold and quiet.
Kris stared at Jongdae briefly, then laughed.

"Mate?" he said. "The two of you? Are you fucking kidding me, is this a joke?"

The scent of angry alpha was all over the place, like bitter chemical smoke. Jongdae was growling low in his chest, and Chanyeol thought the other growl behind him must be Minseok. He was pretty certain the cackle was Luhan.

Chanyeol felt Jongdae square up next to him. He saw how Kris smirked down and grounded his back foot. Both of them – probably all 3, given Zitao – ready to throw down.

They got called in at work to break up alpha fights, sometimes. Standard procedure was that alphas got sent to jail to cool down, then fined for public bullshit. And the thought of that made Chanyeol tired. He had just finished a work shift. He hadn’t had breakfast. He had less than zero desire to spend any part of his day in a goddamn police station filling out goddamn forms because his goddamn ex was such a motherfucking asshole.

He punched Kris in the face.

Kris was a little taller than him and an alpha, but he worked a desk job, and Chanyeol ran up and down burning buildings carrying hoses for a living. Kris dropped to the floor, and blood gushed out of his nose.

More than one person – including Jongdae – started laughing. Chanyeol turned around to see Luhan hanging off Zitao (naked from the waist up), howling. Minseok’s face looked like it didn’t know what to do with itself. Zitao was blinking rapidly.

If his upper half was anything to go by, he hadn’t been kidding about being beautiful naked. Luhan was already getting a little handsy.

"Why are you half-naked?" Chanyeol asked in a stupor of – everything.

"Do you have any idea how difficult it is to get blood out of polyester?" Zitao said.

"What the fuck," Kris said, his voice muffled.

Chanyeol sighed and stepped away.

"Where are you going?" Jongdae asked.

"Car," he said, "first-aid kit."

Jongdae was able to hand him the keys before he had to bend over and hold his stomach, laughing.

When Chanyeol turned around from slamming the trunk closed, first-aid kit in hand, he was unsurprised to find Minseok standing behind him.

"You okay, Chan?"

"Ask me later."

It was good to have Min walk beside him – and good that Min didn’t try to touch him. Kris had migrated to the bleachers when they returned, Jongdae and Zitao standing too close over him and blood all over the front of his shirt.

"You’re not fucking touching me," he snarled when Chanyeol snapped the first glove on.
"If it were up to me, I wouldn’t,” Chanyeol said. “But I have a professional obligation as a first responder to provide first aid. And if you weren’t worth giving up my job for when I liked you, you’re sure as fuck not worth losing it now.”

“Back off,” Kris growled.

Chanyeol shrugged.

“If that’s how you want it. By the time you get to the hospital, your nose will have seized up and the adrenaline will have worn off so everything’ll hurt more, but it’s your call.”

“Oh, don’t be a baby and let Chan set your damn nose, Yifan,” Zitao said.

Kris turned red, grimaced, then flinched at how the facial movement hurt. Chanyeol didn’t even try to process why everyone was so calm and nobody was yelling at him yet.

“Don’t move,” he said.

He stepped in before anybody could get to thinking, felt around with his thumbs, and pushed diagonally. Kris’s yelp drowned out the crack of his nose setting back into place.

“I should sue you for assault,” he said, trying and failing to get away from Chanyeol wiping his face clean.

And he knew it was manipulative and mean, but Chanyeol didn’t bother to stop himself. He leaned back and widened his eyes.

“He touched me without my permission, officer,” he said, making his voice soft and hesitant. “I was afraid of what else he might do.”

“Ha!” Jongdae barked behind him.

Kris looked away.

“That’d be a great way to get ahead in the workplace,” Zitao drawled. “Suing my ex-boyfriend’s omega mate. When said ex-boyfriend is my mate’s best friend. Talk about awkward!”

Chanyeol figured Kris probably joined him in gaping at Zitao. Luhan winked. Chanyeol stored away that little bit of weirdness for later.

He wasn’t particularly gentle shove gauze up Kris’s nostrils, and he was more than glad to stand up and away from that scent of smoke and hot stone. He hated that it still smelled so familiar. He hated even more that the scent of Kris’s anger still had the power to make him want to bend down, apologize, fix it.

He hated how clear the memories were in his head suddenly. He had spent so much time trying to shove it all away.

“Yeah, okay,” Luhan said, louder than was strictly necessary. “You alpha assholes take care of your stupid business, I’m walking Chanyeol out.”

He hooked his arm around Chanyeol’s and pulled.

“Come on, man, let’s get you out of this stink,” Luhan murmured, and Chanyeol let himself be led.

It was better outside. The wind was cold. It blew away that nagging urge to bend his neck and be
“Minnie’s right behind us, just keep walking to the car, Chan.”

And why not keep walking to the car? The whole space inside his head felt like either an empty hole or a dam about to crack open, or maybe both at the same time, he didn’t even know. Might as well walk over to the car, lean against it, and cover his face with his hands, just to see whether a little darkness made anything more clear.

“What do you need, sweetness?” Minseok asked.

Chanyeol looked at him: solemn and obviously worried, standing within grabbing distance but not close enough to crowd.

“I don’t know,” he said.

“Then we’ll just hang out here for a second until you figure it out,” Luhan said. “I mean, who knows how long those jerks are gonna yell at each other, anyway?”

“I assume Taozi will prevent Jongdae from causing any permanent injury,” Minseok said, sounding dry.

Luhan shrugged.

“I guess maybe,” he said. “Yifan’s a pretty decent salesman, after all. Though if he’s really so bad, Chan, I’d be happy to lobby for Taotao booting him out on his ass. I’d totally win that conversation, I have definite wiles.”

“You play unfairly, Lu,” Minseok said.

“I play to fucking win,” Luhan said. “You know that, Minnie.”

Banter was nice. It gave him something to focus on, other than the 5000 thoughts trying to surface in his head at one time.

“Just leave it alone,” he said to Luhan. “He’s not worth the effort.”

Luhan gazed at him for a long moment.

“That I’ll believe,” he said.

Jongdae emerged from the field house. Chanyeol watched him walk toward them, annoyed alpha clear in his swagger, and for a second, Chanyeol was just done.

Except – then he’d have to wash his own hair again.

“Oh, Channie,” Minseok said.

The darkness with his face pressed up against Min’s neck was a lot more comforting than hiding behind his own hands.

“That was a lot, hm?”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t know if you and Zitao still plan on brunch with that lovely example of an alpha inside, but
we’re out,” Jongdae said.

“Duh,” Luhan said. “Taotao can shove him back into his cubicle where he belongs, brunch would be wasted on him. Did you see his mullet?”

“How could I miss it?”

“Go cheer up your boyfriend. I’m gonna go act all affrighted and see if that makes Taozi take me to the really nice brunch place. Wait for me, caviar, baby, daddy’s coming for you!”

“He’s such a monster,” Minseok murmured, laughter in his voice.

Chanyeol felt Jongdae tug on Min’s arm and raised his head.

“Well,” Jongdae said, his voice soft. “I’m going to guess that’s the one whose trachea needs to come out?”

Chanyeol looked away before he could do anything stupid like cry or agree to such a plan, but he nodded.

“Can I have your phone, Channie?”

He couldn’t imagine what for, but he unlocked it and handed it over, watched Dae make a call.

“Nope, sorry, it’s Jongdae,” he said. “Shit, no, he’s okay, sorry to scare you, Baekhyun. Are you home? Channie’s had a rough morning, I think he could use his people around him.”

Well fuck, there went any chance of not crying.

“Thanks, man, we’ll be there in a few.”
Chapter 32

Halfway to Baekhyun’s place, the whole thing hit Chanyeol physically, like the gravity had been turned up too high. He felt sick, and too hot, and there was too much scent of upset and anger still. He opened the window and leaned his face against the nice, cold frame, breathing in as much of the chill wind as he could get.

His right hand ached. He looked down, and two of the knuckles were busted open. There was blood all over his hand. It hurt to bend and wiggle his fingers, but not enough that they were broken. He hoped. But when he hissed, the ring in his lip pulled uncomfortably, everything was just too much.

“I need this lip ring off,” he blurted. “I’m not refusing it, I just can’t wear it right now, I’m sorry – “

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said from the driver’s seat.

Chanyeol hated a little bit that the alpha-voice made him shut up, and he hated himself a little bit for hating it, because this was Jongdae, eyes solemn in the rear-view mirror.

“It’s okay, baby. Take it off and give it to Min. I’ll keep it for you.”

Minseok was turned around, watching him. Had probably been watching him the whole time. He took the lip ring and gave it to Jongdae.

“Hand hurt, sweetness?”

“Yeah.”

“Will you let Yixing or Baekhyun look at it when we get there?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Thank you.”

Minseok sat like that, watching but without making an attempt to touch, the whole drive. Jongdae opened the car door but didn’t go further than one hand squeezing his forearm. There was another thing for Chanyeol to hate about himself – how grateful he was that they didn’t touch him, when all they probably wanted to do was sit on him and comfort him, because they were nice people.

Whatever Chanyeol’s face was doing made Baekhyun’s mouth drop open the minute he opened their door.

“Fuck,” he said. “Okay, shit, emergency protocols. Get your asses inside. Honey, bring me every pillow off our bed.”

Chanyeol almost felt a tiny bit better for a second, because it had been a long time since Baek and Xing had built him an emergency nest in their living room, but they still had the routine down. In under 5 minutes they had it ready for him to burrow into the pile, leaned back against their sofa, Baekhyun tucking a blanket around him. Jongdae hovered worriedly, but Minseok looked like he was thinking about a smile.

“What else do we need?” Baek asked.

“Yixing, if you would, please, take a look at Channie’s right hand to make sure it’s okay,” Minseok said. “And none of us have had breakfast, I think that’s not helping.”
“His hand?”

Xing knelt on the front edge of the nest and took Chanyeol’s held-out hand.

“Oh, Yeollie. Who did you hit?”

“Kris,” he said to the far wall.


Chanyeol ducked his head down into the blanket. Looked like he was out to ruin just about everyone’s morning.

“I could really use some coffee,” Minseok said. “I’d be happy to make it, if you’ll show me where the coffeemaker is, Baekhyun?”

Baek’s expression was a clear “I see what you’re doing here,” but he nodded and led Min into the kitchen.

“Let’s see this,” Yixing said in his soft voice, his grasp gentle on Chanyeol’s hand. “Wiggle your fingers?”

Chanyeol did, and only flinched a little.

“Okay, good. This is just a little bruising and split skin, you don’t have to look so freaked out, J.D. But Yeol, you’ll let me clean this up, right? It looks terrible.”

“Yeah.”

Chanyeol looked up at Jongdae when Yixing went for their medical supplies. He was standing with his knees pressed against the outermost edge of the pillows, and he did look pretty wigged, eyes wide and lips tight together. It was weird to be in the same room with him and not have heard his voice once.

“You can sit on the sofa behind me, if you want,” he said.

Jongdae pretty much teleported over, sitting cross-legged behind him but still not touching. His exhale was shaky when Chanyeol scooted back and leaned his head against one shin. He could hear Minseok’s voice in the kitchen, presumably bringing Baek up to speed. That was good. And Yixing’s hands were so gentle that cleaning up his knuckles barely stung at all. Min and Baek brought in a cluster of coffee mugs on one tray and toast on another.

“You know the drill for this,” Yixing said, handing Chanyeol a cold pack. “I would like to know, however, why Chanyeol’s the one who busted open his hand on an alpha’s face when you were there, J.D.?”

Yikes.

Baekhyun’s and Minseok’s eyebrows went the same kind of outraged, probably for opposite reasons.

“Because I didn’t feel like spending my day trying to convince the police not to put my mate in the cool-down room. It seemed easier to just hit him myself,” Chanyeol said.

Yixing sat back on his heels at that one, blinking a lot. Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s fingers, hesitant in his hair, and leaned back into them.
“I hope it felt great,” Baekhyun said. “I’d love to hit that guy.”

Chanyeol shrugged and gratefully accepted a mug of coffee, despite having to juggle it and the cold pack around.

Minseok came over to hold the cold pack against his knuckles so he could drink his coffee; otherwise, no one bothered him for a few minutes. Chanyeol could feel the weight of their attention, but the quiet was nice. So was the warmth of the pillows and blanket around him and the feather-light touch of Jongdae’s fingers in his hair.

Baekhyun and Yixing had made a lot of pillow forts for him in the immediate aftermath of Kris leaving. And, now that he thought about it (which was horrible, he had worked so hard not to think about it), several times during their relationship.

“What did he say to you, Yeol?” Baekhyun asked eventually.

Chanyeol shrugged.

“Not much, really. Enough that I didn’t want to hear the rest of it.”

“Pulled some bullshit about not turning his back on an alpha,” Jongdae said behind him, voice low and raspy. “Grabbed his arm.”

Chanyeol watched Yixing watch Jongdae’s fingers in his hair and felt how careful those fingers were. He felt Minseok squeeze his hand. So he totally missed Baekhyun losing his shit.

“That motherfucker,” he snarled. “I wish you’d torn his throat out, fucking scumbag bully – “

It made Chanyeol tired.

“Quit it, Baek.”

It was probably only the third or fourth time he had ever seen Baekhyun too angry to pace or wave his arms around.

“I fucking won’t, Chanyeol. This can’t happen again. I can’t do it a second time, I can’t see you come in my house crying with finger marks on the back of your neck – “

If only Baekhyun had shut his damn mouth 2 seconds earlier. Then maybe the air wouldn’t be full of growls and the scent of angry alpha all over again.

Chanyeol had to leave his nice warm nest just to get away from it. That was terrific, because then everyone was maximum upset.

“I’m sorry, Jongdae. I just. I can’t take any more angry alpha right now.”

“Why the fuck do you have to apologize for how you feel?” Baekhyun yelled.

He almost left. He could walk out the door, get on the bus, and go home to his nice, dim, empty apartment. Lie in his bed on sheets that probably smelled musty from how long it had been since he slept there.

They’d follow him, though – probably all of them would follow him. He knew he was stuck with at least two of these people for the rest of his days. He was starting to suspect that he’d be stuck with the whole lot.
Objectively, that was great. At the moment? He kind of wished they’d all just fuck off for a hot minute.

“Because Jongdae’s been trying to comfort me, Baek, and I actually give a shit about hurting his feelings.”

The last time he’d seen Baek cry was when they were 8 years old and his grandparents moved to the south coast. It was horrible to watch his expression crumple and his nose turn red. Given that, Chanyeol was hardly surprised to get an armful of upset best friend.

The commentary pretty well knocked the wind out of him, though.

“I’m sorry,” Baekhyun hiccupped. “All those times I should’ve said something, Yeollie. I let you down, I was a shitty friend to you, I should’ve taken better care of you, I’m sorry.”

“No, Baek.”

“I was, I let you keep going back to him, I should’ve done something.”

“What were you going to do, Baek? What would I have listened to?”

And he hated knowing that was true.

“That’s enough,” Minseok said.

“I agree,” from Yixing. “Get back over here, both of you.”

Chanyeol was glad to climb back in among the pillows, Baek still clinging to him and sniffling. Some of the stiff anger in him released; he reached back and pulled on Jongdae’s leg. Jongdae made a small, unhappy sound but let himself be tugged on until he was curled against Chanyeol’s back, nose pressed to his neck and one arm around him.

“I’m Minseok, by the way,” he said, settling behind Jongdae.

Yixing laughed.

“I figured that part out,” he said, and then, after a pause, “how did this happen? Where did you guys see him?”

“He works for my ex,” Minseok said. “I met up with them to play basketball this morning. Channie and Jongdae came to meet us for breakfast.”

“That is quite a coincidence,” Yixing said slowly. “How did we end up in this confluence of problematic exes?”

Jongdae’s head popped up, cruelly making the back of Chanyeol’s neck cold.

“Oh, don’t glare at me, J.D., you already said you know you were a jerk. It’s fine. And I see where you were coming from, Minseok is very handsome.”

“Right?” Baekhyun mumbled.

Jongdae settled his face back where it had been and whispered “Jesus,” under his breath.

Now that most of the people he liked best in the world were squishing him, Chanyeol could almost start to appreciate how ridiculous all of this was.
“He was quite charming when we first met up,” Min said.

It was the same bored, breezy tone that he used when he talked about Jongdae’s father.

“Very charismatic. And good-looking, of course, if a bit beady-eyed.”

“Yes, I remember,” Yixing said. “It was easy to see why Yeollie liked him at the beginning.”

Baekhyun shuddered. Chanyeol held on to him for both their sakes.

“Amazing how quickly his mean streak came out, though, as soon as his prowess was challenged by an omega and a small beta.”

Yixing sighed.

“I should’ve done something,” Baekhyun said.

“Come on, Baekkie,” Xing said. “We thought he was happy. It took a long time for us to notice that even you hadn’t seen him outside work in a while. We were just busy, Chanyeol knows that.”

“I do,” Chanyeol said.

He’d been busy too, trying everything he could think of to be better, to follow all of Kris’s ever-changing rules about where he should go and how he should be. Hanging onto Kris’s rare smiles and praise like they were necessary to his very existence. By the time that tiny little thought in the back of his mind whispered that he might be unhappy, he’d been thoroughly convinced that all their problems were his fault – so his unhappiness had to have been his fault, too.

And by that point, he had barely seen anyone besides Kris other than at work for months. So he didn’t know how to ask for help.

“Ugh,” he said.

“I’ve been so worried,” Baek said. “You don’t even know, Yeollie, I’ve been so worried about you for like two years straight now.”

“I’m fine,” Chanyeol said.

Baek raised his head, still red in the nose and around his eyes, looking furious.

“You’re fucking not, Chanyeol!”

Aw, dammit, he was the biggest dumb omega in the history of big dumb omegas, fictional and real. Why couldn’t he have remembered this one thing earlier and saved everybody all this drama? What a pain.

“Baekhyun. Recently I have been really good.”

“Channie,” Minseok said softly, while Jongdae squeezed him too hard for comfort.

“Oh. Yeah,” Baekhyun said.

He blinked a lot, and his confusion made his face look so young.

“Yeah, I guess you have.”
“You’re making this all about you, my love,” Yixing said.

“What? I am not!” Baekhyun said, wriggling around. “I was just trying to say that I have spent – oh fuck you, you’re right.”

“It’s horrible how he does that,” Jongdae snickered.

Yixing’s loud, high giggle rang out. What a relief.

Chanyeol totally blamed Minseok for the next couple of hours, because he sat around with them and talked. About his feelings. Even worse, he appreciated that it made him feel better.

Terrible.

It wasn’t terrible. They drank coffee and ate the cold toast, and despite everybody having laughed at him for making the conversation about himself, Baekhyun talked some more about how worried he had been. Chanyeol pulled his hair for not having said anything, and then Yixing pulled Chanyeol’s hair, because,

“You know you would’ve clammed up and gotten mad if he had tried, Yeollie, don’t even try to say otherwise.”

Minseok pursed his lips and sipped his coffee pointedly at that.

But he and Jongdae asked a bunch of questions about how Chanyeol had been after Kris left. That was no fun to remember, his disappearance and the way he blocked Chanyeol’s number less than a week later, without any kind of explanation or apology.

“We kept waiting for Yeollie to snap out of it,” Baekhyun said, “but he just never seemed to be able to stop being unhappy. It was hard.”

“We both wondered why you looked so sad all the time,” Minseok said. “Once I almost approached you in the grocery store, because you’d been staring at a pile of apples as if they had torn your heart right out of you, and it made me worried.”

“He broods very attractively, though,” Yixing said.

“For real,” Jongdae said. “You could probably scroll back through our text histories and still find things like ‘o no the hot neighbor is sad again’.”

“God, you guys,” Chanyeol said.

It was super uncomfortable to have his two best friends talk about his previous dating woes with his two boyfriends. Chanyeol kept wanting to dive head-first into the pile of pillows – except that once the fort was no longer necessary, they cleaned it up and sat on furniture or the floor like normal people, so he had no means of escape.

It was comforting, though. A couple of times he stumbled over words, hating having to admit how he had let himself get torn down and had blamed himself. But none of them fussed at him or told him he was stupid. And it took some of the power away, to say out loud how afraid he had been that he had lost them, and know, saying it, that that was wrong.

“We would never, never stop loving you, Yeollie,” Yixing said. “Not even if you disappeared for ten years.”
And of course he knew that, just like he knew that was true for his family too. But it was still nice to hear. Nicer still the way Minseok put his arm around Chanyeol’s shoulder and kissed his temple.

Less nice the way Baek took one sock off and threw it at his face.

Once things calmed down (and a second pot of coffee had been brewed), Baekhyun demanded a detailed description of Chanyeol’s adventure. Minseok make him sound sexy and glorious, and Chanyeol had to laugh. It was pretty impressive that he had dropped a large alpha with one punch.

He thought it was weird that Min told the story. Jongdae was strangely quiet, had been for a while, leaning up against Chanyeol’s shoulder drinking his coffee.

“Pissed-off Channie is not the most gentle provider of first aid,” Min said, which set Baekhyun off into a loud laugh.

“I hope not,” Baek said. “Did he give his speech about his professional obligation to help?”

Minseok nodded, grinning.

“That’s standard Chanyeol,” Baekhyun said. “I’ve heard that speech at so many bars, you don’t even know, he’s like the first-aid angel of closing time.”

“Jesus, Baekhyun.”

But Min waggled his eyebrows, which made it possible for Chanyeol to smile.

Then Yixing wanted to know about Minseok’s basketball skills, and in about 2 minutes, he and Min looked well on their way toward being friends for life. Chanyeol had to squeeze on Baekhyun’s arm a little bit at the sight of the two of them smiling at each other. Jongdae, too, had his chin ducked low, watching them through his absurd eyelashes, a small smile hovering at the edges of his mouth.

“He’s magic, huh?” Chanyeol whispered.

Jongdae nodded.

Chanyeol slung his arm around Jongdae, happy to listen to everyone chatting with one another. Dae didn’t smell upset anymore, so Chanyeol could simply enjoy being next to him and let the morning’s stupidity fade.
Chapter 33

Chanyeol begged off cooking lunch, despite being arguably the best cook on premises, in lieu of staying where he was with his arm around his boyfriend. Quiet Jongdae was actually really pleasant. He didn’t mind Chanyeol constantly rubbing against the side of his face. All that drama and sore hand aside, Chanyeol was surprised by how good he felt. He guessed he’d have a ton of thinking to do in upcoming days, but he was getting pretty loose and comfortable the longer he hung onto Dae. And he was starting to feel a little frisky.

He looked over at Dae, who was watching him, serious but not upset-looking. Chanyeol thought he might be on the same make-out frequency. Maybe they could eat lunch quickly and go home. He grinned, and Jongdae’s fingers drew slowly up the inside of his arm, making Chanyeol shiver.

“How spicy do you want – “ Yixing called out from the kitchen doorway, then, in a sharper voice, “J.D. Hey, J.D.!”

Jongdae neither turned his head away from Chanyeol nor blinked.

That was weird. For a second, it was like having vertigo, falling into the warm brown of Jongdae’s steady gaze.

“Everything all right here?” Minseok asked.

“You need to go home,” Yixing said. “Now.”

Chanyeol looked over at them, and Jongdae’s hand tightened on his arm.

“What?” he said.

Minseok walked over and turned Jongdae’s chin so that Dae transferred that unblinking stare to him.

“Oh. Shit. Okay.”

He stood up.

“Sorry, Channie, this is the worst possible timing, but Yixing is right. We need to leave immediately.”

He pulled on Jongdae’s arm. Jongdae didn’t let go of Chanyeol, so they stood up together, and he pulled Chanyeol close.

Oh. This was it.

No wonder he'd been practically climbing into Jongdae’s lap.

Well. That was yet another thing he hadn’t been anticipating for the day.

“For pity's sake, you guys don’t do anything the easy way, do you?” Baekhyun said, turning around and taking the tray with lunch on it back into the kitchen.

“I’ll let work know, don’t worry about it,” he added over his shoulder.

At the door, Yixing stepped toward Chanyeol, and Jongdae moved between them with a spooky silence.
“I just want to look at his hand one more time,” Yixing said to Jongdae’s left shoulder, his voice soft. “I won’t touch him anywhere else.”

After a pause, Jongdae stepped to the side and wrapped his arm around Minseok’s waist. He watched Yixing examine Chanyeol’s hand (which turned out to just be an excuse for Yixing to whisper “don’t worry, Yeollie”) and grabbed Chanyeol’s wrist the second it was free.

“Sorry about this, and thank you for everything,” Minseok said.

Yixing waved them out, and the three of them stumbled their way to the car under Jongdae’s close herding.

“Come on, love, let me have the keys. You can sit in the back with Channie.”

It was so, so weird, the way Jongdae was quiet and pliant, while at that same time insistent on standing as close to both of them as possible. Chanyeol could feel his heart racing again, and he wasn’t sure whether it was nervousness or pheromones. He was grateful for the reassurance of Minseok squeezing his fingers. And for the distraction Jongdae provided right after.

“No. No way, you have to sit on the seat and wear a seatbelt,” Chanyeol said, pushing until Jongdae rumbled once and slid off his lap.

He totally felt Chanyeol up while getting buckled in, which Chanyeol didn’t mind, even as weirded out as he was. The whole ride home, Jongdae held onto Chanyeol’s arm with both hands, fingers skating around his wounded knuckles and mostly paying attention to the courting bracelets. Minseok watched them carefully at every red light.

“Is this normal?”

Jongdae grinned briefly.

“Yeah, it sometimes comes on quietly like this,” Minseok said, and exhaled hard. “It probably means we’re in for a long one.”

Jongdae put Chanyeol’s entire pinkie finger in his mouth and sucked hard.

Oh boy.

By the time they arrived in the parking garage, Chanyeol’s hand had been thoroughly licked, Jongdae had escalated to molesting his thigh, and Chanyeol had a little bit of fear boner going. Although “fear” might be putting it strongly.

“Are you really that worried, Channie?” Minseok asked in the elevator.

This came out somewhat strangled, because he had his chin lifted while Jongdae licked long stripes up his neck.

“I don’t know?” Chanyeol said.

He tried to pry Jongdae away and received a couple of hands shoved up under his sweater for his trouble.

“We’ll be fine,” Min said, steering Jongdae out of the elevator. “We had fun during your heat, right? We’ll have fun now too.”

Except that it hadn’t been “four or five days” since his shot, and he wasn’t going to have the benefit
of heat hormones, and he had just that morning socked someone in the face for getting all alpha at him, for fuck’s sake. What was going to happen if he wigged out and turned Jongdae down in the middle of his damn rut?

By that point, they were inside with the door shut behind them. Jongdae gave a little growl that sounded more like a purr than anything else and pushed Minseok against the wall for an extensive, sloppy kiss. He was already pulling at his clothes, whining once when his arm got stuck in his shirt. Chanyeol took pity on him and tugged it over his head. Jongdae reached back and hauled Chanyeol up against his back, resuming his attentions to Minseok’s mouth.

That was a little awkward, until Chanyeol realized that it gave him a great view of the super-hot proceedings. When he ground against Jongdae’s ass, Dae sucked Minseok’s on bottom lip, and they both moaned nicely. Standing bent over the back of Jongdae’s head, Chanyeol got a nose full of scent – the Jongdae baseline, but ramped up, like the freshest chilly rain had just fallen on a garden exploding with springtime.

That scent drove much of his worry right out of him. Chanyeol took advantage of his size and leaned forward, pressing hard against Jongdae, to put his lips to Minseok’s neck.

“Fuck,” Minseok panted when he got his mouth free, “I’m supposed to be the one keeping his head on straight.”

Jongdae moved, and Minseok gasped.

“Min,” Jongdae growled. “Min.”

He put his hands on Minseok’s sweatshirt like he was going to tear it in half.

“Help me out here, Channie, I need a minute,” Minseok said.

Well. Sehun had said alphas liked to work for it.

Chanyeol took a deep breath (through his nose, of course, for inspiration), then grabbed Jongdae around the waist, lifted him up, and hauled him several steps back before he let go. Minseok slipped away toward the bedroom as Jongdae slowly turned around and Chanyeol tried not to freak completely out under the assumption that he had just fucked everything up all to hell.

Jongdae's teeth were bared in what looked like was maybe a kind-of smile? Not a full-on snarl, anyhow. He didn’t look quite angry as he dipped his chin and stalked toward Chanyeol.

Chanyeol batted his outstretched hand away and stepped backward. Jongdae’s eyes narrowed, and the expression on his face after that was definitely closer to thrilled than unhappy. They played that game for a while, Jongdae lunging for him and Chanyeol twisting out of the way, back and forth across the living room. The longer it went on, the more Chanyeol kept wanting to giggle. His breath was shallow, and he bounced on his toes every time Jongdae paused to stare at him, grinned each time Jongdae chased him. It was obviously okay. He wasn’t working that hard to get away, and several times, Jongdae would get a hand on him, then let go the instant Chanyeol tried to escape.

When Chanyeol saw Minseok return out of the corner of his eye, he let Jongdae catch him. But he made Dae actively pull his head down.

“Stop it,” Jongdae rasped.
“Stop what?” Chanyeol said, mostly getting it out before his mouth was full of Jongdae’s tongue.

But he stepped back again the minute Jongdae tried to shift his grip. He grinned at Jongdae’s annoyed huff, ran to the other side of the kitchen island.

Minseok watched all this leaning against the wall, his arms crossed and one eyebrow lifted.

“Feeling less nervous, Channie?”

Jongdae’s head snapped around 90 degrees, and in a heartbeat he had Minseok pressed against the wall, kissing him hard.

Chanyeol watched for a bit, then knocked over the salt canister, just to see whether the noise would make Jongdae swivel his head like that again. It did, and Jongdae hunted him around the kitchen, once coming close enough to strip his sweater off.

“Why,” he said, still in that harsh growl.

“Because it’s funny,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae bared his teeth again, lunged, and when Chanyeol turned to escape, Minseok blocked his way. Jongdae was up against Chanyeol’s back in an instant, hands undoing his fly.

“If you’ll please trust me on this, it’s time to let him have his way. He’ll want to chase you again, I’m sure,” Min said, looking wry.

“Bed,” Jongdae said when he was done stripping Chanyeol of his clothing.

Jongdae was similarly naked before they’d even made it to the hallway, and Chanyeol figured that was the end of each of them wearing clothes for the next few days. But he let Jongdae hustle him onto the bed, tried to tamp down the nervousness trying to reassert itself.

“Hold him,” Jongdae rasped.

Minseok put his arms around Chanyeol’s chest.

“No. *Hold him.*”

Minseok held his arms behind his back, high enough that his chest was lifted, but his grasp gentle.

“Is this okay, Chan?” Minseok murmured in his ear.

“I think so.”

For an instant, Chanyeol seized up, but Min kissed his neck, and he breathed through it.

“You tell me if you need me to let go,” Minseok said.

Jongdae climbed over his legs, took Chanyeol by the back of the neck and kissed him, growling a little into his mouth.

“Chan.”

Okay. That helped.

Then Jongdae splayed his hand across Chanyeol’s chest and stroked himself with a tight grip, still
staring with that unblinking gaze.

“I dislike this part,” Minseok murmured into Chanyeol’s ear. “Thank you for taking the hit.”

Chanyeol had to grin when “the hit” was Jongdae curling inward and coming all over his chest and belly with a soft grunt. He spent the next few minutes very thoroughly rubbing his semen all over Chanyeol’s torso. He paid special attention to the base of Chanyeol’s neck, then put his nose there, inhaling hard, biting a little.

Minseok let go and slithered away again. Chanyeol lay back, and Jongdae hunched over, rubbing his own come onto Chanyeol and licking it back off, half-hard again already.

“Channie,” he said once, his mouth moving over Chanyeol’s cheek.

“My,” he said a little later, stroking himself again.

Chanyeol could’ve howled. With all his fretting about whether the two of them had meant it when they called him theirs, his own worries and struggles, goddamn Kris, and them wanting him to be their mate. In, what? Under a week? It was all just fucking too much. But here was Jongdae, out of his mind with hormones, and apparently he wanted to claim Chanyeol.

Well, fine.

What the hell. Chanyeol wanted to be his anyway. Might as well agree.

“Yes,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae smiled with a lot of teeth and came all over him again.

Minseok interrupted Chanyeol’s second layer of skin treatment to bring them juice. He was really bossy about it, too.

“Don’t you scowl at me, Dae. I know you’re busy with your gross project right now, but none of us ever got breakfast, I’m getting calories into both of you while you still have any brains left.”

Jongdae made a face, but he took the glass. He shoved it at Chanyeol, however, with Authoritative Eyebrows.

“That’s yours,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae shoved the glass at him again, so the straw poked him in the lip. Chanyeol tried to ignore Minseok’s smirk while he and Jongdae drank their juice with Jongdae holding both glasses.

Trying to get him to eat a kimbap was a hilarious pain in the ass, because every bite Minseok handed him, he would feed to Chanyeol, and every bite Chanyeol handed him, he would feed to Minseok, but they managed to get a few pieces in him before he started turning his head away in favor of licking Minseok.

“Okay, okay,” Min said. “Let me take – or no, I guess Channie can take the food away and you can kiss me, that’s fine.”

By the time Chanyeol returned from the kitchen (and finishing the kimbap), Minseok had Jongdae’s dick in his mouth, and he was already starting to toss his head like he was close. Chanyeol knelt behind him, holding him upright. He kneaded Dae’s ass and whispered encouragement into his ear, until Jongdae grasped Min’s shoulder, turned around, and Chanyeol got a new layer of semen on his
chest. Jongdae rubbed it on him for a while, while Minseok laughed under his breath and finally took his stupid track pants off.

That inspired Jongdae to transfer his attention again – totally reasonable, in Chanyeol’s opinion. Only a fool would ignore naked Minseok. Chanyeol would’ve been willing under any circumstances to conduct a full-body oral examination of Minseok’s trim, beautiful form, as Jongdae was currently doing. Min hadn’t even been one-third licked, though, before Jongdae groped blindly for the lube bottle and tossed it in Chanyeol’s direction.

“What do you want me to do?”

Jongdae glanced up from licking Minseok’s belly with a look on his face like Chanyeol had lost his mind. He gestured vaguely down.

“No knot,” he mumbled.

Minseok laughed and stroked Dae’s back.

“Oh, babe,” he said. “Jongdae, my love.”

“Min.”

Chanyeol watched them kiss and couldn’t resist leaning in to nip at Min’s bare shoulder. Jongdae blinked slowly at him while he licked Minseok’s cheek. Chanyeol touched Jongdae’s face. Chanyeol hadn’t expected any warmth in the middle of all this business. How many times had Dae knotted Minseok? But he could find it in himself to remember, even in rut, that Min wasn’t built for it.

Chanyeol pressed up against Min’s side and stretched him open, his other arm curled over the top of Minseok’s head. Maybe it was a little less than romantic, given the way Min kept insisting that he work faster and Jongdae once leaned up to bite Chanyeol’s finger in what Chanyeol thought was impatience. Additionally, Chanyeol’s dick was definitely starting to feel left out, even if the rest of him was okay with kissing the side of Min’s face and occasionally getting his mouth tongue-fucked by their pesky alpha.

Minseok said he was ready at a point earlier than Chanyeol would’ve ordinarily agreed to, but he didn’t flinch when Jongdae batted Chanyeol’s hand away and went at him immediately, face pressed up against Min’s neck as he moved.

“No, leave it,” Minseok said when Chanyeol tried to lend a helping hand. “You can get me during round two, sweetness. Watch this.”

He dug his heels into the back of Jongdae’s thighs, canted his hips upward, and put both hands into Dae’s hair, pulling hard. Jongdae made a brief, surprised sound, and went limp. Minseok grinned.

“Round one is always too brief to fuss with,” he said.

Jongdae weakly slapped his shoulder without otherwise moving.

“Come and kiss me while he’s out of it, Chan.”

There was a chore he never found unpleasant. Chanyeol took the time to enjoy some slow, simple kisses and the softness of Minseok’s lips against his own, the way Min smiled when Chanyeol briefly licked his upper lip. He had just cupped Min’s jaw with his free hand and pushed Min’s mouth open with his own when he felt fingers on his face.
Jongdae was watching, chin on Minseok’s chest.

“Keep going,” he whispered.

Chanyeol felt it in his mouth when Jongdae entered Min again, from the chill of Minseok’s indrawn breath and the way his jaw went loose. He shifted for a better angle to work his tongue deeper into Min’s mouth. Jongdae tugged on his arm; Chanyeol reached down and took Min in hand, trying to pull in a rhythm that complemented Dae’s, if less frantic, until Minseok whined and tipped his head back. Then Chanyeol pumped his hand fast, spurred on by the way Min’s eyebrows drew together, his unsteady breath, the way he bit his bottom lip.

“Isn’t he gorgeous?” Chanyeol said.

It popped out without intent, but when he looked up, Jongdae was smiling down, and as Min’s body undulated and he groaned, Chanyeol watched Jongdae’s eyes go wide before he gasped and fell forward with a few more ungraceful thrusts before he stilled.

Minseok snorted when Chanyeol took his sticky hand and wiped it on his own chest.

“Might as well,” he said.

“I don’t know, Jongdae might disagree,” Minseok said.

Jongdae grunted and flopped onto Min’s chest. Chanyeol curled himself around the two of them and tried not to focus on how very hard he was. If this was like heat, it was better to pace oneself at the beginning, to avoid things like an unfortunate chafing situation that one’s hormones cared nothing about. Dick burn was serious business.

“Aaaaand, he’s asleep,” Minseok laughed a couple of minutes later. “Thank god, we need a debrief. Are you doing okay, Channie?”

Chanyeol rubbed his face in Min’s hair.

“So far so good. This is really not like what I thought,” he said.

“How so, sweetness?”

“I didn’t expect things to be quite so – funny?”

“Ah,” Minseok said.

He reached up and ruffled Chanyeol’s hair.

“He must’ve been trying to stave it off, to get that deep into himself.”

All the morning’s stupidity rushed back, and Chanyeol couldn’t stop himself from trying to draw away.

“Oh, Channie, don’t fret, that was no criticism of you. He probably would’ve lasted another day or two if it hadn’t been for that jackass ramping him up. This is all on Yifan. Or – what did you call him?”

“Kris,” Chanyeol said from the refuge of Minseok’s shoulder. “I guess he never even told me his real name.”

“His list of charms only grows, doesn’t it?” Min said. “Well, whatever, he has no place here anyway.
And we’re doing fine so far. You’re extremely sticky, I’ve been nicely boned, and Jongdae is asleep, there’s nothing for anyone to complain about.”

“I don’t know,” Chanyeol grumbled. “I’d kind of like to get boned at some point.”

Minseok laughed softly.

“That was just the prelude, Channie. He’ll be in full rut by the time he wakes up. You’ll be lucky to have ten minutes without a dick in your ass for the rest of the day.”
Minseok had wriggled his way free and escaped for more food when Jongdae’s eyes snapped open and focused on Chanyeol. It wasn’t the same kind of still intensity as before: the expression was back in his face. The kind of expression Chanyeol had seen on nature shows, when a predator was about to pounce.

“Chanyeol,” he said, his voice the low, rolling growl of a pleased alpha. “There you are.”

That voice went straight from Chanyeol’s ears to his dick. He tried to ignore the accompanying twinge of nervous/annoyed: like Minseok had said, it wasn’t his fault that Jongdae had rutted early.

“Hey,” Jongdae said.

He snuggled close and pressed against Chanyeol, his hands warm on Chanyeol’s chest.

“Channie,” he murmured. “I tried to hold it back, Chan, are you angry?”

Chanyeol boggled that he could even put two brain cells together enough to say that. Especially given the way he was already grinding against Chanyeol’s hip.

“No,” he said. “I know you tried. I’m okay.”

“Yeah?”

Jongdae put his nose under Chanyeol’s ear.

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

He could feel Jongdae’s mouth against his neck, heard him sniff, and then he gave a quiet growl. His hands got an even worse case of wanderlust.

“You let me come on you, Channie. I can smell it all over you. Omega. You smell like mine, Chan.”

His mouth moved while he talked, lips dragging over Chanyeol’s neck, his collarbones, his shoulder, hands roaming over his chest. Chanyeol felt himself growing dizzy from it, those hot touches and Jongdae’s scent all around him, the reek of sex in the room. His hands slid over the curves of Jongdae’s biceps of their own accord.

“Min’s getting you some food,” he said, sounding feeble from the lack of blood in his brain.

“Don’t want it,” Jongdae said, and dragged his tongue across Chanyeol’s nipple, sucked it, laughed
under his breath when Chanyeol gasped.

“Want you, Channie.”

It reminded Chanyeol of his heat, that disorientation and Jongdae’s mouth on his chest. The scents of petrichor and arousal. The ache between his legs and his skin alight with the desire to be touched. His hands curling over Jongdae’s ass to pull him close, press as much of that scent, that alpha, that person against him.


“I’m right here. You can have me.”

Jongdae grinned wide. Chanyeol squeaked with surprise when Dae’s hand grabbed his dick – jeez, finally.

“How was he even supposed to answer, with Jongdae’s tight grip moving over him, Jongdae’s tongue in his mouth? With his fingers dug into the flesh of Dae’s lower back. With his body, arching up into Dae’s hands. With his voice, moaning into Dae’s mouth.

Jongdae’s fucking scent all around him. They’d been doing this for hours now, and Chanyeol was ready to scream with frustration. Jongdae set his teeth in Chanyeol’s bottom lip.

“Come on,” Chanyeol whined.

Jongdae lifted his head, smiled down.

“Impatient,” he rumbled.

He sat back on his knees, then shifted around until he had Chanyeol’s cock pressed under him. He rolled his hips, and Chanyeol groaned to have all those nice body parts sliding against one another.

“Look at you,” Jongdae purred, hands all over Chanyeol’s chest. “Look at my fucking omega, delicious.”

Between the hip rolls, those hands, and the alpha rumble of Jongdae’s voice, Chanyeol felt dizzy for a second – all of it so good and so far from enough, that when Jongdae leaned in and bit him on the chest, even though it was his everyday teeth, Chanyeol felt that weird dropping sensation that meant his slick coming in.

Which had never happened outside his heat. It felt so strange, but at the same time, it was going to make things so much easier, if only Jongdae would eventually get a fucking move on with the fucking.

He could tell the instant Dae smelled it – he lifted his head, inhaled a long breath, then rolled his head in a circle, ending with a heated grin at Chanyeol. He never broke that rolling grind of his hips as he leaned in and sucked at the hollow of Chanyeol’s throat.

“Chan,” he groaned. “Baby, you smell so good, so ready for me.”

Chanyeol thrust upward to meet Dae’s roll, and Jongdae growled, quickened his pace until they were both gasping.

“I’ve brought snacks too late, I see.”
Chanyeol opened his eyes to see Minseok setting a tray on the dresser. Jongdae turned to him and licked his lips.

“Minseok,” he said, deep and greedy-sounding.

Their kiss was messy, with a lot of teeth and Jongdae’s hand holding the back of Min’s neck.

“This omega,” Jongdae growled afterward. “Min.”

“Are you taking good care of our Channie?”

Jongdae reached down behind him, then put two slicked-up fingers in Minseok’s mouth. Chanyeol watched Min startle, then eagerly lick his slick off Dae’s fingers. Chanyeol’s dick throbbed at the sight of it. It was too fucking hot to bear.

Jongdae kissed Minseok again.

“He smells so good, Min.”

“Tastes good, too.”

Chanyeol wondered how in the world he hadn’t yet burned up completely.

“I want you to hold him for me.”

Minseok grinned.

“Again?”

Jongdae cocked his head, looking from one of them to the other. Minseok stroked Dae’s chest.

“You had me hold him, before, when you wanted to come on him.”

Jongdae grinned. He leaned down and licked Chanyeol from navel to shoulder, with a nice bite at the end.

“Channie,” he whispered into Chanyeol’s ear.

Chanyeol grabbed his hair and kissed him with every ounce of impatience in his cells.

“Turn over, Chan.”

Alpha growl again – he turned over and found Minseok waiting for him, hands cool on his chin.

Jongdae pulled him up on his knees; Chanyeol could hear his own unsteady breath. He put his head down in the hollow of Min’s shoulder and closed his eyes to concentrate on Minseok’s hands on his back, Jongdae’s hands on his ass. Jongdae’s hands spreading his ass.

Jongdae’s tongue – oh.

“Fuck,” he said, probably louder than was comfortable, given how close his mouth was to Minseok’s ear.

He said it a few more times, while Jongdae licked his ass like it was candy and Minseok hummed.

“Good, sweetness?”
“Fuck,” Chanyeol said again, with a break in his voice.

Jongdae pressed one finger inside. And his tongue.

“Fuck, god, Jongdae,” Chanyeol sobbed.

Minseok started sucking on his neck while Jongdae worked his ass with fingers and tongue, and Chanyeol wanted to squirm away from both of them – it was too much all at once, but Min’s arms were around his shoulders and Jongdae’s hands gripping his ass, there was nowhere to go, he had to kneel there and take it, all that sensation, edging toward pain on his neck, the burn of a second finger, Minseok’s hand wrapped around his leaking cock.

“Don’t come,” Jongdae rasped at him when Chanyeol’s legs started to shake.

He was three fingers in by that point – three fingers and his goddamn tongue, thrusting in and out of him, licking at him, slick dripping down his thighs.

Chanyeol set his teeth into Min’s shoulder and groaned, trying to keep himself together. Jongdae’s fingers spread inside him, and he whined, high but soft.

Jongdae backed off, which was way worse, and Chanyeol whined again. Jongdae smacked his ass. He crawled up and kissed Min, who licked Chanyeol’s slick off Dae’s chin and cheeks, and Chanyeol shuddered at the sight of it.

“Omega,” Jongdae said, biting him lightly on the arm.

“Our sweet, sweet Channie,” Minseok said.

If they’d given him a minute to think about that, Chanyeol might’ve had to have a small cry. But Jongdae put his arm around Chanyeol’s waist and proved what he had said about an alpha’s strength: with one heave, Chanyeol was on his back. Minseok plundered his mouth, and Jongdae pressed his legs up and back, ass in the air, and shoved into him with one thrust.

His groans were muffled by Min’s tongue as Jongdae plowed into him with a fast, steady pace that made Chanyeol’s ears ring. He didn’t know what to do with his hands, until Minseok murmured, “Grab the headboard.”

It made everything seem that much more intense, once he wasn’t worried about his hands anymore. To lie there and receive – Minseok’s filthy kisses and Jongdae’s thrusts – was like a seismic event growing in him, building out from the center of him, until he kept trying to hold his breath and Minseok cupped his face with one hand, murmuring “shhh.”

“Not yet,” Jongdae said. “Don’t come, Chan, not yet.”

He tried to hold back. He tried to think of anything other than the way he was being split open and Minseok’s warm eyes were looking down at him. He tried to think about work, but then he tilted his pelvis by instinct, and Jongdae’s dick slid across his prostate, and he sobbed aloud.

He tried to think about that Coldplay song he’d been trying to learn on the guitar, but then Min rolled one nipple between his fingers, and he hissed.

He tried to think about the infinite-step recipe for pork-neck stew, but then he remembered that Jongdae was fucking him without a condom.
He tried to tell himself that it wasn’t so different – a little warmer, a little smoother, but the thought rolled over him, heat and a hint of fear, and he arched his back, groaned. Jongdae inhaled through his nose, and his fingers dug harder into Chanyeol’s thighs. He growled, and Chanyeol felt a tug of resistance at his rim.

“Min,” he said, high and desperate. “Min, hold onto me.”

Jongdae laughed. Minseok sat up to press Chanyeol’s shoulders down with his hands.

“There you go, sweetness,” he said.

One thrust and Chanyeol’s skin felt too small to contain him. Two thrusts and an edge of pain rolled over him like a wave. On the third thrust, Jongdae’s knot stretched its way into him, and Chanyeol made a high, thin sound, fighting to rise up against Minseok’s hold.

“Ah, fuck,” Jongdae said, slumping forward.

Chanyeol writhed against the knot trying to split him in half, but between Min’s hold on his shoulders and Jongdae’s hold on his legs, he couldn’t get any leverage and could only jerk feebly – though that was enough to make Dae hiss and clutch his thighs hard enough to hurt.

“Please,” he said. “Please, Jongdae, please. Alpha.”

Jongdae gave a long, rolling growl. He wiped one hand along the inside of Chanyeol’s thigh and pulled him off with his own slick. In under 20 strokes, Chanyeol was arching up with a frantic moan: there was a tricky moment when Dae started to go over and his hand faltered too soon, but Minseok took over, pumping Chanyeol with a slow grip until he striped his own chest and belly, feeling Jongdae’s teeth set into his calf, and the pulse of Jongdae coming inside him, over and over and over.
Chapter 35

Chanyeol figured he had to have been caught up in pheromones, given that it wasn’t awkward to hang off Jongdae’s knot for the next 20 minutes while Dae’s eyes rolled back in his head and he just kept on coming, until the sounds he made were definitely more on the side of pained than otherwise. But Chanyeol couldn’t focus on the weirdness – he was too busy trying to get his hands on Jongdae. This was made easier when Dae slumped forward, groaning and shuddering. Chanyeol and Minseok stroked his back, and Chanyeol rubbed his face against the top of Dae’s head, until finally Jongdae relaxed.

Minseok took such good care of them. He checked in with Jongdae, brushing sweaty hair out of his eyes, helped get a pillow under Chanyeol so he could let his legs relax while they waited for Dae’s knot to go down. Put a peeled tangerine in Chanyeol’s hand. Chanyeol had to grin when the only convenient place to set down its two halves was on Jongdae’s bare shoulder.

Jongdae tried to wave the first couple of sections Minseok gave him in the general area of Chanyeol’s head, which made Chanyeol break out into the giggles. Jongdae gave an irritated mumble.

“He has his own, babe, just eat the damn thing,” Min said, also laughing a little.

It was pretty weird (and definitely unsexy) to lie around with his ass stretched around a knot outside his heat – not uncomfortable, thanks to slick and preparation, but without that sense of his body’s craving being met. Chanyeol looked over at Minseok, pushing tangerine sections into Jongdae’s mouth with a small, fond smile on his face.

He was probably like this for those years when it was just the two of them, right? Rushing around every moment possible, trying to keep Jongdae fed and hydrated and maybe even occasionally sort-of clean. Even when he was sore. Probably having to manage his own prep and lube when Dae was really out of it.

Chanyeol laid his hand on the back of Min’s head and felt the edges of his smile tremble when Minseok looked up at him, then turned to kiss the inside of his wrist.

Jongdae sighed, and when Chanyeol hugged him with one arm, Dae hummed and stroked the side of Chanyeol’s face with his thumb.

It was a real shame they couldn’t all just stay like that forever.

When his knot finally went down, Jongdae sat up, shaking his head like he had water in his ears, though he still kept one hand curled around Chanyeol’s calf.

“Okay, Channie?” Minseok asked.

Chanyeol shifted around to test.

“Doing good,” he said. “Though I don’t want to see what just happened to that pillow under me.”

Jongdae huffed. Minseok laughed.

“Oh yeah, that pillow is dead to me now,” Min said. “It’s going straight in the trash the minute this rut is over.”
Jongdae jumped over and flattened Minseok.

“You’re terrible,” he growled.

Not too terrible to kiss, obviously.

They weren’t able to convince Jongdae to clean up at all (or allow Chanyeol to clean up), but he was a little more lucid, if still quiet. He kept one hand on either Minseok or Chanyeol at all times, and seemed most willing to eat if he could smash his face up against someone’s neck while he chewed.

It wasn’t long before Jongdae pushed the food away in favor of straddling Chanyeol’s lap to bite at the base of his neck, until Chanyeol hissed at the sting.

“Come here, babe,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol didn’t know whether it was hilarious or made him jealous that Min literally pulled Jongdae away by his dick. Which was hard again already.

“Lie down, Dae, you know this drill. You like this drill.”

Jongdae lay on his back, fingers gripping Minseok’s legs. He bit his lip, eyes moving to watch each of them.

“Slick him up for me, Chan.”

So that was hot, as was the way Minseok grinned as he sank down onto Jongdae.

“Now Channie,” he said, “you’re in charge of Dae’s knot. I think between your hand and my ass, we might be able to help our alpha come again, hmm?”

Jongdae growled.

“We just might,” Chanyeol said, and Min rose up, then dropped down.

It was so fucking gorgeous, watching the muscles in Min’s legs, the way his body tensed and moved. Jongdae held his hips in a punishing grip, and he moaned when Minseok leaned in to kiss his jaw. Chanyeol couldn’t stop running his hands down Min’s back, down Dae’s legs – he almost forgot what his task was, until Min made a small noise, and Chanyeol saw the swelling at the base of Jongdae’s cock.

He wrapped his hand around it and squeezed, and Jongdae jerked hard enough that Minseok lost his rhythm for a second. Min looked back at Chanyeol with a fierce smile. He stopped completely, holding himself just far enough up not to put any pressure on Chanyeol’s hand while Chanyeol rolled the knot with his fingers and Jongdae made a series of high-pitched noises. When he started to buck up and dig his fingers in, Min resumed bouncing on him and Chanyeol kept up his end.

He couldn’t recall paying this close attention to a knot before – for all his previous experience with them, he’d been in heat and not really great with details. If he hadn’t had it inside him already that day, he might’ve been a little intimidated by that hard ring of flesh, with its own pulse and no give to it at all. But from the way Jongdae squirmed and gasped, having his knot played with was doing the trick.

And given that he was down there anyway, Chanyeol figured he could do a couple other things that he knew Jongdae liked.
“Holy fucking fuck,” Jongdae shouted a couple minutes later.

Chanyeol twisted his finger.

“ Fucking hell,” Jongdae yelled.

“What are you doing back there, Chan?” Min gasped around his continued efforts.

“Just putting my fingers in his ass,” Chanyeol said, trying for a conversational tone and adding another finger.

Jongdae yelled a couple more curses.

“Oh, good idea,” Minseok snickered.

It was so nice to hear Dae’s voice again that Chanyeol was inspired to curl and spread his fingers in all sorts of fun ways. He felt Jongdae’s knot throb when he pressed on Dae’s prostate, and that was just too much temptation for anybody to deny. He squeezed tight with the one hand and drove hard and fast with the other while Minseok continued to move, until Jongdae arched up so hard off the bed that he lifted Minseok entirely and Chanyeol had to scramble to maintain his grip while Jongdae wailed loud enough that the sound rang around the room.

Chanyeol held on through the next few minutes of Jongdae’s orgasm, feeling the knot pulse in his hand. He wondered what Jongdae would do if he sucked on it. Wondered whether Dae would let Min fuck him during his rut, with his knot buried in Chanyeol’s ass.

He kissed Minseok’s lower back, given that all these thoughts were obviously owing to Min’s perverted influence.

“What a good idea you had, Channie,” Min said.

“Jesus fuck, what the hell, I can’t even fucking,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol squeezed his hand, and Jongdae shuddered and cried out again.

He dozed off not long after that, giving Chanyeol the chance to clean up a little, even though there was nothing anybody could do about slick. Unless one were Kim Minseok and decided to get in and lick an omega’s thighs clean. Jongdae woke up in the middle of that, with a deep inhale and a growl.

“This is a fucking beautiful sight,” he said.

Min looked up.

“Good nap?” he asked, as if his face wasn’t covered in slick and he didn’t have half his hand in Chanyeol’s ass.

“That’s my job.”

“I’m just trying to keep things simmering while you slept,” Minseok said. “Since neither of us came last round.”

Jongdae hissed and hauled Minseok up onto his knees. The interesting things Dae’s muscles did during that process were so neat that Chanyeol wasn’t even sorry about Min’s hand moving away. Minseok didn’t try to help, just kind of sagged against Jongdae’s grasp, looking off to the side with a smirk that earned him one hand in a greedy grab against his ass and one hand on the back of his neck. Chanyeol swallowed around the desire to be grabbed like that too.
“You want to come, mate?” Jongdae growled.

Minseok shrugged, but Chanyeol could see how he shivered a little at that deep alpha voice. Jongdae shoved him down.

“You will,” he said. “When I say. Now I want to watch Channie kiss you.”

So apparently the bossy portion of the proceedings had arrived. In Jongdae’s parlance: yay.

“Guess you’d better kiss me, sweetness,” Minseok murmured up against his mouth.

That was never a burdensome duty, but the scent and flavor of his own slick on Min’s face made Chanyeol feel slightly crazy with want. Jongdae knelt over his outstretched legs, and when Chanyeol glanced over, Jongdae was stroking himself slowly, chin dipped low as he watched them.

“Bite him, Chan,” Jongdae said. “Mark him up.”

Minseok tipped his head back with a brief smile, and Chanyeol pulled him close to suck at the side of his neck. When Min hissed and stretched against him, Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s hand on his leg. Every time he got a reaction out of Minseok, Jongdae would give him something – kisses along his ribs, a hand kneading his ass, fingers brushed lightly against his entrance. Every sound Min made, every wriggle, was another kind of reward, all of it so good.

“Look at you,” Jongdae said. “Look at how fucking hot you both are. Let me see, Min. Show me how Channie marked you.”

Minseok rolled onto his back. He made a show of it, stretched long with one hand on his stomach. Jongdae leaned over Chanyeol’s legs and touched each one of the bruises and teeth marks on Min’s chest and neck.

“Beautiful,” he said. “Well done, Chan, he looks so good.”

He moved his hand to Chanyeol’s chest.

“Don’t you think he should match you, Min?”

Er, what?

Minseok smiled like a shark, and Chanyeol’s brain shorted out from the way Jongdae would touch one of the marks he made on Min, and Min would dive in to mark him in the same place – not with any kind of pattern that Chanyeol could anticipate, just watching Jongdae’s fingers, feeling Minseok’s mouth, hearing Jongdae’s curse-laden encouragement. And after all that, Jongdae kneeling over the both of them, looking satisfied despite the leaking erection between his legs.

Though, to be fair, that description worked for all three of them.

“I suppose you still want to come,” Jongdae said.

“Please, alpha,” Minseok said.

It was so low and soft, and so completely unexpected, that Chanyeol’s tongue felt heavy in his mouth while Jongdae growled. Even if Min’s grin said that he knew exactly what he was doing.

“I’m going to fuck Chanyeol,” Dae said. “I want to watch you kiss each other while I do it. I’ll let you know when you can make each other come.”
“Bossy Jongdae is amazing,” Chanyeol whispered.

Minseok winked.

“That’s not what you’re supposed to be doing with your goddamn tongue, omega,” Jongdae said.

Jongdae pounded him deep and slow, hard enough that Chanyeol’s breath hitched with every stroke, and he knew he was kissing Minseok with nothing like finesse, but they were panting in each other’s mouths anyway long before Jongdae gripped Chanyeol’s thigh hard and said,

“Hands. Come before my knot or not at all.”

Minseok continued to be an absolute miracle, because he knew where the lube bottle was in all that activity. Chanyeol’s groan when Min started to stroke him was more than half pure relief. But he could feel that slight pull with every stroke, how little time they had.

“Faster, please,” he whimpered.

“Tighter, Channie,” Minseok said.

Minseok pulled him, and Jongdae filled him up. Chanyeol worked Min with both hands, and for a second, Chanyeol thought he’d be left in the cold, because Minseok’s hands went still when he spilled over Chanyeol’s hands with a deep groan, and Chanyeol could feel the tug of that knot against him.

But Jongdae stopped, his fingers digging into Chanyeol’s back, for just long enough that Minseok’s eyes opened and his fist moved over Chanyeol even faster than before, so that just as Jongdae’s knot stretched into him, Chanyeol thrashed, shouting and bearing down hard on that nearly painful pressure in his ass, with Minseok’s quiet “there you go, sweetness” and Jongdae’s stream of curses.

“You follow directions so well,” Jongdae said a little later, just before Chanyeol passed out with Dae’s knot still inside him.
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

"Three chapters"?? ha ha ha or the rut that never ends

Chanyeol could feel time pass more clearly than during heat – he knew he didn’t sleep long, even though Minseok and Jongdae were totally out, lying in each other’s arms next to him when he woke up. He took a little time to stretch a bit, have a snack, brush his teeth. To lean against the door frame, naked and cold, and watch them for a while in the light of the small lamp Minseok had left on.

Slick dripped down his legs, and his dick felt heavy with the beginnings of desire – his libido was definitely working like he was in heat, but without the need, or the burning, or the overwhelming emotion. It was weird. Maybe it was the number of orgasms in a short period of time that made him feel so calm, or the scents of sex and Jongdae in the room keeping him riled up. Maybe it was just them, those two small, gorgeous bodies entwined, in a space where he had only ever had safety and pleasure. Chanyeol could barely remember all the drama from the morning or the nervousness he had felt.

As if he could hear Chanyeol thinking, Jongdae stretched and rolled onto his back. He gazed for a moment, then held out one hand. The dim, yellowish light highlighted the angles of Jongdae’s face and shadowed his eyes, making him look fierce and beautiful. Chanyeol saw no point in hesitating. He lay down, and Jongdae clung to him, his mouth hot and hands soft, whispering things like “smell so good, Channie,” and “wish I had six hands so I could touch more of you.” It was so good: all that languid, messy kissing in dim light, in the early hours of the morning.

Jongdae fucked him slow and soft, such that Minseok didn’t even wake up until Dae’s quiet cry when he came, and Chanyeol didn’t even mind that he hadn’t come, because the whole thing had been so warm and comfortable and tender that it was enough to hold Jongdae through his many minutes of trembling, lips against his hair. Chanyeol figured it was because it was the middle of the night and mostly in the dark that a wave of overwhelm hit him and he cried a little, while Minseok kissed his face and Jongdae reached up to stroke his cheek.

All day, Chanyeol felt himself falling into a haze from a mixture of exhaustion and the sheer amount of sex. After dawn, they finally coaxed Jongdae into the shower, where Chanyeol learned that sucking on a knot would inspire an alpha to make a bunch of sounds that didn’t usually come out of a throat, and not long afterward, Minseok had to hold Dae upright while Chanyeol was grateful that he hadn’t even tried to swallow all that, what the hell, how did alphas even produce that much come?

“I’m fucking tired,” Jongdae said later, leaning his head down on the kitchen island counter.

“Tired of fucking?” Min asked.

Jongdae looked up with a grin.

“Never.”
They got in a couple of actual meals over the course of the day, resolutely ignoring the way Jongdae slowly stroked himself pretty much throughout. He didn’t make another project of coating Chanyeol in protein-based bodily emissions, other than that one time where he got caught up talking about how Chanyeol needed more hickies and came all over him in the middle of sucking a 47th or whatever mark onto Chanyeol’s belly.

Jongdae bit him for the first time after they spent a long while lounging together in a pile, Chanyeol with his nose pressed to the spot where their heads rested together, breathing deep and trying to let their combined scents calm the restlessness that he couldn’t seem to shake. Jongdae played idly with Minseok’s cock until Min couldn’t hold himself still, kissing Jongdae’s neck. Chanyeol had already tried out one of his ideas from earlier: why not the other?

“You should let Min fuck you,” he said, in as deep a voice as he could manage.

Minseok stopped wriggling and smiled slowly as Jongdae went a little stiff. Not the right kind of stiff, but maybe Chanyeol could do something about that, too. He dragged his fingers slowly down the side of Jongdae’s neck, bent to murmur in Dae’s ear.

“Don’t you think that sounds fun, alpha? To knot me while Minseok fucks you just the way you like.”

Minseok hummed and moved against Jongdae’s body, mouth dragging across Dae’s collarbone.

It took a moment, but then Jongdae growled long, pushing Min up and back, kissing him.

“Do it,” he rasped. “Fuck me hard enough for Chan to feel it.”

“He may throw you around a little,” Sehun had said – Jongdae hauled Chanyeol down onto his back, legs and ass up in the air, so quickly that Chanyeol needed a second to catch his breath – and then a few seconds more, when Jongdae’s lips wrapped around his dick and two fingers entered him. It was way rougher and sloppier than Jongdae’s usual technique, not that Chanyeol was ever going to complain about Dae’s mouth on him, ever.

Then Jongdae pulled off and snarled back at Minseok, then tossed his head.

“Can you fucking take me,” he muttered, and Chanyeol didn’t know what he meant until he spread those two fingers wide apart.

“Yeah, yeah, do it.”

It was a literal stretch – he’d had a few hours since the last time, but Chanyeol arched down into it, the pressure of Jongdae filling him up. Jongdae kept shuddering and growling, teeth bared. His grip on Chanyeol’s thighs was so tight his knuckles were white.

“Okay, babe?” Minseok asked.

“Fucking more,” Jongdae growled. “Fucking makes me want to hit something, don’t you fucking stop, Minseok.”

He slammed into Chanyeol, then tipped his head back and groaned. The line of his torso was so beautiful but his face so contorted. Chanyeol felt himself squeeze around the organ inside him; its stillness made him feel itchy and dissatisfied. Chanyeol drove his elbows into the mattress to lift himself up. Jongdae wrapped his arms around Chanyeol’s thighs.

“Come on,” he said. “Come on, Jongdae, please.”
Jongdae grinned.

“Say that again.”

He tossed his head, and Minseok said,

“There you go.”

God, it wasn’t even like he was about to come. But his whole body felt like it was alight – Chanyeol fancied he could even feel the air against his skin. Minseok’s dark hair behind Jongdae’s shoulder, Jongdae holding him, inside him, body hot against him.

“Please,” he said. “Please, Jongdae. Please fuck me, please.”

One long stroke out, and back in hard enough to make his teeth knock together.

“Say it again.”

“Babe, I’m going to fuck you until you scream for me,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol had to gather enough breath to speak. How did that even work, breathing?

“Jongdae.”

One thrust.

“My alpha.”

Another.

“Please, Jongdae.”

Again.

“Oh god. Please, I –“

Again.

“My mate.”

Jongdae shoved into him, then rocked forward and shouted, Minseok’s face triumphant over his shoulder, hands on his hips.


Who was he talking to? Minseok grinned at him and drove forward hard enough that Jongdae cried out again, sliding out of and back into Chanyeol.

“Let his legs down, babe,” Minseok said. “Lean over. Put your hands on our pretty Chan.”

And then it was Chanyeol’s turn to moan, because Jongdae’s scent was all around him, his body warm against Chanyeol’s chest, one hand in his hair while Minseok fucked him hard enough for both of them.

“More,” Jongdae said, tongue against his chest. “Tell me, Channie.”

“Touch me,” Chanyeol said. “Want to come around you, Jongdae, please.”
Jongdae growled. He bit down; Chanyeol gripped his shoulder hard, looked up at Minseok smiling
down, hair falling over his eyes.


“Your knot’s not up yet?” Minseok said.

He smacked Jongdae’s ass hard, and Jongdae made a high sound, quickly cut off.

“Gonna knot me, Dae?” Chanyeol said.

“Yes.”

All that talking they always did. Maybe he was used to it by now, Chanyeol was ready to babble his
damn head off, if for no other reason than to keep from losing himself. They were moving together
as if choreographed. The slide in and out of him was so warm, so good, and Minseok’s face looked
triumphant.

“Give it to me, Jongdae.”

Jongdae made a sound like a sob.

“Come on, Dae. Let me have it, I want it.”

Jongdae mouthed at his chest. He wasn’t ashamed to beg.

“I want your knot, Jongdae.”

He got it. Jongdae growled again, and there was a clumsy moment when he moved faster and
Minseok didn’t immediately catch up, but then Jongdae’s knot pushed into him, and Jongdae
writhed, stuck while Minseok continued to drive into him at a relentless pace.

“Touch yourself, Channie,” Min said. “Come on him.”

Jongdae made a low, desperate sound.

Chanyeol reached down to pull himself off, twisting his hips against the pressure in his ass.

“Come on, Jongdae,” he said.

He was so close. Every time Min slammed home that knot shifted inside him.

“Put your fucking hands on me, come on.”

He worked himself fast, staring into Jongdae’s face, feeling Jongdae’s hands on his chest, feeling
Minseok driving Jongdae’s dick into him. He watched Jongdae’s expression twist when he came. He
didn’t bother to hold back his long moan, let himself grasp the back of Jongdae’s neck hard, felt
himself clench around that knot while he spilled onto his belly.

“Channie,” Jongdae said.

“You need to come now,” Minseok said.

“Yes,” Chanyeol said.

“Do it,” Minseok said. “Scream.”
What a good alpha, even in rut, to do as he was told. Jongdae opened his mouth and threw his head back. Minseok drove into him, Chanyeol still felt that knot moving in him as a harsh cry tore its way out of Jongdae’s throat, until he fell forward and sank his fangs into Chanyeol’s shoulder, still groaning, scrambling like he was trying to get away, even though he was pinned by his knot on one side and Minseok’s dick on the other.

Must’ve been all the sex, and the rut – Chanyeol held Jongdae’s head in place, even when Jongdae shifted his bite, but the pain was nothing, just a background to the satisfaction of being claimed.

“Beautiful,” Minseok said, obviously on his way over too. “So fucking gorgeous.”

Jongdae sobbed.

Chanyeol had to agree.
“He’s never let me have him in rut before,” Minseok said a little while later. “What a good idea, sweetness. He was so pissed off when he came that I thought he’d squeeze my dick off, it was great.”

Chanyeol found it necessary to spend some time kissing that filthy mouth.

He would’ve thought getting the daylights fucked out of him like that would’ve cured his inability to keep still. But once they had all caught their breath and cleaned up a little, he could feel his skin crawling again, as if he wanted to pace like Jongdae would.

With an alpha in rut around, though, he just kept having more sex instead of pacing. That was more fun, anyhow, and Chanyeol didn’t want all that slick to go to waste. Jongdae was so deep in rut by this time that his refractory period was about 6 minutes, which was astounding given how long his orgasms lasted. He looked exhausted; Chanyeol and Minseok spent much of the afternoon wrapped around him, trying to coax him into drinking juice or protein drinks via the application of begging and makeouts. They were never able to get much liquid into him before he’d push the glasses away and nose at them for another round.

Chanyeol had always heard that rutting alphas were so swept up in the biological imperative to breed that they would ignore everything else. Jongdae, though, seemed content to vary it up: after he bit Chanyeol, the next round was between Min’s thighs in the shower, Chanyeol leaned against the wall, holding Minseok upright. The next one after that, he talked Chanyeol through blowing Min (“let me see your tongue, Channie,” and “don’t suck him so hard, not until he begs for it”), jerking himself until he came on Minseok’s face.

The whole apartment smelled like Jongdae and sex – Chanyeol could taste it on his tongue, even. Even Minseok had given up on trying to do anything about how gross the bed was, and Chanyeol couldn’t bring himself to care about it. He felt restless again, knew he was staring at Jongdae. Found himself with his hand around his own dick and no memory of deciding to put it there.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said when he noticed.

Chanyeol opened his mouth for Jongdae’s sloppy, possessive kiss. He lifted Jongdae’s hand and put it on the back of his own neck and shivered when Dae growled into his mouth. The warmth of their bare chests pressed together made him ache for anything, as long as it was more. He whimpered.

Jongdae pulled back and gazed at him, brushed his hair off his forehead, then pressed his own forehead against Chanyeol’s.

“I see you, Chan,” he said, not in alpha voice but his own regular voice, sounding so warm and fond that tears gathered in Chanyeol’s eyes. “I’m glad you’re here.”

They kissed some more around Chanyeol’s sniffling, until Jongdae was grinding against him and Chanyeol felt his own hands shaking. Jongdae smiled at him, pushed him onto his back, dragged him by one leg to the end of their bed, and put that (by now, truly horrifying) pillow back under his hips.

“Come here, Min,” he said over his shoulder.

He wrapped Chanyeol’s legs around his waist, pushed into him slowly. Minseok knelt next to Chanyeol on the bed. Jongdae leaned over and kissed him, unhurried and wet. Chanyeol felt shivery, on an edge of emotion, at the thought of more of that soft, tender sex from the middle of the night.
Except that as Jongdae straightened, he said,

“Fuck yourself open with your hand, Min. I want to watch you ride Channie while I’m inside him.”

“Fuck,” Chanyeol said, clenching at just the thought of that, so that Jongdae grinned and blinked slowly at him.

“Well,” Minseok said, “I suppose if I must.”

“Watch him, Chan,” Jongdae said.

He moved in and out of Chanyeol’s ass with long, smooth strokes. Minseok knelt by them, ran his hands over himself. Chanyeol wondered how in the world they hadn’t killed him with sex yet, because he was for sure going to have a heart attack at some point. Jongdae’s hands were warm on his hips. Minseok looked hotter than the surface of the sun, biting his lip while he fingered himself, smiling a little when he looked over at Chanyeol.

“It won’t take much, sweetness,” he said. “I’m almost ready for you already.”

His arm muscles flexed, and he tossed his head. Jongdae kept up that steady, sliding pace. Chanyeol felt ready to fly apart. He put his hand on Minseok’s knee just to have some kind of contact; Minseok hummed, and all those interesting muscles in his abdomen flexed. Jongdae drove in hard and stayed still, long enough that Chanyeol shifted, hungry for more.

“Are you ready for him, Min?” Jongdae asked.

“Just about,” Minseok said.

“You want him, Chan? Want Minseok to ride you?”

Chanyeol’s “yes” sounded broken and a little desperate even to himself.

Jongdae laughed under his breath and fucked him at a frantic pace for a minute, until Chanyeol was gasping. Then he stopped again, and Chanyeol groaned with frustration.

Then he groaned because Min sank down onto him, and Chanyeol thought his brain probably melted. They’d done this during his heat, but he barely remembered it – and no wonder, because he didn’t have any room inside him for thought. He was nothing but nerve endings, Minseok tight and hot around him, Jongdae thick and warm inside him. That extra bit of heat and thrill that all of it was skin against skin, no latex anywhere.

And then they both started to move. Chanyeol cried out sharply, arching his back, fingers clutching at Minseok’s thighs.

Somehow, they even moved together, until Chanyeol thought he could hear his own blood roaring in his ears. He fought to keep his eyes open, to watch Minseok grinding and bouncing on him. Jongdae was watching him over Minseok’s shoulder, his hands on Min’s chest.

It was so much – heat and friction, how beautiful they were, how much they made him crazy with want. And there was the deep, almost painful, almost breaking pleasure of Jongdae’s knot. Chanyeol groaned. He watched Minseok smile as Jongdae’s arms wrapped around him and he rode Chanyeol faster. Chanyeol bucked up into him, feeling Dae’s knot with every movement. Seeing Jongdae’s dark eyes staring at him over Min’s shoulder.

It was too much. He couldn’t stop the tears that flowed from his eyes or the sob that left his mouth.
He couldn’t help squeezing as he thrust up and saw how Jongdae’s eyelids fluttered. One of Jongdae’s hands gripped Minseok’s cock and pumped him; Minseok hissed.

“I’m gonna mark him, Channie,” Jongdae said, alpha voice back in full force. “Just as soon as you come.”

Chanyeol moaned.

“Come on me, Chan,” Jongdae growled.

Minseok grinned and squeezed hard as he drove down, and Chanyeol couldn’t hold back his high, needy whine. Min raised up, dropped back down, and Chanyeol stared into Jongdae’s fierce eyes until they were the only things he could see – everything else was pleasure screaming out of him while he writhed against Jongdae’s knot. He watched Jongdae’s mouth open, Minseok’s shudder and gasp when Dae’s fangs punctured his shoulder, and Chanyeol cried out again on another wave, trying to buck up into Minseok, who laughed and tightened around him, leaning his head back against Jongdae as he striped Chanyeol’s chest.


He ground up against Chanyeol, his arms tightened around Min, and Chanyeol felt him come. Jongdae watched Chanyeol the whole time.

Even as Min leaned down to wipe Chanyeol’s tears away, Jongdae watched him, still twitching with orgasm. Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s hands on his chest when Minseok pulled off so he could crouch down to kiss Chanyeol until he stopped crying.

Chanyeol struggled to calm himself afterward. There was nowhere he could go that didn’t have Jongdae’s scent, like it was reaching up through his nose to tug directly at his brain. He drank a glass of water that was mostly ice and felt just as thirsty afterward.

Slick dripped down his leg. And it seemed so obvious, all of a sudden. How long had he been in heat? Just thinking it made his skin flash hotter. How long had he been restless and distracted. Of course he could taste Jongdae’s scent in his mouth. Now that he wasn’t trying to pretend it was something else, Chanyeol could feel his temperature rise by the second. He stretched his neck, feeling the way the itchy restlessness of the day was actually heat-wanting. Feeling the way that it wasn’t that he couldn’t get away from Jongdae’s scent. It was that he couldn’t get enough of it.

That scent. That alpha in rut. And he was an omega in heat.

Jongdae growled. Chanyeol heard it from across the room, a vibration that shivered through his entire body.

He turned to look into Jongdae’s hot stare. Put two fingers to the base of his throat and trailed them slowly down until his fingers skated over his own erection. Doing so, under Jongdae’s gaze, left him about 20 degrees hotter by the end of the gesture.

And then Jongdae was pressed against him, mouth open against his chest, breathing in, then groaning once and licking Chanyeol’s skin. Chanyeol leaned down and put his own open mouth against Jongdae’s neck, inhaling through his mouth and nose at the same time, and he felt his knees start to buckle before stubbornness broke out in him. He backed away, laughed at Jongdae’s scowl.

“Doing this again, Chan?”
He burned – with heat, with desire. He was so hungry to have hands on him, to be filled up. He was so ready for it that he ached. Jongdae would give it to him: when he said yes.

Chanyeol laughed again, with the sheer power of it. He ran to the other side of the room and stood with his back to the wall, palms flat against it, grinning at Jongdae’s stare.

He wanted to be caught. But not yet.

A couple of times he let Jongdae get arms around him; Chanyeol thoroughly enjoyed the way their bare skin slid together as he struggled, and the rush when Jongdae let him go to stalk him again. Once, he nipped Dae’s shoulder hard with his teeth, which prompted a highly satisfying snarl. He was so full up with wanting that there wasn’t room for air in his lungs.

The distance he was willing to stay away from Jongdae got shorter and shorter, until a moment when Jongdae caught him, and instead of wriggling to get away, Chanyeol leaned down and breathed in again. Then he let the fire coursing through him to take over.

He dropped to his knees and tilted his head back, exposing his neck.

Jongdae’s fingers tangled in his hair, but he didn’t pull Chanyeol’s head lower. Chanyeol looked up, and there was nothing he could see in Jongdae’s face to make him feel small or afraid – only eagerness and desire. Jongdae bent down and laid his teeth against Chanyeol’s neck, dragged them and his tongue up until he sucked Chanyeol’s earlobe.

“Oh, baby,” he growled into Chanyeol’s ear. “You let me get you. I have such a reward for you.”

And then Chanyeol blinked with surprise, heat-haze blanking out momentarily at the sheer unlikeliness of Jongdae fucking lifting him, despite the improbable physics of it – was Jongdae actually that strong? He had to keep his feet lifted off the floor, it probably looked ridiculous, Jongdae hauling him back toward the bedroom. Chanyeol briefly caught Minseok’s assessing gaze as they passed him.

But then Jongdae’s muscles shifted, and he tossed Chanyeol onto the bed, clambered onto him, and Chanyeol’s heat roared back over his mind at the touch of his alpha’s hands and mouth on him. He was made to be kissed like this, to burn, to crave, to choke on the pleasure of that knot breaking him open, he was lost.
Chanyeol woke up crusty, sore, and wrapped fully around Jongdae. Heat broken already, and if Dae was this soundly asleep, rut too. He rubbed his nose in Jongdae’s (filthy) hair, and the scents of sex and rain-soaked ground were still good, still made his heart feel over-full and happy, but his restlessness and sense of need were gone. Not one part of his body perked up in the slightest.

He could feel the mountain of things to ponder sitting in the back of his mind, but there had been so much about the past few days that had been good. Had been hot, and crazy, and just plain fun. Even with – at least – two new mating scars on his right shoulder, none of his fears about Jongdae’s rut had come to pass.

The whole thing had been so them. So very Jongdae and Minseok.

Speaking of which, where was Minseok?

Chanyeol had to go looking, and found him sitting at the kitchen island, fully dressed, paging through a book, head down. Chanyeol hoped he was wrong about it being the loneliest thing he’d ever seen.

“Good morning,” he called out softly. “Is it morning?”

Minseok looked up, and there was so much sadness on his face that Chanyeol crossed the room at almost a run.

“Min, what is it? I know you don’t want me to hug you, I’m so filthy and gross, but what is this? What’s wrong?”

Minseok showed a total disregard for the many dried fluids all over Chanyeol’s torso and pressed his face against it. Chanyeol bent down far enough to get his nose under Min’s ear and inhale.

“There you are,” he said. “I feel like I’ve been missing you.”

He didn’t like how the sound Min made might have been a laugh, but it might also have been a little cut-off sob. Screw it, he could clean off the stool seat later. Chanyeol sat down and tugged until Minseok left his own seat and let himself be pulled into the circle of Chanyeol’s arms and legs. He burrowed his head up against Chanyeol’s neck, and even licked it once, which - yuck. Chanyeol wouldn’t have licked himself on a bet, at the moment.

How had they made Min so sad?

“You smell like Jongdae.”

Oh. Oh no. Of course he did, and Chanyeol didn’t miss the wistfulness in Minseok’s tone. Chanyeol
hugged Min tight. He felt terrible.

“Ah, Minseokkie,” he said, and Min twitched at the nickname, “did we make you feel like the odd beta out?”

Minseok was still for a few heartbeats. Chanyeol drew back far enough to rub his face against Min’s cheek and shoulder.

“I’m so sorry.”

Min stroked Chanyeol’s shoulder, not meeting his eye.

“Logically, I know it’s stupid to get my balls in a twist when it’s Gland Central Station up in here,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol grabbed his face and kissed him with all the “hey you are both stupid and awesome” that he could put into one kiss.

“Thanks for that,” Minseok said after, with finally a tiny little smile going.

“Gland Central Station is hilarious, by the way. Jongdae’s gonna be so mad that he didn’t think of it first.”

And that earned Chanyeol a real smile.

“Right? I’m pretty proud of it. I had a lot of time to think in between checking to make sure you two hadn’t accidentally killed one another.”

Chanyeol cringed.

“No, I’m sorry,” Minseok said. “That was mean. I’ll get over myself.”

Chanyeol stroked his shoulder.

“Were we very rude?”

Minseok grimaced and shook his head.

“No, I’m being dumb. You were both just - not interested. And it was really only part of one day, I shouldn’t -”

“Beat yourself up about it?”

Minseok scowled.

“Stop sounding like me, Chanyeol, I hate it.”

Chanyeol grinned. But he disliked how Minseok still didn’t want to look him in the eye. He put his hand up Min’s shirt in the back, just to get more skin contact, rubbed his face on Min’s cheek.

“How long has it been?”

“It’s evening, actually. But still Monday. You only lost a little over twenty-four hours.”

Chanyeol put his arms back around. He hated to see Min so unhappy.

“I swear I’m being stupid,” Minseok said. “I was in the mix for plenty of it until the last bit. You
even called for me once, Channie, when I was out of the room. Though I have to say, by your usual standards, it was a pretty subpar blowjob.”

Even worse than Minseok looking unhappy was Minseok babbling. Chanyeol squeezed him until he shut up.

“Min.”

And Minseok exhaled, shifted until he felt less stiff and awkward. But Chanyeol wanted more skin, to hold him closer until that little furrow between his eyebrows went away.

“Come lie down with me,” Chanyeol said.

“In that gross bed?”

Chanyeol pulled at his sleeve.

“Yes, in that gross bed. It needs your scent in it. Please, Min.”

Minseok let Chanyeol pull him into the bedroom and take his clothes off, still looking sad, if less indrawn. He let Chanyeol curl around his back, one arm around his chest.

So Chanyeol felt it when Minseok reached out to push Jongdae’s hair off his forehead, and his breath hitched.

It was awful. And it was his fault.

Chanyeol turned that over in his mind for a minute, his arm still holding Minseok close. It was his fault. His being there had been the thing that made Min feel left out. But would that be fixed, if he left, and they went back to what they were before?

Probably not. It would cause a whole new host of problems, right? And on top of that, he didn’t want to leave.

For once, he didn’t want to back off from the hurt. He didn’t want to run away from the difficulty. He wanted to fucking stay.

And to do whatever it took to make sure Minseok knew he needed to stay too. Because what Chanyeol wanted was all of it. The three of them together, for as long as they could possibly make it last. His mates.

He pulled Minseok closer and put his face in Min’s hair, wormed his other arm up to curl over Min’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I’m so sorry, Min, I never want you to feel bad.”

Minseok, as the nicest murder beta alive, pressed back against his chest and kissed his fingers.

It was so comfortable, and the skin of Minseok’s shoulder tasted so good under his lips. Min laughed when Chanyeol got a little more handsy and things began to perk up below the waist.

Well. His ass might need an extended break after everything, but his dick was just fine.

“So ridiculous,” Minseok murmured.

But he reached back and positioned Chanyeol’s dick between his thighs, then twined his legs
together tightly and wound his fingers behind him, in Chanyeol’s hair.

Happily, there was still a little residual slick action going on – just enough to get himself nice and slippery between Min’s legs and have some left over to reach around and take Minseok in hand.

“Min,” he whispered as he began to move, licked behind Minseok’s ear.

And Minseok sighed, stretched his legs so they gripped Chanyeol’s dick tighter.

Jongdae woke up after a couple of minutes, when things had heated up but they were both still quiet. He stared down for a minute, looking surprised.

When he looked up, whatever he saw in Minseok’s face made his expression go soft and serious. He slid over and kissed Minseok, his mouth gentle, one hand curled over Minseok’s cheek. Chanyeol watched them, still moving, still feeling too full inside his own chest. Jongdae’s hand joined his; Chanyeol let go and gripped Minseok’s chest instead, using the leverage to move faster, laying one leg over Minseok’s hip to get closer. Their kisses grew rougher, Jongdae’s hand moving fast. Minseok shifted, made a small sound.

Chanyeol thought about how he and Min had lay on the sofa together, just a week ago, and all the things they had said to one another. Saying the words without saying them. He thought about how both of them were so beautiful. Minseok sitting in his family’s living room, laughing. The scent of rain-soaked ground and the scent of mint. All the sex and all the laughter and all the food. Minseok’s sad face, and how very much he wanted to make that sadness go away.

Between one heartbeat and the next, Chanyeol knew: he loved him.

This was what love was, right? Not like what he had thought it was before, fearful and clutching, a thing so overwhelming that sometimes he was afraid it would blot him out.

Instead, love was seeing sadness and wanting to make it go away. It was not running away from the hard stuff. It was making space for each other inside daily routines. It was wanting to know all the parts of them, even the awkward and ugly bits. Scents that made you feel like you belonged. It was feeling better and braver just to be around them.

It was happiness. To love Minseok.

Minseok made another small sound. Jongdae’s mouth swallowed it up. And something deep and wild rose up in Chanyeol, something that would’ve frightened him if he were absolutely anywhere else than in this place with them. His fangs filled his mouth.

He must’ve growled, because Jongdae looked up and his eyes went wide, but all Chanyeol knew was the scent of mint inside his head, and it meant mate, and he bit down.

A tiny, shocked bit of himself noted the flavor of blood and thought “gross,” but his body took it and ran into a huge, messy orgasm, at the same time that Minseok practically screamed, and they pretty well covered Jongdae’s torso in come between the two of them.

“Holy shit,” Jongdae said right about the time that Chanyeol had come back to his senses (and his normal teeth) and had time to note that apparently his jaw and his fangs were also oversized, because Min’s shoulder was a fucking mess.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Minseok rolled into his back, and his smile was so brilliant that Chanyeol skipped a breath and
maybe a few heartbeats.

“You’re sorry?” he asked, laughter in his voice, his hands cool on Chanyeol’s face.

Chanyeol could only smile back, feeling shy and tender around the edges, until Minseok pulled his face down and kissed him with so much sweetness that tears pricked at Chanyeol’s eyes.

“Chan,” Jongdae said, his hand gentle on Chanyeol’s back. “Oh, Channie.”

And he leaned in to kiss Chanyeol’s cheek. Which was too much for one overwhelmed, tired omega, so Chanyeol cried for a while.

“Ah, fuck, no salt water on the shoulder,” Minseok laughed, but his put his arms around Chanyeol anyway.

“You ever do that before?” Jongdae asked, wiping Chanyeol’s tears away with gentle fingertips.

Chanyeol shook his head. God, it was like the two of them had found a way to make their smiles even more beautiful.

Or maybe it was the way his eyes saw them now.

He and Jongdae licked Minseok’s shoulder clean between kisses. There wasn’t a trace of sadness left in Min’s face that Chanyeol could see. So maybe he had done something right. It did weird things inside his chest to see that bite on Minseok’s shoulder, knowing it would always be there, no matter what happened with them.

Jongdae was the one who finally made them get up and get clean. His smile never left his face as he herded them into the shower, wiped Min’s shoulder gently, washed Chanyeol’s hair, despite the shadows under his eyes and how drawn his face looked.

Chanyeol waited to say it until Jongdae was sleeping again, though, clean and fed and passed out on the sofa. He didn’t think it was a problem – and he wasn’t so completely self-deluded as to think it didn’t go for Jongdae too – but he wanted the moment with Min, just the two of them.

Maybe it wasn’t romantic to make declarations while sponging gross spots out of a recently overburdened mattress, but Chanyeol watched Min’s small hands blotting at one area, and he could only think about how those strong, callused hands had only ever meant kindness and pleasure to him, ever since the first time Min had held his hand, on their first date. It felt like the right time.

“I love you, Minseok,” he said.

How lucky he was, to have seen Min’s smile when he rolled over, shoulder bleeding from the mating scar. How lucky he was, to see how Min smiled now, so wide and delighted that it forgot to be crooked anymore, his eyes disappeared into crescents, not even noticing how the sponge dropped out of his hand.

“Chanyeol,” he said, sounding breathless. “My sweetness.”

He crawled over and put his hands on Chanyeol’s face, still smiling up at him, shining as bright as the moon.

“Oh, Chan, I’m so crazy about you,” Minseok said.

He kissed Chanyeol, soft and sweet.
“I love you so much, my Channie.”
Chanyeol kept trying to tell himself that saying it out loud didn’t really change anything.

Then he told himself to shut up. Of course it changed things.

He and Minseok took forever to sponge the mattress into a state anywhere close to not-totally-gross. They kept having to stop to smile at each other, to kiss, to put their hands to one another’s cheeks. Chanyeol was exhausted, and pretty much every centimeter of his body ached, but he felt like he could take flight.

“That’s enough,” Minseok said finally. “Though we may have to sleep in the guest room tonight, this’ll take forever to dry.”

Chanyeol only quailed for an instant, but that sliver of nervousness couldn’t find anything to hang onto, so it didn’t last.

“Or we could sleep at my place,” he said.

Minseok put an arm around his waist and leaned up close, smiling.

“Your place,” he said. “When’s the last time you slept there?”

Chanyeol tried to think back, and it was so funny that he couldn’t help laughing.

“The day before our first date?”

Minseok’s eyes went comically wide.

“Seriously?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“As far as I can remember.”

Minseok shook his head.

“You’re going to give me ideas, sweetness.”

Ideas that he had no brain for talking about yet, after the past few days they’d had. Chanyeol leaned down to kiss Min anyway.

He whispered “I love you” up against Minseok’s mouth, just because he liked saying it, and he liked the way he felt Min’s lips smile against his own.

They heard Jongdae protesting wakefulness and went to sit on him. He demanded to see Minseok’s shoulder again, which made Chanyeol feel about 19 shades of red, even while he smiled.

“Damn,” Jongdae said. “Way to make a guy feel inadequate.”

“Shut up,” Chanyeol said, shoving him. “You’re just jealous.”

“I’m not jealous. I’m the only one around here who isn’t going to be on an ass break for at least the next week. I feel certain that my spectacular booty will not only get wrecked but also inspire my
own chewed-out shoulder. I’m looking forward to it.”

He had to be kidding, right?

“You’re just out of rut and you still want to do it?”

Jongdae stared at him like he was insane.

“Duh,” he said.

Chanyeol looked at Min, who rolled his eyes.

“Alphas are so gross,” he said.

“It’s true,” Min said. “But your ass is amazing, babe, no one’s questioning that.”

He patted the body part in question, despite Jongdae’s scowl.

They ordered pizza. While they waited for it, Chanyeol wormed himself around until he had the two of them lying more on top of him than anything else, an arm around each of them. For a couple of moments he let himself simply feel content. He closed his eyes, feeling their nearly equal weights against his chest, Jongdae’s ribs under one hand and Minseok’s hair under the other. Listening to their voices as they bantered.

Boyfriends. And mates. And loves.

How did he get so lucky?

“Yikes, you’re going to squeeze out all my organs, Channie,” Jongdae said.

“Sorry.”

But Dae was smiling at him when he opened his eyes, with that warm, quiet expression he so often wore. Chanyeol took a shaky breath, and he felt Minseok’s fingers curl over the neck of his hoodie. Here was this moment, too, to say the thing he had to say to Jongdae.

The door buzzer rang.

“All right, pizza,” Jongdae yelled, rolling up off the sofa to head for the door.

Chanyeol had to sigh.

Oh well. It wasn’t like he wouldn’t have another chance.

It was better than anything to sit so close together that they kept knocking elbows while they ate. Minseok grabbed a piece of Chanyeol’s Hawaiian and ate it slowly and suggestively, to Jongdae’s high-volume scorn. Chanyeol laughed so hard that he knocked the box off the table – but because he was on some kind of luck high, it landed right side up, so no lasting harm was done.

“I’ve had it in the back of my mind that you had another heat coming up next month, Chan,” Minseok said. “What’s this going to have done to your schedule? Did this heat last long enough to count?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Yeah. It still counts, even if it was short and weird.”
He grinned and waggled his eyebrows.

“I might get a little extra frisky for a couple of days around the time I would’ve normally had it. Hope you won’t mind.”

Minseok gave him a dirty smile.

“Fuck,” Jongdae said.

Not quite the response Chanyeol had been expecting. Additionally, Jongdae had literally dropped his slice of pizza, and his face looked a little green.

“Fuck,” he said again.

He lunged toward Chanyeol, scrabbling at his collar and smelling his neck.

“Shit, Channie, I’m so sorry, did we even use a single condom? You don’t smell like, but no, it’s so soon. What the fuck were we thinking, my god.”

Chanyeol could feel him shaking, and by that point, Minseok looked a little green too.

“Hey,” Chanyeol said.

After a couple of tries, he succeeded at grabbing Dae’s hands.

“Jesus, Jongdae,” he said, “I got a shot, I can’t believe neither of us told you, I’m so sorry.”

“You – what?”

“Fuck, babe, I really dropped the ball,” Minseok said. “He told me about it when I dropped off the key, I’m apologize, I forgot to mention it.”

Jongdae stared at Chanyeol, eyes so wide that Chanyeol could see the whites above his irises. He squeezed Dae’s fingers.

“Yeah,” he said. “I mean, it was barely enough time, I should definitely go get the morning-after stuff tomorrow just in case, but I got the shot last week. I’m good for like three months. I’m sorry, Dae. With everything that happened, I forgot.”

Unfortunately, all that did was make Jongdae’s face crumple.

“Aw, fuck, Chanyeol. Are you okay? Is your hand all right? I can’t believe I fucking rutted right when your fucking horrible ex showed up. God, Channie, you must be furious, I’m so, so sorry.”

It actually took a second for Chanyeol to even remember what Jongdae meant about his hand. He looked at the scabbed-over knuckles, a little amazed that there was anything still there. It seemed like a hundred years ago that he sat in Baekhyun’s apartment, feeling miserable.

“I’m not mad,” he said.

“Son of a bitch,” Jongdae said. “What day is it?”

“Uh, Monday?”

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.”
Jongdae snatched up his phone and stabbed at it. Chanyeol leaned against Min for ballast, because what in the world?

“Amber,” Dae said a moment later, “dammit I’m so, so – “

He glanced at Minseok, and some of the panic when out of his posture. He reached over to squeeze Min’s knee.

“Good. But look, I can’t believe I missed that meeting, I’m so sorry. Yeah, almost a week early. No, it’s over now, I – shit, what time is it? God, I’m sorry, I freaked out when I realized it was Monday, I’ll be in first thing tomorrow –”

Even Chanyeol could hear the “you will the hell not” from the other end of the line in a smooth female voice. Jongdae shut his mouth, listening with one hand over his eyes.

“I’m fine,” Jongdae said. “There’s so much to do, I can – that’s not the point, you need. Okay, but I’m coming in on Wednesday. Yes, I am. I’ll sign in tomorrow so I can read the meeting notes from today. I am not going to. Look, I feel bad, okay? No, you know I appreciate it, I just. Yeah, okay. Thank you. I’m sorry I called so late. Yeah. Talk to you tomorrow.”

He tossed his phone down and put his hands in his hair.

“Thanks for calling work, Min,” he mumbled after a minute, then, “fuck.”

“What are you freaking out for, babe?”

“We had a super important client meeting today. I was really counting on not fucking rutting early so I could get through it.”

Jongdae thunked his head down on the table. His shoulder hitched when Chanyeol and Minseok each put a hand on his back, like he wanted to shrug them off but stopped himself. He made a low, frustrated sound, and when he looked up, his expression was almost as bad as when he got back from his parents’ house.

“What the fuck was I thinking? We didn’t talk about it all, Channie. I just kept putting it off, and then your jerk ex, aw fuck, did I scare? That has to have been the last thing you needed. Did you even get a chance to calm down before I went at you? I can’t fucking believe I zoned out during what was a very fucking critical conversation, shit, and then you had to put up with. God, this is awful.”

He banged his head back down on the table.

“Jongdae,” Minseok said gently.

“Don’t try to make me feel better, Min, this is a disaster.”

Chanyeol glanced at Min and saw more fondness than upset in the way he looked at Dae.

“Except it’s not?” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae lifted his head and stared at him with pure skepticism.

The path of sincerity ran in one direction, and the path of jokes in the other.

Chanyeol had no choice, really.

“The only thing that really alarmed me was how one body could produce that much come,” he said.
“And how much of it you rubbed on me.”

Minseok laughed, high and loud. Jongdae scowled, then scowled some more, then scowled to a degree that was clearly fake, and Chanyeol grinned. Jongdae leaned over until Chanyeol let himself get knocked onto his back with an alpha crouched over him. Such a familiar position, the past few days.

“Quit trying to act like this is no big deal,” Jongdae said, grabbing Chanyeol’s hair and shaking his head. “We have to talk this shit out.”

Chanyeol put his arms around his dumb, grumpy alpha boyfriend.

“How about not when we’re all too tired to move and you’re not also freaking out about work?”

“Chanyeol,” he grumbled with his mouth mashed against Chanyeol’s chest.

“You already apologized, anyhow.”

Jongdae lifted his head.

“When?”

“Right at the beginning, just before you started trying to cover me head to toe in semen.”

Jongdae’s ears turned red.

“It doesn’t count if I don’t remember it,” he muttered.

“I remember it.”

“Jongdae,” Minseok said. “Let Chan be good to you. He’s right that we’re too tired for big conversations. There’s plenty of time for you to beat yourself up later.”

Jongdae nodded and let Chanyeol kiss him. Chanyeol shelved the other conversation for the moment, too. He could wait until things were calmer.
Jongdae’s frown never did quite leave his face all evening, despite Minseok’s and Chanyeol’s best efforts to distract him with the application of kisses and snuggling on the sofa for an episode of *Complete Love*. But he curled up close to Chanyeol, with one arm draped across Min, in their usual bedtime configuration, and didn’t protest when Chanyeol kissed the top of his head.

Chanyeol felt 3 times more conscious and 70 times more sore in the morning – their guest-room mattress, being a little on the too-firm side, didn’t help with that. Jongdae seemed to be in the same boat, walking around stiffly and rubbing at his legs. Minseok fussed over them both, looking so adorable while he cooked breakfast that Chanyeol wanted to turn inside out.

“I’ll take Channie to the clinic,” Minseok said. “Assuming you want a ride over, Chan.”

Like he was going to turn that down.

“Yeah, of course.”

Jongdae nodded, already into his phone, texting work probably. He stopped long enough to buckle the cuff back on Chanyeol’s wrist and set the ear cuff on his ear. When Minseok set the silver triangle in Chanyeol’s other ear, his smile was slow and eager, and he blinked slowly at Chanyeol’s dipping his head sideways so the dangle brushed against his shoulder.

They couldn’t find the black spring ring, though, which brought Dae’s glower back. He pulled the pockets of the jeans he’d been wearing that morning inside out twice, and emptied the entire clothes hamper looking for it. When he flat-out growled, sitting on the floor with dirty clothes and sheets piled around him, Chanyeol grabbed his wrist.

“It’s okay,” he said.

“It’s not. That was yours, I said I’d keep it for you.”

Chanyeol tugged at him.

“Make it up to me by kissing me.”

Jongdae rolled his eyes, but he straddled Chanyeol’s lap and kissed him thoroughly enough to make them both have to adjust the front of their pants. Then Minseok leaned in to kiss Jongdae for good measure, one thumb stroking his cheek.

“Stop worrying,” Min said.

“Is he okay?” Chanyeol asked when they were headed down to the parking garage.

“He’s frequently tired and moody just after a rut,” Minseok said. “I’m sure that’s all it is.”

The same doctor who had given Chanyeol his shot was on duty. She quirked one eyebrow at him when she walked into the exam room.

“Ah,” she said. “You didn’t get as much time before your partner’s rut as you wanted, I bet. Emergency contraception?”
Chanyeol nodded, happy that she was already digging through a cabinet and not noticing how red his face was. He was less happy at her squint when she turned back around.

“And since you’re not here in uniform, I’m going to assume that you have time for me to actually complete your chart.”

Awkward. She asked a million questions about his dating life that made him squirm from the get-go, having to explain that he had two boyfriends, and no they weren’t registered mates, and he was pretty certain they didn’t have any other relationships going on, but no he couldn’t say 100% for sure, so she insisted on drawing blood for an STD screen and frowned at him a little, especially after she walked him through the timeline of his off-schedule heat.

“And do you have any emotional or safety concerns stemming from your partner's recent rut? Any unusual physical symptoms, blood, or pain?”

Chanyeol had always thought the superpower he wanted most was flight, but at the moment, he was seriously considering teleportation, invisibility, or possibly time travel – whatever would end this conversation faster. Even though the doctor was really professional, and he would've said to any of his campers back in the day that all her questions were perfectly normal and needed to be asked, etc. It was still embarrassing.

“None of those,” he said.

“If you have a new mating scar, I’d like to see it, please,” she said. “Just to make sure it’s healing cleanly.”

She blinked at the number of hickeys and regular bite marks covering his torso.

“These were all consensual?”

“Argh,” Chanyeol said.

And then, in response to her giving him an eyebrow almost worthy of Yoora (nowhere near Minseok territory),

“Yes.”

She poked at his shoulder a bit, then winked at him.

“Try not to be so embarrassed,” she said. “And this looks fine. I’m glad everything went well. You seemed a little nervous last week when you came in for your shot; I just wanted to be sure things are all right with you.”

“It was the first time,” he said. “For a rut, I mean. You always hear such crazy stories.”

She nodded.

“You don’t want to hear my crazy stories,” she said. “But anyhow, I’m glad they’re not relevant here. You’ll want to be more careful about timing next year and make sure to get your shot well ahead of time. You know that, right? That you’ll probably go into heat immediately next time, as soon as your partner’s rut starts?”

Next year, whew. Chanyeol nodded. He swallowed the pill she handed him and listened vaguely to her instructions about how bad he’d probably feel for the rest of the day. Took the lollipop, of course, to chase away the pill’s bitterness.
He held Minseok’s hand tightly on the walk back out to the car, brain whirring with the whole pile of everything that had been dumped on him recently.

“Okay, sweetness?”

Chanyeol liked how Min hadn’t even put the key in the ignition, like he was willing to sit all day in the clinic parking lot and listen if he had to. Hell, he probably was willing. Would probably be disappointed if Chanyeol only said he was fine. Because Minseok actually wanted to know, not to be allowed to just skate over the surface of things.

“You’re great,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok smiled, though he shook his head.

“The feeling’s mutual, Channie, but that’s hardly an answer.”

“I know,” Chanyeol said. “I’m good. She’s running an STD panel on me.”

Chanyeol watched Min’s eyes widen and his cheeks go pink before he huffed a short laugh.

“We keep doing everything backwards, don’t we, Chan?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“I’ll get one too,” Minseok said. “And we should ask Jongdae. He and I have no reason to be concerned, but it’s best to make sure.”

Chanyeol wasn’t surprised that Min offered – to be responsible and generous was who Minseok was. But that he offered immediately and didn’t need to be asked: it made the whole love thing seem so easy. And that made awkward things easier to say.

“She said I’ll probably go straight into heat next year. If we’re still together,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok put one hand to Chanyeol’s face. Chanyeol felt overwhelmed for a second by how much he loved that soft little smile. Obviously he had been loving it for a while, and it was the best thing in the world to just say so and not try to hide from it anymore.

“I don’t like that ‘if,’ sweetness,” Min said. “Let’s change it to a ‘when’.”

In Chanyeol’s view, anything that maximized the amount of time he spent with Minseok’s lips against his own was preferable. Especially when it was exactly what he wanted to hear.

By the time they returned home, all those dreaded side effects were kicking in. Chanyeol felt feverish, nauseated, and too tired to do anything but stay still and stare into space. Min hauled him upstairs, and Jongdae fretted at him for the few minutes it took for Minseok to organize a sick bay in their guest room.

The whole thing was really cute, with a heating pad for his stomach, both water and juice, and pretty much any item Chanyeol might’ve thought to ask for in 2 lifetimes. They both tucked him in and patted his hair a lot.

“I have to go to the shop,” Minseok murmured, kissing his cheek. “You sleep.”

“Yell if you need me,” Jongdae said.
Chanyeol slept fitfully for a little while, but the stomach cramps kept waking him up, and his body was so achy that he couldn’t get comfortable. And he was bored. And he was lonely.

And he was crabby enough about feeling bored, lonely, and gross that he didn’t even bother trying to work up any guilt about dragging the duvet and the heating pad into the living room to plop onto the sofa next to Jongdae.

“Hope I’m not bothering you,” he said, wedging himself in so the top of his head was pressed firmly against Dae’s leg.

Since the lap he wanted to put his head on had a laptop on it.

Jongdae combed fingers through his hair for a couple minutes, computer keyboard sounds in the background. Chanyeol closed his eyes, glad to have something that felt nice to concentrate on.

“Chanyeol, that heating pad isn’t even plugged in.”

That was a dumb comment that wasn’t worthy of any response other than pulling the duvet up over his face. Even dumber, it was followed by Jongdae getting up. Chanyeol pouted under the duvet, listening to Jongdae’s footsteps crossing back and forth and the sounds of things clinking around and feeling the heating pad tug a little, then start to warm back up. Jongdae tugged the duvet down just far enough to uncover Chanyeol’s eyes.

“Feeling pretty bad, Chan?”

Chanyeol would’ve said no, except that a stomach cramp hit him at that instant, and he grimaced. Jongdae put his hand on Chanyeol’s head.

“I’m really sorry.”

Honestly, he felt like total shit, he didn’t have any energy for this guilt bullshit, either from himself or from Jongdae.

“Well, quit it,” he said. “You had a fucking rut, it’s not like you could help it, and I’m gonna feel gross for twenty-four hours because it’s better than the alternative. I think we’ll survive.”

He opened his eyes to see Jongdae looking nonplussed, on top of (still) exhausted.

“You don’t look so great, either.”

“Gee, thanks,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol rolled his head forward to push into Jongdae’s hand.

“You know what I mean.”

“Yeah, okay.”

Chanyeol figured that if Jongdae really felt that guilty he’d enjoy getting ordered around a little. By the end of that, Chanyeol had his earbuds, better socks, a piece of ginger candy to suck on, and (finally) his head in Jongdae’s lap. He listened to music and dozed while Jongdae worked, occasionally playing with his hair. He realized he had slept for real when Jongdae woke him up, groaning,

“Aw fuck, my neck,”
and almost falling off the sofa during his own wake-up process.

Fun.

Anyhow, he felt a little less dire post-nap, and less dire still after sitting on the shower floor with Jongdae and hot water blasting down on their heads (much less romantic than it should’ve been). By the time Minseok came home, Chanyeol was sitting upright, only wrapped in duvet to the waist, and had even been thinking that he could face the glass of lukewarm juice on the coffee table without too much misery.

“Ah, there are signs of life,” Minseok said into his phone as he took off his shoes. “Zitao wanted to bring dinner over, do you two mind?”

Jongdae scowled; Chanyeol figured his face must not be much better, given the way Min laughed.

“Dae, he says they won’t stay long, don’t worry. What do you think you might be able to eat, Channie?”

Chanyeol bit back his initial rude comment.

“Chicken porridge, maybe? No promises.”

Minseok nodded, and there followed a bunch of strategizing that Chanyeol ignored in favor of texting Baekhyun to distract himself from the fact that while he felt less dire, he still didn’t feel anything like good.

“R u fuckin serious ur done just in time to not even take a day off? rude,” Baek wrote.

Ironic from someone who had like 3 months of vacation saved up. Chanyeol showed the text to Jongdae anyway, who stuck his tongue out.

Shame. Under other circumstances, Chanyeol might’ve wanted to do something with that tongue. Instead, he concentrated on drinking juice a milliliter at a time and leaning against whichever boyfriend was closest at the moment, until Zitao and Luhan clattered through the door.

He at least felt better enough that the scent of grilled meat didn’t send him running for the bathroom, though it didn’t smell appetizing at all. Luhan grinned at him and his winces while Zitao handed all the bags over.

“I promise we won’t stay,” he said. “I just feel really bad. If I’d had any idea, I would’ve rescheduled our game, I know what it’s like to lose your temper and have your rut come screaming in all of a sudden, it sucks.”

Jongdae’s face went through about 6 snarky responses before he finally settled on simple thanks.

“Chanyeol, I really have to apologize to you,” Zitao said. “I had no idea, I’m so sorry.”

“You couldn’t possibly have known,” Chanyeol said. “It’s okay. I’m all right.”

“You sure?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“I’m curious about the fallout at the office,” Minseok said.

Luhan cackled, and Zitao grimaced.
“I stopped by Taotao’s office yesterday afternoon,” Luhan said. “We had a long and loud conversation about all the fun the three of you probably got up to.”

Chanyeol would’ve cringed if he could’ve moved that quickly without unpleasant aftereffects. Zitao looked at his mate with a pained expression.

“You mean you spent thirty minutes yelling the most perverted things you could think of while standing next to Yifan’s desk,” he said.

“Of course,” Luhan said. “Using my inside knowledge of having dated Minnie for a couple of years and having seen Jongdae naked in more than one locker room. Seemed pretty effective, if the expression on his face was any indication. I mean, I assume you guys have both been up Channie’s ass at the same time, but if not, one, you should, and two, it was pretty easy to extrapolate in hypothetical detail.”

Chanyeol figured that he might be really upset and embarrassed if he had any energy and felt slightly less awful. As it was, he could only cover his eyes briefly and wish for quiet.

“Lu ge. Sometimes I worry that you’re a terrible person.”

“Oh, please, you love me.”

“I do,” Zitao said. “But that doesn’t make me worry any less.”

They made good on their promise not to stay, though Luhan poked Chanyeol with a grin.

“Looking pretty pasty there, my friend. I bet somebody had to go get a pill this morning, huh?”

Chanyeol groaned, and Luhan laughed.

“That’s how Minnie and I met, you know. He found me heaving my guts out into a potted plant in the lobby of our apartment building. At first I thought I’d died and god had sent an angel to fetch me to heaven, but then I remembered the preceding three days, which was why I had to go to the clinic in the first place, and I figured I must still be alive, because no way any demon from hell looks like Min, right?”

“Uh?” was the best Chanyeol could come up with in response to that.

“Yeah. Not very romantic, as first meetings go. It took me like a month to convince him that I ought to suck his dick to thank him for taking such good care of me.”

The way Luhan grinned at the assorted noises of derision and annoyance around the room told Chanyeol that that was the response he’d been going for.

“Okay,” Zitao said. “Stop trying to make Chanyeol throw up. Jongdae, I’m sorry, and if dinner doesn’t make it up to you, please let me know what will. Chanyeol, I’m also sorry, and if there’s anything more you want to say to me about my employee, I’ll listen. Minmin, I’m going to get Lulu out of your hair before you castrate him.”

Luhan swooped in to hug Chanyeol before anyone could stop him.

“Feel better,” he said softly.

So that was nice. Minseok and Jongdae had steak, packed up with lots of fancy side dishes. Chanyeol’s porridge was really pretty good, even if he could only manage 4 bites of it. Mostly he ate
mashed potatoes, fed to him one tiny spoonful at a time by his boyfriends.

Chapter End Notes

I have more fun with Luhan in this, he's SO AWFUL.
Chapter 41

Chanyeol felt so much better after a long night’s sleep back in their bedroom that he put forth a mighty effort to make Jongdae late for work.

“Let go, Chan, I need to get up.”

“No, I need affection.”

Jongdae wriggled, and Chanyeol tightened his hold with all four limbs.

“Come on, Channie, I’ll be late.”

“I need you to hug me.”

“I am hugging you, but I have to go to work.”

“No work. Hugging.”

“Yeah, and what are you going to say to me if I pull this act tonight?”

Unfair tactics. Chanyeol grumbled and tried to get another squeeze in. Sadly, that only lasted for a minute or so before Jongdae put his stupid alpha strength to use and pried himself free.

“You’re mean.”

Jongdae kissed his forehead. That was good at least.

“I know,” Dae said. “Go snuggle with Min, he’s a nicer cuddle anyway.”

“Only if you shut up and stop moving so much,” Minseok grumbled in a groggy voice.

They had a super-quiet day. Chanyeol felt better but still wasn’t friends with anything food-like other than honey water. This inspired more than a few episodes of trying to get away from Minseok slowly and relentlessly pursuing him across rooms with a spoonful of porridge in one hand. By the third time, Chanyeol played along just because it was funny, even if he had to chew each mouthful for like 2 minutes just to get it down.

He enjoyed letting Min coddle him and spent a lot of the day bundled on the sofa, trying to convince Minseok to sit with (on) him and only complaining a little when he was recruited to help fold the pile of newly clean sheets. He plowed through 3 volumes of *Hell’s Heat*, which included about 40 pages of an extremely sticky threesome with some kind of tentacle-alien thing. Even if he had regained his appetite, that would’ve killed it all over again. So much goo.

But the combination of post-heat perkiness and post-sickness relief that he yet lived another day had Chanyeol so cheerful that he knew he was being ridiculous – and didn’t care. When Min finally sat down next to him, Chanyeol squirmed around until he had fit as much of himself as would go (less than 50%) into Min’s lap, head leaned against Min’s shoulder. He lifted Minseok’s hand and put it on his stomach, pushing it around a little until Min got the memo about a tummy rub.

"Chan,” Minseok said, and kissed his head.

“Mmm, you’re taking such good care of me.”
“Yeah, sweetness?”

“Yes,” Chanyeol said, and burrowed closer. “Because you love me.”

“This is true, I do love you,” Minseok laughed.

It was so nice. Chanyeol lay draped across Min, and every time he tilted his chin up for a kiss, he got one. He developed a mild case of the giggles comparing their hand sizes, until Minseok play-growled at him and put that little hand around his neck. That turned into some more-serious kissing, which Chanyeol minded not at all.

Sadly, responsible betas could not be induced to lie around making out when they had one mate about to leave for work and one about to come home. So when Jongdae walked through the door, Chanyeol was wrecking his back, lying on his stomach with his chin propped on the arm of the sofa, watching Minseok cook and pouting across the room.

“Be careful,” Min called out. “He has the adorable cranked up to fifteen.”

“Still? You must’ve had a nice day,” Jongdae said.

“Very.”

Flattery was definitely going to get them everywhere. Except not until after his work shift. What a bummer. Not that he wanted to have sex at the moment, when several parts of his lower body were in recovery from too much going on. Still, he rolled over and reached out when Jongdae approached the sofa.

“Protect me, Jongdae, he’s going to try to make me eat.”

Oof, he was so handsome when he grinned. Chanyeol had to go limp and sigh at it, which just made Jongdae grin more. This whole having to work thing was going to be a problem.

“Still not up for food?” Jongdae asked, sitting on the table and leaning in to rest one hand on Chanyeol’s face.

Chanyeol shook his head.

“Maybe you should call in.”

It was so, so tempting. But he felt most of the way better, and honestly, he was as bad as Baekhyun when it came to taking time off.

“No, I feel a lot better,” he said.

Chanyeol tugged on Jongdae’s wrist, trying to pull him down.

“Wait a sec,” Jongdae said.

He pulled something out of his pocket.

“This is for you.”

Chanyeol paused to let his heart seize up briefly, then dug into the tiny blue velvet bag and pulled out three black spring rings like the one that had gotten lost.

Jongdae was avoiding Chanyeol’s eye, his smile a little uncertain, like he was still waiting for some
kind of unpleasant fallout from the weekend. Chanyeol was tempted all over again to call in sick, just to have time to both tell and show this dumb, stubborn alpha how he felt. But there was still a moderate possibility that that much jiggling around would make him barf.

Instead, he put one ring on his lip, one on his eyebrow, and one on his left earlobe. By the end of that process, Jongdae’s smile wasn’t uncertain anymore. He let himself be pulled down onto the sofa.

“I had high hopes you’d put one here again,” Dae murmured, tracing the one on Chanyeol’s lip first with his thumb and then with his tongue.

“I’ll definitely take requests for placement,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae gave a quiet laugh and kissed him, his mouth soft and slow.

“Should’ve made time to talk, Channie,” he said when he drew his head back.

He was trying to frown again. Unacceptable. Chanyeol sucked on his bottom lip for a minute – maybe not the most obvious sign of disapproval, but the most fun option for everybody.

“I have to be at full health for talking,” he said, hauling Jongdae closer so their bodies pressed together.

“Oh, is that how it is?”

But at least after that Jongdae stopped trying to chat instead of make out. It was even nicer to trace his fingers over the planes of Jongdae’s face and kiss that perpetually smiling mouth when he was fully in his right mind than it had been during Dae’s rut. And when Minseok called out for them, he got to straighten Jongdae’s glasses on his nose. That made Chanyeol have to lean in to rub his face against Dae’s cheek, so he got to straighten the glasses twice.

Minseok had packed him a little bag of food “for whenever you can eat it.” Even though they both knew the station would be full of food. Chanyeol flapped around a little bit and hugged on Min a lot, kissing the side of his neck while Jongdae watched with a quiet expression.

Letting them take his jewelry off made Chanyeol almost tempted all over again to take a sick day. In historical dramas, mates stripping jewelry off an omega was always a dramatic scene, the omega weeping until they were tossed out into the street (always in the rain or the snow) to wander around suffering horribly until they either died a tragic death or their alpha had a change of heart and chased them down to cry on each other in a last-minute reconciliation.

But Minseok and Jongdae weren’t taking his jewelry from him. They were guarding it for him, each removing one piece at a time with light touches and soft kisses to each spot where a piece was removed, until he was left with Jongdae’s mouth pressed to the inside of his left wrist and Minseok’s lips warm at the base of his neck, and Chanyeol trembled with frustrated desire and an over-full heart.

He insisted on walking to work, despite the combined power of two frowning boyfriends. For one thing, he needed to stretch his legs out, and for another, he hadn’t had more than a couple of minutes to himself since … Saturday morning, before all the shit with Kris.

So yeah. Ten minutes to walk in the cool autumn air with only his own thoughts for company was good. It felt like a month’s worth of stuff had happened just in the past 5 days. He poked around at the memories of seeing Kris’s face and found that his stride didn’t falter at all. Fear didn’t drop cold into his guts. Mostly he felt exasperated, having to even deal with all that crap again. But he couldn’t just call up that memory – it was accompanied by Jongdae appearing at his side as if by magic, by
Minseok walking next to him, by Yixing’s gentle touch and Baehyun’s choked apologies, even Luhan’s sharp laugh. By the memory of being able to tell all of those stories aloud in Baekhyun’s living room and realizing that they didn’t have power over him anymore.

Maybe Jongdae was right and he should have been upset to go straight from that to a bunch of melodramatic biology. Chanyeol couldn’t work up any upset, though. He’d been afraid of dominance and gotten bossed around in a sexy way and covered in come instead. He’d been afraid of being overwhelmed, but the only truly gobsmacking thing was realizing how much he loved them. And he couldn’t even be afraid of that, because it felt so natural and happy – and he knew that Minseok, at least, felt the same.

So yeah. Not a magical fix to all his troubles and insecurities, for sure, but a step forward.

And Chanyeol didn’t know whether something showed on his face or he’d been oblivious about more than just romance, because the kindness with which his team treated him just about knocked him over. Joonmyun took one look at him and his expression went sharp, and he crowded Chanyeol into the kitchen to interrogate him and put a cool hand on his forehead. He grinned and blushed at Chanyeol’s stammered explanation about the morning-after pill, and Chanyeol found himself on driving duty for the whole shift. It meant he got very little down time at the station, but it was the cushiest task on the roster by far. It also meant that Chanyeol got to sit with the truck at the grocery store and play with all the kids who wanted to climb on it and wear his helmet.

Sehun looked him up and down with narrowed eyes and cornered him while Chanyeol was brushing his teeth.

“All good?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“Your advice was really helpful, Hunnie. I appreciate it.”

Then Sehun ran away before Chanyeol could commit any sins like saying something heartfelt or attempting a hug.

Baekhyun, though. Chanyeol kept having to wrap arms around him and nuzzle his skinny neck, because Baek was so great. They talked and talked, every minute they could get free. And yeah, some of it was Baek teasing him until Chanyeol choked on his own spit about rut stuff, but mostly they talked about the past, and how many regrets they both had for handling the Kris stuff the way they did, and how glad they were that their friendship had come through it all intact.

“I love you, Baek,” Chanyeol said one afternoon, arm slung around Baekhyun’s shoulder while they sat in the lounge between calls.

“Duh, I’m super lovable,” Baekhyun said.

But he laid his head against Chanyeol’s.

“Love you too, Yeollie.”

This was the same afternoon that Chanyeol learned that Minseok had exchanged numbers with Baek at some point and kept him and Yixing current on Chanyeol’s state of being during Dae’s rut. Chanyeol might’ve felt a little weird about that, except that he learned it in the context of watching Baekhyun get absolutely demolished by Min at Words with Friends.

“He’s so vicious,” Baekhyun complained. “And how does he fit that much vocabulary in his hot,
“He’s that powerful.”

“God,” Baek groaned. “I love him.”

“Yeah. Me too,” Chanyeol said.

Baekhyun smiled at him like a lighthouse beacon. It was super nice.

Also super nice: the group chat. Chanyeol’s test results came in Thursday morning, and he sent a screen shot of the all-clear, to thumbs-up from both of them. Neither Min nor Dae had mentioned getting tested yet, so he was surprised to get a similar screen shot from Minseok on Thursday afternoon and one from Jongdae on Friday. He wondered how long it would take to get used to this whole keeping-promise thing. Maybe he didn’t want to get used to it, if he was always going to feel this pleased and cared for whenever they did such things.

Even better than that was the way they flirted with each other like crazy all day, every day. Starting from Thursday afternoon, when Chanyeol sent,

“All foods are now mine,”

because he felt so much better, and Jongdae sent back,

“But if we become weak from hunger we won’t be able to have sex.”

So Chanyeol amended that to,

“All foods in my immediate vicinity are now mine,”

prompting many minutes of cute gifs and stickers.

Chanyeol sent numerous pouty selcas until Jongdae agreed to take them out on a date Saturday night. Minseok wrote,

“Not that I don’t appreciate the photos, but he was on the phone making a reservation the minute you asked,”

and they entertained Chanyeol for a good 15 minutes cussing each other out, until Chanyeol received a blurry photo of Jongdae balled up like a wrestler about to lose his match, obviously mid-yell, Min’s hand visible in the lower right corner almost certainly opening Dae’s fly. The group chat was silent for a while after that; Chanyeol tried to work up some annoyance about it, but mostly he just watched the clock, waiting for his shift to end.
The problem with going on dates was that the process of getting ready for a date made Chanyeol want to skip the date. And then, because Minseok and Jongdae only seemed nice, they would say things like “but we have a reservation” and “anticipation heightens the experience, sweetness,” and prove themselves impervious to Chanyeol’s attempts at seduction.

Okay, not impervious. Everybody was adjusting their flies when they put their shoes on at the door, and Jongdae was not subtle about feeling up Chanyeol’s ass. Chanyeol sat next to Min in the back of the cab, skin buzzing from the too-brief make-out session, still feeling how Minseok had smoothed his sweater over his chest and how both their fingers had lingered, putting his jewelry on him. Feeling the weight of the heavy silver triangle in one ear and the pinch of two of the black spring rings and the small ear cuff on the other ear, how the other black ring moved on his eyebrow every time he made a new facial expression.

Minseok was similarly blinged up, a long dark chain dangling from each ear, a pile of necklaces around his neck, a heavy silver bracelet on one wrist, and on top of all that a black leather jacket so soft that Chanyeol had felt it necessary to rub his cheek against Min’s shoulder. Jongdae had looked almost cross-eyed at the two of them standing next to each other and visibly swallowed when Minseok took Chanyeol’s hand. As if the dark-green sweater Min had given him for his birthday didn’t cling to his shoulders in a way that made Chanyeol’s hands itch to touch him.

And it made Chanyeol feel like his lungs were too big for his chest, the way they had stood in his bedroom, bossing him and flinging his clothes around (Jongdae), then neatly putting the rejects away (Minseok). Chanyeol figured, from the way Minseok glared at the contents of his closet, that he was about to join Jongdae in receiving clothing for his birthday.

He’d long given up on ever being stylish, but in a jacket, sweater, and super tight jeans picked out by his boyfriends, he knew at least they thought he looked hot. He’d raised an eyebrow when Jongdae pulled a pair of chunky, battered combat boots that were old enough to drive out from the back of his closet.

“Yeah, because I need to be taller.”

“Well,” Jongdae said, “get you in shoes tall enough and I won’t even have to bend over to suck your dick.”

So there was a mental image to cherish.

“You show those boys some fun, alpha,” the cab driver said when he dropped them off.

Jongdae’s “hmm” was entirely filthy.

“Planning on it,” he said.
“Who’ll show whom, I wonder?” Minseok murmured.

By the time Jongdae turned around from paying the cabbie, Minseok was standing with his head lowered and his fingers tangled loosely with Chanyeol’s. Chanyeol could see the tiny smile on Min’s face, and dropped his head too when Minseok gestured for Jongdae to lead the way.

“Jesus,” Jongdae whispered as he passed.

The restaurant was impossibly romantic, with low, gold-tinged lighting and flowers everywhere. They were seated in a semi-secluded booth, and Jongdae rolled his eyes when Minseok crowded in next to Chanyeol, bowing and gesturing for the waiter to hand the menus to Dae. It took every gram of concentration Chanyeol had not to giggle at the expression on Jongdae’s face – like he was loving every second of it but also wanted to throw his water glass at Minseok’s head. Regardless, Jongdae spent some time gazing seriously back and forth between the two of them and the menu while Minseok drove Chanyeol slightly crazy tracing circles on his thigh under the table. Everything Jongdae ordered sounded so good that Chanyeol had to wrinkle his nose at him not seeing the menu. The wine arrived, and after Jongdae poured and they raised their glasses to one another, he drank half of his in one go. Minseok snickered under his breath.

“Haven’t we all had enough trouble thanks to my glands, lately?” Jongdae complained. “What are you doing, babe?”

The waiter laid a plate in front of them covered in small pieces of toast topped with things so colorful and delicious-looking that Chanyeol couldn’t possibly decide which one to eat. Jongdae grabbed the one that looked like salmon roe and some kind of white paste.

“I just wanted to give you a last illusion of control,” Minseok said, “before Channie and I fuck you until you can’t walk.”

Jongdae choked on his appetizer. Chanyeol thanked his indecision for helping him not be in the same boat.

“Do you like pesto, sweetness? Try this one,” Minseok said, choosing one of the little toasts and feeding it to Chanyeol with a smirk.

Jongdae caught his breath and finished his glass of wine, poured another.

“Well, I’m committed to doing whatever you guys ask of me until I’ve earned your forgiveness, but I didn’t expect that to sound so fun.”

Chanyeol caught Minseok’s glance just so he could roll his eyes.

“Yeah, I really hated all those orgasms,” he said.

Jongdae probably would’ve protested if his mouth hadn’t been full, so Minseok was able to get in first.

“But Channie, weren’t you upset to get covered in come like that?”

“Oh sure. It was just awful to have my boyfriend’s hands all over me, telling me how amazing I am, just terrible.”

“Come on,” Jongdae said. “You can’t be serious.”

“Super horrible to get knotted,” Chanyeol said. “Not like my body was made to take it or anything.”
“Okay, but Min – “

“Dude,” Chanyeol said. “You literally went out of your way to make sure and fuck him before your knot came in.”

“I. What?”

His confusion was adorable. Minseok ate a little toast with what looked like maybe raw beef on top. Chanyeol ate one with red paste on it that was a little spicy and a lot garlicky and so completely unlike gochujang that he didn’t know whether he wanted to spit it out or eat 3 more.

“Chanyeol,” Jongdae said. “All those things you said. About your ex, and alphas. And then I went and rutted right after. That can’t have been okay.”

Chanyeol had a brief flash of intelligence, gifted to him suddenly from heaven.

“Like you said once to me, there wasn’t a minute where I felt unsafe,” he said.

Minseok put one arm around his waist and squeezed him tight. And Chanyeol got to watch Jongdae’s face move from consternation to surprise to a wide smile so beautiful that Chanyeol’s heart ached to see it.

“Are you for real?” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol nodded.

“You’re not. You’re both – okay?”

“We’re good, love,” Minseok said.

“I didn’t fuck things up?”

“Well, the night’s still young.”


His smile was amazing.

After that, they had so much fun, laughing together across that narrow wooden table over a bunch of delicious food and a couple bottles of wine. Jongdae seemed like he let all his moodiness of the past couple of weeks go and was back to his nonstop self. He flirted and flattered them, demanded bites of their dinner and fed them bites of his own, until Chanyeol’s cheeks hurt from smiling.

“We should go on more dates,” Jongdae said at one point.

“You just want an excuse to eat at every fancy restaurant in Seoul,” Minseok said.

“I’m not opposed to traveling for food.”

“Eating tour of Jeju,” Chanyeol said.

“Yes!” Jongdae said. “Let’s put that on our list for spring.”

Spring. Next year’s rut. Maybe it would even happen. Chanyeol thought maybe his insides had been replaced by helium and he could float away.
“I personally feel left out of the bowling thing,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol cringed, but the whole conversation that followed, with an extended comedy routine of escalating ridiculousness about protecting him from rogue alphas, had him laughing and agreeing by the end.

“He’ll crush you,” Jongdae said.

“Only fair, since I crush him at Words with Friends,” Min said.

“I want to go to the movies,” Chanyeol said. “I haven’t had anybody to go with in forever. I just want to sit in the dark and eat popcorn and hold hands and go for ice cream to talk about it afterward.”

Minseok leaned against him, and Jongdae made one of those quiet little smiles that Chanyeol liked so much.

“I’m not sure how you’ll eat popcorn holding both our hands,” Jongdae said.

“You can just feed it to me.”

And that inspired Jongdae to feed Chanyeol a bite of his (really delicious) duck, so that was nice.

“I want to eat at your mom’s restaurant,” Jongdae said.

“Well that’s easy enough.”

Chanyeol pulled out his phone, not caring that he was calling in the middle of the Saturday rush.

“I’d like to make a reservation for tomorrow for three,” he said when his mom answered.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” his mom said. “There’s no way I could possibly accommodate such a last-minute request, is there another date that might work for you?”

Chanyeol grinned.

“Not even for your own son?”

He could picture what went on with his mother’s face – her rapid blinking, her mouth opening and closing, and her brief glower followed by a smile.

“Yeol! Give your mother some warning next time!”

“Sorry, Mom.”

“You want to come in tomorrow night? The three of you?”

“Yeah, if you can squeeze us in.”

“Yeollie, I’d stuff you into the kitchen if I needed to, you know that. We’re so eager to meet your Jongdae and see Minseok again. The party room’s free. I’ll tell your dad and your sister to come along? How’s seven?”

“That’s perfect, Mom.”

“Well, wonderful, my darling. We’ll see you tomorrow.”
“Tomorrow at seven,” Chanyeol said when he hung up.

“Geez, you move fast,” Jongdae said, smiling and pouring more wine into Chanyeol’s glass.

“Won’t that be lovely,” Minseok said. “Provided Jongdae can walk.”

“Oh right, I forgot about that part,” Chanyeol said while Jongdae made faces. “I can carry him if I have to.”

“Shut up,” Jongdae said.

“Hmm, I haven’t decided yet how we’ll go about it,” Minseok said. “What do you think, Channie? I like the idea of him on all fours, with your arm around his chest, pounding him until he weeps, but do you think it would be better for him to suck me off at the same time, or for me to take him first and get him ready for you?”

Jongdae got stuck in time for a moment, with his fork held in mid-air. Chanyeol tried to recover his brain from its current occupancy way up in the atmosphere.

“I mean, both are good options,” he said. “But I guess, maybe I like the second option?”

Jongdae’s cheeks went pink.

“Done,” Min said. “I suppose we can make a game-time decision about whether you want his mouth on you while I fuck him.”

“Okay,” Chanyeol said, hearing how thin his voice sounded and seeing how Jongdae’s eyelids fluttered.

Awesome – so much so that they got their desserts packed up to go. Even the most romantic restaurant lost some of its allure when there was nakedness to be found elsewhere.
Chanyeol sat in the front for the cab ride back, with the bag full of dessert boxes on his knees, eyes trained on the road while he listened to the barely audible noises of Minseok driving Jongdae out of his mind in the back. He didn’t look back, but he could imagine those light, subtle touches — nothing that the cab driver would notice — Min’s fingers curling over Jongdae’s wrist, or his neck, pulling slowly up the inside of his thigh. Chanyeol was glad to have that bag sitting in his lap.

Jongdae’s eyes looked a little unfocused — with wine or lust, Chanyeol couldn’t tell — when he stood inside the door, the fingers of one hand holding Minseok’s belt loop and the other hand around Chanyeol’s wrist.

“We’re seriously okay?” he asked in a soft voice.

“Chanyeol,” Minseok said, “kiss this idiot.”

Finally. Chanyeol hauled him close with one arm, diving in when Jongdae’s mouth opened to his, feeling the muscles of Jongdae’s jaw move under his hand. Tasting wine on Jongdae’s tongue, feeling his gasping little breath when Chanyeol sucked on his bottom lip. Chanyeol felt Min step up close and raised his head to look, watched the way Jongdae’s head tipped back when Minseok pulled the collar of his sweater to the side to kiss his neck. Jongdae’s kiss was a little wetter and more eager after that, and he leaned his body against Chanyeol’s until Chanyeol was taking some of his weight.

It had been a while since Minseok brought the boss out, and Chanyeol’s dick twitched happily when it turned out that the next time Jongdae’s mouth left his, it was because Min had yanked Dae’s head back by the hair, saying

“Let’s take this to bed,”

with that pronounced burr that always promised so much fun.

Chanyeol wondered what they would do if he got bossy. It’d be a first, but he could see how that might be fun — mostly because he guessed they would love it. He filed that idea away for later, leading Jongdae down the hallway by one hand and waiting next to the bed for orders.

Minseok kissed Jongdae with a commanding slowness, thumbs digging into the underside of Jongdae’s jaw to control his head. Chanyeol bit his lip, stepped forward to press against Jongdae’s back and put his hands on Minseok’s shoulders.

“Hands at your sides,” Minseok said after several minutes of that. “Chanyeol’s going to take your clothes off.”

Which of course Chanyeol used as an excuse to put his hands all over Jongdae — the rounded curve of his shoulders, the plane of his stomach (twitching when Chanyeol’s hand dipped low), the contours of his legs. Since he was on his knees when he slipped Dae’s underwear down, Chanyeol didn’t resist the opportunity to wrap a hand over each ass cheek and squeeze a bit while he filled his mouth with Jongdae’s cock.

“I said hands at your sides,” Minseok said in almost a whisper when Dae groaned and put one hand in Chanyeol’s hair.

Chanyeol laughed in the back of his throat, and Jongdae hissed. Chanyeol licked at him, ran his
hands over at much of Jongdae as he could reach, lapped up salty drops of pre-come with a grin.

He pulled back when Min’s arms went around Jongdae from behind.

“Do you remember when you had me ride Channie while you knotted him?”

Jongdae’s dick jumped in Chanyeol’s hand.

“Not … really?” Jongdae said, with a bit of a gasp.

Chanyeol watched Min’s fingers trail down Jongdae’s chest. Jongdae craned his face sideways, obviously looking for a kiss. He didn’t get one.

“You had me stretch myself open,” Min said. “Told Chanyeol to watch. You’ll do that now.”

“Fuck,” Chanyeol said, wondering whether he needed a fire extinguisher to use on himself.

It was so weird: all those memories of rut and heat were so recent that Jongdae’s scent and the scent of his arousal made Chanyeol feel melty, but he and Min stood at the end of the bed, still fully clothed, idly playing with each other while they watched Jongdae fuck his own hand. The dichotomy of it messed with Chanyeol’s brain in a way that made it all seem that much hotter – which he supposed was the point.

“There you go, babe,” Min said when Jongdae sucked his bottom lip into his own mouth and arched down onto a second finger.

His hand was shiny with lube, moving in and out of himself at a pretty fast pace, his other hand clutching at his thigh hard enough to dent the skin.

“Please,” he said.

“Please what, Jongdae?”

“I want to watch you kiss.”

“Another finger, first.”

Jongdae nodded, then grimaced a little and slowly slid three fingers inside himself, breathing hard through his nose.

“Okay,” Min said. “Come here, Chan.”

Minseok’s fingers were cool and gentle, drawing Chanyeol’s head down into a languid kiss. Chanyeol put one hand in Min’s back pocket and pulled him close. He let himself get lost in the sensation of their mouths moving together and the familiar pressure of Minseok’s tongue. Jongdae made a soft sound. They looked over, and he was stroking himself with his free hand, the other still working in and out.

“Did I say you could touch yourself?” Minseok said, quiet and cold.

Jongdae went still, lips pressed tight together, then grabbed the sheet instead of his dick.

“Sorry.”

“Did I say you could speak.”
Jongdae’s cheeks darkened.

“Strip me, sweetness.”

Chanyeol took Min’s clothes off him slowly, following his hands with his mouth. He enjoyed every second of it, touching Minseok all over, until he stood behind Min, hands clasped lightly over Min’s chest. Jongdae was panting and red-faced over all four fingers.

“Have you decided, Channie? Do you want Dae’s mouth while I take him?”

Chanyeol curled his hand into Minseok’s hair, kissed the top of his head.

“No, I want to watch.”

Chanyeol remembered how weirded out he had been at first, watching Min take charge. Now that he had a personal acquaintance with how strong Jongdae was, he was fascinated by the way Dae let Min use him. He could see the urge to fight back cross Jongdae’s face a couple of times, most notably when Min positioned Jongdae on his knees, pushed his head low, and took his arms in a tight grip straight behind him, so that Jongdae had to hold himself up and balance with just his legs and abs. Jongdae grimaced, but then he shook his head and glanced over at Chanyeol, licking his lips.

Then his mouth dropped open and his eyes closed as Minseok shoved into him in one thrust. Jongdae lurched forward briefly, just barely catching himself – and not fighting at all. Chanyeol reached forward to lay his fingers on Jongdae’s cheek.

“Chan,” Dae whispered.

Chanyeol shed his own clothing piece by piece while Minseok pounded Jongdae, still holding his arms at that awkward angle, until Jongdae had his face buried in the mattress, toes digging in while he slid back and forth.

“Please,” he said, “please Min, please let Channie touch me.”

“No.”

Chanyeol touched himself, though, loose fingers circled around himself just to blunt the sharp edge of longing while he watched them. Minseok’s grip on Jongdae’s wrists was tight enough that Dae’s hands were going white. Chanyeol saw the moment Min noticed it, saw the chagrin that crossed Min’s face and grinned at it, even though all Jongdae knew was that Minseok let his arms go suddenly, making him almost lose his balance.

Chanyeol watched Min tip his head back, the beautiful line of his throat as he tossed his head and how one hand reached out to run down Jongdae’s back when he came with a low cry. The quiet smile on his face when he finally opened his eyes and looked down. Jongdae was trembling, hands in his own hair, face hidden.

“You turn, sweetness,” Minseok said, voice distant, a complete contrast to the expression on his face.

Jongdae twitched, making a soft, desperate sound.

Chanyeol kissed Min while he was still inside Jongdae, his hand curved around the back of Minseok’s neck. Min moved away with a heavy sigh and flopped down onto the bed. Chanyeol leaned over Jongdae’s back, relishing the press of skin against skin, tasting the sweat on Jongdae’s shoulder under his tongue. Dae’s chest heaved against the pressure of Chanyeol’s arm wrapped
around him.

He pictured that expression on Jongdae’s face again, controlling the urge to fight. Wanted to see it for him, too.

“Jongdae,” he said, deep and quiet, and kissed the nape of Dae’s neck.

Jongdae’s breath hitched, and he pushed his hips back, eager.

Chanyeol looked over to see Minseok watching them.

“Minseok,” he said, and ran his tongue across Jongdae’s shoulder.

Min spread his hand across his own chest and smiled slowly.

“I might switch it up from what you said.”

“He’s yours to do with as you please, Channie.”

Jongdae twitched. Min followed Chanyeol’s gesture and rolled over to hold a pillow against the headboard.

Jongdae let Chanyeol flip him and haul him up until his shoulders rested against the pillow. His eyebrows did a thing when Chanyeol put hands under his hips and rolled him up until he was balanced precariously on the headboard and Chanyeol’s thighs, knees pressed against his own chest.

“Grab my arms,” Chanyeol said.

He shoved up against Dae, his dick sliding across the cleft of Dae’s ass and that slippery mess of lube and come.

“Jongdae. I don’t want you to be quiet,” he said.

Jongdae grinned.

“Fucking get in me, Chanyeol,” he said. “I want it.”

That was where he wanted to be, anyhow – inside Jongdae, the heat of him, how he groaned and clenched as Chanyeol slid into him.

The success of Chanyeol’s experiment was immediate in the way Jongdae squirmed but couldn’t get any leverage, bent in half with nothing under his ass but Chanyeol’s legs, so the only thing keeping him from falling to the side was his grip on Chanyeol’s arms and Chanyeol’s hold. Even better, once Chanyeol started to move, it was clear that being crunched up meant that Dae couldn’t take a deep breath. The way he gasped, looking up through his eyelashes, made Chanyeol burn.

This first time fucking into Jongdae with just skin on skin. Knowing that half the slickness of it was Minseok’s come inside him. Surrounded by the scent of alpha, knowing that at any second Jongdae could take control, but didn’t want to.

God, he was not going to last. As good as it felt, slapping flush against Dae with every stroke, and as good as he looked, red-faced and wild-eyed, Chanyeol regretted that Jongdae was so far away from his mouth.

But he still wanted to test the limits of how much Jongdae would take.
He had put his hand on Jongdae’s neck plenty of times – cupped his jaw, laid his hand across Dae’s nape to pull him close or give an affectionate squeeze.

Now, he put his hand on Jongdae’s throat in a dominance hold, let his thumb and middle finger dig in under Jongdae’s jaw just a little bit. Kris would’ve broken his arm for it.

Chanyeol watched Jongdae bare his teeth, felt him tense. Chanyeol slammed home and stayed there.

“Press down,” Jongdae growled, teeth still bared.

Before Chanyeol had a chance to do more than think, “what?” Minseok was at his side, one hand on his arm.

“Just a little, Channie,” he said. “He can take it, don’t worry. But don’t scare yourself, either.”

Min pressed the heel of his hand into Chanyeol’s upper arm.

“Like that. That much pressure’s okay.”

Fuck.

He pressed down, Jongdae’s Adam’s apple sharp against his palm, and his hips moved on their own, snapping hard while his blood rushed in his ears. Jongdae’s face turned red, and when he started to toss his head, Minseok whispered for him to let up. Jongdae gasped, but his grip on Chanyeol’s arms was as fierce as the expression on his face.

“One more time, Channie,” Minseok said softly when Jongdae’s breath slowed.

Chanyeol pressed down, and he couldn’t tell whether he was terrified or more turned on than he had ever been, or maybe a little of both? Because this time, when Jongdae started to struggle, Chanyeol broke out into goosebumps, and he would’ve let go, except that Dae grabbed his wrist and held on for way longer than Chanyeol would’ve thought was okay. The second Dae tapped his hand, Chanyeol let go. On the inhale, Jongdae wheezed and arched; on the exhale, he screamed, squeezing Chanyeol so tight that he could barely move, both of them coming at once. Chanyeol heard a long, harsh groan, and it took a second to realize that it was his own, amid the flood of orgasm that made it hard to remember how to inhabit his own skin.

When Chanyeol was aware again, he felt how Min was pressed up against his arm, rubbing his back with one hand, the other stroking Jongdae’s shoulder. Jongdae still had his eyes closed, panting. Chanyeol pulled out and sat back. Minseok immediately pulled Jongdae into his arms, hands moving slowly over him.

“You did so well, babe. You’re okay. Well done, love,” he murmured, over and over.

Chanyeol put one hand on Jongdae’s leg, also rubbing slowly and trying not to freak out. Jongdae grabbed his hand.

“Okay, Channie?” he asked, his voice (understandably) a little raspy.

“Am I okay? Are you okay?”

“It’s a valid question, sweetness,” Minseok said. “We shouldn’t have sprung our ‘sometimes activity’ on you without warning like that. Did it freak you out?”

Chanyeol clenched his hand into a fist to lessen the sensation of Jongdae’s throat moving under his
palm. Freaked out. Was he freaked out? Jongdae had come so hard. He had said “press down.” Minseok had told him how.

But he wasn’t stupid enough to lie about it.

“A little,” he said. “Not during, but now.”

Both of them smiled at him, so wide and fond that Chanyeol got a little wet around the eyes, and Jongdae pulled him down until they huddled together in Minseok’s lap, all holding onto one another. Minseok’s fingers were gentle against Jongdae’s neck. Chanyeol tipped Jongdae’s head back and was relieved to see only faint red marks on his skin. Jongdae kissed his fingers, and Chanyeol felt three arms around him when he bent his head to Jongdae’s chest.

“Not to criticize,” Jongdae said after a few moments of soft kisses and softer hands, “but I’m pretty sure I’m still capable of walking.”

Minseok snorted.

“Brat.”
Chapter 44

Huddled together later in pajamas with wet hair, they dug into their takeout containers of dessert and Jongdae made them tell him about his rut.

“Why don’t I get to chase you around when I can remember it?” he whined immediately.

“You can chase me around any time,” Chanyeol said with a shrug. “I might even let you catch me. As long as we’re not on the running track.”

Jongdae wrinkled his nose over cheeks puffed out with a large bite of bittersweet chocolate cheesecake. Cute.

He grinned over the description of his attempts to cover Chanyeol in semen.

“You must’ve been thrilled to get out of that, babe.”

Minseok laughed.

“I’m so grateful, I definitely owe you one, Chan.”

Chanyeol had a few ideas about that. For a time when he had a bit more energy.

Jongdae shrieked with laughter to find out that the thing that brought his voice back was Chanyeol fingering him.

“I kind of remember that! Like this full-body sensation of whaaaaaaaaat the fuuuuuuuuck,” he said, rolling backwards and kicking his feet.

“That was pretty much what you said,” Chanyeol said.

But Jongdae seemed comforted that they laughed while they walked him through everything that happened during the rut. When Min mentioned that soft, sleepy session in the middle of the night, Chanyeol couldn’t make himself talk about it. He wanted to keep that memory for himself, and would only say, “it was nice.” Jongdae’s gaze was sharp on Chanyeol for a few minutes after that, Minseok’s hand soft on his knee.

“I’m really glad I didn’t fuck things up,” Dae said a few minutes later, voice deep and serious. “Thanks for that.”

“Chanyeol handled it beautifully,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol ducked his head into his container of lime-white chocolate chiffon cake, feeling his ears go hot. Maybe he should’ve felt upset about the whole thing. He couldn’t tell.

Jongdae leaned over and pressed against his arm.

“Well anyway, one decent rut down to make up for any bad memories you have, right?”

Chanyeol blinked at Minseok for a minute. Shit, they forgot this too?

“Um,” he said. “That was actually? The first time for me?”

Jongdae dropped his fork.
“Are you kidding me? What the – am I even more freaked out? Jesus, Channie.”

Chanyeol put one arm around him.

“It’s okay. I kept being surprised by how much fun it was.”

Jongdae glowered at him, still clearly skeptical.

“How is that even possible? None of your exes? Didn’t you date that mullet-headed shitstain for almost a year?”

Hoo boy.

“I mean,” Chanyeol said, and then nodded when Minseok squeezed his knee.

“I had a lot of really short-term relationships. And Kris, uh. Um.”

It was so fucking embarrassing. He hadn’t ever told anybody about this before. It was so easy to pull up that sense of shame and rejection. Minseok rubbed his kneecap.

“He just kind of disappeared with no warning for like a week. He told me later that he went to one of those center things.”

Then Chanyeol had to fuss at himself, because why did he still expect them to act like he was the one who was wrong? Of course they didn’t. Of course Minseok and Jongdae both recoiled, cursed, and then immediately leaned back forward to touch him, comfort him.

“Are you fucking kidding me,” Jongdae said. “He went to a rut center? He had you – you! Right there!”

He waved his hands up and down.

“A fucking rut center? Gross!” he yelled. “Who would rather have antiseptic, impersonal bullshit when you don’t have to? Gross!”

Chanyeol wouldn’t have been able to anticipate how affirming it could be to watch someone jump around yelling while trying not to spill a cardboard container of cheesecake. It did a lot to dispel the memory.

“If I’d known that, I would’ve found a way to make sure my elbow connected forcefully with his junk,” Minseok said.

“Euw, you don’t want to touch that even clothed,” Jongdae said. “If you ever see him again, just throw a basketball at his groin.”

“Good plan.”

“I don’t want to know what he said about your heats, do I?” Jongdae asked, still glaring.

For the first time, Chanyeol was glad there was only the one heat to semi-remember, even if, at the time, the “business trips” suddenly scheduled around the other two heats he had during their relationship had left him miserable and solo.

“I was told I’m too needy,” he said.

It was so great, the way they both scoffed.

Chanyeol shrugged.

“What a crock of shit,” Minseok said.

“For real,” Jongdae said. “I fucking hate alphas.”

He pulled out his phone and tapped forcefully at it.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m buying you some damn jewelry, Chanyeol, I’m so mad, it’s either this or hit something. If it wasn’t so late at night I’d go out right now.”

Chanyeol blinked.

“You say that like there isn’t a vending machine with ring pops outside the stationery store,” Minseok drawled.

Jongdae looked at Min, scrunched his eyebrows together, then rolled up off the bed and stomped out.

Chanyeol heard the door slam.

“Did he just?”

“He did,” Minseok said, grinning.

“I think I have whiplash from this conversation.”

“Come cuddle, then, it’ll make you feel better.”

It totally did, and Min fed him some toffee crème brulee, which was also nice. Jongdae stomped back inside just a few minutes later, slightly less frowny and bearing two ring pops. He put the red one on Minseok’s finger and the blue one on Chanyeol’s.

“I think I might die of cuteness right now,” Chanyeol said.

“You’re not allowed, we have a reservation at your mom’s restaurant,” Jongdae said.

It was hard not to die, because the cuteness just kept going. Jongdae woke them up with kisses approximately 600% too enthusiastic for 7:30 am on a Sunday, but before Minseok could remove his skin, Dae handed them each of mug of coffee and was granted clemency to survive. He lay with his chin on Min’s leg and a set of misbehaving fingers until Minseok was awake enough to get sucked off. Chanyeol watched, sipping coffee and getting hard, hoping it would be his turn next.

Even better, he got to hold on while Minseok stretched his body into a beautiful arc while he came, then got pulled off in the shower with Jongdae between his thighs. And he got his hair washed.

“Hey, see if Baekhyun wants to come to brunch,” Jongdae said when everyone was dry and partially dressed, shocking Chanyeol like a thunderbolt.

“What? They were super great. And I’m at a hormone ebb, I’m probably less obnoxious now than any other time of the year.”
Chanyeol looked at Minseok. Minseok smirked.

So it was a table for 5 at the usual brunch place. Chanyeol felt a little stupid wearing a ring pop out in public, but (a) Jongdae had insisted loudly and (b) Min was wearing his too, which made it better. Yixing’s face tried to do so many things at once at the sight of them that he probably got a cramp in his cheek. Baekhyun laughed before he played along, turning it into a whole routine with Jongdae that lasted until their food arrived.

It was good. Dae was already smiley and affectionate in Chanyeol’s direction, which was a good way to get into Baek and Xing’s good graces, but he made an effort to be nice to them too, and to not take over the conversation. Chanyeol caught Yixing watching Jongdae cut a slice of ham into tiny pieces and sneak them onto Min’s plate one at a time. He was pretty sure the expression on Xing’s face was a corner turned. He was certain that it was when Yixing put his arm around Baekyun’s back and nuzzled his shoulder.

The three of them wandered a little after brunch, poking their heads in and out of shops. Jongdae spent almost half an hour frowning his way around a flower shop, trying to pick the perfect bouquet for Chanyeol’s mom, and then doing it all over again when Chanyeol pointed out that his sister would be there too. Thank god Minseok was there to make out with, or Chanyeol might’ve succumbed to boredom instead of getting worked up behind a table of potted orchids.

By the time they made it to his mom’s restaurant, Chanyeol was in such a good mood that he annoyed the shit out of Yoora by hugging her too much and stepped on his dad’s foot.

“Oof, your good moods are so dangerous, son,” Dad said.

Watching Jongdae flirt with his family at a level equal to Minseok did exactly nothing to dampen his happiness. Chanyeol’s mom had put all his favorite dishes on the menu. He figured that if heaven existed, it would have to be like that evening, with Minseok’s arm around his waist, both of them smiling, and his family all around him. Well, maybe Baekhyun would be in heaven with him, too. And Mr. Noodle.

Chanyeol learned that his dad was (or pretended to be) interested in solar power, and he enjoyed listening to Jongdae nerd out about his work project, even if he understood very little of it. His mom was over the moon to have a group of people she liked around for her to feed them. She even let Jongdae coax her into a chair at one point and Minseok make a little plate for her, beaming red-faced over their

“Eomonim, you can’t give us all this wonderful food and not enjoy it yourself,”

while Yoora rolled her eyes at them.

They laughed until Chanyeol’s stomach hurt, and his mom packed so much food that they each had a bag to carry home. Chanyeol couldn’t hold still – he was too full up with happiness, to the point where he was as wiggly as Jongdae, and Minseok cruelly left them hugging on the sofa, saying they were giving him motion sickness.

Too bad for him: they followed him to the bed, and the two of them together weighed too much for him to throw them off.
Chapter Notes

Just to quote myself a little from this chapter - it IS hard to take things close to your heart and put them out where other people can see them. I know I keep saying stuff like "this silly thing" and "my dumb werewolves," but this thing is meaningful to me, and I'm having such a good time writing it. I'm really, really grateful that so many of you are reading it and for the kindness of your comments, especially those of you who cheer me on every chapter. Thank you all.

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All that happiness made Chanyeol feel generous enough to get up and go to the gym with them on Monday morning. The lady alpha was there again, but Chanyeol couldn’t work up any annoyance at her. It was too early to split his focus like that.

Jongdae appeared to disagree, though. Chanyeol turned around to find her grinning at him one time apparently too many. He stepped back and into Jongdae, who grabbed his arm, spun him, and pulled him down into the kind of kiss that tended to leave behind swollen lips and mild brain damage. Chanyeol gaped down at him afterward, breathing slightly hard and also having a slightly hard problem elsewhere.

“Oh,” the lady alpha said. “OH. I thought you were with – ?”

“Yes,” Jongdae growled, still staring at Chanyeol.

“Dammit. Where the fuck is my hot harem?” she said, and Minseok cracked up.

So it wasn’t the greatest workout ever, because Chanyeol’s brain never could get back in gear after that. He finally gave up zoning out in the direction of the weight racks and just rowed until Min and Dae were done wandering around performing feats of strength and looking like miniature fucking sex gods or whatever.

Chanyeol would’ve been content to spend the day lazing about on a sofa (preferably theirs), but Min had taken on an extra shift at the studio and invited him along to watch. Even with giant ear protectors on, Minseok, in his tight t-shirt, climbing around with a chainsaw throwing frost into the air, was stupidly hot. Chanyeol posted a bunch of pictures to the group chat, until Jongdae was reduced to key-smashing.

The cuteness parade continued with Min and his set of ice picks and files, frowning with his bottom lip stuck out at the rough outline of a dragon. After not much of that, Chanyeol couldn’t stand to sit on the side any longer and had to drag his chair over so he could ogle from close up. Minseok straddled his lap and kissed him, hands cold on his shoulders and mouth hot.

“Sorry I’m taking so long, sweetness. You’re very patient to wait.”

Chanyeol rubbed his hands up and down Min’s back.

“Nah, I like watching you.”
And then Minseok’s fingers were cool on his chin and his kiss a soft thing that Chanyeol wished would last for another decade or so.

“Give me a bit to improve the shape of this,” Min said, forehead pressed against Chanyeol’s. “Then I’ll take you to lunch.”

“You could just take me for lunch,” Chanyeol murmured, tilting his jaw forward.

Minseok smiled and drew back just far enough to be out of kissing range.

“Don’t you worry about that. You’re definitely dessert.”

Within the hour they were sitting with their heads bent close together over a couple of lunch sets and Minseok’s folder of sculpture photos on his phone.

“They’re just dumb centerpieces,” Min kept trying to say.

“Dumb, my ass,” Chanyeol said. “Every single animal in that zodiac looks like it’s about to fucking step down onto the table and run away.”

Chanyeol watched the way Minseok ducked his head, cheeks pink and trying not to smile, and wished they weren’t in public. He had to settle for an arm squeezing Min’s shoulders.

“You’re biased in my favor,” Min muttered.

“Bullshit. My heart and my dick may be, sure, but my eyes are totally objective.”

Min laughed and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Well, anyway. I’m lucky to have a job I don’t hate.”

He took the phone out of Chanyeol’s hands and started speed-scrolling.

“Here, this’ll make you laugh.”

After a minute, he handed it over, and the screen showed an ice swan broken halfway up the neck, with a chunk out of the tail and scuff marks along the bottom edge. Chanyeol had to stomp his feet with sheer delight.

“No!”

“The very one,” Minseok said with a grin. “If you could magnify it enough, you’d probably even see lint from Jongdae’s terrible rental tux there along the bottom.”

Chanyeol laughed so much that everyone in the restaurant stared at him. But he couldn’t be bothered to care about it.

“I’m so happy that you saved a picture of it, that’s so funny,” he said, wiping his eyes.

“I used to have a picture of what was left of the head after I stepped on it trying to lift the thing off Dae’s arm, but I figured a photo of a pile of ice shards was pointless, so I deleted it.”

Chanyeol hugged him.

“Not pointless,” he said. “I’m super mad that I don’t get to see it.”
Min wrinkled his nose, making Chanyeol wish yet again that they weren’t out in public, because his kiss counter was getting dangerously low.

But they lingered over lunch, after Chanyeol asked whether Minseok still made “artsy sculpture” – a phrase that made Minseok laugh aloud – talking about art and music, and how hard it was to take things that were so close to one’s heart and put them out in public where somebody else might mock them. But if Minseok could talk about how much he regretted letting his family pressure him into stopping his efforts to show sculpture because they worried about the family’s “reputation,” then Chanyeol could talk about how he stopped writing songs while he was dating Kris and hadn’t ever felt brave enough to go back to it.

“Some of the guys at the station play at an open mic sometimes,” he said to his fingers, interlaced with Min’s at the moment, Min’s thumb moving back and forth over the top of his hand.

“They used to ask me to go with them, but I guess I said no enough times that they stopped bringing it up.”

“I find myself with a dilemma,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol looked up, into his warm, dark eyes. The prettiest eyes he’d ever seen, really, especially if he was going to see that much fondness in them.

“I want to sit here and encourage you to trust yourself enough to write again, to let yourself take the risk even if it’s difficult and frightening. And to point out that your coworkers obviously value you and would almost certainly be thrilled for you to go with them to play. But that would make me an enormous hypocrite.”

The thing that moved through Chanyeol was so huge and warm that it only allowed his mouth to say one thing for a second.

“I love you.”

Minseok squeezed his hand.

“Love you too, Channie.”

“I guess I’d better encourage you, then, so neither one of us is a hypocrite.”

“Oh dear,” Minseok said. “We’re about to try to make each other be brave here, aren’t we?”

Chanyeol nodded.

Any further mushiness was unfortunately interrupted by Chanyeol’s phone with a text from Yoora reading,

“It’s gross that my little brother can make two guys this handsome look so lovesick. I’m definitely bringing out the naked baby pictures next time I see them,”

and a photo of the three of them from the night before – Jongdae and Chanyeol obviously both talking at the same time, holding onto one another’s arms, with Min leaned up against Chanyeol, laughing.

Miraculously, it was even flattering of all 3 of them. Chanyeol set it as his lock screen immediately.

“You’d better post that to the group chat, Chanyeol,” Min growled.
He set it as his lock screen the second Chanyeol had done so.

“Hottest. Harem,” Jongdae texted a couple minutes later.

It was a long walk home, and Chanyeol enjoyed every second of it, strolling slowly with Minseok’s hand in his on a cool, clear, autumn day. They detoured through every park they passed: once they found a nice half-hidden bench that practically begged them to stop and kiss on each other a bit, and once Minseok made Chanyeol stand next to a sapling for a photo that took 3 tries to come out, he was laughing so hard. If it had been anyone else, Chanyeol might’ve been annoyed at being forced to have his picture taken next to a tree his exact same height, but the way Min hung onto his waist and laughed until tears streamed down his adorable little bun-cheeks made it impossible to get mad.

In short order after they got home, Chanyeol traced his fingers and then his lips over the remaining scabs from his own fangs on Minseok’s shoulder. Min craned his neck, wearing a small smile. It still seemed unreal, though Chanyeol could clearly recall the sensation of his mouth, too full of teeth. The sight of the scare made a shy, shivering feeling in his chest. One scar among many, his fangs and Jongdae’s. The scars he wore on his own shoulders, too. Wondering what would bring out that sense of wildness and belonging when he marked Jongdae.

“You good, sweetness?”

With Minseok in his arms, the scent of mint and the flavor of his skin?

“I’m wonderful,” he said.

“Come with me,” Min said. “It’s been too long since I had you in my mouth.”

Which he then tried to make up for by drawing it out into the world’s longest, most awesome/frustrating blow job. It went on for so long that Chanyeol wanted to cry, even though Min’s mouth felt incredible, moving slowly over him: suction, warmth, and just the right amount of pressure to feel amazing without ever bringing the tension of orgasm any closer. Min might not have been able to swallow Chanyeol’s dick whole like he could Dae’s, but the feeling of his throat working while his hand squeezed tight at the base turned Chanyeol into a pleading mess anyway.

“Please let me come,” Chanyeol begged.

Minseok raised his head, licked Chanyeol from root to tip, and grinned.

“Who’s stopping you?”

Another week went by, of tight lips and the flat of his tongue pressing hard, moving slowly up and down. It was so good, Chanyeol couldn’t stand it.

“Min,” Chanyeol groaned. “Please.”

Minseok hummed, and finally his mouth moved a little faster, his tongue a little firmer. The buildup came from so far away that Chanyeol thought he could almost see it. It was like his orgasm started in his toes, rolling up through him in a slow wave that paused at the crest – a pause in which he could neither move nor even breathe just from pure pleasure – before it broke over him and he clutched at his own hair, sobbing aloud while Min sucked him dry.

Chanyeol maybe could’ve moved if he’d had to, but it was way better to let Minseok pull him down and hide his face in the angle of Min’s neck, feeling cool hands on his back and hearing Min murmur to him about how good he was, how beautiful. As his breath calmed, Chanyeol’s brain function returned, along with the awareness of the scent of mint and Minseok’s body pressed against his. He
tipped his face up and tasted himself on Min’s tongue.

“What can I do for you?” Chanyeol whispered up against Min’s mouth.

“We have a mate coming home soon,” Minseok said in a low, amused voice. “Why don’t you make me ready for him?”

That Chanyeol could do, and happily. There were 45 minutes or so before Jongdae was due home, so Chanyeol took almost as much time as Min had with him, stripping Min’s clothes slowly and running his hands over that muscular body. Teasing him with gentle fingers, easing them into Minseok’s body. Holding Min close, the fingers of one hand sliding inside him and the fingers of the other hand around his cock.

He hadn’t paid this much attention to how it felt to stretch someone open probably since the first time he’d done it (Baekhyun – which he supposed was the second time, and the first was technically himself, but that was different). So often it was a matter of trying to keep things moving forward, putting up with the burn to get to the screwing or the coming. But with time to spare, Chanyeol focused on the heat around his fingers, slow strokes until he felt Minseok’s body relax before he added the next, slow and smooth.

“So good, Chan,” Min said, or something like it, over and over. “God, that’s just right, yeah.”

His grip around Chanyeol’s wrist was like a vise when they heard the door open and Jongdae call out.

“In here,” Chanyeol said.

“Well,” Jongdae said from the bedroom doorway, eyebrows raised and his jacket over one arm. “I guess this is why nobody was answering me in the group chat.”

Chanyeol pushed his fingers all the way in, and Minseok groaned.

“He’s ready for you, if you want him,” Chanyeol said.

That brought Jongdae’s smile out right away.

“For me? Well jeez, I guess if you’re offering,” he said.

“Quit being witty and get over here,” Minseok gritted. “I’m going to die if I don’t come soon.”

Chanyeol felt so proud.

“Sure thing, hyung,” Jongdae said, making that somehow the dirtiest phrase Chanyeol had ever heard.

Chanyeol watched Jongdae strip down: he didn’t rush, standing in front of them with a grin on his face, staring down at Minseok, already half-hard by the time he climbed onto the bed and leaned down to kiss Min. He laughed a little into Min’s mouth.

“Let’s see about this supposed state of readiness,” he said, pouring lube over his fingers and reaching down.

Chanyeol moved his hand, bent his head to kiss Minseok’s shoulder. Min inhaled sharply.

“Oh, nice job, Channie, he’s perfect,” Jongdae said.
“Well I mean, technically that’s always true,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae grinned at him.

“Granted.”

“I will fucking do it myself if one of you doesn’t fuck me right now,” Minseok growled.

So Jongdae was laughing as he hauled Min onto his back, legs into the air, and slid into him. Minseok gave a long groan. He looked so beautiful that Chanyeol couldn’t bear to not be touching him. Which seemed like a good excuse to sit on his knees, brace himself on the far side, and put one hand and his mouth around Min’s dick.

“Shit,” Jongdae said. “That’s fucking gorgeous, do that, Channie.”

He hauled Min’s hips up a little higher so the angle was better and he could move without knocking Chanyeol in the face.

“Son of a bitch,” Minseok said, “how the fuck am I supposed to – “

Maybe Chanyeol had done a little too well getting him ready, because Min spilled down his throat, fingers grasping Chanyeol’s hair hard while Chanyeol drank him down. Jongdae’s laugh was deep and dirty.

Minseok rolled his eyes and tossed his head, breath sharp.

“Babe,” Jongdae said, pounding in to him. “Min, fuck, it’s so good.”

Chanyeol sat next to them, one hand on Minseok’s chest, watching Jongdae stare down, hearing Min’s gasps. Holding Jongdae’s forearm when he reached out, all the way through Dae’s loud orgasm.

What a good fucking day. That even included good fucking.

“Gotta take care of you, Chan,” Jongdae mumbled a bit later, collapsed on top of Min.

Chanyeol kissed his cute alpha’s back.

“Min got me, I’m fine,” he said.

Jongdae opened his eyes and frowned a little. That wouldn’t do.

“I kinda think I’ve had enough time that I could use some deep dicking tomorrow, though,” Chanyeol said.

There was the smile he wanted.
Come for the porn, stay for the, um, philosophy of art, I guess.

Jongdae woke Chanyeol in the morning by grabbing his ears and kissing him, saying, “T-minus ten hours to your deep dicking, Park Chanyeol.”

Which, while welcome news, was a ridiculous thing to hear at 7:00 am when still mostly asleep.

On his other side, Minseok snorted.

Min had a shift at the butcher’s shop, and Chanyeol felt like he hadn’t had sufficient rest since Chuseok, so he had a quiet day, paying his bills and airing out his apartment (the state of the refrigerator was terrifying), pulling out some warmer loungewear to put in the drawer Min and Dae had assigned to him. He made himself be brave for a second and dug out one of his old song notebooks: the misery evident in every word was pretty cringey, but the songs themselves were actually better than he remembered their being.

He stuffed the notebook in his backpack to take to work and read some more. All the notebooks in the box under his bed were ragged and dirty from how he used to carry them around with him everywhere, pages bent around pens and whatever assorted junk he shoved in them for inspiration, food and drink stains on the pages. It felt good to think about carrying a notebook around again, even if he wasn’t ready to start writing yet.

He even found a small stack of unused ones stuffed in another box, and remembered packing them when he moved to this apartment, feeling certain at the time that he was wasting space and energy and should just throw them away. A couple of years in a box under the bed hadn’t done them any harm. He stroked the clean, pale brown cover of the top-most one and felt like he was making a promise to himself.

And while he had been busy traveling memory lane and making himself sneeze from all the dust under his neglected bed, his boyfriends had been amusing themselves in the group chat.

Dae: MY DICK IS READY

Min: that sounds inappropriate in a professional environment

Dae: my dick is appropriate for all occasions

Min: is this your way of saying you want to try public sex?

Dae: no
Dae: maybe

Min: then you’re responsible for saving up sufficient bail money to spring the three of us when we get arrested for indecent exposure

Dae: okay but when the impressed crowd throws cash at us I get to keep it

Min: …

Min: …

Min: sure

Dae: where tf is chanyeol

Min: recoiling in horror from the idea of our bare asses being exposed to an unsuspecting public?

Dae: jerking it to the super-hot image

Min: questioning his life choices?

Dae: researching potential locations

Min: researching new apartments

Dae: don’t be horrible minseok you’ll make yourself cry

Min: I’ll make you cry

Dae: please

Me: actually, I was sweeping dust bunnies out from under my bed

There was a long pause before his phone erupted into laughing emojis from both of them. Chanyeol grinned at the screen. How long had they been dating now? Almost 3 months? And he couldn’t even imagine getting tired of them – not the way each of them was separately, and not together.

Damn. They sure had packed a lot of drama into not-quite-3 months. Chanyeol shook himself. His phone buzzed.

Dae: but my dick is still ready

Min: your dick’s always ready, babe, it’s what we love about you

Chanyeol figured it was pretty lame to tell someone you love him for the first time in response to a jokey text message, so instead of agreeing, he put on his dorkiest grin, made a thumbs-up, and sent the first halfway decent-looking version of that photo. “omg cute” and “adorable” both arrived pretty much simultaneously.

It was slightly disappointing a bit later when Minseok declared his intention to go drinking with Luhan after work.
Dae: S C A N D A L I Z E D

Min: oh stop it, you and Channie haven’t had any alone time lately, your rut doesn’t count

Dae: D E L I G H T E D

Min: that’s more like it

Me: what does it mean that I can hear the tone of voice indicated by those spaces?

Min: that we’ve broken your will completely

Dae: that you think I’m G R E A T

Me: both.gif

Min: well done, sweetness. save me some pizza

Chanyeol wandered back to their apartment (using his key), to avoid the inevitable complaining if Jongdae had to chase him down in his own apartment. He put his clothes away and was just starting to feel awkward (and wonder why, since he pretty much lived there these days), when Jongdae clattered in.

“Why are you not naked and face down on the bed?”

Despite Jongdae looking unfairly delicious in his work clothes and glasses, Chanyeol wrinkled his nose.

“Oh, I see how it is,” Jongdae said.

He sauntered over and climbed on Chanyeol.

“Gonna make me romance you, huh?”

Chanyeol leaned back against the sofa and put his hands around Dae’s waist.

“I’ve only been waiting for ten hours,” he said. “Don’t I deserve at least a little foreplay?”

Jongdae laughed. He leaned forward and put one hand on each of Chanyeol’s cheeks.

“I guess you do deserve a reward for your patience,” he said.

Jongdae’s kiss was slow and wet, like he was trying to savor every part of Chanyeol’s mouth. The way their tongues moved together made want coil in Chanyeol’s belly; he pulled Dae closer and worked clumsily at shirt buttons until he was able to slide his hands across the warm skin of Jongdae’s chest. He tipped his chin to the side to let Dae kiss down his jaw and back underneath his ear.

Jongdae inhaled, hummed. Sucked at that thin skin until Chanyeol twitched.

“Hi,” Jongdae murmured.

“Hi,” Chanyeol said, tugging Jongdae’s shirt off and dropping it to the floor.
He leaned down so he could scent Dae too, licking under Dae’s ear from pure instinct as that scent spread through him like warm water, a sense of safety and calm that briefly overwhelmed even his desire. That didn’t last long past Jongdae claiming his mouth again. Chanyeol got greedy fast – he stripped off his own sweatshirt and pulled Jongdae flush against his bare chest.

“Let’s maybe not make Min have to clean the sofa again,” Jongdae said with laughter in his voice.

Lying on the bed was better, anyway, especially given that they finished stripping first, so there was lots more bare skin to press up against, even if it was chilly enough that they needed to get under the covers. Chanyeol never appreciated Jongdae’s wiggliness more than when they were naked.

There was never a minute where he didn’t appreciate Jongdae’s mouth on his neck. Or the curve of Jongdae’s ass under his hand.

“Chan.”

Or his name when Jongdae said it, quiet and deep.

Jongdae rolled him onto his back, warmth and desire in his eyes.

“I think about the first time it we were together, the two of us, a lot. You want to ride me, Channie?”

The optics of that – and the unlikely physics of it – were briefly a little too vivid in Chanyeol’s mind. It must’ve shown on his face, because Jongdae smiled.

“It’s okay.”

Then he felt bad.

“No, I can. I just. I’m so big, that’s not usually how anybody – uh. But if you want.”

Jongdae kissed him.

“Not if you’re going to make that face. Don’t cringe, it’s okay. I just thought I’d ask.”

He trailed his fingers down Chanyeol’s torso, with just enough pressure not to tickle.

“You know I can think of infinite other ways to get up in you and have a good time.”

And Chanyeol wasn’t able to argue, with Jongdae’s tongue in his mouth. He couldn’t even worry, with Jongdae’s hand around his dick.

It was a little awkward how he had to curl his body to keep their heads level and continue kissing when Jongdae scooted downward with the lube bottle in his hand. Worth it, though, to feel Jongdae smile around his gasps, to feel tongue and fingers inside him at once, winding him up like a spring. Dae let Chanyeol pull him close, one leg thrown over his hip so he could keep sliding his fingers in and out while Chanyeol wrapped one hand around his erection.

“Fuck,” Jongdae groaned. “Wanna have you pull us both off soon, yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“I love to watch it, Chan, your hand working both of us.”

He curled his fingers, and it was Chanyeol’s turn to groan.
“But not today.”

Jongdae licked his neck, bit down lightly once.

“I think a lot about the second time you fucked me that day.”

His fingers dragged through Chanyeol, slow and so good. Such an empty achiness when those fingers pulled out. Jongdae rolled them over, his hand under Chanyeol’s neck and heat in his eyes.

“How warm it was, your hand on the back of my head, how deep you fucked into me. The way you looked at me like there was no other place you ever wanted to be. It was so good, Channie.”

Chanyeol fell into Jongdae’s deep, slow kiss. He was gasping when he opened his eyes to stare up at Jongdae again. He nuzzled into the thumb stroking his cheek.

“If only my torso were several centimeters longer,” Jongdae murmured.

He nipped Chanyeol’s bottom lip and smiled.

“Sadly, you have to put up with my miniature alpha self.”

“You’re perfect,” Chanyeol said.

“Keep on telling me that, Channie, even though I will literally never believe you.”

There was another long, messy kiss that made Chanyeol wish he didn’t need to breathe.

“As much as I want to see you, I’d rather be close. Turn over, baby.”

Chanyeol could get with that conundrum. But he turned over, shoved a pillow under his hips, and god, there it was, finally, Jongdae sliding into him slowly, that excellent stretch and fullness. Jongdae’s body pressed up against his, mouth moving between his shoulder blades.

Jongdae snaked one arm around his chest. He held still for long enough that Chanyeol pushed back against him, then laughed once and bit Chanyeol’s back.

That middle-of-the-night session aside, during his rut, sex with Jongdae had been fun but so focused on getting to those drawn-out orgasms that Chanyeol had A Moment when Jongdae moved in him with long, slow thrusts. It felt like it had been ages since he had had this: Jongdae not taking him, but giving to him. He put his hands in his own hair and groaned.

“Good, Chan?”

“So good.”

Jongdae hummed and tightened his hold. Chanyeol stretched his legs out behind him, and Jongdae made a low noise in his throat at the added squeeze. Chanyeol’s brain couldn’t hold onto any thought: he was caught up entirely in the sensation of Jongdae sliding against his back, driving in and out of him, that hand on his ribs, and the friction of the pillow against his cock. He could hear the little cut-off moans that he didn’t mean to make.

“Touch yourself, baby, I want to feel you come.”

Chanyeol hissed as wanting flooded through him. He bit down on his own forearm, just above the cuff bracelet, just so his mouth wouldn’t feel so lonely.
“Don’t need it,” he gasped. “Pillow’s enough.”

“Yeah?” Jongdae said, sounding breathy himself and slamming in hard.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said, with a bit of a squeak.

“You want me to keep going like this, babe? Slow and deep for you?”

Chanyeol moaned again.

“Fuck,” he said. “More, Jongdae, please.”

Jongdae licked his back and laughed.

“Faster or harder?”

“God, both.”

Jongdae’s low growl sounded so pleased. And then Chanyeol was really out of his mind, the way Dae drove him into the mattress, arm tight around him. Everything felt so damn good – Jongdae was hitting him in just the right spot, over and over, like lightning strikes, contrasted with the slide of the pillow against him and the sheets under him. He started writhing and groaning even before he came, it was too much contrast and too much pleasure all at one time. Jongdae held on tighter, ground into him faster, and bit down against the skin of his back when Chanyeol went stiff and shouted into the mattress, hanging on to the edge for dear life.

“Fuck, Channie,” Jongdae moaned. “Fuck, I can – squeeze me again, yes, fuck, just like that baby, I’m –“

Chanyeol’s mouth felt a little too big for itself while Jongdae shuddered and groaned against his back, like his fangs were thinking about making an appearance. Too bad he was on his stomach: that sensation didn’t last long.

But afterward. Jongdae rolled over and held him for a long time – they laughed quietly about doing horrible things to yet another pillow and kissed each other a hundred times. Dae’s fingers were so gentle on his face and his eyes so warm that Chanyeol’s heart was too over-full even to say what he wanted to. He hid his face instead in the crook of Jongdae’s neck and hugged him close.

That quivering, heart-too-full feeling never went away all evening, because Jongdae was similarly quiet, and he kept doing things that made Chanyeol want to fall down on the floor with pure happiness. Chanyeol kept looking up to see Dae smiling at him with a smile so much more tender than his usual sharp grin that it evaporated Chanyeol’s breath. He took forever to wash Chanyeol’s hair because he kept pausing to bend down with a swift, soft kiss.

They did order pizza, and they toasted one another silently with a bottle of wine that seemed tastier than usual. Jongdae was lying up against his chest on the sofa, Chanyeol more than halfway asleep, when Minseok came home.

Drunk Minseok was hilarious. He was barely inside the door before he started rambling about the ontological existence of ice as a sculptural medium, which made exactly zero sense, but he definitely felt very strongly about it, if the volume was any indication.

“I mean, it melts,” he said very earnestly to Chanyeol while Jongdae tried to get him to replace the sweater he had dumped on the floor with a sleep shirt.
“So does it exist? If you know for sure that it won’t exist in the future.”

“Of course it exists?” Chanyeol said.

“How do you know.”

“One of your sculptures broke my arm, babe, they exist,” Jongdae said.

“But,” Min said around a large mouthful of cold pizza, “it wouldn’t have a day later. If you’d been there a day later there wouldn’t have been any broken arm.”

He dropped the pizza back into the box.

“We wouldn’t be together. Because it melted and it wasn’t real, and we wouldn’t be together.”

He had actual tears in his actual eyes, and Chanyeol told himself very firmly not to do anything that would endanger his personal safety, like laugh or coo.

“But it was real, and we are together, so you don’t have to worry about it,” Jongdae said. “Drink some water.”

“But water is the problem!” Minseok shouted.

“Oh god,” Jongdae said.

“Don’t you get it? Water. Is. The problem. The ice melts! The sculpture disappears into a thing without form! You know it’s gonna happen! So how do you even trust it when it can just – “

He waved his hand.

“Disappear?”

“What if you pour the water into like a glass thing that’s shaped like the sculpture?” Chanyeol asked.

He really hoped that he would never, ever do anything that would make sober Minseok stare at him with such open disgust.

“That’s not the same thing, Chanyeol. It’s cheating. The ice is the point.”

“Then doesn’t the point make it real?”

Min’s mouth dropped open. He clutched at Jongdae’s arm.

“Is that it?” he asked. “Does the point make it real?”

“Yes, Min,” Jongdae said.

“Okay,” Minseok said.

He drank the glass of water and finished his slice of pizza, his brain obviously still trying to work hard despite the haze of alcohol. Chanyeol caught Dae’s eye; they smiled at each other, and Chanyeol couldn’t remember ever feeling so at home in his whole life – even when he lived at home.

“It’s still tricky,” Min said eventually. “Because it melts. So how do you know it really exists? If it’s not going to exist in the future.”

Jongdae groaned.
“Did Luhan put you up to this?”

Min scoffed.

“Luhan. Luhan can’t tell a pre-Raphaelite from an Impressionist, he doesn’t get it, Jongdae. He and that hot little mouth of his just skate through life without even trying to understand – “

He trailed off into an effortful bite of pizza.

“What’s that about his hot little mouth?” Jongdae asked, sounding not angry, exactly, but definitely not happy.

Min rolled his eyes.

“Please. Like I’d go there after he threw me over just because Taozi smells like the Fragrant Hills of Haidan in springtime or whatever. Do you have any idea how much work those two are? I love ‘em to death, but god, try to get a word in edgewise. Try to keep one square centimeter of countertop clean, ever. There’s no fucking way. You’re fifteen times the alpha Taozi is, Jongdae, I don’t care how many god damn martial arts medals he has.”

“Well, thanks, babe. I’m going to go get you more water now.”

“See? This is what I’m talking about. You’re a giver. You understand the greater philosophical ramifications of presentation. You’re a caretaker, Jongdae. It’s not about dominance, it’s about responsibility.”

“It sure is,” Jongdae said, peeling his shirt sleeve out of Min’s grasp. “You’re absolutely right.”

Minseok let Jongdae go and nodded at the pizza box for long enough that it started to make Chanyeol dizzy.

“Why don’t you eat some more?” he said.

Min’s head snapped up, and he stared at Chanyeol in a way that made him suspect Minseok had forgotten Chanyeol was even there. Min launched himself into Chanyeol’s arms.

“Channie,” he said. “Channie, you understand. The ice is the point. The ephemerality is what makes it beautiful.”

Chanyeol bit his lip so he wouldn’t smile.

“That’s right,” he said.

“You wouldn’t throw me over for somebody who smells like the Fragrant Hills of Haidan.”

“I don’t even know what that is,” Chanyeol said. “But you smell like mint, and I like it.”

Minseok blinked at him.

“I what?”

“You smell like mint.”

Minseok jumped to his feet, fists clenched at his sides. Jongdae, standing behind him with another glass of water, took a step backward.
“Kim Jongdae, you fuckhead,” Min snarled. “You fucking told me I fucking smell like fucking toothpaste.”

“You do,” Jongdae said. “Mint toothpaste.”

There followed a very exciting several minutes that started with a spilled glass of water and ended with Jongdae and Minseok on the floor while Min cried into Jongdae’s collar about how lucky he was. Chanyeol spent the whole time with his hands over the lower half of his face, trying to hold the laughter in.

“Oh babe,” Jongdae said, petting Minseok’s hair. “You are so damn drunk.”

“I know, I really am,” Min said.

Chanyeol cleaned up the spilled water, and by the time he returned to the sofa with yet another glass of water and a wet washcloth for Min’s face, things had gotten calm and Minseok’s eyes looked slightly less hazy. He thanked Chanyeol for the water in his normal tone and drank the whole thing while plowing through another slice of pizza.

He took a shower not long after that. Jongdae spent the duration of that shaking his head and laughing under his breath while he and Chanyeol cleaned up from dinner and changed the sheets on the bed. Min definitely wasn’t sober after his shower, but he was more like himself. Chanyeol laughed at him and got pinched for it, but they piled on the sofa together as usual. Chanyeol watched Jongdae smooth Minseok’s hair, his hands as gentle as they had been on himself earlier. He leaned down to kiss the top of Jongdae’s head, and Dae looked up over his shoulder, a small smile on his face.

“Sorry I got so irritable,” Min mumbled.

“You’re okay, love,” Jongdae said. “Everybody’s good here.”

Chanyeol could only agree.

It was even better than usual to lie down with them, Jongdae on one side and Minseok on the other, the way they reached over him to lay their hands on each other. Chanyeol blinked into the darkness, feeling his wet eyes and too-full heart. So, so happy. So happy to hold them, to fall asleep with them, and to sleep in happiness and perfect safety.

Even in the morning, even when he refused to join them at the gym, he was so content, feeling two hands in his hair and two mouths kiss his face. He mumbled,

“Love you.”

“Love you too, sweetness,” Min whispered.

One of the hands left his hair.

“Is that the first time you’ve heard that?” Jongdae murmured.

A thumb swept across Chanyeol’s cheek one more time.

“No,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol dreamed that he rolled over and said, “I love you too, dummy,” to Jongdae, but he didn’t actually do it, and he didn’t remember any of it later when he woke up.
Chanyeol floated through his day, even if both his boyfriends had abandoned him for dumb stuff like adult responsibilities. Minseok invited him to the studio again, but Chanyeol knew he was too bouncy and wired and would only be a distraction. He talked to his mom on the phone for a while (great, because she had tons of nice things to say about Min and Dae for him to agree with) and spent most of the afternoon letting his butt fall asleep playing Destiny with Baek. Despite the extended lecture he got on how under-powered his character was on account of having the temerity to prioritize sex over videogames.

“You’re jealous,” he said.

“Of course I’m fucking jealous, Xing’s on call *again*, but I’m also pissed about having to carry your ass through this raid.”

It was fun, though. And then he got to hang on Minseok, kissing his face and trying to drape himself over Min’s shoulders until he laughed.

Jongdae texted around 4:30 that he had to work late.

Me: dumb

Dae: Sorry, Chan. Hitting crunch time. I’m sure you & Min can think of fun to have without me

Me: booooooooooo

Dae: sorry

“What a shame,” Minseok said. “It’s like this sometimes with his work projects, though. I think they start construction soon. I’m hoping he can get me in to see it, I think it’ll look interesting in-process.”

So that was a bummer. They took advantage of his absence, though, making a kimchi jjigae so hot that they both sniffled into it, and Chanyeol thought his ears might melt off. They lounged around, reading *Hell’s Heat* and playing a couple rounds of Words with Friends, kissing on each other. In other words: a totally excellent evening.

When Jongdae finally got home, Minseok was asleep, head in his lap, while Chanyeol raced through the volumes in which the alpha human was being forced to marry the daughter of a vampire while the omega demon was caged in Hell. It was all very desperate and thrilling, with lots of shouting and tears. Chanyeol craned his neck back and waved. Jongdae looked – surprised?

“Why do you both have all your clothes on?” he whispered after he had padded over and looked down at Min.

“We were just hanging out.”

Chanyeol pulled on Dae’s arm when it seemed like he was going to walk away, which was 100% against the rules, and pulled Jongdae down for a hello kiss. When he leaned back, one of Jongdae’s eyebrows looked a bit quizzical, but his hand was soft on Chanyeol’s cheek.

Dae nodded.

“I’m gonna grab some food,” he said.

Chanyeol knew Jongdae liked his boss, but at the moment she was on his shit list, because Jongdae looked totally exhausted. Chanyeol watched him slump around, pour a glass of wine. There was a moment of danger: he started messing with the container of leftover jjigae, and Chanyeol had a sleeping beta in his lap, so he couldn’t call out.

“DON’T EAT THAT,” he texted. “SPICY.”

Disaster averted – Jongdae made busy eyebrows at his phone, then nodded and put the container away. Chanyeol learned that Dae liked to reheat pizza in a pan on the stove instead of in the microwave like a normal person. Even more weird, Jongdae sat down with his plate outside of getting distance. What a jerk. Chanyeol poked him with one toe.

“What are you doing?” he mouthed.

Jongdae looked down at his plate and back up again.

Chanyeol waved him closer.

When there was no immediate response, Chanyeol poked him with one toe again.

“Quit it,” Jongdae whispered.

“Move closer,” Chanyeol whispered.

“What are you two doing?” Minseok mumbled.

“Jongdae’s too far away,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok raised his head and squinted over at Dae, who rolled his eyes and slid over to an acceptable distance.

“See? There you go,” Chanyeol said. “I have two hands, therefore I require both boyfriends to be within reach. It’s the law.”

Minseok hummed and snuggled up closer, face pressed against Chanyeol’s belly. Jongdae frowned sidelong. Chanyeol stroked the back of his neck. Poor grumpy alpha.

Such sleepy mates. Jongdae barely sat for 20 minutes at the other end of the sofa with 4 feet in his lap before he started nodding over his wine glass. Chanyeol herded them both through the bedtime ritual and went to wash the dishes. They presented him with a dilemma when he was ready to climb in bed with them: they were in the middle, wound up close together, Min’s head tucked up under Jongdae’s chin. He stood and watched them sleep for a few minutes, feeling yet again that his heart was like a cup about to spill over. He eventually decided to curl up against Minseok’s back, but he reached across to drape his hand over Jongdae’s shoulder.

“I’ll drive you to work, Chan,” Dae whispered in the morning, just as Chanyeol had hoped.

Washed Chanyeol’s hair, just as he’d hoped. Stood next to him by the bed while they kissed their sleepy Minseok goodbye.
“Min’s so easy to love,” Jongdae said once they had buckled themselves into the car.

Which was an unexpected bit of early morning conversation.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said.

“He would be anyway, just because he’s him. But it makes it so much easier, right? Knowing that because he’s a beta, you’re not caught up in your hormones or instincts, or whatever. You can trust that you just love him.”

Chanyeol’s morning grogginess parted into a haze of confusion.

“Um. I guess so?” he managed while Jongdae pulled out into the street.

The wheels of Chanyeol’s mind strove to move at a pace faster than a dead stop. That was – what?

Hold up.

“What does that mean?” he asked.

By this point, they were already in the driveway of the fire house. Jongdae turned to look at him, and fuck if he didn’t look sad, what the hell.

“Just that,” Jongdae said. “Like he always says. The way our glands try to make us believe stuff that’s not true. But with him, we can trust that it’s real. Not just. Biology.”

Not just – what?

“What are you trying to say?”

Jongdae put his hand to Chanyeol’s face, which for once was the exact opposite of comforting.

“That it’s fine, Channie. It’s okay. I don’t – I don’t have any crazy expectations or anything.”

And that didn’t clear anything up at all.

“Joonmyun’s staring at us,” Dae said. “Better get to work.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Chanyeol said.

He leaned in for – and got – a kiss, but damn if he knew what was going on the whole time he did so, or climbed out of the car, or zoned out through the whole morning meeting.

Believe things that aren’t true?

Feel things you can’t trust?

Just biology?

“Okay,” Baekhyun said, cornering him after the meeting broke up. “What happened.”

Chanyeol shook his head.

“Yeol. You’re obviously thinking hard enough to wear out all the gears in your brain.”

“I need to figure stuff out first.”
Baekhyun squinted at him.

“Figure stuff out or avoid stuff?”

Chanyeol slapped his shoulder.

“Quit acting like you know me better than I know myself. Figure stuff out, asshole.”

“But I do know you better than you know yourself.”

Chanyeol stared at him until they broke out in simultaneous grins.

“Okay, Yeollie.”

It was one of those shifts that was too busy to allow for any brooding. The nights were cold enough that they never ran out of house fires from kerosene or charcoal heaters to supplement all the usual calls. He ran from heart attack to house fire to downed power line to house fire to choking victim to house fire to house fire to restaurant fire to house fire for the entire 3 days straight.

Throughout it all, Chanyeol kept playing that strange conversation over in his mind, trying to figure out what in the world Jongdae had been trying to tell him.

Midway through the first day, Chanyeol realized that Dae must’ve figured out that he’d confessed to Min. A minor wreck between a fruit truck and a bus full of daycare kids was enough of a distraction (only minor injuries to the kids, who, once their initial fright was over, were pretty thrilled by all the fire trucks and free fruit) to give his sense of guilt time to wear itself out.

Because why feel guilty about loving Minseok? Why feel guilty about saying it?

Thankfully, that was a problem easily solved. All he had to do was say what he’d been meaning to say anyhow.

In one of the brief periods back in the station for a change of uniform and half a meal, Chanyeol found a bunch of notifications in the group chat with photos from the first wine-of-the-month shipment. There really were a lot of educational materials with those two bottles of wine.

“You’d better save that for when I’m home,” he wrote.

The station alarm went off, so he didn’t see Jongdae’s “really?” until 2:30 in the morning, when Chanyeol was too exhausted to type more than “yes really” before passing out for the half-hour before the next call.

The next morning and third call after that was when he remembered “keep telling me that, even if I’ll literally never believe you.”

Chanyeol paused in his shoveling through the remains of a house wall, looking for live embers among the ashes. How true was that? “Never believe you.”

He turned it over in his mind as he turned over shovels full of burned-up household debris and stomped out a few hot bits. He turned it over in his mind as he did a stroke assessment on an elderly beta man and waited for the ambulance to come get him. Chanyeol pondered it while he braced his feet and held the hose to put out yet another house fire.

“Not just biology.”

“You can trust it.”
They pulled a family – four generations, including maybe the oldest alpha Chanyeol had ever seen and her numerous descendants – out of a smoldering apartment with moderate burns and smoke inhalation while he kept grinding, over and over, on everything Jongdae had said.

Was he trying to say that even if Chanyeol said he loved him, he wouldn’t believe it?

Because that would be stupid.

Right?
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

ONE THOUSAND KUDOS! Jeez louise, y'all, thank you!!!!

The problem with pondering a set of unanswerable questions while moving nonstop for nearly 36 hours straight on a total of 6.5 hours of sleep was that it made being smart impossible. Chanyeol showed up back home on Sunday morning – too tired even to quibble with himself about thinking of their apartment as “home” – Jongdae opened the door, and all he could do was sag against the doorframe and stare at Dae’s face.

“Jesus, Channie,” Jongdae said.

He pulled Chanyeol’s backpack off his shoulder and tugged him inside.

“Rough shift? Did something bad happen?”

“No,” Chanyeol said. “No, just busy. I didn’t really sleep.”

He ducked down to inhale at the top of Jongdae’s head and tried not to feel weepy at the comfort of that scent.

“I don’t guess you want me to offer you any coffee.”

Just the thought made Chanyeol’s stomach churn.

Maybe they tried to be good boyfriends taking care of a tired firefighter, but their efforts involved putting him into the shower alone.

“This is terrible,” he said to the copious space around him.

“I’m not supposed to have to wash my own hair,” he said to the shampoo bottle.

“I hate it,” he said to the water spray, which was falling efficiently on a single body.

“You are giddy with exhaustion,” Minseok said, waiting like a miracle outside the shower with a towel in his hands. “You were talking to yourself the whole time.”

“I had to wash my own hair. You expect me to keep that kind of cruelty to myself?”

“Poor Channie. We put you through such misery.”

Minseok scrubbed him dry until Chanyeol sighed with happiness.

“And now we’re putting you to bed.”

“With kisses,” Chanyeol said.
“With kisses,” Minseok said.

“I’ve never seen anybody so tired that they’ve gone pure ridiculous,” Jongdae said, after being summoned via yelling to provide the necessary oral sleep aid.

“I’m not ridiculous,” Chanyeol said. “I’m a dedicated public servant sacrificing my health for the greater good. My work saves lives, Kim Jongdae, I deserve kisses.”

“Okay, dedicate yourself to sleeping, Mr. Fireman.”

“One more,” Chanyeol said. “Each.”

The bummer that was the night shift: Chanyeol slept all day. Jongdae only woke him up because it was dinner time, and they (correctly) figured he could stand to stuff a meal in himself before sleeping some more.

Dinner was fun, because the wine-of-the-month stuff had recipes in it, so Chanyeol got to do homework while Min cooked. The flowery descriptions of the wine sounded dumb, but the way Jongdae demonstrated how to taste it (“swish it around, not like mouthwash, kind of like you’re chewing it”) was too cute to be believed. And the wine was tasty, as was the spicy braised chicken they ate with it. When he followed Dae’s instructions to take a bite of chicken, a sip of wine, and then inhale through his mouth after he swallowed, Chanyeol could kind of see how, if “notes of plum” was a stretch, there was a definite fruit-like sort of flavor in there.

Neat.

“I look forward to doing this every month,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“You don’t have to put up with my nerding out, Channie, it’s a super cool gift, you don’t have to suffer through it.”

“Uh, excuse me. It was totally selfish on my part to give you this. How else am I going to mend my barbarian ways? You’re locked into a monthly wine lesson now, tough luck.”

Jongdae looked skeptical still, but his cheeks were a little pink.

“You’re very opinionated when you’re sleep-deprived,” Min laughed.

All this totally derailed Chanyeol’s plans for Important Relationship Conversations, though. He was wired and bouncy after dinner, to the point that he and Dae decided over dish-washing that the time had come to relocate his gaming system. They brought everything over in one trip, and the resident engineering genius hooked it all up faster than Chanyeol believed was possible for electronics (including routing the sound through the stereo correctly on the first try, which Chanyeol didn’t even know was possible). Then he fell asleep sitting up with the controller in his hand, waiting for Battlefront to load.

Chanyeol endured a little light mockery at that, but Jongdae didn’t seem put out to abandon gaming. They lay around instead. Chanyeol demanded to know about their day, laughing into Jongdae’s leg about how annoyed Min was to have watched yet another pathetic performance by Ulsan on the football field.
“All work and no play for me,” Jongdae said. “I’m a very dull boy.”

Chanyeol vaguely remembered waking just enough to brush his teeth and fall back into the bed. He remembered not at all when they left for the gym in the morning, or Minseok coming back. Waking up with his face pressed against Min’s thigh and Min’s fingers in his hair was really nice, though. Some breakfast and a good stretch later, and Chanyeol even felt most of the way the back to being a human being.

It took until mid-afternoon to feel up to saying something, though. And even then, his voice quavered a little.

“So Jongdae wasn’t kidding when he said he’s bad at emotional stuff, huh?”

Minseok paused in dusting the electronics and turned around, eyes narrowed.

“What did he say to you?”

“Well, for one thing, he said you’re easy to love, and I totally agree with that part.”

Min crossed his arms and pursed his lips, but Chanyeol could see the smile in his eyes.

“And a bunch of stuff about how we can really only trust loving you, since our hormones are trying to trick us.”

Minseok looked pretty alarmed at that.

“And that I shouldn’t worry about him having crazy expectations.”

Min put one hand over his face and groaned.

“For fuck’s sake,” he said.

So yeah. That wasn’t encouraging. Chanyeol sat down. Standing up seemed like a lot of work all of a sudden. Minseok sat next to him, close enough to be a comfort.

“I kind of got the feeling that it meant if I told him I love him, he wouldn’t even believe me.”

Min took his hand and squeezed it.

“That’s a reasonable reaction,” he said.

But his glance was sharp.

“Do you?” he asked. “Love Dae?”

That part was easy to answer. That part was the happiest, easiest thing to say.

(Of course I do. How could I not? He’s like the perfect combination of obnoxious and adorable. The way he jumps around and runs his mouth are the only things that make early mornings bearable. I feel like I can never breathe around him, because I’m either laughing my ass off or cross-eyed from wanting him. Every time he acts soft I want to melt into a puddle on the floor. I fucking love him like crazy.”

Another thing he loved like crazy: Minseok’s broad, happy smile. It made him crazy enough to be all open and stuff.)
“I love you for you, and him for him, and both of you together,” Chanyeol said.

Then his mouth was busy for a few minutes, having Min’s tongue in it.

“Chanyeol,” Minseok said, his hands soft on Chanyeol’s face. “That’s huge. That you feel brave enough to say that to me – it means the world, love. Knowing your past, and how you were when we first got together. I’m proud of you, sweetness.”

“Well, we said we were gonna help each other be brave, right?” Chanyeol said, pulling Min’s mouth back to his.

After a very enjoyable little while, Chanyeol’s lips were buzzing and he ran his fingers through Minseok’s hair while Min’s head rested on his chest.

“How did you tell him you love him, the first time?” he asked.

Minseok laughed.

“I didn’t. I waited for him to tell me first.”

Which made sense to Chanyeol, especially factoring in Yixing’s history with Jongdae. He could see that maybe waiting until Jongdae was ready to say it himself was the best way to –

“Which wasn’t until after we got back together again the second time,” Min added.

What?

“Are you kidding me?”

Chanyeol was glad for once that Min sat up and away from him, because he had to get a look at Minseok’s face to make sure that wasn’t a joke. Minseok was smiling, but the sort of lopsided, rueful smile that made Chanyeol think he was serious.

“Yeah,” Min said, rubbing the back of his neck in what Chanyeol considered some totally reasonable sheepishness.

“Let’s.”

He stopped and heaved a deep breath.

“Let’s make some coffee, and I’ll tell you about it.”

The story started out undeniably funny – Min talked about Jongdae in the omega lounge again, and about Jongdae’s heavy metal—singer days – but Chanyeol didn’t miss the undercurrent of how difficult the two of them had made things for themselves, from the beginning.

“I would’ve sworn it was just an idle hook-up,” Minseok said into his coffee mug. “I mean, the sex wasn’t even that great, given that we both had the stamina and finesse of college students.”

“Being college students,” Chanyeol said.

“Yeah,” Min said with a smile. “Except there he was again, knocking at my door in the middle of the night a couple of weeks later. And a few weeks after that, we ran into each other at the library and twenty minutes later were getting each other off in the world history section. A couple more times he came by my room on the pretext that his roommate was annoying. And then I saw him at a party dancing with some girl, obviously drunk, eyeliner smudged all over his face and his hair looking like
someone had run it through a blender, and when the girl kissed his neck, all of a sudden I was just like ‘fuck no, that’s mine,’ and I just went over and grabbed him.”

Chanyeol made the requisite happy squeaking sound when presented with this highly romantic story. Minseok’s smile was wide, slow, and dirty.

“That was Jongdae’s introduction to bottoming.”

Chanyeol only spilled half his coffee laughing. Luckily they had relocated to the kitchen, so he only had to clean the countertop and not their poor sofa.

“By the end of that weekend we were pretty inseparable. But you have to remember, Chan, we were just kids, and we were both a mess. We fought a lot, over stupid shit. He was a party hound, and I was still friends with my ex-boyfriend, and our schedules never meshed, we both drank too much. And by the time I was thinking seriously about dropping out of school, it was just constant. All we did was scream at each other and fuck.”

Chanyeol could barely imagine it – the screaming part, anyway – and put his hand on Minseok’s arm.

“I knew I loved him, of course. But I figured I was just a college fling for him, you know? The beta dude intended to piss his father off – which I did, and do. Not that he wasn’t loyal, Channie, you know how he is. He didn’t so much as look at anybody else once we were together, and he had an open invitation to warm the beds of like a quarter of the campus at that point, taking him out of the dating pool did not make me popular. So I genuinely thought I was doing him a favor when I broke up with him. It wasn’t until I saw the look on his face. I mean. He had fought with me for weeks, trying to get me not to drop out, and that whole time it never occurred to me that it was because of me. All I heard was him telling me the same shit my parents were telling me, and it made me furious. So even when I watched him just … break, I was so determined that I was right, and we had to split up.”

“Min.”

Chanyeol hooked his foot over the rung of Minseok’s stool and dragged it across to get him within hugging distance. He wasn’t sure he was a fan of hearing the act 2 conflict of their romantic comedy, it was so sad.

“Yeah. I tried to call him about a week later, ready to throw myself at his feet and beg him to take me back, but he’d blocked my number. I didn’t find out until we’d been back together for about a year that he only had me blocked for like a month. But by then I’d had to get on a new phone plan when my parents cut me off from everything, so.”

He shrugged, and Chanyeol squeezed him.

“I couldn’t believe it when I saw him in that wedding hall, Channie. I literally thought I was hallucinating. I don’t think I trusted that any of it was real until about two days later, when Dae was naked in my bed, whining that his cast itched. It was all so messy. His family was furious with him, for missing the wedding, for taking back up with me when they’d picked out some nice omega girl for him to start dating. We were both stubborn, but we had more stubbornness than trust, if that makes sense. And we both had a shit ton of bad habits. I was squirrely from my breakup with Luhan and Taozi, and Dae was squirrely from every fucking relationship he’d ever had up to that point, including ours.”

Chanyeol put his chin in his hand and watched Minseok swirl his tepid coffee around in his mug.
“How long did it take for you to fall back in love with him?”

Min looked up and laughed once.

“Ten minutes? Thirty seconds? I don’t think I ever stopped, really.”

“How long did it take him to tell you?”

“Six months, give or take.”

Min’s smile was so soft and fond.

“Six months of watching him watch me like I was some kind of precious object. Chan, I swear, I could see it coming from weeks away. He wrapped himself up in knots, trying to say it and not to say it at the same time. I felt like I was living half a meter off the ground, he was the sweetest thing in the world.”

Chanyeol could relate. He figured he was currently at least a couple centimeters off the surface of the kitchen stool.

“Luhan told me he loved me the first time I fucked him,” Minseok said, looking over with a grin and his cheek pressed against his fist.

“Not that one can necessarily believe what comes out of someone’s mouth when you’ve been railing their prostate for the past ten minutes. But he was like that. Jongdae, though.”

He shook his head.

“He told me he loved me the first time on a Wednesday night when I was digging between the sofa cushions for the TV remote, then clapped his hands over his mouth like he’d made a mistake.”

“Oh my god, that’s the most Jongdae thing ever,” Chanyeol said, hugging Min again out of necessity. “I mean, it’s not nearly as romantic as me confessing while we were sponging come stains out of the mattress, but he did his best.”

Minseok laughed, and kissed him, and Chanyeol wondered what the upper limit of happiness was, because he hadn’t reached it yet.

“Both times were perfect,” Min said. “I wouldn’t change either one.”

And Min looked happy too. That was even better.

“I’m pretty sure he even believes that I love him, now. It took a lot of saying it, though. A lot of standing by him and taking his side.”

“Is that what it takes?” Chanyeol asked.

Minseok squeezed his fingers.

“I’ve only met Dae’s mom a few times, but if you asked me, I think she does love him exactly as much as he wants her to. It’s just that he can’t understand how she also loves his father, and that means that she won’t always take his side. Especially since his ‘side’ is sometimes him being stubborn.”

“Oh,” Chanyeol said. “So it’s an old thing.”
“Let me show you a picture.”

Chanyeol wasn’t aware that the drawer in the table by their front door even worked – nobody ever touched that table except to put stuff down while they were taking their shoes off. But Minseok brought over a small photo album, and Chanyeol got it the instant he saw the picture. Jongdae’s mom was a tiny omega, short and slight, with a tender smile. Jongdae’s dad and brother weren’t tall, but they were burly, all shoulder and obviously alpha. Physically, Jongdae strongly favored his mom.

“Ah,” he said.

Minseok tucked the album back into the drawer.

“Yeah. Dae’s had a chip on his shoulder since presentation. He was so angry to present alpha, and his father reacted badly to his being pissed about it, and then he never had that post-presentation growth spurt, and and and.”

“Well, shit,” Chanyeol said. “I can relate to that. Taejoon may have been joking at your family dinner, but I literally went into heat the first time at the dinner table, and none of us had any fucking idea what was going on.”

“Oh god, Channie!”

“Yeah. It’s a very, very funny story when I’m very, very drunk, and otherwise I would prefer not to think about it.”

“You’re lucky, though,” Minseok said, putting one hand to his cheek. “That your family was there for you. Even the way Yura noona teases you, it’s obvious that she adores you. And I had Minjoo. Jongdae always felt like he was fighting for scraps. He defaults to assuming that he loves more than he is loved.”

And to a point, Chanyeol could relate to that, too, even though he had always worked under the assumption that if he just loved more/harder/better, somehow he’d get it back in return. It sounded lonely, to assume that one would just always be on the lesser end.

“I guess that must’ve hurt his feelings, then, that I said it to you first.”

“I assume,” Min said coolly, “though of course I’d know better if he would deign to actually speak to either of us about it.”

“So what do I do?”

Min spread his hands.

“You have to do what feels right to you, Chan. It felt right to me to wait until he was ready to say it, and that worked out, but you’re not me. What do you want to do? Do you want me to intervene?”

Chanyeol turned that idea over in his mind a few times.

“No,” he said. “I don’t want him to feel like we’re ganging up on him.”

“I agree,” Minseok said.

“I see where you were coming from, waiting for him to say it first,” Chanyeol said. “And I know how I feel, that’s not going to go away.”

Min smiled.
“Do you doubt how he feels about you?”

“I don’t,” Chanyeol was glad to say, and to feel that it was true. “I really don’t.”

“Good,” Minseok said. “You shouldn’t. I’m convinced that he’s as gone for you as I am. It’s just hard for him to say it. So you’ll wait?”

Chanyeol grinned.

“I don’t think I’m as patient as you are,” he said.

Yeah. This was actually great, now that he thought about it.

“Minseok,” he said. “I am a naturally mushy person.”

“No,” Min said, laughing.

“Yes,” Chanyeol said. “And I’ve been waiting my whole life for some dumb alpha who just needs to be smothered by affection.”

“Have you, now?”

“I apologize in advance if you get caught in the affection cross-fire.”

“Sounds terrible, Chanyeol, I look forward to every second.”
Chapter 49

By the time Jongdae got home, Chanyeol even had a name for it: Operation Overwhelming Affection.

He’d already been practicing on Minseok, and so far, it was going great.

It was like switch had flipped in his brain. He was here, with Minseok, who loved him, and Jongdae, who probably also loved him, and neither one of them had ever said anything like ‘dial it back’ or ‘you’re too much.’ Not once. Min called him ‘sweetness,’ and Jongdae wanted to have it proved to him that he was loved.

Well, if there was one thing Park Chanyeol could do on a scale larger than most people, it was fucking love.

“I hope you’re ready,” he said when he pulled Minseok onto his right leg and stuck one hand under Min’s shirt to wrap around his ribs, making him squirm, “I’m about to go full Chanyeol on you guys.”

“Oh really?” Minseok asked. “What percentage of you have we had so far?”

“Hm, about seventy, eighty percent?” he said, and nuzzled up against Min’s face.

He tightened his hands around Minseok’s waist, licked under his chin.

“I think I’d be disappointed to know you’ve been holding back, sweetness, except that you’re somewhat distracting at the moment.”

“I adore you,” Chanyeol said with his mouth against the skin of Minseok’s neck and his voice low. “I adore every single little thing about you, Kim Minseok.”

He kept his mouth there, reaching out with a little lick every now and again, while he told Minseok everything he liked about him. He tried to vary it up between admirable physical characteristics (his murder scowl, his pointy chin, the muscles of his back, his strength driving his cock into Chanyeol’s ass) and endearing personal qualities (being a troublesome fucking tease, the way he cared for them, his intelligence). It took a while – as it turned out, Chanyeol liked a lot of things about Minseok. And it was so much fun to feel his mouth moving against the skin of Min’s neck, to pull Min closer and wrap him up close, stroke his stomach and feel his abs twitch, feel Min start to shift impatiently in his lap.

“Oh, Jongdae’s doomed,” Min said.

Chanyeol kissed his neck.

“Yes.”

Jongdae came in the door, and Chanyeol and Minseok had their heads close together, kissing and murmuring softly.

“This is new,” Jongdae said. “Is that a comfortable make out spot?”

Chanyeol gazed at him, the way he was trying for a grin but the angle of his eyebrows gave him away.
Yeah.

Prove how much he loved this alpha?

He could do that.

Chanyeol reached out and yanked Jongdae forward, shifting his leg to catch Dae before he fell, wrapped an arm around him before he could protest.

He rubbed his face slowly against Jongdae’s face and neck, hearing Dae’s inhale, feeling how he slowly relaxed against the arm around his waist.

“Okay, Chan?” Jongdae said after a moment, voice soft.

“I missed you.”

Jongdae tugged a little at his shirt.

“I was just at work.”

Chanyeol rubbed his nose at the good spot under Dae’s ear.

“I can’t miss you when you’re at work?”

“Why would you when you have Min right here?”

Such a reliable alpha, providing him with an opening right away.

Chanyeol nipped him hard on the neck.

“Ow!”

Min snickered.

“The fuck was that for, Chanyeol?”

“I miss Min when he’s not around, even if you’re here. You’re not substitutes for each other, Jongdae. When you’re not around, I miss you.”

He watched that little tidbit of information try to make it past Jongdae’s mighty shield of stubbornness, and when he saw the first glimmer of a frown, Chanyeol leaned in to kiss Dae slow and deep. Minseok slipped off his right knee, so Chanyeol pulled Jongdae flush up against him and went straight for the tonsils. Just after Jongdae finally softened into it, he pulled back.

“Anyway, hi,” he said, and stood up. “I figure it's my turn to cook dinner. Why don’t you go change and come tell us about your day?”

“Guh,” Jongdae said.

After a minute, he wandered away, looking mussed and flustered.

“Utterly doomed,” Minseok laughed. “I'll go help him remember how to use his limbs.”

“Maybe kiss on him a little too.”

“Oh yes, that’s a given,” Min said. “Can’t let him regain too much equilibrium.”
Chanyeol grinned his way through pawing around in their refrigerator and throwing together a little stir fry. He didn’t know how long he’d be able to keep up the affection cascade before he started feeling shy – but might as well run with it while his heart felt like it was pumping helium instead of blood.

Jongdae and Minseok were holding hands when they reentered the kitchen. Chanyeol sighed at the sight. He sighed again when Min leaned against him to look down into the pan and hum his approval at the proceedings.

Jongdae was the one who sighed when Chanyeol paid for his glass of wine with a soft kiss to the neck. Min patted Chanyeol’s butt in approval.

It was no big culinary achievement, but it was a tasty enough dinner. They were kind of draining the dregs of side dishes. Mostly, though, Chanyeol let himself stare at Jongdae to his heart’s content, despite the wriggling it inspired.

“Min,” he asked, “what’s your favorite part of Jongdae’s face?”

“Hey,” Jongdae said.

“Hmm, I’m strongly biased toward his face, so it’s hard to say,” Minseok said.

Jongdae was the color of the hose truck.

“It’s easy to pick how the corner of his mouth turns up, that’s so charming,” Min said.

“Yeah.”

Chanyeol leaned in and kissed Dae there. Jongdae startled.

“But I think I like even better how his eyebrows tilt up at the center. It lets you know he’s always thinking about everything around him,” Minseok said.

And it was true, they did – even when he was trying to scowl with confusion. Chanyeol leaned in again and kissed Jongdae between them. He didn’t lean back, though – instead, he laid two fingertips against Jongdae’s cheek.

“It is hard to choose,” Chanyeol murmured. “But I think I like here best. Cheekbones that could cut glass.”

He kissed Dae’s cheek, then rubbed his own cheek against it.

“You are in a mood,” Jongdae said in a low voice.

“You don’t mind, do you?”

Jongdae grabbed his chin, and Chanyeol’s dick registered its approval of Operation Overwhelming Affection and its mission success so far.

“I’m a little suspicious that you’re angling for more jewelry or a fancy vacation,” Jongdae said, staring at Chanyeol’s mouth.

“And for what it’s worth, I like the freckle on your nose.”

That’s not where Dae kissed him, though. That was okay – mouth was better anyhow.
“I’m not angling for anything,” Chanyeol said, trying to sound all breezy and unconcerned, “I have no idea what you mean.”

It was great how Minseok supported his important relationship project after they’d cleaned up from dinner, maneuvering Jongdae to be in the middle on the sofa, his upper half in Chanyeol’s lap. It was so easy from there to let his fingers wander: down Jongdae’s arm and back again, up his neck to behind his ear, down Jongdae’s chest. Jongdae tried to act as if he was totally unaffected, but he went through his glass of wine at a high rate of speed and huffed when Min prevented his getting up by taking his glass to the kitchen for a refill.

Chanyeol took very brief pity on him, running fingers through Jongdae’s hair.

“Work okay?”

Jongdae’s expression was quiet, and he nuzzled into Chanyeol’s chest.

“Busy,” Jongdae said. “Busy today, busy tomorrow, busy for at least the next few weeks while we finalize the plans and they start construction.”

“Min wants to see it while it’s being built.”

“I do,” Minseok said, handing a full glass to Jongdae.

He leaned in to give Dae a lingering kiss.

“I’ll work it out, love,” Jongdae said.

Because of course he would. Their alpha.

Chanyeol watched him drink his wine and watch the two of them, cutting his eyes back and forth. Watched Minseok rub his shin.

He ran his fingers down Jongdae’s arm again, across his stomach, then up under his shirt, back and forth across the warm skin of Jongdae’s belly. He let his hand creep up slowly while he listened to the growing unevenness of Jongdae’s breath. He dragged his fingers up until he played idly with one nipple and Jongdae hissed.

“We’re low on side dishes,” he said.

Chanyeol pinched; Jongdae made a high noise in his throat and shifted.

“I noticed that,” Minseok said.

“Yeah, maybe I’ll cook some more tomorrow,” Chanyeol said, flicking one fingernail across that stiff nub while Jongdae stared up at him.

“That’d be great, Chan,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol gave Dae’s nipple one more pinch, then trailed his hand down, dipping under Jongdae’s waistband to cup his not-quite-soft dick. Jongdae bit his lip.

“Any requests, babe?” Chanyeol asked.

He looked down to see how the pet name would be received. Jongdae’s eyes were a little wide, staring up at him. When he didn’t answer right away, Chanyeol squeezed a bit and felt Jongdae harden under his hand, felt him shift over his legs.
“I like green onion salad,” Jongdae said, his voice breathy.

“Oh, that’s one of my favorites too,” Minseok said.

“Done,” Chanyeol said. “Anything else?”

By this point, Jongdae was well on his way toward hard, Chanyeol’s hand wrapped around him, stroking slowly. Minseok was watching out of the corner of his eye, his lips pursed in a way that meant he was holding back a smile. Jongdae shifted and sighed.

“No requests?” Chanyeol asked.

He briefly moved his hand faster, then slowed back down. Jongdae arched his back as if he was stretching. He took a long sip of wine.

“Seasoned radish,” he said in a rasp.

“Yeah?” Chanyeol said.

He tightened his hand, moved it incrementally faster.

“I really liked – “

Jongdae tossed his head.

“I really liked those anchovies you had, when – “

He gasped.

“When we first started going out. Channie.”

“I’ll make those for you, Dae.”

“Those were good,” Minseok said.

He peeled Jongdae’s joggers down his legs and watched Chanyeol’s hand move over Jongdae’s dick with a quiet smile on his face.

“Wasn’t that a nice surprise, babe? Finding out our Channie can cook?”

“Yeah,” Jongdae gasped after a minute. “It was good.”

“It was the next day – wasn’t it, Chan? – when Dae fucked you while you sucked me off, and he gave you that huge bite.”

Chanyeol’s hand tightened, moved faster. Jongdae shifted, and he bit his lip around a soft moan.

“It was,” Chanyeol said.

“That was a good day,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol watched Jongdae roll his eyes and toss his head.

“Lots of good days,” he said.

Minseok lowered his head and sucked the head of Jongdae’s dick.
“Fuck,” Jongdae said.

They worked him together, slow and steady: Minseok’s mouth and Chanyeol’s hand. Chanyeol had to take the wineglass away and put it on the floor. It was a good opportunity to shift everybody around enough to get his mouth on Jongdae’s.

“Min’s mouth feel good?” he whispered.

“Yeah.”

“You gonna let us make you come, Jongdae?”

Chanyeol kissed him before he could say anything, stroking hard but slower than he knew Dae liked with the slickness of Minseok’s spit easing things and Jongdae restless against him.

“You gonna answer, Jongdae?” Chanyeol rumbled when he lifted his head.

“You gonna let me?”

Minseok sucked hard, and Jongdae groaned.

“Come for us,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok’s hand wrapped around his own; Chanyeol let Min set the pace, his mouth and Chanyeol’s hand. Chanyeol looked down into Jongdae’s wide, dark eyes.

“Let it go, Dae,” he said.

Minseok hummed. Jongdae tipped his head back and moaned.

“I’m going to kiss you,” Chanyeol said. “I’m going to kiss you, and you’re going to come.”

Which was just how it went, with Minseok’s low, muffled laugh, Chanyeol driving his tongue deep into Jongdae’s mouth, and Dae clinging to him, groaning into him, letting them have him.
Chapter 50

One of the nicest things about Jongdae was that even when he was being the dumbest of dumb alphas, after an orgasm he was nothing but smiles and snuggles. It was fully within the guidelines of Operation Overwhelming Affection to hold onto a snuggly, post-coital Jongdae, pet his hair, and murmur all kinds of sweet nonsense into his sweet, nonsensical face.

In other words: a great evening.

Chanyeol even put forth the effort to heave himself out of bed when Dae was in the shower the next morning so he could start the coffeemaker and hang out a little.

“Why are you up?” Jongdae whispered at him.

Looking all unfairly attractive with his dress shirt untucked and his wet hair curling over his forehead.

“I wanted a proper hug before you go to work. So I figured I’d start the coffee.”

Jongdae shook his head, but he stepped into Chanyeol’s embrace, head tipped back to rest his chin on Chanyeol’s chest.

“Still in a mood, Chan?”

Chanyeol smoothed his hands down Dae’s back and cupped his ass.

“Might be a long-term mood,” he said.

Jongdae squinched up his nose. Maybe Jongdae meant it as a protest, but the expression was so adorable that Chanyeol kissed him anyway: slow and sleepy, both hands cradling the back of Jongdae’s head and Dae’s hands gripping the waistband of his pajama pants.

“There you go,” Jongdae said. “Now you maybe won’t miss me so much while I’m at work.”

Chanyeol pulled him closer, kissed his nose.

“You dummy, this is only going to make it worse.”

Chanyeol was happy to slide back under the blankets and curl around Minseok. He never really went back to sleep, though, and by the time Min stretched himself awake, Chanyeol was up on one elbow, having spent a very pleasant little while staring at a very beautiful face and combing gently through some well-loved hair.

“Are you watching me sleep?”

Chanyeol shrugged.

“You’re ridiculously handsome,” he said.

Minseok rolled onto his side, up against Chanyeol’s chest with a leg thrown over his hip.

“Flattery will get you everywhere,” he said.

Then he flopped back with a grin.
“After coffee.”

Chanyeol laughed.

“Lucky for you, I already made some!”

“Now see, Channie, it’s just this sort of thing that made me fall in love with you.”

“Oh, that’s how it is,” Chanyeol said, poking his bottom lip out. “It’s that and not my handsome face or large dick?”

Minseok poked him in the gut.

“Shame on you, using innocent coffee as bait to fish for compliments.”

“Oh my god, so witty, and you’re not even fully awake yet!”

Jokes and kisses – really the best way to start any day. Followed by coffee, toast, and kissing lazily in the shower with a wet, naked body pressed up against his. Chanyeol figured they were working up to yet another good day to add to the list. Jesus, his hand fit so perfectly into the small of Minseok’s back that it was like fate, he definitely could’ve stood there kissing under the warm water all day long.

“How about we not have sex right now?” Min said, punctuating this unfortunate statement by biting gently at Chanyeol’s lower lip, then soothing the spot with his tongue.

“That way we’ll be good and ready when Dae gets home.”

“Your words are saying one thing to me, and your hand around my dick is saying another.”

Minseok grinned, winked, and (after three hard, quick strokes that made Chanyeol gasp) removed his hand.

“Ugh, you’re the worst and the best,” Chanyeol said. “Give me that tongue.”

Not that each of them trying to make it impossible for the other to breathe really helped in the mixed-signals arena, but it felt good.

“I guess it’s a good idea,” Chanyeol said in and among dragging his lips over the curves of Min’s ear. “But you have to wash my hair to make it up to me.”

Minseok laughed.

“Of course, love.”

Min was more businesslike about the hair-washing business than Jongdae, but his fingers were strong enough to provide an excellent scalp scrub. Chanyeol clung to Min’s leg and enjoyed every second. After Min had tipped his chin backwards, one hand shielding his ears from the water, Chanyeol leaned in and placed a small kiss on the tip of Min’s soft cock.

“Thanks,” he said.

“Thank you,” Minseok murmured, smiling down at him.

“You two have ruined me forever for hair-washing and back-scrubbing,” Chanyeol said afterward.
“And lotioning, I’d imagine,” Minseok said, from his current position of rubbing lotion up and down Chanyeol’s back.

Chanyeol hummed his agreement.

“One of the things we liked about this apartment is this nice big bathroom and the separate tub,” Min said. “Jongdae spends half of every winter submerged in hot water.”

“Cute,” Chanyeol sighed.

Minseok laughed.

“Yeah, our first-choice apartment was closer to his office and had a huge garden tub that you probably could’ve fit into with him, Channie.”

Chanyeol’s imagining that extremely nice image was interrupted when felt Min shudder and turned around to see him wide-eyed and blinking rapidly, his mouth a little open.

“Fuck,” Min said. “We were so bummed not to get that place. Thank god we didn’t.”

He hugged Chanyeol. After a second, the ramifications of what he’d said hit Chanyeol, who hugged back hard enough to make Min grunt.

“Damn,” he said. “I should send flowers to that landlord for turning you down.”

Chanyeol couldn’t feel off-balance about it, though, for once in his life. The world felt too solid under his feet, with the memory of Jongdae’s mouth against his own from earlier and Minseok in his arms. He could only curve one hand over Min’s cheek and smile down into the warmth of Min’s gaze, savor the way Min nuzzled his face into Chanyeol’s palm and kissed his wrist.

They walked out together – Min to the butcher’s shop and Chanyeol to the grocery store. After a quick squeeze of hands at the subway station, Chanyeol put his earbuds in his ears and thoroughly enjoyed his day. He hummed to himself all through the grocery store. Back home, he couldn’t figure out Jongdae’s complex electronics setup and grabbed his portable speaker from – next door? his place? – and settled in for a deeply pleasant few hours of cooking.

When Min got home, Chanyeol was singing full voice along to one of his favorite J-rock albums, with a pair of tongs as a microphone. He turned around to see Min leaning against the wall by the door, arms crossed, smiling. Looking delicious with his flannel tied around his waist and his form-fitting black t-shirt. Chanyeol grinned around the blush that heated his face.

“You are,” Minseok said, “completely adorable. And your singing voice is lovely. I’m definitely going to kiss the shit out of you.”

It was nice that Min stalking across the room gave him time to set the tongs down in a safe place so they didn’t fall on the floor when Min grabbed him around the waist and kissed him until he wasn’t sure how gravity worked anymore. Minseok tasted like ginger and matcha tea; his hands were chilly on Chanyeol’s neck but his body warm where it was pressed up close.

“How was work?” Chanyeol murmured into the space between Minseok’s lips.

“Uneventful,” Minseok said, then licked his bottom lip. “My home smells delightful. How has your day been, sweetness?”

Chanyeol pulled him even closer, licked into Min’s mouth. Their tongues moving against one
another made Chanyeol feel like he could set could be set alight with one breath.

“It was good,” he said, hearing the gravel in his voice.

Oof.

“You know,” Chanyeol said later, when Min was sitting on the other side of the kitchen counter, grinning at him over a cold beer, “betas are supposed to be all calm and sensible and not make a person feel like they’re going to fall over sideways with lust at any given moment.”

“You tell yourself whatever you need to, Channie,” Minseok laughed.

But it was fun. He talked Min through the side dishes under production – anchovies, seasoned radish, sauce for green onion salad, marinated fernbrake, potatoes both sweet and spicy – and they chatted quietly. It was comfortable and happy.

Jongdae texted that he’d be late again, and for a moment the mood of the room deflated.

“Hey,” Minseok said. “Want to take dinner over to their office?”

There was a thing Chanyeol would never have thought of.

“Can we?”

“Yeah, of course. Even if they’re there half the night, they still need to eat.”

They had a good time, chatting softly through finishing all the side dishes and packing them away. Walking hand in hand to the subway station, sitting with their legs pressed together on the train.

“We have to get a salad, too,” Minseok said while they stood in the pizza shop, ordering. “In case Dae’s boss’s boss is there. Sunny will chew you up and spit you out with such a smile on her face that you’ll think she’s doing you a favor. I’ve never actually seen her eat a carb.”

Jongdae’s office building was one of the big skyscrapers downtown. They walked in with their bags and boxes, and Minseok asked the security guard for “Lee and Associates.” They stood around for a few minutes, until a beta lady bounced out of the elevator.

“Minseok!” she yelled. “It’s been way too long.”

She kissed him on the cheek, grinning widely. With her short hair, skinny pants, and vest, she was as cute as a button.

“You’ve got to be Chanyeol,” she said, looking him up and down.

“I am.”

“Well you’re even more adorable than anticipated! How the heck do you even deal with that smile, Min?”

“I’m basically putty in his hands,” Min said, the liar.

“Yeah, I bet. I’m Amber, Jongdae’s boss. What’s all this?”

“We brought dinner,” Minseok said.

“Because you’re awesome,” Amber said. “Here, give me a bag, let’s go feed some hungry
In the elevator, she pulled out her phone.

“Chanyeol, indulge a crazy person and smile for me.”

He did, and she took his picture.

“My girlfriend Sunyoung is super invested in this whole *Complete Love* thing you guys have going on, she’s going to scream when she sees how cute you are.”

The elevator doors opened; they stepped out, and Amber pulled her phone out again and grinned at it.

“Yep. Screaming. She’s the best.”

The best part of all that was how they got about 10 steps off the elevator to see Jongdae dash across from one office to another, then back out of his destination, staring with his mouth open.

“What are you doing here?” he said.

“We brought dinner,” Minseok said.

Jongdae had a bunch of paper in his hands, and half his shirt tail was hanging out. His glasses were barely hanging on at the end of his nose. He looked so startled – and handsome – that Chanyeol briefly lost the ability to stand up straight. Jongdae looked at Min, at Chanyeol, and back at Min.

“You brought? What?”

“Obviously you came just in time to save his blood sugar levels,” Amber said. “Let’s set this stuff up in the conference room.”

By the time they had put everything down and started to open boxes, Jongdae had recovered sufficiently to hang on Minseok’s arm for a minute and then on Chanyeol’s.

“You didn’t have to do this,” Jongdae murmured.

“Yeah, well, maybe Min and I like making you smile,” Chanyeol said.

That poor dumb alpha tried to screw his face into a grimace, but it didn’t last, and the smile Chanyeol wanted arrived. There were 8 or 10 people in the office, all of them happy to have dinner magically appear, and all of them thumping Jongdae on the shoulder over his excellent taste in boyfriends. Boss’s boss Sunny looked as fresh as if it was 8:00 a.m., holding a very tiny salad in one elegant hand and blinking slowly at Jongdae with a smirk. She seemed perfectly friendly, though.

“Ham and pineapple!” one engineer said. “Finally a decent set of pizza toppings.”

Jongdae rolled his eyes, and Chanyeol grinned at him.

Mostly the talk around the room was work-related, but Amber sat next to them, chatting up Minseok like they were old friends and asking Chanyeol a million questions about anything and everything. When they were nearly done eating, and Jongdae was leaning against Min with his fingers tangled lightly with Chanyeol’s, she sighed at them.

“Look at you guys,” she said. “Oh my gosh, it’s so romantic.”
Jongdae’s cheeks were slightly flushed.

“Yeah, pretty much like a fairy tale,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae’s cheeks darkened considerably at that, and Minseok smiled while Amber laughed.

“Render’s done!” someone called out soon after, and all the engineers trooped over to an office. Chanyeol and Minseok tidied up to the soundtrack of groans from the other room.

“I can’t figure out what the problem is,” someone said.

“There’s a bug in the damn code,” someone else said.

“We’re not going to find it tonight,” Sunny said. “This is more than a two-hour fix. Everybody go home, get some rest, and we’ll comb through it starting tomorrow morning.”

They all slouched back into the conference room, a couple of people morosely pawing back through the pizza boxes.

“I suppose you won’t let me reimburse you for dinner?” Sunny asked.

Minseok shook his head.

“Well, thank you. We needed to clear our heads. Now take Jongdae home, we’ve all been here long enough today.”

Amber shooed them out, offering to clean up. In the elevator, Jongdae stared at the two of them like he still couldn’t believe they were all in the same space.

“Long day, love?” Min asked.

He put his arm around Jongdae’s waist; Dae leaned into it, eyes closed briefly while he rested his cheek against Min’s hair.

“Frustrating,” he said. “We’re so close to done, but one of the efficiency numbers keeps coming out weird in the simulations, and nobody can figure out where the problem is.”

He sighed.

“We’re gonna have to go through the code line by line to try to find it, ugh.”

None of that made any sense to Chanyeol, but it sounded tedious and awful. Jongdae squeezed Min.

“Damn, it was good to see you.”

“Oh yeah?” Minseok said. “How much of me do you want to see?”

Jongdae grinned over at Chanyeol.

“All? I’m thinking all, Chan, what about you?”

“All sounds good to me.”

By the time they all climbed into the car, negotiations were in full swing.

“You cannot be unaware that the current blowjob tally is completely out of balance.”
"Min. Babe. It’s not my fault that your instinctive response to my stressing out about work is to deep-throat my dick."

"It’s an effective way to shut you up."

"How could that possibly be more effective than putting your dick in my mouth? That logic totally fails. And you know your dick is one of my top three favorite things I like to put in my mouth, along with pizza and pancakes."

"Uh, excuse me," Chanyeol said from the back seat.

"Oh shit," Jongdae said.

Minseok cracked up.

"I’m so sorry, Chanyeol, you know I’m a big fan of your big dick."

Chanyeol tried to hold his affronted facial expression, but it was pretty precarious.

"I mean, I also have a fucking tongue, but I guess you don’t appreciate that either."

"Dammit," Jongdae said while Minseok bent over in the passenger seat with his hands over his face and his shoulders quivering.

"I’m going to have to redo all my math! I can’t believe I left out kissing, that’s definitely better than pancakes."

"But not pizza?" Min choked out around his giggling.

"It’s maybe better than pizza," Jongdae said. "Unless pineapple is involved, and then definitely."

"Wow," Chanyeol said. "Dismissing my dick, my kisses, and my pizza toppings of choice, all in one go. I thought it usually upset you to make me cry, Jongdae, I’m disappointed."

He could see the smile crinkles at the corners of Jongdae’s eyes in the rear-view mirror.

"Gosh, Channie, how can I make it up to you?"

Minseok turned around to grin at him. Chanyeol gave the fakest of fake sighs.

"I guess if you kiss me a lot and tell me how great I am, maybe that would make me feel better," he said.

"I’ll put forth my best effort," Jongdae said.

"And."

"Uh oh."

"And I might have to come in your ass."

"It’s only what I deserve for my terrible behavior," Jongdae said.

"Okay," he said when they were inside, removing shoes and jackets, ticking them off on his fingers, "so I’m supposed to suck Min’s dick, kiss on Chan and compliment him until he squeaks or whatever, and get my ass reamed. Anything else?"
“I guess in the interest of efficiency you could fuck me while Chan’s going at you,” Minseok said. Chanyeol didn’t mean to say “ooo!” out loud, but he totally did.

“It is a work night,” Jongdae said. “And we’re supposed to go to the gym in the morning.”

“So there you go, better add that to the list,” Chanyeol said.

“Whew, making me work for my dinner,” Jongdae said.

“And if you’re passing out compliments,” Minseok said, “it’s not like I ever get tired of hearing how awesome I am.”

“Ah,” Jongdae said.

He slung one arm around Min’s waist and pulled him in close.

“I suppose you want to be kissed too?”

“Only if my tongue is one of your favorite things to have in your mouth.”

Jongdae’s fingers against Min’s neck and the smile on his face when he leaned in to kiss Minseok inspired Chanyeol to just go ahead and take most of his clothes off. Since it was a work night, and they were trying to multitask.

“Now, see, look at this,” Jongdae said when they came up for air and he glanced over. “This chest you’ve got going on here, Channie. Every time I see it, all I want to do is bite it.”

And then did so, which was great, especially since it was accompanied by a pair of hands roaming over him and the view of Minseok stripping in the background. Min took a turn nipping at his ribcage when Dae pulled Chanyeol down for a kiss.

“Jesus,” Jongdae said. “What’s with my harem getting naked without me? I already said I was going to tell you both how great you are, you don’t have to work this hard.”

“I wish I were harder,” Minseok said, with an exaggerated sigh. “I probably would be, too, if you had your mouth where it’s supposed to be.”

“This is a problem,” Jongdae said. “I have too many mouth-related tasks to take care of at once.”

He grabbed their wrists and dragged them to the bedroom. Chanyeol and Minseok grinned at one another and let themselves be pulled along. He pushed Chanyeol onto the bed first and climbed over him.

“You know I want to kiss you all the time,” Jongdae said.

Dae licked over his bottom lip. His fingers skated so lightly over Chanyeol’s face and neck that Chanyeol shivered.

“Since the second I walked into your apartment and saw you lying there naked, with your face all red and your eyes wide, this absolutely beautiful cock – “

he wrapped his hand around the organ in question –

“ –just begging for my mouth.”
Chanyeol tried to unbutton Jongdae’s shirt while being kissed halfway to unconsciousness for the fourth or fifth time that day. It took a few tries, and a few tries more to fumble Jongdae’s belt loose and get one hand down his pants. Jongdae raised his head and stared down at him.

“And you know, Channie, none of that would mean a damn thing if you weren’t also sweet and funny and fun to be around.”

Jongdae’s voice was deep and warm, and Chanyeol melted into the mattress, all the air knocked out of him.

“Min calls you sweetness,” he said, dipping his head down so his breath warmed Chanyeol’s ear. “It’s the perfect name for you, Chan. With your big heart and your warm smile.”

Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s tongue against his neck.

“And the way your scent makes me crazy for you. Channie.”

Who was supposed to be overwhelming whom with affection, again? Chanyeol couldn’t even remember. He tangled his fingers in Jongdae’s hair and lifted his chin while Jongdae’s mouth moved over his skin. Minseok smiled down, placed one hand on the top of Chanyeol’s head.

“All correct,” Min said.

Jongdae lifted his head.

“And you,” he said. “You filthy, beautiful fucker.”

Chanyeol had to laugh at the change in tone as Jongdae pulled Min down and crawled on top of him.

“Every year that goes by you get nothing but hotter.”

He kissed along Minseok’s collarbones.

“Can’t believe I don’t have to fight off half the world over you, Min. You’re like a magnet, even the light’s drawn to you, the sun doesn’t rise for me in the morning until I’ve seen you.”

“Wow,” Chanyeol said.

Min laughed, and Chanyeol briefly felt bad for ruining the moment, until he looked down at Jongdae’s grin.

“What you didn’t think I could be romantic?”

He pulled Chanyeol down into a kiss.

“With mates like the two of you, of course I’ve gone all gooey and romantic.”

He licked at Chanyeol’s bottom lip.

“Jongdae,” Min said. “Please.”

Jongdae smiled into Chanyeol’s mouth.

“I have a job to do, Channie.”

Chanyeol watched while Jongdae took Min into his mouth – licked at him, sucked until Minseok
squirmed. After a couple of minutes, he fetched out the lube from their nightstand and set it nearby. He leaned down to set his teeth gently into one of Min’s nipples until Minseok grabbed his hair, then he sucked hard, felt Min writhe and heard Jongdae hum. He ran his fingers over the ridges of Minseok’s abs, down the hollow at the center of his chest. Dragged one fingernail across Min’s collarbone and kissed him.

“You want to come like this, love?” Jongdae asked in a hoarse voice.

Minseok tilted his head away from Chanyeol’s mouth.

“No. I want to come with you in me.”

Jongdae licked Minseok’s cock and grinned at Chanyeol.

“Want to make it hard for me to concentrate, Channie?”

Did he ever – especially if Dae was going to get up on his knees like that with his ass in the air. It was a great view, watching Minseok toss his head and spread his legs wide while he pulled at the sheets; watching Jongdae’s head bob up and down; and watching his own fingers sliding in and out of Dae’s ass.

“God, you’re both so beautiful,” he said.

Minseok arched his back and smiled briefly, before it turned into a gasp.

“Yeah, Channie?”

Chanyeol ran his free hand up Jongdae’s back, dragged his nails back down. Jongdae shuddered.

“I can’t wait to be inside you.”

Jongdae’s head paused, but Chanyeol could see the tension in his arm, and Minseok tipped his head back, mouth open. Chanyeol waited until all that tension released before he curled his two fingers forward and drove them in hard. Jongdae made a low sound in the back of his throat, and his head dipped forward.

“Fuck,” Min said. “Fuck, stop, stop, I don’t want to come yet, Jongdae, please.”

Dae lifted his head and panted against Minseok’s leg, then gave a high moan when Chanyeol’s third finger entered him.

“Thought you’d be looser, Min,” he gasped. “Did you fuck Chan this morning? Or did you suck each other off?”

Chanyeol laughed under his breath and bit one of Jongdae’s splendidly round ass cheeks, getting a nice growl in response.

“Didn’t,” Min said. “Waited for you.”

“Wanted you,” Chanyeol added.

“Fuck,” Jongdae said. “Fuck, come on, get in me, Chanyeol.”

“Not yet.”

Jongdae whined and Minseok swore, but too bad.
“I want to be standing up,” Chanyeol said. “You have to be good and ready.”

Minseok looked delighted.

“Gonna fuck me hard, Chan?”

“I am.”

It really did seem to take fucking forever to get Jongdae ready. Minseok didn’t seem to realize that he kept shifting around to match the movement of Dae’s hand, and Jongdae had been shaking steadily for a couple of minutes.

Finally, he dragged his hand free. Jongdae moaned while Chanyeol hauled him toward the end of the bed, ass still up in the air.

“Yes,” Min hissed.

He flopped onto his stomach and scuttled down until he was crouched under Jongdae. If he’d been any bigger, it never would’ve worked, but he was just the perfect size, bent over his own knees, the two of them groaning aloud when Jongdae slid inside him. Looking down, Chanyeol could just see the top of Min’s head over Jongdae’s shoulder and Jongdae’s hand gripping his arm.

“Beautiful.”

He guided himself into Jongdae. Heat and pressure, it was so fucking good, and Jongdae gave a long exhale. Staying still took everything in him.

“Tell me when I can go.”

“Do it, Channie.”

Standing up, one hand braced on Jongdae’s shoulder, Chanyeol had all the leverage he needed to put all those leg exercises to their best possible use. He dragged out and slammed back in so hard that Minseok was the one who made a small, choked sound. That detonated the inside of Chanyeol’s brain – there wasn’t a single higher thought left, just the slide of his dick and the slap of his skin against Jongdae’s ass. The wood of the floor under his feet, Jongdae’s shoulder muscles shifting under his hand and the ferocious pace he set making his thighs burn.

Over the roar of his own blood in his ears, Chanyeol could hear Jongdae chanting “fuck” over and over and Minseok’s panting breath. He went harder, and Jongdae’s cursing went up half an octave. Min reached up to the hand on Jongdae’s shoulder and grasped it in a punishing grip.

He smacked Jongdae’s ass; Jongdae cried out, and Chanyeol felt his hips tip back by just a hair. Dae cried out again. Chanyeol went harder, and it wasn’t long after that before Jongdae tried to thrash, pinned between the two of them, saying,

“Fuck, come on, Jesus Channie I’m – ah, come on, just a little faster.”

Minseok made a soft, dirty little laugh, and Jongdae flat-out yelled, trying to fight against Chanyeol’s grip on his hip and shoulder and Minseok’s sudden hold on his wrists.

“Minseok,” he cried out, “Min, oh god, fuck, Min.”

Chanyeol felt him come, that squeeze even better all around him. But there was still Min to consider, and he was the one driving. So he kept going, while Jongdae sobbed on every exhale.
“There it is,” Min said. “Yeah, Channie, you piledrive him into me, I’m – “

and that devolved into a long groan while Jongdae cried out sharply again, with,

“Ah, god, Min.”

And he squeezed all over again. The world whited out. Chanyeol tipped his head back, and pleasure screamed out of him, figuratively and literally, until he had to lean his knees against the bed or risk falling over on top of them both.

“I’m just going to stay here for the rest of the week,” Jongdae said eventually.

Which sounded like an excellent idea.

“Next time we do this, I get to be in the middle,” Min said from the bottom of the pile.

“How do you sound so perky?” Chanyeol croaked.

“I didn’t have to do any of the work,” Minseok said. “Aside from this mess in my lap, I’m as fresh as a cherry blossom.”

“That means you have to do most of the cleanup,” Jongdae said.

“Well, shit.”
A thing Chanyeol enjoyed about Operation Overwhelming Affection was that he was allowing himself to give in to all his dorkiest instincts. So when Jongdae texted “BUG FOUND” around 10:30 on Wednesday, after the initial flurry of congratulatory gifs, Chanyeol searched around on the internet until he found a kids’ science website with a page full of lame bug jokes. Then he sent a new one to the group chat every 20 minutes until he’d used up all the good ones.

For a generous description of “good.”

It was great, because Jongdae played along at being increasingly horrified by things like “what did one flea say to the other: should we walk or take the dog?” and “why did they kick the butterfly out of the dance? because it was a moth ball,” but also he learned that his super cool and sexy murder beta boyfriend had the sense of humor of a really nerdy grandpa.

Chanyeol hadn’t known that he’d been waiting this whole time to see Minseok rolling around on the sofa with his hands over his mouth laughing over terrible jokes. But it was extremely awesome.

“How is it that you can make every text sound so dirty?” Chanyeol asked.

“Because mentally you hear them in my voice, and I’m always going for maximum flirt around the two of you.”

A midafternoon date called for all his jewelry, of course. Chanyeol put the three black spring rings in a line up one earlobe, topped by the little helix cuff, just to balance out the heavy triangle nestled in his other ear.

“I like that,” Min said, very nicely running his fingers over Chanyeol’s ears until he shivered. “I like how you always wear those black rings in a different configuration.”

“We need a non-eating date at some point so I can wear one on my lip again.”

Minseok’s eyes went half-lidded and dark.

“Oh yes, Channie. We definitely do.”

He was a little cold – the only sweater he had with a v-neck low enough to show his necklace was pretty thin – but it was worth it, given the way that Min’s eyes kept going to his throat. And the way that Jongdae’s grin went broad when they walked up.
“Finished your simulations?” Min asked while they briefly tangled their fingers together.

“Done and dusted,” Dae said. “We were gonna go out for celebratory drinks, but then we all decided we couldn’t stand to look at each other anymore. So now I get to get my day drinking on with raw fish and the country’s two hottest boyfriends, which is way better.”

“Mmm, no, you don’t have the two hottest boyfriends in the country,” Chanyeol said.

“Beg to fucking differ.”

“I am a fire safety professional and an omega, Jongdae, I know way more about all things heat-related than you ever will, and I’m telling you right now that the person with the two hottest boyfriends in the country is me.”

Minseok laughed while Jongdae was doing annoyed eyebrows at the top of his face and goldfish mouth at the bottom. It was super cute.

“Starting out like you’re going to argue with me and then turn it into a compliment, what is that?” Jongdae grumbled.

“You like it,” Chanyeol said with a grin.

Jongdae glared at him.

“I admit to nothing.”

But he looked pleased, wrapping his arm around Chanyeol’s waist for a squeeze.

“Finished simulations” seemed to mean that they had combined all the plans for pieces of the solar array into a cohesive blueprint, and construction would begin soon.

“And how long will that take?”

“Months,” Jongdae said. “Six months, minimum. Probably more like eight. The building’s not even due to open for tenants for a year.”

He grinned and poured himself another cup of sake.

“Before that’ll be a very fancy party and finally I’ll get to see you walking around in that uniform.”

“And even better, take it off of him,” Min said.

Jongdae grinned. Chanyeol tilted his head to the side and blinked slowly.

“Gonna dance with me?” he asked, pitching his voice low and soft.

Jongdae’s ears turned so red.

“Can you dance, Channie?” Minseok asked. “Because if not, that might be unfortunate for everyone’s toes.”

“Argh,” Jongdae said.

His ears were still pretty red. Chanyeol put his arm around Dae’s neck.

“I’m a terrible dancer. You know I have more leg than good sense.”
“That sounds treacherous.”

Chanyeol nuzzled Jongdae’s cheek.

“We’ll stick to what we’re good at.”

He sucked on Dae’s earlobe a little, just for good measure. Then leaned back and pushed his empty sake up forward.

Minseok laughed.

“Min, is there some reason you know of that Channie’s been trying to drive me crazy the past couple days?” Jongdae asked while he refilled Chanyeol’s cup.

“Oh dear, do you feel crazy?”

Under the table, Chanyeol curled one hand very slowly over the top of Jongdae’s thigh.

“Very,” Dae sighed.

“Maybe I’m just happy,” Chanyeol murmured.

He laid his head on Dae’s shoulder. Minseok was smiling over the rim of his sake cup. Chanyeol felt Jongdae’s arm go around his waist.

“I want you to be happy,” Jongdae said, his voice sounding a little gruff.

Chanyeol lifted his head and kissed Jongdae’s cheek with a loud smack.

“Well great! I totally am.”

He drank his sake and ate a few edamame while Jongdae shook his head.

“You’re a menace,” he said finally.

“So I’ve been told,” Chanyeol said. “Usually by my noona or Baekhyun, and usually after I’ve dropped something breakable or messy.”

All very good, especially when they all got to laughing about the bug jokes, Chanyeol brought out even more terrible ones just to send Minseok into fits, and Jongdae tried to put a stop to it by shoving sushi into Chanyeol’s mouth. And of course, once he started with the whole feeding thing, his cheeks got pink and Chanyeol and Minseok both got spoiled rotten.

“Any chance we can convince you to take tomorrow off?” Min asked at one point.

He leaned in so his head was lower than Dae’s, and Chanyeol thought he detected actual eyelash fluttering. He for sure would’ve agreed to just about anything at the moment, between that mischievous face and Min’s husky voice.

“Don’t you have to go to the shop?” Jongdae squeaked.

“I’m sure I could switch shifts, and Channie doesn’t go in until evening.”

Minseok tilted his head to one side and smiled with only one side of his mouth. Chanyeol lost feeling in his extremities.
“I am so lucky,” Jongdae said. “The faces the two of you pull out to make me do stuff are so irresistible, it’s a good thing you both have a strong moral character or I’d end up robbing banks and shit.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, I don't even have any wiles to use on you,” Chanyeol said. He crossed his arms on the table and laid his head atop them, looking up with wide eyes.

“But it sure would be fun to spend the whole day together.”

“God!” Jongdae laughed. “Awful! Both of you! Fine!”

The two of them spent a few minutes on their phones. In the absence of his own schedule change, Chanyeol consolidated their remaining food and stacked empty dishes, refilled everyone’s sake cup.

“You pile up plates like someone with extensive waitstaff experience,” Minseok said.

“Bus boy, mostly,” Chanyeol said, “but yeah, of course, I grew up in my mom’s restaurant. I’d spend every afternoon there until Dad came to pick me up and take me home.”

“That’s nice to imagine.”

“Oh, I did my fair share of complaining about it, having to bus tables when I didn’t have a lot of homework and eating fancy food instead of cup noodles and convenience-store kimbap with my friends. But they all seem like good memories when I look back on them now.”

“I gotta say, I really envy your family stories sometimes,” Jongdae said to the table.

Chanyeol looked at Minseok, at the quiet concern on his face and the way he reached out so his fingertips touched Jongdae’s. Operation Overwhelming Affection wasn’t just about being cute. Love wasn’t just about that.

“You’re already in, Jongdae,” Chanyeol said. “You don’t have to envy it.”

Jongdae directed his surprise at the table, and the frown that followed it. When the frown looked as if it might settle in for a while, Chanyeol decided that maybe an anti-allergy remedy was necessary for that dose of feelings.

“You’ll be able to tell when noona takes up picking on you.”

Jongdae snorted and rubbed the bridge of his nose, then turned a wry smile on Chanyeol.

“What’s sad is that I’ll probably love that.”

“You are a glutton for punishment,” Minseok said.

“I’m hoping you’ll punish me later.”

And there was Jongdae back with them.

They laughed over the remaining sushi and walked around for a bit afterward, just because the sun hadn’t set yet and the light was so pretty. After they stumbled onto a churro cart – “when the universe sends you dessert, you eat it,” Minseok said – Jongdae held Chanyeol’s hand for a couple of blocks. Min looked at their interlaced fingers and smiled. Chanyeol floated his way down the street.
He even kind of thought, later that evening, lying next to Jongdae, when Dae reached up and pushed his hair to one side with gentle fingers, that he understood what Minseok had meant by Jongdae staring like he was “some kind of precious object,” and he had to lean in for a kiss so that his mouth didn’t betray him too soon and startle his dumb, wonderful alpha.

Minseok came over and lay down on top of them both, wearing that small, quiet smile of his. Giving out kisses equally distributed to each of them and whispering praise until Chanyeol squirmed – not because he was embarrassed, but just because he couldn’t take anymore awesome without possibly exploding.

Min was the one who woke them up for slow, sleepy sex in the morning, all of them fumbling around mostly not-awake, so that Chanyeol almost thought he was dreaming, except that Jongdae’s mouth was too warm and wet to not be real, and of course dreams never quite got the sensation of suction right. Tasting himself on Dae’s tongue woke him up fully, so he could enjoy watching and helping Dae out while Min had his thighs.

“Best way to start a morning,” Jongdae sighed afterward.

And then tried to give Chanyeol a heart attack by licking his own come off Chanyeol’s hand.

“Jesus, keep that up and we’re going straight to round two,” Chanyeol croaked.

Jongdae wagged his eyebrows and bit Chanyeol’s finger.

“Oh no, coffee,” Minseok growled.

They lounged around and made out for half the morning while Min and Dae congratulated themselves on their impromptu day off. They spent a couple of hours at some batting cages, which mostly meant Minseok cleaning the floor with his boyfriends. Chanyeol was slightly pissed, because he’d always thought he was pretty decent with a bat, but of course he paled in comparison to that jerk Kim Minseok, who could do anything, apparently.

Of course, the way Min’s body twisted smoothly every time he swung was pretty great to watch, so that made up in part for the point discrepancy.

“I’m so bad at all this crap,” Jongdae laughed.

“That’s okay, we’re really only looking at your ass, anyhow,” Min said.

“True,” Chanyeol said.

Trying to bat with his ass stuck out far back to show it off made Jongdae’s score markedly worse. Nice view, though.

“This has been a great few days,” Chanyeol said later, when they were back home with bowls of black-bean noodles with Complete Love (several episodes back, since nobody remembered what was going on) playing.

“It really has been good,” Jongdae said. “I kept trying to be stressed out from work, but I feel like you two keep spoiling me. I don’t know what I did to deserve it, but I hope I keep it up.”

Minseok winked at Chanyeol. Dae really was making Operation Overwhelming Affection so easy.

“Maybe you just intrinsically deserve it by being awesome,” Chanyeol said.
“Occam’s Razor,” Minseok said. “The simplest solution is often the correct one.”

“Shut up,” Jongdae said.

Like his blush didn’t give him away.
Chapter 52

“I really like the full Chanyeol experience,” Minseok said while he drove Chanyeol to the station.

Chanyeol grinned. Given that Min was driving, the only thing available to hug was the bag full of side-dish containers in his lap, so Chanyeol hugged that.

“I thought you were just naturally a little bit hesitant. To see how funny and affectionate you are when you’re confident is so endearing, sweetness.”

Food containers were not very comfortable to hug, but for pity’s sake, what else was he supposed to do?

Minseok put the car in park and reached over to take his hand.

“I don’t think you’ll have to wait six months for Jongdae.”

Chanyeol took a deep breath. It didn’t do anything for his light-headedness at all.

“And if I hadn’t been besotted before, I definitely would be now.”

With all this making out Chanyeol did with his boyfriends in the driveway of the firehouse, he was going to get a reputation. Awesome.

He floated on a cloud of pure happiness into the station, lips still tingling, and plowed straight into Sehun, who smirked at him. Though, to be fair, Sehun’s face kind of naturally looked that way.

“Every time I see you, you look happier than the last time,” Sehun said. “It’s grossing me out.”

“I know,” Chanyeol said.

He shoved the bag of side dishes into Sehun’s arms.

“Grossing you out with sheer jealousy.”

Sehun glared.

Chanyeol grinned.

“What do you want me to do with these?” Sehun asked, sighing.

“Just put them on the counter. I want to put them away so I know where everything is. I assume I’m on breakfast duty tomorrow.”

“Correct.”

Chanyeol got everything put away neatly before the shift-change meeting, which he spent with one leg draped over Baekhyun’s lap, making it heavier and heavier until Baek started to slide forward and pinched him. That earned them both a glare from Taeyong, but whatever. He was C team’s leader, not theirs. Anyway, the bell rang, and off they sped to a false alarm at an office building.

“Honestly, does anyone pay attention to the ‘no popcorn’ signs on office microwaves?” Joonmyun
complained.

Chanyeol didn’t know what that reminded him of the wine-of-the-month club, but as they put their gear away, he told Joonie all about it.

“Oh, the zinfandel, right? You liked it?”

“Hyung, how do you even say that word? But yeah, it was really good. Minseok made the spicy chicken recipe that came with it, it was great. They were tasty together.”

Joonmyun smiled.

“I always wish I could cook when I get my shipment, the recipes sound so good.”

Chanyeol grabbed his arms.

“Oh! You should definitely come over some time! Min and I’ll cook, and you and Dae can nerd out about the wine! It’d be really fun!”

Joon blinked at him as if he had been hit by a mild typhoon. For a second, Chanyeol felt a flash of embarrassment, and he let go of his enthusiastic grip on Joonmyun’s arms. But Joonie smiled.

“I think that sounds terrific, Yeol.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, of course. You ask them, and we’ll figure out a date.”

He patted Chanyeol’s arm.

“That’s a great idea, I’m so pleased that you asked.”

The nice thing about tiny little boring calls was that it made everyone feel as if they’d done their work without anybody being traumatized, so the evening was kind of boisterous. There were numerous cut-throat card games, a demand for Chanyeol to make approximately a vat of tteokbokki, and a devolution into chaos that ended with Chanyeol throwing Baekhyun into the shower. Which really just meant that Chanyeol got a fully clothed, cold shower too, but he was the one in control, so it didn’t count.

“You’re an asshole,” Baekhyun shrieked, and finally got in a good enough kick that Chanyeol let go.

“It never fails to amaze and disappoint me how similar my job is to my noona’s,” Taeyong said, surveying the damage with Joonmyun. “She’s a preschool teacher.”

Still, it was mostly worth it, even though Chanyeol had to scrub down the bathroom as punishment. He did feel a little bad, watching Baekhyun try to shake water out of his ears all evening.

C team took the medical call that came in before anybody went to bed. B team had a car crash around midnight – just a single car, but gruesome enough to take the wind out of Chanyeol’s sails a little bit and mess with his sleep so that he felt pretty rough when it was time to get up and make breakfast.

What was really surprising was that Baek dragged himself out of bed too.

He wasn’t a coffee drinker, so Chanyeol made up a mug of citron tea for him – not Baek’s favorite, but the ginger would perk him up, at least. Baek took the mug with a strange expression on his face.
“You still pissed about last night?” Chanyeol asked. “Because I saw a tiny bit of brisket in the back of the fridge, and I’m totally willing to cook it up just for you to buy your forgiveness.”

“Yeol,” Baekhyun said.

His voice sounded kind of hoarse, maybe he had taken the car wreck really hard.

“Yeah?”

Baek set his mug down and stood up, peering up into Chanyeol’s eyes like he was searching for something. He must’ve found it, because he squeezed Chanyeol tight. Of course Chanyeol hugged him back, because best-friend hugs were the third-best kind, after boyfriend hugs and mom hugs.

“You’re back,” he said.

“What? Back from where?”

Baekhyun laughed against his chest.

“I don’t know. Mars? What’s the planet of suffering? You didn’t apologize once, Yeol, you just offered to bribe me with tasty meat. Do you know how long it’s been since your first instinct wasn’t to grovel?”

Oh.

Chanyeol thought back.

“Probably about – two years and four months?”

Baek laughed again.

“I missed you.”

Chanyeol squeezed him until Baekhyun squeaked.

“I think I missed me too.”

So that was cool, because he got to talk about Operation Overwhelming Affection, which made Baekhyun laugh until he fell off his chair. Also, it was just great to talk about how much fun he was having. How head-over-heels, music-swelling, soft-movie-filter in love he was.

“God,” Baekhyun said. “You’ve been waiting your whole life for people to let you be as gooey as you want.”

“Right?”

“I personally feel like I need to brush my teeth now just to prevent cavities, but that’s awesome, Yeollie.”

The talk reminded Chanyeol that there was another grandpa hanging around, and he sent the page of bug jokes to Joonie. Sadly, this backfired. He should’ve waited until after breakfast, when Joonmyun no longer had a captive audience to torment.

That day was exciting, because for the second time in his career, Chanyeol got to help deliver a baby, which was sticky and alarming and definitely not anything anyone would want to do on the shoulder of a bridge over the Han River in the middle of the afternoon, but the little girl was on her
own schedule. He mostly just hung onto the beta mom while she cried and pushed (and cussed out her mate over the phone), but Baek handed the pup over after he’d cut the cord, and Chanyeol held her on his knees while she screamed, wiping her clean with one towel and wrapping her snugly in a second one. She was so indignant to be out where it was cold and bright. She was so tiny that he could almost hold her in one hand, and he couldn’t help getting a bit misty as he handed her to her mom, just in time for the ambulance to arrive from one direction and the dad from another.

He didn’t want to bear – he’d had to memorize all the stuff about male omegas’ bad health outcomes from pregnancies for camp, when he’d been at an impressionable enough age for that sense of dread to really stick. And just the past spring, A team had been on a call similar to this one that hadn’t ended happily for the omega dad or the pup. Siwon and Yesung had sat on him for an entire day, solemn-faced and too upset even to change out of their bloody clothes for the first couple of hours. He’d had a member of the A team within grabbing distance for the rest of that entire shift, like they didn’t want to let him out of their sight: which told him everything he needed to know about what happened, even if he very carefully didn’t ask for details.

But that tiny, vibrant life squirming in his hands made a scary little flutter deep in his chest. Like maybe this was a topic he could think about now. Whether someday he might want to have his own family. Whether – just maybe – his loves might want that too. Someday. Because it sure did seem like they were all planning to have a lot of somedays together.

Oof.

“That’s like the best part of our job,” Baek said after the ambulance had left.

“Blech, how do you figure?” Sehun groused.

Chanyeol kicked him.

“What? It’s so messy!”

Baekhyun took the towel he’d been using to wipe his hands and threw it at Sehun’s face.

Still, it was so exciting that he had to call Min and Dae, who were very nice about listening to him say some variety of “and she was so tiny – no, seriously, you don’t understand, she was so, so small” about 75 times without even making (much) fun of him.

“Got fun weekend plans?” Chanyeol asked, and even he could hear the little bit of sigh in his voice.

“Running out my sexual frustration?” Jongdae said.

Then he made a choked sound, and Chanyeol could picture a number of things Minseok might’ve been doing to him at the moment.

“Getting punished for my sins?” Jongdae amended.

Minseok laughed, low and filthy, in the background.

“Jeez, send pictures.”

It was quite a picture. Chanyeol had never hog-tied anybody with a belt before, but it was a good look on Jongdae. And at the rate he was going, he was going to have to lock down his phone 7 different ways to keep anybody from ever seeing his photo folder ever.

On Saturday evening, Chanyeol got back from a very unpleasant factory fire (biohazards and
treacherous equipment galore) to find an actual voicemail from Jongdae, asking him to call.
Chanyeol’s guts dropped to the center of the earth briefly.

“You okay?” he blurted when Jongdae answered.

Jongdae’s chuckle was quarter-hearted at best.

“Yeah, sorry to startle you. It’s just. We’ve been summoned. By my father.”

Jongdae sounded so glum that Chanyeol’s urge to comfort outweighed his nervousness for the moment.

“Summoned for what?”

Dae sighed.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be so dramatic about it. Just dinner, Chan.”

“Just” dinner.

“The three of us?”

And there was Dae’s miserable little laugh again.

“No. He won’t see Min. Just you and me.”

“Okay. My work schedule’s in the calendar. Just let me know when.”

The pause lasted half of forever.

“You sure, Channie?”

“You’ve met my parents, why would I make a fuss over meeting yours? I’m excited to meet your mom.”

“My mom’s not the issue.”

“Yeah, well. I’ll put on the manners I use when the big brass comes to the station. It’ll be fine.”

He was terrified all the way down to his bone marrow, but he wasn’t about to tell Jongdae that.

“Channie – “

“It’ll be fine, Dae.”

“It’ll probably be a fucking nightmare, but I can’t say no.”

After a lot of back and forth via text while Jongdae was on the phone with his mom, they worked out a plan for dinner on Tuesday, giving each of them plenty of time to fret beforehand, hooray. The rest of Chanyeol’s shift was taken up by a bunch of uneventful little calls and cooking. He and Baekhyun talked a couple more times, draped over each other on one of the sofas or Baek perched on the kitchen counter.

So Chanyeol wasn’t tired when he knocked on their door Sunday night – not that that prevented him from falling into their arms anyway.

“Why didn’t you use your key?” Min said, sounding a very little bit strained while Chanyeol leaned
“I dunno, I feel weird just letting myself in while you guys are here. I don’t want to interrupt.”

“Interrupt?” Jongdae yelled.

And then chased Chanyeol around the living room, knocked him down, and sat on him.

“Quit being dumb, Chanyeol.”

“Is this the part where I talk about getting the nonsense fucked out of me?”

“Yes!”

“Seriously? On the floor? When we have a perfectly nice bed in the other room?” Minseok asked a few minutes later.

Which was kind of a bummer at first, though in the end probably best for Chanyeol’s knees.

He and Min talked a lot throughout the day on Monday about the very few interactions Minseok had had with Jongdae’s family. It made Chanyeol depressed.

“I tried for a long time to convince myself that he acts the way he does out of concern for Jongdae,” Min said after one particularly unpleasant story involving a surprise visit from Dae’s father to Minseok’s job.

“But ultimately, I just couldn’t care anymore. He’s an asshole. He hurts my mate. If a piano fell on his head, I wouldn’t be sorry. Though I suppose that for Jongdae’s mom’s sake, I wouldn’t actually push the piano.”

Jongdae was moody and twitchy all evening. He kept getting up to pace around the living room and drank more than he usually did on a work night. Chanyeol felt like the hair on the back of his neck was permanently on end. When Min left for the shop on Tuesday, Chanyeol called his mom.

“I just hate that,” she said when Chanyeol had rambled his way through all his worries.

“Your Jongdae is so sweet, and it’s obvious how much he and Minseok mean to each other. I just can’t imagine why parents do that to their own children.”

Chanyeol thought back to when he came out to his family, stammering and half-hiding behind the kitchen door. How his dad had turned red in the face and huffed a little, Yoora had made a comment about how at least she’d be spared his following her friends around, and his mom had stared off into space for a minute, then nodded, and said “well, honey, all we care about is that you end up loved and happy, right?” and glared at the other two until they agreed with her. Out loud.

The whole omega thing had been a lot more awkward and weird (and awful), but since that had come first, maybe it made the whole “I think I might be … kinda … partially … gay?” thing easier.

“Mom,” he said. “You’re awesome.”

“Now I know you’re just saying that because I said something nice about your boyfriends, but it’s completely true, so you don’t have to thank me for it. I like them a lot, Yeollie. And you know that if you love them, that makes them part of our family no matter what, right?”

“I know, Mom.”
“Don’t get all weepy, you have to be on an even keel this evening for Jongdae.”

“I don’t know how I’m supposed to do that if you keep being super sweet.”

“If you wanted stern, you should’ve called your father, he’s better at pretending that than I am.”

Chanyeol had to laugh.

“Pretending.”

“Don’t tell him I said that!”

Jongdae had told him not to dress up, but that was patently ridiculous. There was no way Chanyeol was going to show up to meet Dae’s super-intimidating alpha father in ratty old jeans with a hole in the knee. Minseok helped him pick out a nice combination of shirt and sweater to go with his least objectionable dress pants.

“You should just throw those out,” Min growled about the navy ones.

Chanyeol knew he was definitely getting clothes for his birthday.

Minseok insisted on putting most of his jewelry on for him. For once it wasn’t particularly sexy, just solemn. It freaked Chanyeol out even worse. He wrapped one hand around Min’s wrist.

“It’ll be fine, right?”

Min leaned down and kissed him, soft and swift.

“Just stick close to him, won’t you, Channie?”

“Of course I will.”

Jongdae swept in just long enough to give Min a lingering hug.

“I parked out front,” he said, not meeting Chanyeol’s eye.

Chanyeol had a tiny meltdown on the way down the stairs. Even when he held the passenger door open, Dae wouldn’t look at him. When he sat behind the wheel, though, he pulled something out of his pocket and stared down at it.

“This is asking a lot, Chanyeol. You have to promise me you’ll say no if it’s too much.”

Chanyeol reached over and pulled Jongdae’s hand toward him.

A collar.

Well. That was a very traditional family.

“I’ll wear it,” he said.

Plain black leather, wide enough to be obvious but not wide enough to be constricting, with a buckle fastening, not anything that looked like it might be permanent. Lined in soft fabric.

“You don’t have to – “

“I said I’ll wear it.”
But he made Jongdae buckle it on him.

“I’m sorry, Channie,” he whispered. “It’ll make things easier. I’m sorry.”

Chanyeol put his hands on Jongdae’s cheeks and kissed the corner of his mouth. He figured that was a kind of comfort Dae might actually buy at the moment.

Okay. Super traditional. That made Chanyeol less inclined to give Jongdae’s dad the benefit of the doubt, but at least he knew the rules. He could play along well enough to get through this. In the meantime, he held Dae’s hand the whole drive over.

Their house was in an old neighborhood, of course an old-fashioned kind with tall walls around it. Chanyeol waited for Jongdae to open the car door for him and hand him out. Walked to the door behind Dae’s left shoulder, with his head lowered and his hands clasped in front of him. He had to smirk to himself, thinking about several of his exes who would be furious at the moment, since they could never get him to behave this way for them.

They hadn’t asked, though.

“Son,” Mr. Kim said when he opened the door.

Seemed pretty rude to use alpha voice on your own child as a greeting, in Chanyeol’s opinion.

He was used to what came next, since it happened pretty much daily. Mr. Kim looked at his chest, raised his eyebrows, and lifted his chin slowly until he finally got to Chanyeol’s (lowered) eyes.

“Father,” Jongdae said in a raspy voice, “this is my omega mate, Park Chanyeol.”

Chanyeol bowed low and spoke softly, but he made no effort to soften his baritone when he said, “abeonim.”

He stood up in time to see Mr. Kim get his face under control and stare sharply at the collar. Jongdae was rigid next to him.

“Well,” Mr. Kim said. “You’re very tall. Better go greet your mother, son, she’s eager to see you.”

He stepped aside and let them in.

The mood brightened the instant they went through the kitchen door – the light was brighter, for one thing, and whatever she was cooking smelled amazing. Also, Mrs. Kim had Jongdae’s smile.

“Mom!”

Chanyeol watched her face while she hugged Dae, the way her hand smoothed the back of his head, and thought maybe Min was right about how much she loved him.

“It has been a while, hasn’t it, son? I’ve missed you,” she said.

Jongdae gathered himself for what was obviously going to be a grumble, but like a pro she took his hand and turned that smile to Chanyeol. Impressive Dae management. Chanyeol hoped he’d remember it.

“Don’t make me wait another second to be introduced.”

Chanyeol wondered whether Jongdae had ever seen two omegas greet each other formally, from the way his eyebrows lifted when Mrs. Kim immediately reached out both hands and grasped
Chanyeol’s as he leaned down to press his cheek against hers.

“Chanyeol,” she said softly.

She smelled like pears.

“You’re so handsome! I can see how warm you are just by your face, I’m so happy to meet you.”

She stepped back and surveyed them both.

“Now,” she said. “How’s our Minseok with this? Jongdae, I can’t believe you’d do anything to make him unhappy, but tell me.”

Okay. Yeah. This was all going to be fine.

“He made me this,” Chanyeol said, and pulled the collar of his shirt to the side so she could get a proper look at his necklace.

He looked at Mrs. Kim’s collar while she examined his necklace. The clasp looked complex and like something one would need help undoing at the back of one’s neck, but the leather had a silk covering on it that matched her dress, so obviously she did take it off. Or her mate took it off for her. And cared enough to let her pretty it up.

“Isn’t that beautiful,” she said. “I’m so happy to finally see some of his work!”

Then she stood back and took one of each of their hands.

“What a nice thought that is. The three of you, happy.”

Then she grinned Jongdae’s bright, wicked grin and elbowed him.

“All that complaining you did about our old-fashioned family, and here you are with a harem!”

“Mom!”

She laughed, and Jongdae very obviously had no idea what to think.

“Go set the table, son.”

“Eomonim, thank you for the jewelry box,” Chanyeol said as soon as Jongdae was out the door. “It means so much to me. I don’t have any omegas in my family.”

“Oh my, really? I’m so glad, Chanyeol. I was glad to give it to you. It was my father’s, you know.”

He nodded.

“Jongdae told me.”

“We’ll drink tea together sometime, and I’ll tell you stories about him.”

Then her glance sharpened.

“But first, I think you and I have some alphas to manage.”

Yes. This was going to be just fine.
Fine, but not in any way comfortable. Jongdae had calmed down after he set the table, and the three of them spent a pleasant few minutes mostly gossiping about Minseok, until Mr. Kim called for Jongdae. Mrs. Kim pressed her lips together briefly after he left.

“Let’s get this food on the table quickly, shall we?”

It took only a few minutes to finish dinner and get it all on the table.

“Oh, here, put the spinach on this dish,” she said, and handed Chanyeol a small, dark pottery dish that made the spinach look like jewels.

“Minseok gave me that,” she continued. “I always make sure to use it when Jongdae comes to dinner.”

She winked.

“I never saw the need to let my husband know where it came from.”

Chanyeol grinned. When all the side dishes were arranged to her liking around the roasted fish and everyone’s stew and rice were neatly placed, she called out softly. Jongdae and his dad hadn’t been alone more than 5 minutes or so, but it was long enough that they both entered the room with scowls on their faces. Chanyeol squeezed Jongdae’s arm when Dae held his chair out for him.

It was so traditional that Chanyeol almost laughed – his chair and Mrs. Kim’s were lower than the others, not that that did anything to make Chanyeol seem any less like the tallest person in the room by more than a head. He saw Mr. Kim look over at him and quirk his eyebrows. The alphas sat closest to the food, of course.

Mr. Kim asked Chanyeol – or, rather, asked Jongdae, who answered if he knew or asked Chanyeol to answer if he didn’t – enough questions about his job, his schooling, and his family that Chanyeol felt like he’d applied for a bank loan. Like Minseok’s parents, Mr. Kim spluttered a bit over the idea of an omega firefighter, but he didn’t say anything overtly offensive, and Mrs. Kim made encouraging smiles in the background.

More than anything else, Mr. Kim wanted to know about Chanyeol’s extended family, their jobs and their presentations. He seemed pleased to hear about Chanyeol’s alpha grandmother. Chanyeol tried to imagine his grandma – who wore bright red lipstick and had a tendency to get so deep into the soju that she climbed on the roof to sing love songs to the moon at family gatherings – at this particular dinner and was greatly cheered by the thought.

Each question seemed to irk Jongdae more than the last, though. His own answers got more and more surly, except when he was complimenting his mom on their excellent dinner.

What Jongdae didn’t notice, even as he dug sweet potatoes out of his stew and set them in Chanyeol’s bowl, were all the times that Mr. Kim, even mid-rant, would set a particularly big bite of fish or nice piece of stewed chicken in Mrs. Kim’s bowl. Chanyeol noticed, and looked over at Mrs. Kim, who took one of those bites of fish and put it into her smiling mouth, then winked at him.

So it was a tasty but awful dinner, at the end of which Chanyeol thought he needed to sit down and think for about a month. Jongdae was so pissed that he was trembling and jumped up with empty bowls in his hands the second Mr. Kim declared dinner over.

“Dinner was delicious,” Chanyeol said, and bowed low.

“Thank you, Chanyeol,” Mrs. Kim murmured.
“Who cooks in your household? You or the other one?” Mr. Kim asked.

Jongdae growled from the doorway behind him, saving Chanyeol from losing his temper.

“Minseok and I are both excellent cooks,” Chanyeol said to the table when he thought his voice might be under control.

“Hmph.”

“Jongdae, I have some fruit and sweets for you to take with you to your father’s study, why don’t you come get them?”

Mr. Kim seemed a bit alarmed to be left alone with a strange omega, much less to be expected to lead him down the hallway. Chanyeol smiled to himself. He thought his safety and his virtue might not be in any danger.

The next set of questions was more invasive and made Jongdae even more annoyed. Chanyeol found himself using every bit of deflection and diplomacy that he’d learned during his years on the job, trying to not tell Jongdae’s father about his heat cycles and whether anybody in his family was infertile.

“That’s enough,” Jongdae snapped after only a couple minutes of this.

If they had been absolutely anywhere else, Chanyeol would’ve kissed him.

“This is invading his privacy, he’s not livestock.”

Mr. Kim’s eyes narrowed.

“Chanyeol, please join my wife in the kitchen, I need to speak to my son.”

Chanyeol felt Jongdae trembling against his shoulder and heard his sharp inhale. He remembered the last thing Minseok had said: stick by him.

Yes.

“No sir, I don’t think I will. I prefer to stay with Jongdae.”

Mr. Kim stood up. Jongdae stood up. Chanyeol stood up and didn’t even pretend to slouch.

“An alpha gave you a direction, boy.”

“That’s true. But you’re not my alpha, sir. Jongdae is.”

“I beg your pardon?”

Mr. Kim took a step toward Chanyeol, and Jongdae stepped between them with a growl.

“You growling at your own father, boy?”

“I am if you try to threaten my mate.”

“I wouldn’t need to if you’d teach him how to behave. I’ve been telling you for years, Jongdae, you need to –“

Jongdae growled again. He clenched his hands into fists and raised his head, ignoring how his
father’s eyes widened when Jongdae met his glare.

“...It occurs to me that I don’t have to give a shit what you think anymore, Dad. My harem’s bigger than yours. According to your rules, I outrank you now.”

Whoa.

Mr. Kim gaped, and Chanyeol saw him almost raise his hand – and Chanyeol knew that it didn’t matter whose house this was nor the presentations in it, if that man tried to slap Jongdae he was going to intervene – but he didn’t. They glared at each other, growled in each other’s faces, nose to nose, and then Mr. Kim looked back at Chanyeol. He blinked a bunch of times.

“This is my house,” he said.

But then he turned on his heel and left, and after a minute, they heard the door slam.

Jongdae was still trembling, and Chanyeol figured he was too angry for hugging, so he just grabbed Dae’s upper arms from behind, holding on tight. When he felt a fraction of easing, he leaned his face down onto the top of Dae’s head.

“Mom!” Jongdae said.

He almost pulled Chanyeol over in his haste.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Kim was sitting at the table with her hands over her face, shuddering.

“Mom,” Jongdae groaned, “Mom, I’m so sorry.”

He rushed over to her, just in time for her to take her hands away from her face and tip her face back, shouting with laughter.
Chapter 53

So that was a surprise.

“Mom?” Jongdae said again.

“Oh, son,” Mrs. Kim said after she had wiped her eyes. “That was a long time coming, wasn’t it, my love? I’m proud of you.”

Jongdae looked like he was afraid the world had turned upside-down, but the gravitational difference hadn’t hit him yet. Chanyeol took his hand, and Jongdae squeezed his fingers hard.

“I’ll make some tea and we’ll have a chat,” Mrs. Kim said.

She continued to shake her head and chuckle to herself while she moved around, turning on the kettle and measuring out tea into three mugs. By the time she placed the mugs on the table and sat down, her expression was quiet again.

“Now, I only heard the loud parts,” she said. “What did you say that set him off, Chanyeol?”

Jongdae scowled, but at a glance from his mother, he lifted his mug and blew on its contents instead of saying anything.

“He invited me to come in here with you, and I said I’d rather stay with Jongdae,” Chanyeol said.

“Politely,” Jongdae growled.

“Of course he said it politely, I wouldn’t expect anything else from this nice young man of yours,” Mrs. Kim said.

She reached over to briefly grasp Chanyeol’s fingers.

“He left,” Dae said.

“I heard.”

“We’ll stay until he gets back, Mom, I don’t want anything to –”

“Anything to happen?” Mrs. Kim asked.

Her tone had a warning in it.

“Like what, Jongdae?”

He frowned at the table.

“I’ll tell you what he’s going to do, son,” she said. “He’ll go to the boxing gym to punch some things, then go get roaring drunk and possibly punch some other alphas. And in the morning he’ll be very pitiful and I’ll make him some hangover soup and feed it to him while he complains.”

Chanyeol watched Jongdae struggle to believe that.

“You’re not afraid he’ll?”

“You’re the only member of this family he ever raised a hand to, Jongdae,” she said gently.
A cold wave of anger rolled through Chanyeol, leaving behind it only sadness and worry for Dae, who was slumped in his chair. He scooted his own chair over closer, until their shoulders touched, and considered it a very good sign that Jongdae reached for his hand. Mrs. Kim looked at Chanyeol, and the seriousness of her gaze let up just a little.

“You know, after he slapped you that day, I banned him from my bedroom for over a month,” Mrs. Kim said.

Jongdae’s head snapped up so quickly that Chanyeol heard his neck crack.

“You – what? How come you never told me that?”

Mrs. Kim sipped her tea.

“Because if I had, you would’ve felt justified in egging him on until he did it again.”

That was a hell of a thing to hear.

But also, kind of – a plausible thing to hear.

Anyway, Jongdae didn’t dispute it, though he looked pretty pissed.

“I will never say you deserved it, my darling. He was wrong, and he knows it.”

“Sure he does,” Jongdae said, in what was obviously a well-rehearsed knee-jerk reaction.

“Jongdae,” Mrs. Kim said, “do you think I’m unhappy?”

Chanyeol drank his tea and tried (failed) not to feel like an interloper. Jongdae muttered something incomprehensible.

“I’m not like Chanyeol,” she said. “No offense, my dear, I think it’s so interesting that you’re an actual firefighter! I want to hear all about it on a more relaxed day. But son. I know you think your father is hopelessly old-fashioned. The thing is, I’m old-fashioned too. I never wanted to be out in the world like Chanyeol. I wanted what I have, my love. A mate, a family, and safety. That’s it. My happiness is what I have.”

Jongdae didn’t move from his slouch, glaring at his mug. But he didn’t try to move his hand out of Chanyeol’s. Chanyeol looked over, and Mrs. Kim nodded at him, smiling.

“He could be nicer to you,” Jongdae grumbled.

“Well, he is when you’re not around. Just like you’re nicer when he’s not around,” Mrs. Kim said, sounding wry.

“He gave her all the best pieces of chicken out of his stew,” Chanyeol’s mouth said while his brain went ‘noooooo’. “Like you gave me all your sweet potatoes.”

Jongdae glared at him for that one, and tried to pull his hand away, but Chanyeol clamped down and tried to put all his stubbornness into his face, until Jongdae backed down. He looked at his mom, and she nodded at him.

“He’s always done that. And brought me whatever plants I want for my garden.”

Jongdae twitched as if in surprise.
“Sweetheart. If I wore all the jewelry your father has given me at once, I probably wouldn’t be able to move.”

She reached her hand across the table. Chanyeol let go so Jongdae could grasp it.

“My sweet son. Maybe it’s my fault, that I kept you so much with me when you were little. I know your presentation was hard. I suppose I let you down there, by trying to let your father handle it. But you two have done nothing but bring out the absolute worst in each other ever since. And I think it’s time for you to see that.”

She squeezed his fingers.

“I know he’s a stubborn old jackass, Jongdae, but he’s my stubborn old jackass.”

Chanyeol took advantage of having his hand free to put his arm around Jongdae’s waist. Jongdae didn’t shake him off, at least.

“The thing is, you’re right about rank, and he knows it,” Mrs. Kim went on. “Those are the rules he has always lived by, and he’ll do it now. It won’t be easy for him, but you watch, Jongdae. He’ll defer to you now. Just like he will when your brother and Aera have a baby, and their pack is bigger than his. And if you and Chanyeol ever bear, then as far as he’s concerned, you’ll have both the harem and the pack, and that’ll make you the head of the family.”

“Head of the. What?” Jongdae croaked.

Mrs. Kim smiled at him. Chanyeol focused on the warmth of Jongdae’s back under his arm, the wooden seat of the chair, and the scent of the jasmine tea. Otherwise, he wasn’t going to do anything but start thinking, and it was too much to think about while Mrs. Kim was still trying to get her point across.

“Head of the family, my love. With all its rights and privileges.”

Jongdae snorted.

“You mean all the pain in the butt.”

“As I said.”

“Why are you telling me all this now?” Jongdae asked after a pause.

“Because today is the day you stood up to him for your own sake, and not merely to fight.”

Mrs. Kim sipped her tea peaceably for a few minutes while Jongdae shook his head slowly, leaning against Chanyeol. Chanyeol kept having to stop himself from wrapping his entire body around Jongdae’s and pressing his nose to Dae’s neck. He figured that would be just a tad too much in front of anybody’s mom 2 hours after meeting them, no matter how nice they might be.

“Go home, my darling,” she said after a few minutes. “Go home and talk with your mates, and you and I can talk more later.”

Mrs. Kim hugged them both warmly, and Chanyeol figured the way she patted his cheek and nodded was a signal to take good care of Jongdae. Of course, he would’ve done that anyway.

Whew.

It was a lot.
Jongdae stared at the steering wheel for several breaths before he started the car.

“Are you okay, Channie?”

Was he okay? Chanyeol could’ve melted like butter. He curled one hand around Jongdae’s arm.

“I’m perfectly fine,” he said.

Jongdae nodded and pushed the button to start the car. But before they even left the neighborhood, he took a sharp left onto a street they hadn’t taken on their way in. The acrid scent of his distress flooded the car.

“I gotta walk,” he said, voice raspy with tension.

He pulled into a parking spot by a park and shocked Chanyeol cold by coming around to open the passenger door before he took off to stalk around the playground equipment. Chanyeol leaned against a climbing platform with his hands in his pockets and watched Jongdae pace, his breath clouding the air.

Jongdae’s spirals stared out wide but tightened until he was pretty much walking in a circle around Chanyeol. That fact warmed Chanyeol more than his coat.

“She’s wrong,” Jongdae said eventually.

“Maybe so,” Chanyeol said.

He didn’t think so, but he was hardly the expert.

“I guess – I guess it’s good to know he’s never laid a hand on her,” Jongdae said after several more circles.

“That is good,” Chanyeol said. “Did you think he had?”

That stopped Jongdae in his tracks. After a pause, he exhaled hard.

“No,” he said. “I guess not. He’s fucking rude, but he never – I guess I never saw him try to dominate her, like. Like he did –”

“Like he did you?”

Lips pressed so tight together that they almost disappeared, Jongdae nodded out at the darkness. Chanyeol looked forward to the moment when he would be allowed to give Jongdae the hug he very clearly needed.

“Why’d he slap you?” Chanyeol asked, pitching his voice to be as gentle as possible.

There was another heavy sigh.

“I told him I’d rather be dead than alpha,” Jongdae said.

He rubbed the back of his neck.

“I may have … had a knife in my hand at the time.”

And that stole all of Chanyeol’s warmth entirely, leaving his teeth chattering.
“I wouldn’t have done it, Channie. I don’t think. I was just so angry, I didn’t want to be like him, I never wanted to be anything like him.”

“You’re not,” Chanyeol said.

“You think not?”

Jongdae’s voice was sharp and higher-pitched than usual.

“You think I’m not just like him, up in his face like that? Fuck, Chanyeol.”

He strode forward and scrabbled at Chanyeol’s neck. Chanyeol felt the collar fall away, the chill of his bare neck, and watched Jongdae’s foot step on it after it hit the ground.

“Making you wear that, what the fuck.”

He walked another couple of wide circles around the playground. Chanyeol picked up the collar and put it in his pocket. It was weird – he wasn’t traditional, he didn’t want to be secluded and collared. But it made him sad to see that collar on the ground with a shoe print on it.

“You didn’t make me,” he said when Jongdae got close enough again.

“Bullshit,” Dae said. “I took advantage of how nice you are.”

Did it count as taking advantage when he was willing? Chanyeol didn’t think so, but he also didn’t think Jongdae was in any state to believe that.

Jongdae paced tight circles around him again, muttering to himself. Chanyeol caught “what the fuck” several times, along with a bunch of incomprehensible muttering, “head of the family my ass.” Chanyeol would’ve liked to point out how no fists were actually thrown, how Jongdae’s mom hadn’t been upset in the slightest. How technically the entire thing had been his own fault by refusing to leave. But he figured he’d have to save all that for a time when Jongdae wasn’t pacing around with clenched fists and a persistent growl going.

Not that the pacing and growling seemed to be doing anything but ramping him up again.

One on circle, Chanyeol reached out to snag Dae and reel him into a hug. He tilted his neck to one side to make room for Jongdae’s face.

“You’re making me dizzy,” he said.

He felt Jongdae breathe in his scent and relax a little. He tightened his arms across Dae’s back.

“I’m sorry,” Jongdae murmured, lips against his skin.

“Dude, let’s go home,” Chanyeol said. “You need Min, and you need to be in your own space.”

Jongdae stood up and stared at him, his eyes looking black in the dim light. One cold hand cupped Chanyeol’s cheek. And Chanyeol could see something hovering in Jongdae’s expression – something that he fancied might be “I need you too.” But he wasn’t surprised not to hear it. A little disappointed, maybe, but not enough to stop himself from pulling Jongdae close again.

“Okay,” Dae said. “All right.”

Chanyeol had to crack the car window for the rest of the drive home. It made the car pretty miserable and cold, but the sour tang of Jongdae’s upset was no better than the stink of anger, and Chanyeol
wanted to keep his head at least semi-clear and not fall into Jongdae’s spiraling with him.

He felt like a jerk the second they got inside and saw Minseok standing by the door, looking totally wigged out.

“Shit, Min, I should’ve texted you,” he said.

He felt even worse when Min pounced on Jongdae as soon as Dae hung up his coat. Min examined his face, each of his hands – obviously looking for signs of a fight. Jongdae shook his head. Both of them exhibited maximum stupidity, in Chanyeol’s opinion, and did not transition immediately to hugging.

Chanyeol took the collar out of his coat pocket so he could go put it in his jewelry box and maybe give them a minute.

“The fuck is that,” Minseok said hoarsely.

He snatched the collar out of Chanyeol’s hand and stared at it.

“What the fuck is this, Jongdae?” Min growled.

Chanyeol learned really fast that there was a big difference between the kind of murder face you could tease about and the real thing.

“You fucking collared him?!”

“No,” Jongdae said, looking at the floor.

Minseok hissed, still staring at the leather in his hands.

“Is this a goddamn shoe print? What the hell is this, Jongdae, you put Channie in a collar and fucking changed your mind?”

By the end of that, Minseok’s voice was almost a shriek and Jongdae’s head was hanging so low that his face was hidden.

“I’m sorry,” Jongdae said.

“Sorry about which part, Jongdae? I ought to fucking make you wear it, if a collar means so little to you.”

Jongdae shook his head and stepped back, eyes looking wild.

“Stop it,” Chanyeol said.

He didn’t have alpha voice, but he did have Professional In A High Stress Situation voice. It worked well enough that Min stopped stalking toward Jongdae and spun to gawk at him. Chanyeol put his arms around Min and leaned down close.

“Stop worrying,” he said. “Just sit down for a minute, please.”

Chanyeol felt Minseok’s fist clutch the back of his sweater. Then Min nodded.

Chanyeol moved to Dae as Minseok went to the sofa. Same thing: he curved himself over Jongdae, wrapped his hand around the back of Dae’s neck.
“Do me a favor and go put your PJs on?”

“Chan,” Dae murmured, sounding miserable.

“PJs.”

Jongdae sighed.

“Okay.”

Chanyeol took his own moment to sigh and gather himself to be The Calm One in the Room. What a nice change from the usual.

“I’m getting a drink,” he announced. “What do you want, Min: tea, beer, soju, or wine?”

“Nothing,” Min growled.

Chanyeol leaned over the back of the sofa to gaze at him upside down, keeping his face as bland as possible, until Minseok rolled his eyes.

“Whatever you’re having.”

“Great, wine for everyone, that makes it easy,” Chanyeol said.

He hoped that the bottle he pulled out of the rack wasn’t one Jongdae was saving for a special occasion. If it was, oh well, that’s what they got for freaking out all over the place and leaving him to run clean-up.

By the time Jongdae sat down, looking just as unhappy but slightly less stiff, Chanyeol had ungracefully managed to get the wine open and poured. Chanyeol sat on the coffee table next to the flung-down collar, facing two frowning boyfriends at either end of the sofa. Jongdae drank half his glass of wine in one go.

“Minseok,” Chanyeol said, “I would never, ever, agree to a change in our relationship if you weren’t part of the conversation.”

If Jongdae’s neck was going to keep cracking like that every time he turned his head quickly, Chanyeol was going to send him out for a freaking massage.

“I – “ Minseok said, looking at the glass in his lap.

“I would not,” Chanyeol repeated.

“Min,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol was able to reach out and grab Dae’s wineglass as he slid across the sofa before it dropped to the floor, then Min’s glass as Jongdae took over his lap and tried to touch all of him at one time.

“Babe, no. I’m sorry, that’s not what it meant, I didn’t. I just asked him wear it, that’s all, I swear, Min. I know how it is for you. I wouldn’t.”

Chanyeol watched Min’s expression go from angry to miserable while Jongdae touched his face, kissed his cheeks. When Minseok closed his eyes and one arm crept around Dae’s waist, Chanyeol put one hand on Min’s knee.

“Sorry,” Min whispered. “I freaked out, I’ve been sitting around imagining one terrible thing after
“I apologize for not texting you,” Chanyeol said.

Then they both fell over themselves trying to gainsay him, until Chanyeol held up his hand.

“Come on,” he said. “I absolutely could’ve taken a few seconds out to update Min that things were fine, and I should’ve thought about it. I’m allowed to be sorry about it.”

“Fine. Is that what it was?” Jongdae said.

But Minseok nodded and tightened his hold on Jongdae, laid his head on Dae’s shoulder. Chanyeol took a long sip of wine.

“Yeah, Jongdae. It was fine. Your mom was really welcoming, your dad didn’t kick either one of us out, nobody hit anybody else, and you not only stood up for yourself but also learned some important stuff.”

And that was fun, because Jongdae squirmed like a pinned bug and Minseok was so surprised that he forgot to look unhappy.

“That’s not how – “ Jongdae tried to say.

“Oh shut up,” Chanyeol said cheerfully.

He’d barely started talking and already everybody was in a much less emo place. It was even better than doing this stuff at work, because he was pretty certain that at the end of all these theatrics there would be some making out.

“I guess technically you were standing up for me, but it was the same thing, really.”

“What happened?” Minseok asked.

Jongdae opened his mouth, but Chanyeol, having learned from Mrs. Kim that distraction was the key, shoved Dae’s wineglass back at him and refilled it.

“I just did what you asked me to, Min. Mr. Kim invited me to leave, and I told him that I’d rather stay with Jongdae. And when he objected, I pointed out that Dae is my alpha, not him.”

Jongdae looked stubborn, but a slow smile spread across Min’s face.

“Did you really, sweetness?”

“He really did,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol told Min the whole thing. He made sure to include Mrs. Kim asking whether Minseok was okay with their triad and the inclusion of the little pottery dish on the table, both of which made Min’s cheeks go pink while he leaned his face against Jongdae’s hair.

He didn’t leave out one single bit of any of it, from the invasive questions to the argument to Mrs. Kim laughing. Chanyeol tried to quote Mrs. Kim’s exact words when he could remember them. A few times, Jongdae tried to interrupt. Once he got as far as “do we really have to hear” before Chanyeol refilled his glass again and stared at him pointedly. If it took getting Jongdae plastered to get through this story, so be it.

Chanyeol even told Min all the parts at the park, to Jongdae’s visible discomfort. The collar, the slap,
the knife. Jongdae tried to get up at that point, but Minseok held him tight until he quieted.

“You didn’t even tell me that story until a couple of years ago,” Minseok said, combing his fingers through Jongdae’s hair. “I’m proud of you that you were able to tell Channie about it now, love.”

Jongdae’s eyebrows did a little dance of confusion and frustration before he nodded and slumped against Min. He finished the wine in his glass and held it out to Chanyeol with a wry look. Chanyeol emptied the bottle into it.

“I’m sorry I freaked out about the collar,” Minseok said. “But I contend that it was a terrible idea.”

Jongdae sighed heavily.

“Nah,” Chanyeol said. “I knew what he meant by it. And it told me what level of rules I needed to follow. You know, even if I ended up not quite following them.”

Minseok nodded while Jongdae scowled.

“I don’t know why you’re acting like it wasn’t uniformly horrible,” Dae said.

“Because it wasn’t.”

“Chanyeol.”

“Jongdae.”

He grinned at Jongdae’s annoyed look.

“Look, man, I’m not gonna lie. If your dad had tried to hit you, you and I would’ve been in a race to find out which one of us could knock him down first. But he didn’t – and not because of anything anybody else did, but because he stopped himself. He took himself out of the equation. And yeah. I was really concerned for you, Jongdae, because I hate it when you’re upset. But all that stuff your mom said to you was good stuff. She flat out told you that she’s happy, dude. She said you were right, and your dad will get up off you know, because you outrank him.”

“I’ll believe that when I see it,” Dae grumbled.

“And then what? If it does happen?”

Jongdae had to think on that one for a few minutes.

“I don’t know.”

“Well,” Chanyeol said, “it can’t be worse than what you’ve had going with each other so far, right? And now you have to decide whether you trust me to go choose another bottle of wine without picking the wrong kind, or you want to go get it yourself.”

Jongdae rolled his eyes, and Minseok laughed.

“Chanyeol, you’re magnificent,” Minseok said. “What got into you?”

“Professionally trained to deal with stressful situations,” Chanyeol said with a shrug.

But he felt pretty magnificent, honestly. It was so nice when he wasn’t the one having the crisis. And just to solidify that he was in some kind of magical groove of doing things right, the bottle of wine that Jongdae brought over was the same kind as the one Chanyeol had opened.
Chapter 54

After he topped off everyone’s glasses, Jongdae reached around to grab the collar from the table and rubbed at the shoe print with his sleeve.

“I’m not Zitao,” he said, “and Chanyeol isn’t Luhan.”

Chanyeol felt warm with pride. What a good job.

A smile flitted across Min’s face.

“It’s not that,” he said.

And then, in response to Jongdae’s quirked-up eyebrow,

“It’s not only that. There’s everything about Channie, too, with his history of control and rejection.”

Chanyeol had a breathless moment of “oh.” Maybe that should’ve occurred to him. Maybe it should’ve been a problem. But how awesome was that, that it wasn’t?

Then he watched the way Jongdae’s eyes went wide and his mouth dropped open. To forestall any renewal of drama, Chanyeol sat on him.

“Oof.”

Chanyeol cupped Jongdae’s cheek.

“I’m not Luhan, and you are not Kris,” he said.

He gave Jongdae 3 seconds to think about that before he continued.

“Jongdae. You said you took advantage of me being nice. But I trust you, okay? Even if I think you’re being dumb, I assume that you’re not out to deliberately hurt me.”

There was a thing he didn’t even really know until it came out of his mouth. But Chanyeol didn’t regret saying it. He watched how that hit, in the way Dae’s eyebrows moved and his mouth thinned, and wasn’t surprised that Jongdae took refuge in a joke.

“Even when I’m being dumb, huh?”

“Yep, even then.”

Chanyeol swiveled around so he could plunk his legs onto Minseok’s lap.

“Thank you for worrying,” he said. “And I trust you too, you know.”

Minseok rubbed Chanyeol’s shins and nodded.

“I apologize for my tantrum,” Min said.

“I apologize for not keeping you in the loop,” Chanyeol said.

“I apologize for, um, being a drama llama?” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol hugged him.
“How about for continuing to not talk about stuff until after it blows up, as usual?” Minseok said.

Jongdae ducked his head into the safety of the angle of Chanyeol’s neck.

“Yeah, okay, that too,” he muttered.

But Min rubbed the back of Dae’s head and smiled up at Chanyeol. Jongdae laid the collar on Chanyeol’s leg and turned to look at Minseok.

“Babe, you know there’s a lot I’ll let you do to me, but a collar is a hard stop.”

Minseok nodded.

“Okay, love.”

“You can’t wear this one anyway,” Chanyeol said. “It’s mine.”

For a second, he worried that it wasn’t an appropriate time for flippancy, but they both laughed.

“Oh yeah?” Jongdae said.

“Maybe on a very, very special occasion I’ll wear it again,” Chanyeol said, sending his voice down as deep as it would go.

Then he rolled up off Jongdae’s lap to put the collar away, leaving behind him a groan and a dirty-sounding laugh.

He took a minute to sit down and let himself feel off-kilter and tired. He texted his mom that everything had gone okay. He thought about how Mrs. Kim had waited until Jongdae was 27 years old to tell him all that stuff, and decided that maybe he didn’t get all his avoidance habits from his father. And that he would not say that to Jongdae.

Chanyeol thought back to that moment when Jongdae stepped between him and his father: the person he was most afraid of. Maybe Jongdae wanted his people to stick by him because of the way he stuck by them. That thought welled up inside Chanyeol, making his breath shallow and his eyes blurry. That dumb alpha was making it really difficult to not shout romantic confessions to him, dammit.

His mental meandering was interrupted by the arrival of two boyfriends, attached to one another at the mouth. Nice.

Minseok pushed Jongdae down onto the bed.

“I got tired of talking,” he said.

“That doesn’t happen very often,” Jongdae said with a grin while he shimmied out of his pajama pants. “I figured I’d better not complain.”

Chanyeol helped Dae get his shirt off and watched Min rub his face against Jongdae’s cheek and shoulder, scent and contact to welcome him home. Chanyeol dug his fingers in Jongdae’s hair; Dae closed his eyes and tipped his head back.

Chanyeol found that he wasn’t tired of talking yet.

“Our Dae was so good,” he said.
Jongdae’s eyes snapped open. Chanyeol stroked his thumb across Dae’s forehead, and those unfairly long eyelashes fluttered over his eyes, either at Chanyeol’s touch or the way Minseok’s face was still dragging over his skin. Or maybe because their hips were pressed together.

“He did so well, Min,” Chanyeol continued. “So much control. I was so proud of how he held his temper.”

“Did he now,” Minseok murmured, brushing his cheek against Jongdae’s chin. “What a good job, babe.”

Jongdae’s cheeks were flushed, and he blinked up at the ceiling as if he were confused, but he whined in the back of his throat. Minseok’s fingers flexed in their grip around Dae’s waist.

Well. That seemed like a very positive response. Every day was just a day to learn something new, wasn’t it?

“You should have seen how well he took care of me,” Chanyeol said while Minseok dragged his bottom lip up the side of Jongdae’s neck.

“Tell me,” Min said, and Chanyeol caught a flash of smile before Min resumed rubbing his cheek against the side of Dae’s face.

It was so fun to watch the way Jongdae bit his lip and stared up with flushed cheeks while Chanyeol praised him, while he was also being driven to distraction by Min scent-marking him. Chanyeol didn’t even know what all he said, keeping up a steady murmur in Dae’s ear. Jongdae tried to worm one hand between himself and Minseok, but at Min’s glance, Chanyeol gently pulled that arm up and pinned it to the bed over Dae’s head. He ran his free hand up and down while he talked, from wrist to waist and back again, in long strokes that made Jongdae arch his back.

“Watching you protect me,” Chanyeol said, “making me feel safe.”

Jongdae whined again.

“So good, taking care of me. Standing under that light in the park, looking fierce and beautiful. Sticking close by me even when you were furious, making sure I wasn’t alone.”

Minseok put his mouth up under Jongdae’s ear, and whatever he did made Dae squirm. Min sat back on his knees and took his shirt off. And it was so funny to watch Jongdae look back and forth between the two of them, obviously having a major gland problem. Chanyeol let Dae’s arm go to pet his hair.

“I need,” Jongdae said, clutching Chanyeol’s wrist.

“I know.”

Chanyeol pushed him toward Min. Jongdae rolled up and grabbed Minseok, one hand on the back of his neck, face pressed up close and inhaling audibly. Chanyeol watched for a few minutes: the way Min tipped his head back, eyes closed, and the shifting muscles in Jongdae’s back as he moved his head around, swapping between scenting and kisses.

Watching made Chanyeol unable to resist touching. He stripped off his own shirt and knelt behind Minseok to trace the lines of his back, first with a hand and then with his mouth, until Min’s breath was heavy and his hold tight in Jongdae’s hair.

They kissed, and Chanyeol took the opportunity to lean up close against Min’s back, lips at his
shoulder, one hand gripping his hip and the other pressed against the erection that filled Minseok’s thin pajama pants. Minseok had asked to be in the middle next time, after all.

Except that Jongdae pulled back, rumbling when Minseok tried to reel him back in for more. Jongdae cupped his cheeks and pressed their foreheads together.

“Mate,” he said.

“Yes,” Min said, and, “heh. You need to scent your other mate too, don’t you, love?”

Oh. Chanyeol thought that sounded great, as long as he didn’t dissolve or catch on fire, both of which seemed like a definite possibility.

Thankfully, neither of those happened: Jongdae gave a pleased little growl, and they maneuvered Chanyeol into the happy middle, where they set about killing his brain all the way dead. It started out perfectly normal, Dae rubbing up against his face and Min’s arms around him from behind, until the moment when Minseok leaned in to bite at the top of Chanyeol’s shoulder.

He couldn’t help squirming, even though he couldn’t imagine wanting to be anywhere else, with his arms around Jongdae, who kissed and sucked on his neck, and Minseok behind him, one hand in his hair and one circling his chest, mouth hot against his shoulder and nape. Chanyeol’s ears rang with the rush of blood. After all that stress and worry, to be wrapped up between them – warm, safe, wanted –

“God,” Chanyeol said. “God, more.”

He gathered Jongdae closer, hummed at the scrape of teeth on his neck. Leaned back on his heels to he’d press closer against Minseok. Inhaled the scents of them and the scent of how they all wanted each other. Chanyeol shoved his waistband down to free his cock, then hauled Jongdae even closer and wrapped his hand around both of them together. Jongdae moaned and tongued at his collarbone.

“Hold on,” Minseok said.

Terrible – because Chanyeol’s back was so cold without Min leaning against him – but awesome, because Min returned with the lube bottle in his hand. He made Dae lean back enough to drizzle some onto them both (cold) and kissed him. Chanyeol tightened his grip and pulled in a slow, smooth stroke. Minseok tightened his grip and pulled in a slow, smooth stroke. Minseok broke off the kiss when Dae moaned, then turned to kiss Chanyeol with a smile still on his lips. Chanyeol leaned into it, tasted wine on Minseok’s tongue. Shuddered at how close he was already, Min’s mouth on his mouth, Dae’s mouth on his neck, the grip of his own hand and the slide of Jongdae against him.

Minseok leaned against their shoulders, fist circling himself. Jongdae reached for him.

“I got it,” Min said. “Just hold onto me.”

It was like that day under the covers together, the three of them close together, a space in the middle made warm by body heat and harsh breaths. Jongdae held all three of them upright, and Chanyeol watched Minseok’s hand so they worked at the same rhythm. Each of them leaned in at one time or another to nip or kiss, there was the odd quiet cry, until Chanyeol shuddered again. He dropped his head to Dae’s shoulder and pulled swiftly, his grip tight.

“Shit,” Jongdae said, “yeah, a little faster.”

And that sent Chanyeol over, his teeth set into Dae’s shoulder while his tricep started to burn. But he hadn’t even finished stripping his own belly when Jongdae hissed and thrust into his fist, making a
hot, slippery mess that kept Chanyeol’s hand moving, even as he started to twitch with oversensitivity.

“Beautiful,” Min said.

Chanyeol and Jongdae looked at one another – and maybe in that moment all the old stories about mates being able to read each other’s minds were true, because Jongdae grinned, and they both turned at once to put their mouths on Minseok (Jongdae to his mouth and Chanyeol to his shoulder), and that was all it took for him to join them in the orgasm club.

“Better, love?” Min asked when they had cleaned up and hunkered down under the blankets – with Jongdae, as Person Most Recently Upset, in the middle for a change.

Chanyeol snuggled up against Dae’s back, nose in his hair, and watched Minseok’s fingers move lazily across his cheek.

“Perfect,” Jongdae said. “Chanyeol said this was what I needed, when I was freaking out in the park. To be here, with you.”

Chanyeol thought he might float off into the sky when Jongdae added,

“Both of you.”
Okay, I think I’m back on schedule now. Thanks for your patience! I was Super Tired last week, but I’m better now.

“No,” Jongdae said when the gym alarm went off. “Absolutely fucking not.”

The squirming around he did to turn it off and reset it was almost as nice as the extra hour of sleep. Chanyeol found himself gladly providing leverage via a stabilizing hand curved around that nice, round butt. When Chanyeol made to get up while Jongdae was getting dressed, he leaned down, one hand soft on Chanyeol’s shoulder, and said,

“No, stay here. I want to think all day about you two here like this.”

Chanyeol lifted Dae’s hand to his mouth and kissed the knuckles softly. He tried to hold back his smile at Jongdae’s heavy exhale. He snuggled back around Minseok with the happy thought that it really did seem like Min was going to be right that he wouldn’t have to wait 6 months to finally get their confessions out of the way.

“What are you reading?” Minseok asked after their first, silent cup of coffee.

Chanyeol grinned over at him.

“Does Jongdae let you have a quiet first cup of coffee when it’s just the two of you?”

Minseok snorted.

“Hell no, you know he makes me put my brain to work the minute my fucking eyes open.”

“His one glaring character flaw.”

“Sure,” Min said with a grin. “Just that one.”

Chanyeol slid his hand to the side so he could lay his pinkie finger over top of Min’s.

“Reading up on traditional stuff,” he said. “Feeling a little dumb that I didn’t do this earlier.”

“Chan.”

Chanyeol leaned over against Min’s shoulder at the concern in his tone.

“I’m just reading,” he repeated.

“You’re okay with everything that happened?”
“I am,” he said, and meant it. “I’m just thinking. Mrs. Kim said last night that she’s really old-fashioned, and I realized it’s been a while since I thought about that stuff.”

“I can’t imagine that’s the kind of life you want,” Minseok said.

Oh boy, Min was going to be so proud of him right now.

“It’s not. But it’s kind of what I did to myself. Pulling in until I only went to same few places, only talked to the same people. It felt safer that way. So I get it.”

Minseok grasped his hand. The expression on his face was so solemn and tender that Chanyeol got choked up briefly. But he told Min about the bowling league, and about the ancient, lonely little omega who had burned her house down. They ended up on the sofa, Minseok warm in his lap, and it was easy to talk, with his head on Min’s shoulder, Min’s hands on him, and that quiet, burred voice never once telling him that he was silly or unreasonable.

“What do you think Jongdae’s dad will actually back off now?”

Minseok’s voiceless laugh was a little puff of air against the top of Chanyeol’s head.

“I have no idea. Mostly because I’m not really capable of having charitable thoughts toward the man.”

That was reasonable, he supposed.

“I hope so,” Min said. “I can’t really picture it, but that would probably mean Jongdae would see his mom more often, and he’d like that.”

The conversation meandered around for a while, until it got to Minseok’s parents.

“It’s not really the same,” Minseok said.

Then he tugged on the hair at the back of Chanyeol’s head.

“Dammit, Channie, you’re going to make me step back and be mature about it. I can’t just maintain my normal low level of background annoyance at them?”

Chanyeol hugged Min close and shook his head, until Min kissed his crown.

“I don’t like to give them this much credit, but when they cut me off after I dropped out of school, they waited until I had a job to do so. They don’t understand me, and they don’t make much of an effort to try, but if this building burned down, I wouldn’t question whether I could show up on their doorstep and be welcomed in.”

He paused and scratched the back of Chanyeol’s head.

“Though I’m cheered to know that we could show up at your family’s doorstep instead. My parents have more guest rooms, but the food’s much better at your house.”

“If dinner at that banquet was an indication, I believe it,” Chanyeol said.

“They’re not so bad when it’s just them,” Minseok said. “Neither of my parents is much of a conversationalist, but when there’s nobody around for them to impress, they’re a lot less – brittle. And they like Jongdae. Electrical engineer is a job title they can understand.”

It was a hell of a nice way to start a day, talking quietly into one another’s ears, coffee-flavored
kisses. Chanyeol got tired of reading about sequestered omegas and the history of the omega rights movement and cooked them an early lunch. Minseok typed for a while on his phone, then gave an irritated hum.

“I’m in trouble,” he said. “Minjoo wants to have brunch on Sunday, and she’s pissed that you won’t be there.”

“I am awfully nice,” Chanyeol said.

Min quirked one eyebrow at him, then grinned.

“That you are.”

It was amazing how Minseok could pitch his voice to speak directly to one’s dick.

“You could always stop by the station after. In case Taejoon really does want to climb on the hose truck.”

Minseok laughed, typed on his phone, and laughed again a moment later.

“It’s a date.”

Someone – who had the good fortune to possess a regular work schedule – was needy over the group chat all afternoon, demanding regular updates, even though Minseok and Chanyeol weren’t doing anything particularly interesting.

“Must be a slow day at the office,” Min said.

It was adorable, though. Chanyeol’s ‘just chatting with my mom’ got back ‘are you saying nice things about me?’ The cascade of cute stickers after Min sent a photo of Chanyeol bent over his guitar with a pick in his mouth was highly flattering.

And then Jongdae halfway fell through the front door with his arms full, and Chanyeol had to put his hand on his chest so his heart wouldn’t leap out of it.

“Babe,” Minseok said, leaning in for a kiss when he took the bouquet of small red sunflowers out of Jongdae’s hand.

“How do I still not know what your favorite flowers are?”

Chanyeol took his bouquet – purples and pale yellows, including something that smelled sweet.

“I don’t really have a favorite,” Chanyeol said. “I like all the ones you guys have gotten me.”

“When did you give Channie flowers?” Jongdae asked.

“It was one little boutonniere at Chuseok,” Minseok laughed.

“It was so cute I almost died,” Chanyeol said solemnly.

“I’m really glad you didn’t,” Jongdae said.

He was a little less successful at playing solemn, especially when he pulled a small bag out of his pocket and handed it to Minseok. Pink cheeks and a lopsided smile looked so good on Min.

“What’s this for, love?” Min asked while Jongdae clasped the narrow leather bracelet around his
“For you being the best.”

Chanyeol watched them kiss, flowers held up to his nose. Damn, he loved watching the way their mouths moved together, the way Jongdae pulled Min close against him, and the way Minseok’s hand cupped Dae’s cheek. He loved the way Jongdae rubbed his cheek against Min’s after, smiling.

“And for you.”

Jongdae handed Chanyeol a much smaller velvet bag.

“Really?”

Jongdae tilted his head and looked at him like he had misplaced his brain.

“Pretty sure you’re the best too,” he said.

“Obviously,” Minseok said.

Chanyeol took refuge in digging into the little bag: after he juggled the flowers momentarily, until Jongdae took them out of his hands. He held the rounded silver band in his palm and found himself unable to put any thoughts together.

“Min doesn’t like rings, so I didn’t really know what I was doing,” Jongdae said. “Is that okay? You don’t seem to have any.”

“I don’t have any,” Chanyeol rasped.

“Is it okay?”

“Yeah.”

Chanyeol was pinned in place, unable to do anything but stare down at the freaking ring in his freaking palm.

“Sweetness,” Minseok said.

Jongdae laughed softly.

“You want me to put it on, Chan? It’s loose on my middle finger, so I figure it ought to at least fit your pinkie, right?”

Chanyeol shivered as Jongdae slid the ring onto his finger. It was in fact a perfect fit on his pinkie.

“Lean down here and kiss me instead of crying, you dork.”

And that was easy enough.

“Channie,” Jongdae said, hands on Chanyeol’s cheeks. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Don’t make me list it all, for one thing I’m starving, and for another I’m kind of hoping to get lucky later.”

Chanyeol figured that was a good excuse to pull Dae in and kiss him again, to lick at that kittenish
mouth of his. He also figured that he had a great reason to follow Jongdae into the bedroom and put all his jewelry on, even though they weren’t going anywhere, just to make sure it all went together. Which it did – even if maybe it didn’t quite go with his tattered hoodie and lounge pants. But whatever.

“I can’t seriously be the first guy to ever give you a ring,” Jongdae said.

Min had put the two bouquets in vases that bracketed the kitchen island, and Dae was pouring wine, so Chanyeol didn’t have anything to do other than sit on a stool and play with the ring on his finger.

“You seriously can,” he said.

And before anybody could say something that might inspire him to break out into an Emotion, he added,

“And even if you hadn’t, Min told me way back at the beginning that he doesn’t want me wearing jewelry you guys didn’t give me.”

“Correct,” Min said.

“Well yeah, of course,” Dae said. “They still should’ve given it to you, and they’re assholes if they didn’t.”

Chanyeol narrowed his eyes.

“Keep that up and you’re definitely getting lucky later.”

“Awesome!”
Chapter 56

Given the way that Jongdae had dipped his chin to blink slowly up at them through his eyelashes during dinner and the way that anytime he needed to move, he would brush against one or the other of them, Chanyeol was hardly surprised that everything went suspiciously quiet behind him while he washed the dishes. He made it into a little game with himself, trying to clean each dish as quietly as possible, even if that slowed things down. A couple of times he heard a rustle or a sigh. Once he heard a soft smacking sound and grinned down, feeling his neck go hot.

When he turned around, all he could see on the sofa was Minseok’s curved back and Jongdae’s hand wrapped around the hem of Min’s sweater.

“Please,” he heard Jongdae murmur as he approached.

“Not here,” Minseok said, his voice deepened by laughter and want. “I’m in no mood to clean this sofa yet again.”

Jongdae sat up abruptly; Minseok grinned at Chanyeol over his shoulder. Chanyeol grinned back when Jongdae grabbed his wrist too and pulled them both into the bedroom where he flung all his clothes off before Chanyeol had gotten as far as untangling his hoodie sleeve from his cuff bracelet.

“Getting naked is your superpower,” Chanyeol said.

“Just giving the people what they want.”

“All two of us,” Minseok said.

“Of course.”

By that point, Jongdae was kneeling in the center of the bed, bouncing a little. When Min climbed toward him, Jongdae reached out, grabbed him, and spun him down onto his back, silencing any protest with his mouth. Chanyeol grinned and fetched out the lube bottle that Mr. Impatient was going to want in a minute or two before he finished folding his own clothes and sitting next to them on the bed.

“Wanna ride you,” Jongdae said with his mouth up under Minseok’s chin.

“And whom would you like to get you ready?” Min asked, sounding completely unruffled, despite the way he chewed his bottom lip.

“Don’t need it,” Jongdae said.

He yanked Min’s track pants down and grabbed the bottle but stilled when Minseok’s hand went around his wrist.

“What does that mean.”

Jongdae grinned.

“Did it at work,” he said. “Locked in a bathroom stall, with my other fist stuffed in my mouth so I’d stay quiet.”

Chanyeol’s dick became suddenly intensely interested in the proceedings.
“Did anyone hear you?” Min asked.

He still sounded totally calm, though Chanyeol saw his hips rut upward. Jongdae shook his head.

“That was a couple hours ago.”

“I want the burn,” Jongdae said.

Which was obvious by his stuttering groan and arched back as he lowered himself slowly onto Minseok’s dick. Min cursed the whole way down. Chanyeol leaned forward to run his hand down the curve of Dae’s spine – it was too beautiful not to touch. Jongdae gave a few panting breaths with his head still tipped back before he grinned down at Minseok.

“Can I come?”

Min ran his hands up Jongdae’s thighs.

“You’ve been super sweet today, of course you can, babe.”

The look on his face turned into something that would’ve made Chanyeol worry, and he reached back to grasp the headboard.

“You can come after both me and Chanyeol. And you can’t use your hands.”

“Fuck.”

Jongdae lifted up and dropped down.

“Not good enough?”

Jongdae barked out a laugh.

“What are you asking me, Min? Whether your offer’s not good enough, or whether I’m not good enough to make you come just like this?”

Minseok arched his body long so that he ground up into Jongdae. Chanyeol’s breath got caught in his throat, it was so beautiful. Jongdae sighed.

“I would never doubt your ability to rock me to my very foundation, Jongdae.”

Jongdae grinned and rocked forward.

“No hands, huh?”

“No hands.”

Chanyeol watched Jongdae bounce up and down, the muscles in his legs and the flush across his face. He didn’t quite know what to do with himself, or, for once, where he was going to fit into the equation, until Jongdae started to talk.

Because of course, Min had only said that he couldn’t use his hands.

“All day,” Jongdae said. “All day I thought about the two of you in this bed. Channie wrapped around you. Min. Baby, how are you so fucking good to me, baby?”

Minseok grasped the headboard and ground up to meet Jongdae dropping against him. Jongdae fell
forward onto his hands, moving faster.

“I could come twice,” he said.

“You won’t,” Min said. “You come on me, and you’ll pay for it. Or do you want the ring?”

It took Chanyeol a second to realize what Minseok meant. He shuddered.

“No,” Jongdae said.

One thrust, a second, a third.

“Me first, then Channie.”

“Min.”

“Make me come, baby.”

Jongdae moved faster, his skin shiny with sweat.

“I will.”

Chanyeol watched them – the pale length of Minseok’s body, Jongdae’s skin as golden as if he carried sunlight inside him. Chanyeol thought about what it felt like to have Dae ride him: the tight heat of his ass, his strength making for a maddening, endless friction that would pull pleasure out of anybody. He thought about Jongdae under him, wriggling and gasping, mouth hot and the flavor of the sweat on his neck.

The problem with those options was that it left Chanyeol waiting until they were done. Listening to those gasps and moans, watching the slide of their bodies against one another, feeling his palms itch with the desire to touch either or both of them and his dick ache.

Instead, he lay next to them, slicked up his hand, and slid a finger into himself, felt his mouth drop open at the welcome stretch of it. It had been a good while since he opened himself up, the heat of his own ass around his fingers and the control of doing it himself, knowing just how much he could take, how much he wanted.

Like Jongdae, he welcomed the burn and slid in a second finger.

“Shit, Channie,” Minseok breathed, looking over at him.

Jongdae sat back up on his knees, bouncing fast.

“Want me to fuck you, Chan?” he gasped.

“Yeah.”

“Make you come, Channie.”

Chanyeol made a show of drawing his fingers in and out of himself slowly.

“Make Min come first.”

Minseok laughed in the back of his throat. Jongdae shoved forward at the bottom of his bounce, and Min gasped.
“There you go,” Dae said. “Gonna come for me, babe? Gonna come in my ass?”

Minseok let go of the headboard in favor of digging his fingers into Jongdae’s thighs. He tossed his head, bottom lip between his teeth and a low growl in his throat.

“Do it, Min.”

Chanyeol burned, watching Minseok thrust up to meet Jongdae dropping down and fucking down onto his own hand. Impatient for his own turn, hand loose and teasing around his own dick.

“Dae.”

Maybe it was technically against the rules for Jongdae to grip Minseok’s wrists, but Min didn’t complain. He tilted his chin up, bent his knees, and shoved up into Jongdae with a groan that sounded more like a growl than anything else. Jongdae laughed under his breath. He leaned down to cup Min’s jaw and kiss him, open-mouthed and wet.

“Well done, babe,” Minseok panted.

Jongdae shifted, and Min exhaled hard, then laughed.

“Quit teasing me and go take care of poor Channie.”

Jongdae turned his head, and the mischievous heat in his glance made Chanyeol choke with desire.

“Touch me,” Chanyeol said. “Jongdae, please.”

So good, his alpha. His lover, his mate. Jongdae separated himself from Minseok with one more soft kiss and climbed atop Chanyeol, hands and mouth both soft and warm, moving over Chanyeol’s skin.

“Tell me how you want me, Chan.”

“Please. Be in me. Your hand, make me come, Dae, please.”

“Chan,” Minseok said.

Jongdae smiled at him, kissed him. Entered him, stroked him. Grinned down when Chanyeol moaned, his free hand spread across Chanyeol’s chest like an anchor while Chanyeol felt the dual pleasure of being split open and pulled off at the same time.

“So good,” he said.

“Yeah?”

Chanyeol blinked up through the haze of how good it all felt. Had he spoken aloud? Minseok’s fingers combed through his hair while Jongdae slid in and out of him.

“Looked so good, riding Min.”

“You look so good under me, Channie.”

“Wanna come.”

Jongdae groaned.
“Please, Chan. Please come, I’m so far past ready, please.”

Minseok leaned in and traced his tongue around the curve of Chanyeol’s ear. Chanyeol tipped his pelvis forward and cried out sharply at the spike of pleasure on Jongdae’s next thrust.

“There you go, baby,” Jongdae said.

“Squeeze him tight, love,” Minseok whispered in his ear.

“A little faster,” Chanyeol said.

He meant Jongdae’s hand, but both was good – Dae’s breath was harsh and his grip was so tight. Chanyeol felt his toes curl, reached out so Jongdae could hang onto one arm and crushed Minseok’s fingers with his other hand. Min leaned down to catch Chanyeol’s orgasm in his mouth, sucking hard so that Chanyeol’s moan turned into a string of shouted curses. He felt himself clench hard, and then Jongdae was gone, rhythm all busted while he gave a high-pitched cry and sagged forward, trying to hold himself up from crushing Minseok’s head.

“You follow directions so well,” Minseok said a couple of minutes later, his head on Chanyeol’s shoulder and his fingers in Jongdae’s hair.

“I do try,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol let them take most of his jewelry off of him for sleeping – he knew the various ear cuffs would only end up falling off overnight – but he kept the ring on his finger. He wasn’t sure which of his boyfriends had the dopier expression on his face at that. But then, his own expression was probably pretty sappy too.

He lay awake for a while in the dark, Dae lying halfway on his chest and Min curled against his side. He listened to their breathing, inhaled the softness of their scents in the warmth of the bed.

Maybe at some point they’d have a gooey, romantic day without any preceding drama.

Wouldn’t that be nice?

Minseok had a shift at the shop the next day. Chanyeol played Xbox with Baek for a bit, but he kept getting distracted by a little fragment of music that kept boinging around in his head. He noodled around on his guitar with it for a while. Filled up a page in a new notebook – more scratched-out parts than anything else, but by the afternoon, he had a couple of bars of something written down. Just enough to hum to himself, a little, happy-sounding thing.

It was more writing than he had done in a couple of years, and that was pretty cool.

The romantic gooeyness appeared to have rubbed off on Minseok, because he returned home from the shop bearing a bag full of meat. And then Jongdae was so thrilled to have fancy-ass steaks for dinner that he talked for like 20 minutes straight with no break, sliding around on his socks.

For a second, Chanyeol thought that he might be able to work up some crying, just out of plain happiness. But that would make Jongdae stop singing at his wineglass. It would make Minseok stop dancing at the stove. He chose instead to harmonize with Jongdae’s dumb song about the wonders of (a) wine, (b) steak, and (c) awesome boyfriends.

And that ended with Chanyeol having a lap full of alpha alternately kissing him and yelling about how great he was, so it had obviously been the correct action to take.
“When does your stupid work schedule go back to weekends off?” Jongdae complained when Minseok pointed out that they all needed to stop making out and go to sleep if anyone wanted to get up at the early alarm without excessive suffering.

“Ugh, not for forever,” Chanyeol said.

“Boo.”

“Yeah.”

He sleepwalked through their workout with them in the morning, then took advantage of the ride to work to load up on a few boxes of doughnuts to take to the station. Was it wrong to hope for a busy shift, just so the time would pass quickly until he saw them again?

“We’ll see you Sunday,” Minseok said, lips up against his mouth.

“Can’t wait,” Chanyeol said.

He took a deep breath, shouldered his bag, and grabbed the doughnut boxes. Tried to remember who they were on shift with. Tried to get his head in the game.

Most of the A team was gathered around the front desk when he walked in the door.

“Hey hey,” Siwon yelled.

He held up a calendar.

“If it isn’t Mr. August!”

Chanyeol cringed with his entire body.
If you watch the drama Missing 9, you can see Choi Taejoon (and Chanyeol) in action! (He's also in The Undateables)

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There were enough people participating in the calendar that most pages were either group shots or collages. But a month or two each year was generally devoted to a particularly good solo picture.

Chanyeol was there, in all his shirtless, glittery “glory,” cropped and touched up, just him and his skin, the barest sliver of his pants’ waistband, taking up the entire page atop the month of August. Smiling at the camera like he wanted it to eat him. And, in small text down in the bottom right corner, his name and presentation.

Well, great.

“Used to be I could count on having my own thirst-inducing page,” Siwon sighed. “I guess the torch is passing in my old age.”

Chanyeol glared at him. Siwon and Baekhyun had the page for March, the two of them hanging off the truck in musical theater poses with huge grins on their faces, looking adorable.

“I guess I get it, though. It’s a great picture, Yeol. I was almost one percent gay for a whole half a minute when I first saw it.”

Chanyeol took that as his cue to slink away from this profound embarrassment and put the doughnuts in the kitchen.

By the time he had changed clothes, the coffee he’d started was ready and his ears no longer felt like they were spouting actual flames. Until his phone pinged.

“I just received a text from Baekhyun,” Min wrote.

Oh no.

While Chanyeol was staring at his phone in horror, a picture of his photo came in.

Jongdae sent three key smashes, and

“THAT'S OURS”

“You got that right,” Min wrote.

So okay, that was pretty nice.

“We won’t ever know what day it is, but how nice to have the comfort of summertime to keep us overly warm all winter.”
Chanyeol squinted at his phone.

“INFINITE AUGUST,” Jongdae wrote.

“Argh,” Chanyeol wrote.

His phone buzzed with a cascade of heart-related and/or laughing emojis and stickers.

“Are your coworkers trying to make you blush so hard you faint?” Minseok sent.

“Aaaaaaarrrrrgh.”

Because he hadn’t participated in it before, Chanyeol had never paid much attention to the amount of work the calendar entailed. An email went out to everyone who had pre-ordered, and the entire lounge was taken over by boxes of calendars and envelopes, stacks of printed address stickers. That was no big deal - he had never minded stuffing calendars into envelopes. What he had forgotten was that some people paid extra to have their calendars signed.

“Why the hell would anyone want my autograph?” he whined when his hand started to ache.

“Man, if I had realized how much you were going to complain about this whole process, I would’ve crossed your name off the list,” Baekhyun said. “You’re gonna be a pain in the butt for the next month.”

Siwon scowled.

“It’s not going to take me a month to sign these stupid calendars, Baekhyun.”

Baek stared at him and burst out laughing.

“Aw,” Donghae (June, with Sehun and Yesung, looking all melodramatic and frowny with hoses draped over them) said, patting Siwon on the shoulder. “I know it’s hard for you, buddy. Yeollie’s going to get all the gifts and not even appreciate it. Now you know how I feel every year.”

“Unfair,” Siwon muttered.

“Gifts?”

Baekhyun slid out of his chair to laugh on the floor.

Oh. Right. The station was pretty much full of food and flowers for a couple of weeks after the calendar.

“What, do you think I’m not going to share the cookies and stuff? Of course I will.”

Baekhyun made a sound that made Chanyeol wonder whether he needed an oxygen mask.

“Our sweet, innocent omega,” Donghae grinned.

Weirdos.

Chanyeol signed calendars until the bell rang. He ran off to help douse a little fire, then settled back in to sign more calendars and endure more teasing. This routine played out until A team went off shift the following night.
“Just kick one of us if we take it too far, yeah Yeol?” Yesung said at one point.

Chanyeol rolled his eyes.

“I’m well aware of you guys’ propensity to exaggerate, but thanks.”

Yesung squinted at him, then laughed.

Baekhyun and Sehun made a big show of holding up Chanyeol’s page at the shift change meeting Saturday night when Joonmyun mentioned that the calendar was in. So there was another round of hollering, which was terrific. At least C team, being younger, would actually shut the hell up when he glared at them.

Because he had visitors scheduled for Sunday, of course a long, messy call came in before dawn on Sunday. The truck pulled in afterward, and his people were waiting for him, clustered together with Mark and Taeyong. Chanyeol looked sooty and smelled of fire-suppressant foam and burned-up warehouse, but he wasn’t about to let that stop him from going straight for hugs.

“Is that blood?” Jongdae yelled before he had gotten 3 steps in their direction.

Chanyeol looked down, then patted at his jacket.

“No, I think it’s rust,” he said.

“Okay, good, you’re not supposed to scare me like that,” Jongdae said, having teleported to only 4 cm away.

At some point, Operation Overwhelming Affection was going to be over, and Chanyeol was going to beat on Jongdae a little for making it so difficult not to shout “I love you” at him all the time.

“You worry about me?” he asked quietly.

Jongdae scoffed.

“Of course I worry about you, what do you think I am, an asshole?”

On the other hand, Jongdae made all the other parts of the operation so easy.

“No, I think you’re amazing.”

Chanyeol had to bite the inside of his cheek not to grin at the way Jongdae startled, turned pink, and rubbed the back of his neck.

“I wasn’t fishing for – Jesus, Channie.”

“Anyway, hello,” Chanyeol said, giving in to his smile urge and swooping down for a hug before Dae could pull himself together.

“How was brunch?”

“Less exciting than what you’ve been up to, but nice,” Minseok said, brushing at the rust stain before consenting to his own brief hug.

“The world is extremely flammable,” Sehun said.

That prompted a round of introductions. Taejoon’s eyes were round as coins, and he was about to
give himself a neck injury from not knowing where he wanted to look. Chanyeol pulled his helmet from around his neck and plopped it on Taejoon’s head. The sound he made put a grin on Minjoo’s face.

Mark remembered his probie duties and offered to give Taejoon and Minjoo a tour of the trucks with the earnestness of every probie everywhere. Chanyeol remembered his brilliant idea and mentioned the wine-club thing when Jongdae and Joonmyun were standing next to one another, which set them off on a nerd spiral that made Sehun flee. That left Chanyeol hanging around watching Baekhyun ogle Min – thankfully for not long enough to get annoyed, because Minseok smiled up at Chanyeol with half-lidded eyes and drawled,

“Seems that I have a calendar to purchase.”

That set Baek to laughing, but also, Chanyeol knew that once they were no longer standing in the vehicle bay where practically anybody could walk by at any time, Minseok wouldn’t mind a little hand-holding. Minseok smirked at the sheer number of boxes stacked up in the lounge. And bought three copies.

“Three?” Chanyeol asked.

Minseok shrugged and handed Baekhyun his card while Baek grinned at him.

“Three copies?” Jongdae asked when they were back in the vehicle bay.

“One for home and one for the studio,” Min said.

“And one for my office?”

Jongdae waggled his eyebrows.

“Babe, no, you have actual work that needs to get done at the office.”

Jongdae pouted so charmingly.

“I guess,” he groused.

“Then who’s the third one for?”

Minseok smiled like a shark.

“I think Luhan will enjoy having one.”

Chanyeol stared at him, then decided, over the sound of Jongdae’s shrieking laughter, that maybe he’d go offer a seat in the ladder truck to Taejoon in lieu of trying to imagine what fucking Luhan would have to say about a calendar full of half-naked firefighters. Including himself.

Taejoon was thrilled to sit in the cab and put his hands all over the dashboard. Minjoo and Mark smiled at each other over his enthusiasm. It really was cute.

And it wasn’t long before Minseok stood quietly behind Chanyeol. Chanyeol looked down at him.

“I won’t give it to Lu if you’re bothered,” he said softly.

Chanyeol couldn’t hold onto his snit in the face of that.

“It’s fine,” he said. “I’m just in a twist about that damn calendar, it’s so embarrassing, but I’ll get over
Minseok squeezed his fingers, warmth and affection in his eyes and Jongdae gazing over at them with a quiet smile on his face. Chanyeol took an unsteady breath.

“Excuse me,” an unfamiliar woman’s voice called out.

Chanyeol ripped himself out of his fall headfirst into more gooeyness and turned to see a beta auntie standing in the middle of the bay with a wrapped plate in her hands. Neighbors brought them goodies sometimes: one of the perks of the job.

Except that she looked him up, down, and up again while he walked toward her, then held out the plate with a grin.

“Well, Park Chanyeol of August, aren’t you even nicer in the flesh?”

Chanyeol took the plate before her words had a chance to make it all the way into his brain. When they did, she laughed at whatever his face was doing.

“I’ve never seen you in the calendar before, are you new?”

“No ma’am,” Chanyeol said. “I’ve been at this station for three years. I just never was – in the calendar before.”

She nodded.

“I see.”

Chanyeol stood under her stare until the discomfort was too much.

“I’ll just? Go put these in the kitchen? Thank you so much, we’ll eat them well.”

The auntie grinned.

“Those are for you, honey,” she said. “I thought maybe a firefighting omega would think rice cakes are old-fashioned, so they’re brownies. I hope you like chocolate.”

“I? Um? Do? Thank you?”

“You sweet thing,” she said, and patted one of his hands.

She laughed. The whole thing was very confusing.

“Are you mated, honey?”

Chanyeol flinched, and the auntie laughed again. Jongdae was at his side before he could do so much as breathe. The auntie looked him up and down and nodded.

“You his mate?”

Chanyeol saw Jongdae startle, heard him clear his throat.

“Not – officially.”

Jongdae’s voice wasn’t quite gravely enough to be a growl.

“He wears my bracelet.”
The auntie shook her head.

“Should’ve had him wear it in the calendar,” she said.

She patted Chanyeol’s hand again, with a sly glance toward Jongdae as she did it, like she knew she was taking liberties.

“Well, you enjoy those brownies, honey. If you enjoy them a third as much as I’m going to enjoy August, it’s a fair trade.”

She lifted her head and called out before Jongdae’s growl really got going.

“Now where’s my Siwon?”

Baekhyun popped up behind Chanyeol’s shoulder, startling him into a stumble but giving him the chance to make a strategic retreat while Baek and the auntie had a loud conversation about A team’s shift and his picture with Siwon before she handed over another container full of snacks and patted Baekhyun on the cheeks. For another thing Chanyeol had to be grateful about, in being spared that.

“What the heck,” he murmured.

“I don’t even fucking know,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol handed the plate over to Minseok with a shrug.

“Got yourself a fan, sweetness?”

Jongdae grumbled.

“I guess?”

“He has no idea,” Baekhyun yelled behind them.

“You guys keep saying that, if you fucking told me what you’re going on about, I’d have an idea.”

“But your cluelessness is so funny!” Baek said.

Chanyeol tried to step on his foot; sadly, Baekhyun danced out of the way.

“Dude, even I get a few fans every year, and you’re new meat.”

Jongdae flat-out snarled. Everybody around them laughed, so Chanyeol bumped his shoulder in solidarity, because what the hell.

“Aw come on, it’s fine,” Baekhyun said. “Yeollie gets an ego boost, we’ll make sure his dubious virtue stays intact, and if he eats all the food people send him, for next year’s calendar all those terrible muscles will be buried under squish, and maybe I’ll have a chance to be the popular kid.”

“Is everything you say calculated to annoy me?” Jongdae asked.

Baekhyun grinned.

“Pretty much,” he said. “I like how your eyebrows jump around.”

“Okay, I need to see this thing that has everyone so worked up,” Minjoo said.

“You really don’t,” Chanyeol said.
He tried to communicate this via a pleading look, but sadly, Baekhyun had the calendar flipped open too quickly. Minjoo blinked and turned red as a strawberry.

“Oh. You’re not as skinny as you were, uh. Back in – at camp,” she said.

“No, I work out a lot,” Chanyeol said over the sirens blaring on the inside of his head and the urge to drop dead on the spot. “For work, you know.”

“Sure,” Minjoo said. “I bet.”

“Wow!” Taejoon said. “I’m not sure that I’m supposed to have such a positive reaction to my half-naked brother-in-law!”

In that moment, Chanyeol loved Choi Taejoon so much. Minjoo smacked him on the arm and pulled herself together.

“No, you’re not,” she snapped. “Also, excuse me, brother-in-law?”

She very pointedly examined her bare left hand. Taejoon grinned. Minseok pursed his lips at them, and Chanyeol loved Taejoon even more, because for sure that was going to obliterate any noticing Minseok might’ve done about them acting weird.

Taejoon grinned and slung one arm across her shoulders.

“We could go jewelry shopping,” he said.

He gave Minjoo just long enough for her mouth to drop open before he added,

“I read this whole article about how jeweled hair clips are the new hot thing.”

They had a cute little tussle in which Minjoo pretended to throw a lot of tiny, pointy elbows and Taejoon pretended to be mortally wounded, until Minseok herded everybody up and announced that it was time to go. Baekhyun hugged on Jongdae until he received a minor injury and on Minseok until Chanyeol physically removed him.

Chanyeol decided that he had had too many frights in the preceding 20 minutes to care about propriety and kissed them both, onlookers be damned.

“Don’t eat all my brownies,” he said.

“We will eat zero of your brownies,” Minseok said.

“Boo,” Jongdae said.

“I’ll wrap them up, and they’ll be waiting when you get home tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow!” Jongdae said, hanging on Chanyeol’s arm. “I guess I can survive for thirty more hours.”

“Maybe we’ll even try not to eat them all during the day, so you can have one when you come home,” Min said.

Chanyeol waved them all off and highly enjoyed listening to Jongdae’s grousing about the unfairness of his work schedule and Min teasing him with threats of no treats.

Then the bell rang, and Chanyeol figured that since he never had gotten the chance to change out of
his dirty work gear, he might as well accompany C team on their call. It was so pleasant to have a nice, calming inferno to quench after all those adventures.

When he got back to the station, there were two more containers of snacks in the kitchen with his name on them, accompanied by cards with a lot of glitter and hearts on them, and encouraging notes with many exclamation points.

“Oh man,” Baekhyun laughed. “Your face! This is going to be so great.”

Just for that, Chanyeol took the rice cakes and went to sit in the office with Joonmyun.
Chapter 58

The rest of the shift was busy enough that Chanyeol didn’t have time to fret over anything other than how signing calendars made his hand hurt. He left the remaining snacks behind on Monday morning but took the cards with him, mostly so they wouldn’t end up filched from his locker and taped up somewhere embarrassing.

He had the whole week at home, and it was glorious. Monday was full of lying around sleepily blinking at his super-handsome beta boyfriend, who was wearing the cutest blue sweatshirt ever designed, that hung loose at the bottom, making a great opportunity to put one’s hands up underneath it and wrap hands around that nice, toned midsection.

Mysteriously, that whole situation ended in Chanyeol having Min under him, his hands in Min’s hair, appreciating how Minseok was the absolute perfect size to thrust into and kiss at the same time, with those strong legs wrapped around his waist, god.

“How do I even love you this much?” Chanyeol groaned into Min’s mouth.

Minseok tilted his hips and pulled in hard with his legs, and Chanyeol made a bunch of sounds way in his upper register that made Min laugh, until Chanyeol clamped down on his shoulder – just with his regular teeth, but right on top of the mark he’d made, and then Chanyeol was squeaking again from the squeeze when Min said “oh,” and came between them.

Chanyeol was still lying atop Min when Jongdae got home, although Minseok had started to exhibit such cruelties as wiggling and pulling at Chanyeol’s hair.

“Well, hello,” Jongdae said from the doorway.

“I think he’s broken,” Minseok said. “And my feet are starting to fall asleep.”

“You can’t smush the only smart one in this relationship, we need him,” Jongdae said.

Which was both true and hilarious, but Chanyeol made himself heavy and floppy anyway, so that Jongdae had to work, laughing, to roll him over. Once off of Min, Chanyeol figured it was a good time to spring into action. Jongdae might’ve had alpha strength, but Chanyeol had surprise and size on his side, as well as the insider knowledge that Kim Jongdae would stop protesting the minute a wrestling match looked like it was going to turn into anything sex-related.

“You’re not even gonna let me take my work, mmmmph!” Jongdae said, and stopped acting like a little residual stickiness couldn’t be laundered out of one business casual outfit.

Finally. Chanyeol was trying to concentrate, a gag reflex was nothing to be careless about. Still, it was nice to be able to rely on Minseok to tag in when needed to keep Dae from distracting him.

And the post-coital brownies had caramel chips in them. Scary beta auntie was a great baker.

All the domestic stuff was just so nice. Minseok’s standards of cleanliness were slightly overboard, but when Chanyeol pitched in to help, they were left with plenty of time to hang out, taking walks and cooking dinner together. And every night, when Jongdae got home, he seemed so thrilled to see them both that it was like a little celebration every time.
On Tuesday, his mom called to say that she’d received her copy of the calendar. Chanyeol screamed on the inside.

“It’s a very flattering photo, son. I only looked at it for three seconds, and I told your auntie that I’m not going to visit her at all during August.”

“Good plan, Mom. Thanks for supporting the station.”

“Oh, well. Of course!”

Tuesday evening found Chanyeol lying in an unapproved configuration on the sofa, legs up over the back and head hanging upside down while he read another volume of *Hell’s Heat*, when Jongdae got home.

“Feet!” Jongdae yelled.

Chanyeol wiggled them in response. That set the tone for the rest of the evening: there was a lot of chasing around and ridiculous commentary. Of course, there was also a lot of kissing, so it wasn’t like Chanyeol was going to complain.

Wednesday he spent racing through the last 2 volumes of *Hell’s Heat*. Minseok arrived home from the shop around the same time as Jongdae, takeout sushi in hand, just in time to find Chanyeol sobbing over the end of the last volume.

“Channie,” Jongdae said, laughing while he tried to wipe tears away.

“It was really romantic!”

“I’m sure.”

“No, seriously!”

“No spoilers,” Minseok laughed, handing over a box of tissues. “And thank you for the warning not to read it unless I’m home alone.”

Yeah. The omega demon sacrificed his life to save his alpha, with a 20-page miserable death scene full of declarations of love. Then there was a whole sad montage of the alpha living a long life all alone, suffering and sad, until the moment of his death, when the omega appeared, having been transformed by love, sacrifice, etc., into an angel and sent to escort his alpha into the hereafter and, presumably, an eternity of celestial fucking.

Super, super romantic. It was totally going to make Min cry. Not that Chanyeol figured he’d ever know about it, even though he had to bear sitting on their sofa with a red face and a snotty nose while they laughed at him.

Thursday night they went bowling, all three of them. There was no sign of the stupid alpha and his group, so they had a grand time. For once, Minseok wasn’t the resident genius, though he held his own.

“I can’t believe I have such lame boyfriends,” Chanyeol said when the sight of his wrist brace led to the shattering discovery that Minseok was not Team Iron Man but instead Team Cap.

“It’s a punishment for bad behavior in a former lifetime,” Minseok said pressing the length of his body close and purring like a cat, such that Chanyeol’s next frame was shot to hell.
“You play so dirty,” Jongdae laughed.

“I do everything dirty, baby,” Min said.

“Tell that to the kitchen,” Chanyeol said.

He was so proud of himself that he didn’t even mind all the hitting.

Jongdae kept bringing them drinks and feeding them fries in between gutter balls. They laughed and teased each other. Minseok and Chanyeol both tried to give Jongdae advice on how to suck slightly less, to no avail.

“Whatever,” Jongdae said. “If all my physical dexterity is limited to my top-notch fucking skills, I’m content.”

“That is a fair point,” Chanyeol said.

“You say top notch,” Minseok said. “Prove it.”

“I’ll go pay,” Jongdae said.

Two orgasms later, Chanyeol was convinced, and given that Minseok was lying face down with his fists still balled up in the sheets, Chanyeol figured he pretty well was too.

“Anybody want a glass of water?” Jongdae asked.

Chanyeol found it in himself to grab a pillow and hit Jongdae in the face with it.

“Thank you,” Minseok mumbled.

Chanyeol tried to remember when he had ever been so happy, and came up with nothing. After dinner on Friday night, he pulled Minseok against him for a slow sweet kiss, and cupped Jongdae’s face with his hands and lingered against his lips.

“Chan, god,” Jongdae whispered.

“Yeah.”

Chanyeol enjoyed his cold walk to the station, chin tucked into his coat collar and a week’s worth of excellent memories in his mind. Unfortunately, Joonmyun and Leeteuk accosted him as soon as he stepped inside.

“We appear to have made a miscalculation,” Leeteuk said.

Chanyeol’s stomach dropped to his feet. He couldn’t imagine what in the world they meant. He replayed the past several calls he’d been on and couldn’t imagine that anybody had complained about him. Nobody had died – nobody had even become injured.

“Come into the office, Yeollie, don’t worry,” Joonmyun said.

Don’t worry? How was he supposed to not worry, looking at the strain on their faces? He loved his job, he couldn’t even imagine doing anything else, what had he done wrong? They’d let him have some kind of plan, right? Like, they wouldn’t just fire him outright when he hadn’t done –
The office was full of flowers.

*Full.* Of flowers. And. Small boxes.

“What the hell?”

Joonie grasped his hand tight. Leeteuk took a long, heavy breath.

“So these are,” Leeteuk said, “courting gifts.”

“For you,” Joonmyun said.

“What the hell,” Chanyeol said.

“And the thing is, Chanyeol, we don’t know what you want us to do,” Leeteuk said.

Don’t. What?

“What the hell?”

“Yeollie,” Joonmyun said softly. “We know you have Jongdae and Minseok. But some of these are formal mating contracts, Chanyeol. It’s not just jewelry. A couple of these people got lawyers involved. We need to know whether you even want to see them. It’s your right. And you haven’t said whether anything with Jongdae and Minseok is. Well, official.”

Chanyeol took a minute to close his eyes so they wouldn’t see how furious he was. But the way Joonie squeezed his hand probably meant that they could.

“It doesn’t need to be official,” he said, hearing gravel in his voice. “I don’t want to read this kind of stuff from strangers.”

“Of course you don’t,” Joonmyun said. “We just had to check.”

“I don’t mean to offend you, Chanyeol,” Leeteuk said. “It’s just that this stuff is official, and we’re a government agency, we can’t let the station become vulnerable.”

Chanyeol grimaced.

“I’m sorry,” Leeteuk said. “You shouldn’t be vulnerable either. You know how much we all value you.”

“As a firefighter and a coworker,” Joonmyun said.

“Exactly,” Leeteuk said. “I just didn’t know what to do.”

“Me either,” Joonmyun said.

Chanyeol looked around at the flowers, the small pile of bracelet-sized boxes (some from jewelry stores whose name he recognized, a couple from Tiffany’s), and the five cream-colored envelopes made of heavy paper with official red seals on them.

“I don’t have to look at them,” he said.

“You don’t,” Leeteuk said.

“We’ll do what you want,” Joonmyun said.
“I mean, I’d prefer this all disappear,” he said.

“Disappear’s a bit of a stretch,” Joonie said, “but we’ll take care of it.”

“I’m sorry to cause trouble.”

Leeteuk patted his arm.

“Should’ve just been less handsome, Yeol.”

Baekhyun had enough kindness to start with hugs before he laid in with the teasing. Yesung and Siwon went immediately to teasing, but cut with enough compliments to soften it. Shindong offered to take all the jewelry, along with a whole conjecture about how much money he’d make pawning it, until Chanyeol was laughing too hard to mind.

“The worst part’s the phone calls,” Sehun said.

“Oh, fuck you,” Chanyeol said.

He tried to put it out of his head. But when he had a free second, Chanyeol texted ‘I should never have done the calendar.’

He wasn’t surprised, but he was pretty happy that his phone rang immediately – first from Minseok and then from Jongdae, followed by both hanging up, and then a call from Jongdae.

“Sorry,” Jongdae said when Chanyeol picked up. “We both had an outbreak of the stupids and didn’t think about how you can’t answer two calls at once. Are you okay?”

“Yeah.”

He told them about the gifts and the contracts. Jongdae growled, even through the part where Chanyeol said his coworkers had promised to run interference for him.

“Any more brownies?” Minseok asked with laughter in his voice, and then laughter outright when Jongdae growled again.

“Some cookies. And mountains of rice cakes,” Chanyeol said. “And several bottles of medicinal wines.”

“Oh ho,” Minseok said. “Ginseng and mushroom, I presume?”

Then it was Chanyeol’s turn to growl. Minseok laughed.

“Don’t even bother bringing those home,” Min said. “They taste horrible. Unless you want to give them to my great-grandfather. I promise not to bring you with me.”

There were sounds of a scuffle in the background.

“Min was invited to taste samples when he took a sculpture to a brewery today,” Jongdae said. “He’s in troublemaker mode. I expect a lecture about either germs or art any minute now. Are you okay, Channie?”

“It’s really uncomfortable.”
“Jesus, Chan, of course it is. All those total strangers? I will totally hunt them all down and bite their windpipes if you want, but I figure maybe that’s counterproductive.”

“I appreciate the offer, though.”

“You can’t fault them for their good taste, though. Even if you are already taken.”

Chanyeol liked the sound of that. Taken. It wasn’t an “I love you,” but it was still pretty good to hear.
Chapter 59

Chanyeol consented to having the piles of flowers placed around the station so his coworkers could enjoy them, and Leeteuk organized another mail team to return the jewelry. Chanyeol never found out what became of the official contracts, because he didn’t ask, and nobody volunteered the information.

He wasn’t great about taking things calmly. Trying to pretend that the flowers and goodies were for the benefit of the station was fine, until he had to go in his locker and see the growing stack of cards.

Joonmyun refused to let him go on the grocery run, no matter how much he protested.

“Just give it a little time to let things cool down,” Joonie said. “The phone’s still ringing for you almost once an hour. I know as well as you do how much you hate getting hassled, just stick around here for a little bit, please?”

Chanyeol did a lot of snapping at coworkers who teased him about those phone calls, until he flat-out yelled at Baekhyun.

Baek let him yell himself out, paused for effect, and said,

“Okay, Yeol. We get it.”

Which was so mature and reasonable that Chanyeol immediately felt like an asshole. He moped around the station for the afternoon, cooking every favorite dish he could remember for the people currently on shift (even though they had gotten the wrong brand of soup base, because they didn’t know what the hell they were doing) by way of apology. So dinner at least was pretty cheerful, and Baek let him snuggle up close while they sat in front of the TV later afterward.

“You’re dying of embarrassment, huh?”

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said.

“Okay, I’ll put the word out.”

Sehun took over handling the people who showed up in person at the station. This was probably pretty hard on the people in question, because he was extremely alpha at them all and only accepted flowers or food if the offerant wasn’t “weird.” For someone who looked essentially like a surprisingly good-looking roadside weed, he was scarily dominant.

“That’s my baby son,” Donghae said, grinning while he opened windows to disperse Sehun’s alpha reek after one encounter that Chanyeol presumed was very weird.

“If only some nice boy would settle him down and make him happy.”

“I have some paperwork to do in the office,” Joonmyun muttered to his feet, and then Sehun was so mad that Donghae had to open a second window to try to get a cross-breeze going.

Not the best work shift Chanyeol had ever worked. He was more grateful than he could say for the way his coworkers closed ranks around him, but it was weird and uncomfortable, and he hated being the cause of so much trouble.

When he returned home Monday night, Jongdae handed him a small box that contained a short
length of blackened chain with a small ring at one end and a faceted crimson drop at the other end – a nice little fillip that could be suspended from all kinds of things, from bracelet clasps to earrings to sunglass arms. Chanyeol had never imagined that he’d have the opportunity to be so sparkly all the time, he had really lucked out.

Then Jongdae took 45 minutes to rub scent all over his face and shoulders. Chanyeol spent the whole time sitting with his hands on Jongdae’s hips, so blissed out with petrichor and affection that it wasn’t until Jongdae kissed him soundly and got up that Chanyeol was capable of thinking “what the hell.”

“Does he have any idea how obvious he’s being?” Chanyeol asked Minseok when Jongdae was in the bathroom.

“Doubtful,” Min said. “He’s so, so dumb. And I love him so, so much.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

“What are you two looking so morose about?” Jongdae shouted.

“Just missing you,” Minseok said.

“Shut up.”

Sure. He said that, but he followed it up by climbing on top of both them, doling out kisses like raindrops in a storm. Was anybody surprised that that ended in a lot of nakedness? Nobody was surprised. Nobody was unhappy about it either, least of all Chanyeol, who watched from close up the way Min’s eyes went so wide, cheeks red and kiss-swollen mouth open, while Jongdae sucked him dry.

“Look at how beautiful you are, love,” Chanyeol said, and Jongdae hummed, which made Minseok clench his teeth, his fingers digging into Chanyeol’s shoulder.

“You’re a fucking flatterer,” Jongdae said a couple minutes later, in a low, alpha-ish growl, hauling Chanyeol’s legs around his waist. “Pretty ironic, given the way you burn like the surface of the sun.”

And the next morning, Jongdae cupped his hands around Chanyeol’s cheeks and rubbed their noses together, whispering “Chan” several times, kissing him so long and sweetly that Minseok rolled over with a sleepy chuckle to ruffle Jongdae’s hair.

The weather was crap the whole time he was home, so they all spent a lot of time indoors. Chanyeol thought that for the first time in his life, he was approaching maximum cuddle capacity, and the long expanse of Tuesday afternoon prompted him to text Eunmi asking for another set of manhwa.

“This is getting ridiculous,” Minseok said when Chanyeol popped next door for a pile of warmer sweaters. “I know we need to sit down to talk about it, but paying that rent is a waste of money.”

Chanyeol dropped his sweaters.

“Okay, sweetness, don’t worry about it. Let me know if you need another drawer.”

So that was. Something to think about.

Otherwise, they ate a lot of soup and watched a lot of Complete Love, which got super exciting when it turned into a crime drama all of a sudden. The nice beta got kidnapped, and the police were totally useless, so the omega lady and the alpha dude had to find and rescue him themselves.
Chanyeol was pretty pissed that they hadn’t gotten to the rescue by the time he had to go back to work.

“Should’ve had less sex,” he said.

“You shut your mouth, don’t be terrible,” Jongdae said. “We can still take away all your birthday presents.”

Pouting still worked great with respect to achieving more kisses.

But it was still frustrating: both the bullshit of people being weird about his presentation at work and the fact that Jongdae had spent so much time scent-marking him, would call him “taken,” would kiss him and fuck him and be fucked by him and hold his hand and feed him pancakes but not just fucking say it.

“How did you last six months?” Chanyeol had asked on Thursday when Dae was at work.

“I grew up learning to only ever be reserved,” Min said. “I think of myself as patient, though I’ve certainly also heard myself described as stubborn and stuck-up instead. Don’t let this turn into a problem, Channie. Talk to him if you need to.”

It wasn’t exactly a problem. Not yet. Not with all the sweetness and silliness, or the way that Jongdae drove him to work Saturday morning and walked into the station with him to stand in a corner rumbling with Sehun. Whatever alpha business they had, it concluded with Jongdae nodding and clasping Sehun’s arm.

“Are you sure you’re not married?” Sehun asked once Jongdae had left.

Chanyeol groaned and left the room before he knocked Sehun down.

There were fewer bouquets than there had been the week before – though there was a second plate of brownies from scary beta auntie, along with a note in Siwon’s handwriting (stuck into the bag of new manhwas) that she felt bad for his discomfort. Plus an addition at the bottom: “I can’t believe you took over MY auntie, jerk.”

Sunday morning, Chanyeol woke up to find a photo sent not to the group chat, but to him directly: Minseok, holding up the final volume of Hell’s Heat, pointing to the single tear rolling down his cheek.

”Too early for squeaking,” Sehun complained from the top bunk.

A text brought Min and Dae over on Sunday afternoon to pick up snacks and books – and, Chanyeol rather thought, to check in on him. Chanyeol blushed and ducked his head away from Sehun’s and Baekhyun’s knowing smiles, though that didn’t stop him from holding Minseok’s hand.

“Where are you taking Yeollie for his birthday?” Baekhyun asked(leered) on their way out.

Jongdae squeezed Chanyeol’s fingers in warning, so he had a second to brace himself.

“Up the ass, if that’s what he wants,” Jongdae said.

Jesus. But for once Chanyeol found himself quick on the uptake, so before Baek’s mouth was even halfway open, he got out,

“Yeah, probably, and vice versa.”
Baekhyun shrieked about it for a solid hour.

“Min is so awesome, and Jongdae is such a troll,” he said, wiping his eyes. “I love those guys.”

“Me too,” Chanyeol said.

Everybody was piled around a football match in the common room, and Chanyeol was just starting to think what he might cook for dinner, when the station erupted into pure noise.

They all stared at one another, and it took a second for Chanyeol’s ears to process what was going on.

Every one of their cellphones. Every wall-mounted phone.

And the station's alarm bells, not ringing out the usual one-pause-one or two-pause-two, but one long, continuous, uninterrupted scream for aid.
A career fire was a reality for everyone – that thing they tried to prepare for, and dreaded. It was probably lucky that the alarms screamed out just at the shift change, so that most of A team was there to jump in the trucks, with their steady heads and experience, not having all left yet as C team arrived. Chanyeol rode the ladder truck, hanging onto the back in the wind, with Doyoung and Mark from C team.

“You’ll be okay,” Chanyeol mouthed, hoping that squeezing their arms and saying so would go any way at all toward calming the panic clear in their eyes.

The fire was well outside their district, and they saw it long before they got anywhere close: one of the huge downtown apartment complexes. Burning from the middle out, on a Sunday night, when most people would be home.

“You were trained for this,” Chanyeol shouted into Mark’s ear.

He wished he could take comfort in it for himself.

The heat and noise were incredible. There were at least 4 other companies already on site when they arrived, with sirens all around. They jumped off the trucks, the team leaders scanning to see what holes needed to be filled.

“Back,” Joonmyun yelled.

Baekhyun scaled the ladder truck to work the huge spotlight set atop it.

Already the sidewalk around them was scattered with blue tarps, evidence of desperate people making a terrible choice. Another fell while they were regrouping, and Chanyeol put his height to work, stepping in front of Mark just as the body hit the pavement.

“God,” Doyoung swore next to him.

Chanyeol was proud of his team leaders, for how quickly they gathered themselves, for how they put C team on the hoses and sent Mark to the EMTs to find out how medical services wanted to coordinate. Chanyeol prayed that he wouldn’t be set to clearing the sidewalk. Maybe he shouldn’t have been relieved to be put on the rescue team, but he was. He suited up with his oxygen tanks and mask, hefted an axe and can, and set off with most of A team, into the building.

It wasn’t bad yet on the ground floor. There were a number of firefighters herding people down through stairwells, probably residents of lower floors, where the fire hadn’t reached yet. Four flights
up, it was too smoky for anyone to be able to see properly. Six floors up, it was an inferno.

For a second, Chanyeol’s determination quailed. This was as bad as anything he’d ever seen. The smoke and the weird light of the fire made it hard to know who was a firefighter and who was a civilian. This building held hundreds and hundreds of people, easy. And here he was, with an axe.

What if he didn’t make it?

Would Minseok tell Jongdae that he’d loved him?

No. He couldn’t go there. He could only trust his training and his abilities. Anything else was out of his control. He was here to help people. Chanyeol took a deep breath and climbed.

At the tenth floor, they couldn’t go any further, and fire roiled along the ceiling. Chanyeol knew he was already drenched with sweat under his gear, but all he could feel was heat. He and his team members – he wasn’t even sure who was behind him, and whether it was still Siwon, Yesung, and Shindong plus a few members from some other company – who fanned out behind him into the hallway. The two behind him held their portable extinguishers out, and they went as quickly as they could, Chanyeol kicking or chopping doors open, making a quick run through smoke-filled apartments, dragging still forms out.

He couldn’t look too closely, couldn’t spend time, couldn’t think about the state those people were in. Only drag them into the hallway, pass them down the line to whoever would carry them down the stairs.

They made it to the end of the hallway, went into the second stairwell and down, did it again. Fire chased them. Fire ran faster than people could. It chased them out of the eighth floor before they could do more than poke their masks through the door, pelting down the stairwell to six. A couple more people dragged out of smoke and flames, and they had to book it again down to five.

The building started to fall apart around them on four. Chanyeol was on his tank by that point, the portable extinguishers of his team mates having run out. He’d handed his axe to the person on his left; they were small but quick, busting open doors with an efficiency he admired. On that floor, it was a little more obvious that the people they pulled out of apartments were no longer among the living.

Chanyeol told himself to ignore it and keep going.

The fire chased them down another floor.

On three, a wall collapsed. Chanyeol, as the largest one in the group, flung himself forward, right arm raised, and took the brunt of the flaming debris. He staggered under the weight of it, felt a few different types of sharp pain, gathered himself, moved on. There was a person lying on the floor behind the collapsed wall; Chanyeol shouldered them, ignoring body’s twinges, and they retreated another floor.

He passed the person to another firefighter, dragged another couple of people out on two and passed them along. One firefighter fell through a hole that opened in the floor. Chanyeol and the small person with his axe dragged them up and down the hallway. Everybody’s canisters were empty.

This low down, the stairwell was full of civilians: some unconscious, most of them crying. How many did he carry out? He had no idea. Maybe a dozen. Maybe two. Fire overtook them, minute by minute, even in that reinforced stairwell where nothing was supposed to be able to burn. Chanyeol carried people out, took a breath, and went back in through the flames, over and over and over, until
he worked on pure habit. His body had gone past tired, to the point where he couldn’t imagine how to stop moving. His brain had gone past horror into a numbness that was the only thing that allowed him to continue going back into the smoke, into the flames.

Into the nightmare, grab a body – arm around the waist if they could walk, over the shoulder if they couldn’t – out into the chaos. Transfer to reaching arms, deep breath, repeat. His arm hurt in a way that let him know he was injured somehow. Whether burned or otherwise, he didn’t know and didn’t have time yet to care.

He turned to the building to go back in. There was a rumble, and an arm of flame reached out like it was looking for more sacrifice. The firefighters stumbled back, then forward again with water fountaining toward the flame.

“Stop,” someone said, tugging at his left sleeve.

Chanyeol tried to pull away, to go back into the heat, try to find more people, bring them out.

“It’s enough,” the person said.

“Chanyeol. We’re done.”

Chanyeol blinked. The face in front of him resolved itself into Leeteuk, pale under the soot streaked across his face, helmet askew.

The ground felt unstable for a moment under his feet, but Chanyeol stood still until it was solid again.

“Come on,” Leeteuk said. “We got everyone out possible, it’s all down to water now.”

The farther they walked away from the building, the more exhausted Chanyeol was, and the more his arm hurt.

“Everybody okay?” he asked.

“I don’t know yet. Are you okay?”

Chanyeol stopped and looked at his right arm. His sleeve and glove were split open, frayed at the edges. Just looking at it made his arm throb.

“I’ll live,” he said.

Leeteuk frowned.

“You still need an EMT, come on.”

Chanyeol figured he’d be able to convince any EMT he saw to let him wait until all the civilians and more serious injuries were taken care of. But he was happy to have a breather, and to follow Leeteuk out of the chaos and the horrible mix of mist, cinders, and burned-up shreds of whatever floating in the air toward the trucks surrounding the building. Leeteuk, anyway, would guide him toward the right trucks.

“Yeol!”

Baekhyun was pelting toward him – jacket awry and helmet bouncing on his back, but okay. Baekhyun okay. There was one worry for Chanyeol to set down.

“Yeollie, we need you over here, hurry.”
Baek coughed while he ran. But Chanyeol could hardly judge, he was coughing too. There probably wasn’t a firefighter on site who wasn’t.

Out in front of the trucks, Joonmyun was down. Sehun was crouched over him, fangs out, eyes bulging, swiping at anyone who got close.

“Shit,” Leeteuk said.

“Hose caught him,” Baekhyun said. “When we were pulling back after a surge, and he got tangled in it. I’m pretty sure his leg’s broken, but Sehun won’t let anybody near him. It’s been a while, I’m worried Joonie’s in shock.”

Joon’s face did look waxy and sweaty. He kept waving one hand toward Sehun, and his left leg looked slightly wrong.

Okay.

Chanyeol dumped his oxygen equipment and helmet to the ground and walked slowly toward Sehun, making sure to keep his face pointed forward but not looking Sehun in the eye, hands low and open.

“Hey, Hunnie,” he said when he got close.

Sehun growled.

“I know man, it’s fucking scary, right?”

Chanyeol tried to keep his voice steady and calm. He felt neither. His throat hurt from smoke. Every part of him ached, his arm was injured. But Joonmyun needed an EMT worse than he did, and poor Sehun had kept all this shit inside for so long, he probably couldn’t help melting down now. He probably didn’t have a choice other than glandular high drama.

At that unfortunate self-reference to Jongdae, Chanyeol had to take a minute to find where he had placed his breath. When he found it, he stepped forward again, eyes firmly on Sehun’s chest.

“I think Joon’s hurt, Hunnie,” he said.

Sehun snarled and hunched down over Joonmyun, hands up, ready to fight. Joonmyun clutched at his pants leg.

“You’ve gotta let the EMTs see him, Sehun.”

Sehun growled.

“They’re gonna help him, Hunnie. You have to let them see.”

Sehun shook his head. Chanyeol crouched, trying to fold his tired body up enough that his head would be lower than Sehun’s.

“Baekhyun and Leeteuk are here, Sehun. They’re going to take care of Joonie, okay? You need to let them see him. He’s hurt.”

Sehun whined.

“They have to see him if they’re gonna fix him.”
Sehun blinked, and his fangs receded a little.

“There you go, Hunnie. Let Baek and Leeteuk help you fix Joonie.”

Chanyeol watched Sehun collapse. His fangs snapped back in, and his face crumpled.

“He’ll be okay?” he asked, sounding so young.

“Of course he will, Hunnie, Joon wouldn’t leave you.”

Sehun pitched forward, and Chanyeol held him close, let Sehun inhale at his neck and cry while Baekhyun and Leeteuk swooped in from behind to lift Joonmyun and drag him toward an ambulance. Sehun trembled against him for a long time.

“Sorry, Yeol,” he whispered finally.

“It’s okay. We all get it, Hunnie. You want to go find them?”

Sehun gave a damp, sniffly nod against his neck.

They set off, and it was barely 20 steps before Chanyeol started to falter, pain lancing up his entire right side.

“Jesus, Yeol!” Sehun said.

He wrapped one arm around Chanyeol’s waist and pretty much dragged him along.

Joonmyun was in the third ambulance they found, on a gurney with a mask and an IV, already looking better. Baekhyun was hunched over on the bench seat behind him, also in a mask. Taeil was standing just outside the ambulance, arguing with an EMT and Taeyong about how he didn’t need an oxygen mask, but coughing too much to do so effectively. All 3 of them looked over at Chanyeol, eyebrows drawing together, and Taeil slumped. He took the oxygen mask and tank and climbed into the ambulance to sit next to Baekhyun.

“Same company?” the EMT asked, looking at Chanyeol’s arm. “What happened here?”

“Yeah. A wall fell on me.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Sehun growled.

But the beta EMT nodded, and between the two of them they slid his jacket off. The movement hurt his skin, so he knew he was burned, but there was an additional hurt in there too.

“Glove’s going to hurt coming off,” the EMT said. “I can’t help that.”

Chanyeol gritted his teeth. That only helped a little. It hurt like a son of a bitch, and his arm was a mess, bright red, blisters already rising.

“I’m sorry, I’m going to have to cut your courting bracelet off before you swell up.”

It didn’t make any sense for that to be worse than the pain he was feeling, but it was.

“Both of them?”

The EMT frowned.
“There’s only one here.”

Chanyeol inhaled too harshly and started coughing. That ended in him sitting on the bumper of the ambulance with his own oxygen mask. The EMT cut Jongdae’s bracelet off and handed it to him. Chanyeol clutched it tightly in his left hand.

“Hey,” Sehun said, his voice about as gentle as Chanyeol had ever heard.

“Hey, Yeollie, this was in the finger of your glove.”

He held out the swoopy shape from the center of Minseok’s bracelet. It was dulled and pitted from heat. Chanyeol started to cry when Sehun placed it in his hand.

“Sorry, did I hurt you?” the EMT said. “Your arm’s broken, maybe in multiple places, but I can’t really splint it with these burns. You have to hold it really still, okay?”

Chanyeol nodded. Tears were flowing down either side of his dumb oxygen mask, which felt so weird, and his nose stuffing up definitely didn’t help with the breathing thing.

The EMT poured a bottle of water over his arm and hand, then wet some gauze and laid it over. It hurt like crazy, which at least helped him be less upset for the moment about Jongdae’s bracelet cut and Minseok’s burned up.

They added Donghae – oxygen mask and a heavy limp – and Mark – hands like raw meat from the hoses – to the bench before the ambulance took off. The EMT tried to bar Sehun from riding with them, but he growled at her, and everyone in the ambulance capable of speaking called for him, so they squeezed together and he climbed in.

“Since none of you are emergencies, we’re taking you to your district hospital,” the driver called back to them.

Baekhyun shuddered and sniffled inside his oxygen mask. Chanyeol tried to lean into him for comfort without smashing his injured arm. That was Yixing’s hospital. Thank god.

A bunch of people ran off with Joonmyun’s gurney the minute they arrived, Sehun right behind them. Chanyeol tried briefly to argue that Taeil, who was still coughing despite his oxygen mask, should go next, but everyone overruled him. He was led to an actual room on the second floor, where a whole squad of tiny nurses descended on him. He tried to not let them have his bracelets, pulling them in toward his chest and trying to argue despite how tired he was and how the mask made it hard to talk.

Once a nurse peeled his hand open and they saw what he had, someone said “aw,” and everybody took a deep breath. After that, they were a lot more gentle with him, which frankly just kept making him cry. He was so tired, and it all hurt a lot.

They peeled him carefully out of his clothes and dressed him in hospital pajamas with the right arm cut off. One of them sponged his face and neck clean. Another one held a cup of water with a straw under his chin and angled his mask away from his face just far enough for him to drink. He had never tasted anything as sweet as that plain tap water. So he’d have one hand to use, they put his IV in his foot. They took his personal information and his vitals, and all but two of them left.

A doctor – not Yixing, unfortunately – came in to look at him, poke painfully at his arm. She called for a portable x-ray and gave the remaining nurses a list of instructions that thankfully included pain meds. These hadn’t really kicked in by the time the nurses started really cleaning his arm, and that was awful, but bit by bit, he stopped caring that it hurt and leaned back against the pillows of his bed.
Somebody came in with a fancy-looking tablet that turned out to be an x-ray machine.

“Hey, look at that, broken in two places,” the guy said. “Clean breaks, though, you’ll heal up fine.”

A nurse poked her head in the door just as that guy left.

“I got in touch with your mate,” she said. “He had a complete meltdown, so just – expect that.”

They had to turn his oxygen up for a minute while Chanyeol tried to process the idea of either one of them melting down. Who was it? Sunday night, who would answer the phone? Minseok was listed first on the emergency contact form, that’s probably who it was.

He could barely picture what that would be like, Minseok melting down.

He felt terrible. In kind of a cloudy, abstract way from the pain meds, but still terrible.

The nurses finished cleaning his arm, applied a layer of ointment and one of wrappings, and set it in a loose half-pipe of plastic that was serving as a splint, suspended from his IV stand like a sling to lessen the pressure on it. He’d had a few moments to close his eyes and be quiet when Chanyeol heard a ruckus in the hallway: a couple of shouts, a snarl.

The door to his room banged open.

Jongdae stood in the doorway, absolutely dripping sweat, breath heaving, looking toothy.

“Channie,” he growled.

Chanyeol blinked, and Jongdae was standing by the bed.

“Chan.”

The only thing Chanyeol could smell was the blankness of the oxygen in his mask, but just at the sight of Jongdae – even sweaty and upset – part of him went limp with relief. Here was his mate, his alpha, to make everything okay. Part of him (the part in charge of his tear ducts) gave a long internal wail of misery.

“They had to cut your bracelet off,” he said.

Jongdae touched his wrist.

“I’m sorry,” Chanyeol said. “I didn’t want them to. They had to cut it off.”

Jongdae’s expression crumpled.

“Channie,” he said.

He put his hands all over Chanyeol’s left arm, his face, his chest, like he was trying to make sure Chanyeol was solid and real.

“I don’t care about that. You’re hurt, baby? I couldn’t even listen to what they said on the phone, I just heard that it was you, and the hospital, and I freaked out, are you okay?”

“My arm’s broken. And burned.”

“Oh, Chan.”
Chanyeol felt those hands moving over him, almost as good as his pain medication for making him feel better.

“Where’s Min?”

Why did Jongdae look so sad? Chanyeol tried to think of what he could say to make Jongdae look less upset, but he was so tired and woozy.

“He’s at the studio, probably has his phone turned off.”

Which – huh?

Minseok always drove to the studio when he was there at night, because the buses stopped running early over there.

“How did you get here?”

Jongdae looked down at his fingers, stroking Chanyeol’s left wrist.

“I ran.”

“You. What?”

“I told you I freaked out, Channie, I didn’t even listen to what they had to say, I just took off running. I don’t even have my wallet.”

“That’s almost three kilometers.”

“Yeah,” Jongdae said, pushing his sweaty hair up off his face.

Three. What?

“Chanyeol.”

Jongdae’s fingers moved over the top of his hand; Chanyeol turned his hand over to lace their fingers together. Jongdae gave a shuddering sigh.

“I know you’re not,” Jongdae said. “I know. I know it’s Min, for you, and I get it, god knows, I love him too. But you can’t. You can’t scare me like this, Chan. I know you don’t feel the same way, but I was so terrified. Channie, I love you, and that’s not any kind of pressure, I don’t expect anything more than what you give me. Baby, what you give me is so lovely, I know I don’t deserve it. But the thought that you could’ve died, and not know how much I love you, I couldn’t bear it. I just. Had to tell you.”

Probably Chanyeol’s O2 sats on his monitor went way down, just because he couldn’t breathe for a minute on account of his heart growing too big to make room for anything else inside his chest.

“You dummy,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae’s head snapped up, and Chanyeol felt a little bad about the hurt in his eyes, but come on. That was the sweetest, most ridiculous declaration ever. “I know it’s Min for you,” what even was that? What a thing to say to a guy hopped up on enough pain meds to knock a house over.

“Of course I love you,” he said.

And there was relief on that sharply handsome face, the beginnings of a smile.
“Yeah?”

Chanyeol squeezed his hand.

“I love you like crazy. I have for a while.”

Jongdae leaned in, that smile growing a bit.

“You have?”

“I have,” Chanyeol said. “And I plan to keep on doing it.”

Jongdae’s smile made the whole room bright, and Chanyeol figured it was more effective than every single drug and painkiller in his IV bag.

It was really damn annoying that Jongdae wouldn’t take his oxygen mask off and kiss him properly, but Chanyeol suspected that grumbling about Jongdae’s mouth pressed to his forehead, his cheek, the back of his hand, would’ve been kind of rude, given that he was happy enough to take flight.

“I heard there was a kerfuffle,” Yixing said from the door. “But I see it’s nothing to worry about.”

“No,” Chanyeol said.

Yixing came over to smile down at him.

“He loves me,” Jongdae murmured.

“Of course he does, JD,” Yixing said, and patted Jongdae’s arm. “Our Yeollie is excellent at loving, you’re very lucky.”

Chanyeol figured that the only reason why he was only teary-eyed and not sobbing openly was the massive amount of prescription-strength painkillers coursing through his system. Jongdae’s smile was so beautiful, and his fingers so gentle.

“How’s Baekhyun?”

That dropped the smile off Yixing’s face really fast, but what followed it was annoyance.

“My Baekkie is a pest,” Yixing said. “He’s under the mistaken assumption that just because his case of smoke inhalation is mild, he can march around checking up on everyone else instead of staying in bed where he belongs. I’d threaten to tie him down, but he’d enjoy that.”

“I’m glad he’s okay,” Chanyeol said, grinning.

“Oh, me too. I’d be useless to everyone else if he wasn’t.”

Yixing patted him.

“No one who came here is in bad shape, Yeollie. A couple of people will be here overnight on oxygen, and Joonie’s the worst off, with his leg. But he’s awake and comfortable. You can go see him in a little while, after you’ve had some more rest, okay?”

Chanyeol nodded. Yixing smiled at Jongdae, who hadn’t looked at him once.

“You can get in the bed with him,” Yixing said.
That made Jongdae look over. Yixing nodded.

“It’s okay. Just be really careful of his arm. And here. His sats are looking good, I can make things a little easier.”

He reached around to all the control stuff behind the bed and switched out Chanyeol’s mask for a nasal cannula.

“There you go. Just don’t jostle him, all right? I’ll go tell Baek to visit some other people before he comes to see you.”

Jongdae was climbing onto the bed before Yixing got halfway to the door. He was slow and careful, not even knocking Chanyeol’s arm once. The weight and warmth of him on Chanyeol’s legs made a fresh shower of tears, and Chanyeol hissed when Jongdae touched the right side of his face.

“Oh no, does that hurt?”

“It’s okay,” Chanyeol said. “I think I’m just a little toasty all on my right side.”

“Channie,” Jongdae murmured.

Chanyeol lifted his chin, and Jongdae leaned in to scent him, hands clutching Chanyeol’s pajama top tightly. He moaned in the back of his throat. Chanyeol held him tight with his left arm.

“I’m okay, love,” Chanyeol said. “I’m all right.”

Jongdae’s mouth was soft against his neck. So completely tender against his own mouth. Chanyeol was tired and loopy enough that it probably was a terrible kiss, even if it felt like briefly inhabiting heaven.

“You have to be okay,” Jongdae whispered up against his lips.

“I am.”

“I love you, Channie, you have to be all right.”

“I’m just a little banged up. I’m sorry I scared you.”

Who could’ve thought it would be so amazing to cuddle in a hospital bed, murmuring nonsense at each other, with one’s blood full of friendly drugs and one’s brain floating between haze and sleep? Baekhyun stuck his head in the door once, but he didn’t do anything more than wink and duck back out.

Jongdae had probably been there for an hour when the door opened again and a nurse came through, followed by Minseok.

The nurse rolled her eyes at Jongdae’s presence in the bed, but she ignored him otherwise, checking Chanyeol’s cannula and his arm. At Chanyeol’s flinch, she pulled a syringe out of her pocket and pushed half its contents into his IV bag. He figured he’d be even loopier, if not passed out, in a couple minutes.

“Our Min’s here,” he murmured.

Jongdae sat up and reached for him. Minseok flew over, grasping Jongdae’s hand and reaching for Chanyeol’s face with the other. His eyes were shadowed and his hair mussed.
“I didn’t see the message,” he said in a raspy voice. “I had my ear protectors on, Channie – “

“I’m okay,” Chanyeol said. “I’m all right, Min.”

“He loves me,” Jongdae said.

Min went still and smiled at Jongdae.

“He does,” Minseok said. “Did you finally tell him?”

Jongdae nodded.

Chanyeol pulled so Min would step even closer. Stupid hospital bed probably wouldn’t fit all 3 of them, especially with his arm hanging up in the air like it was. But Minseok leaned in to kiss him, and then Jongdae, already looking a little calmer.

Minseok asked all the questions Jongdae hadn’t about his injuries, which Chanyeol answered to his best ability considering the way he was starting to slur his words and his eyelids had 100-kilo weights on them.

Baekhyun was there when he woke up, sitting in a chair by the foot of the bed, with Min in another one up near Chanyeol’s head, leaning against the mattress and holding Jongdae’s hand. Jongdae hadn’t moved, a warm weight against Chanyeol’s legs and chest, his head tucked up against Chanyeol’s neck. Chanyeol looked across to Baekhyun, with his own nasal cannula and IV stand. Baek nodded to him.

“Hey there, sleepy,” he said.

There was an outbreak of concerned boyfriends, patting on his face and asking him how he felt, as if “okay” wasn’t a sufficient answer. Chanyeol woke up completely over the next few minutes, when he announced his intention to go pee and they tried to fucking escort him. Which, just – no. He’d have to be a lot more debilitated to let anybody help him out that way, no matter how intimately acquainted they might be with his dick.

“I’ve been peeing on my own for almost thirty years, I do not need help,” he said.

Not that it wasn’t a legitimate pain (literally and figuratively) to try to finagle his arm, the stand, and all his tubes and limp across the room with a needle stuck in the top of his foot. But he did, and successfully shut the bathroom door in Jongdae’s face.

He took a look at himself while he was in there. His face was only a little red on the right side. It was still tender, like his skin had small scratches on it, but it was the kind of thing that’d clear up in 24 hours or so. His fingers had gotten more of a hit, and were slightly swollen, but they weren’t blistered, only shiny with ointment. That was good. Above the splint and wrappings, his arm looked pretty bruised on top of red. He’d be hurting for a while.

A nurse was waiting when he came out. It was great to have some backup, because she told him he had done a good job by getting up and moving around on his own. She also answered all of Minseok’s questions about his injuries, way better than Chanyeol had.

“We’ll probably let him go home by morning,” she said. “Somebody will run you through how to dress his wound for him. And he’ll have a removable cast. His oxygen levels just need to keep looking this good for a couple more hours.”

“If he’s smart, though, he’ll let these nice mates of his make him sit down and get spoiled rotten for a
“few days,” Baekhyun said.

“If he’s smart,” the nurse said, play-glaring at Chanyeol.

“That’s pretty rich, coming from somebody who’s been roaming the hallways since he got here,” Chanyeol said.

“Who told you that?”

“Oh please,” the nurse said. “Anybody?”

Another nurse stuck his head in the door.

“Your friend’s awake down the hall,” he said. “Looks like there’s a meeting about to happen.”

It was easier to get up and organized the second time around, and the nurse found Chanyeol a pair of slippers that she only had to trim a little to avoid messing with his IV.

“Don’t stay upright too long,” she said. “You need your feet elevated for your IV to work. Thirty minutes tops, okay?”

With Jongdae, Minseok, and Baekhyun all bringing out their stubborn chins, Chanyeol felt certain he’d be lucky to get 20 minutes before he was hustled back to bed.

Joonmyun’s room was already full of people when they crowded in. Chanyeol got misty again with plain relief to see his coworkers all in one piece. Donghae was in a chair with one ankle heavily wrapped. Siwon was in a wheelchair.

“Strained my back,” he said with a shrug. “No big deal.”

There were lots of IV stands and nasal cannulas. Chanyeol looked and counted, and before he could freak out by Taeil’s absence, Taeyong said,

“He got a little more smoke than everybody else. They’ll keep him at least overnight, but he’s okay. His girlfriend flat out refused to wake him up for this, and I wasn’t going to fight her. You and Joon got the worst of it, Chan.”

Joonmyun was in bed, leg propped up and thick with wrappings, IVs and oxygen going, of course. But given the way that he kept looking down at the way Sehun was holding his hand, Chanyeol figured he must be feeling better than expected.

“It’s a spiral fracture,” he said when Leeteuk asked. “I might need surgery in a few days when some of the swelling goes down, they don’t know yet.”

Chanyeol told them about his broken arm and second-degree burns.

Leeteuk caught them up on the aftermath of the fire. The building was a total loss, and the civilian body count had been pretty high – but not as high as Chanyeol had feared.

“Our people were lucky,” Leetuek said. “Ten companies answered, and there are only three guys in bad shape. Pretty good chance we’ll have one funeral, but it might be only the one.”

Everybody needed a moment after that. Chanyeol was glad for Minseok’s hand in his and Jongdae pressed up against his back.

“Okay. Our station’s going to be staffed by part-timers and academy students for a while. C team,
you’ll have to step up. I have confidence in you,” Leeteuk continued. “We have to wait for the doctors, of course, but it’s likely that we won’t have Joonmyun for two or three months, and Chanyeol for at least a month.”

“A month!” Chanyeol blurted.

After a pause, there was a lot of laughter.

“Yeah, I’m just going to let your mates take care of glaring at you for that one, Yeol,” Leeteuk grinned. “Regardless, it’ll be weird, and there’ll be a lot of unfamiliar faces, but we’ll deal. Talk to each other, remember your training. We did a good job tonight. There’s a lot to be proud of. Now let’s let Joonie get back to his tender confessions and maybe some sleep.”

Poor Joonmyun was bright red, but Sehun looked even more smug than usual.

“Glad you’re okay, Yeollie,” Joonmyun murmured when Chanyeol bent down for a very awkward, light hug.

“You too.”

Siwon was waiting in the hallway.

“Some little dude from Station Seventeen brought your axe back afterward,” he said. “Said to tell you it was a pleasure working with you.”

Chanyeol was glad to know that guy had been okay.

Baekhyun came back with them to his room, and they even had a brief visit from Yixing as the night wore on toward morning. Minseok and Jongdae watched very carefully the whole ouchy process of cleaning, treating, and wrapping Chanyeol’s arm.

“I bet they’ll be way nicer about it than I would be,” Baekhyun said.

“Dude, half the time when I hurt myself, you offer to stomp on my foot to distract me from the pain.”

“Do you need me to do that now?”

“I have an IV in my foot!”

The nurse bent down – after a swift pinch, she said,

“Not anymore! Knock yourselves out, I’ll be back with meds in a minute anyway.”

Baekhyun giggled at the way Jongdae moved to stand between him and Chanyeol the minute the nurse left.

Minseok, proving yet again that he was by far the smartest person in the room and the most sensible, realized that IV removal meant that Chanyeol’s discharge was imminent and that he didn’t have any clothes, his work gear having been collected at some point. By the time he returned, Chanyeol was being fitted for a cast made of openwork plastic. Because why the hell not, Chanyeol had chosen purple-and-neon green swirled plastic with neon green straps, much to Jongdae’s amusement. It fit over the bandages with enough to room to tighten down as his burns healed, only looping once over his thumb so he’d have plenty of freedom to use his hand.

Chanyeol exhaled hard.
“Okay, love?” Jongdae asked, hand gentle on the back of his neck.

“Just feeling lucky,” Chanyeol said.

The med tech smiled at them on his way out. Jongdae leaned down to kiss his cheek.

“Me too,” he said.

And then, once Chanyeol had let them dress him very carefully in sweats, one of Min’s football tanks, and a jacket over his good arm, he said,

“Let’s go home.”
Chapter 61

Being out of the hospital, while objectively better because it was out of the hospital, was also kind of worse:

- just looking at the 0314 on the clock in the car dash made all the hours of exhaustion crash down at once
- being in the hospital was unfamiliar, and there had been a bunch of stuff that it was important to pay attention to, unlike riding in the back seat of their car, where Chanyeol could no longer ignore the fact that the fire had been terrible and he had dragged dead people out onto the sidewalk and had to leave other ones behind and been really afraid and gotten moderately hurt
- but also he was super happy? because Jongdae had finally confessed? and was sitting with him in the back seat, arms around him, one hand in his hair?
- and he knew he should feel really really lucky to get out of a fire like that with only treatable burns and a broken arm
- but it all really fucking hurt, even with painkillers, and it had all been really terrible

It was a lot. Even the way Jongdae kept looking at him, like he was made out of diamonds, was a lot. It was a lot, the way Minseok’s eyes were shiny when he handed Chanyeol out of the car. It was too much to be asked to make the decision about whether to climb in bed smelling like hospital and smoke or to take a bath, and he broke down.

And he knew that being upset at them was bad, because they were also freaked out and exhausted, and they were being wonderful, they were taking as good care of him as his –

“God, Channie!” Jongdae said. “Breathe, baby, you’re at home, we’ve got you.”

“I have to call my mom,” Chanyeol choked out finally.

He was the worst, his parents would’ve been glued to the TV for hours, did anybody call them? Where the fuck was his phone, he didn’t know where anything was.

“Sweetness,” Minseok said.

“I don’t have my phone,” Chanyeol sobbed into his shoulder.

“I’ll call her,” Min said, and kissed his temple. “You’re so tired, Chan. It’s okay.”

Jongdae pulled him into the bathroom with gentle hands.

“Here we go, love,” he said.

Just the gentle tone of his voice was enough to set Chanyeol off again.

“Okay, Chan, it’s all right. Just sit here.”

Chanyeol tried not to mind crying weakly onto his own shins, sitting in the tub while Jongdae washed his hair. The exhaustion and the medication helped a lot with the not-minding part. And it was nice not to smell like smoke anymore. It was good to feel Jongdae’s hands on him, warm and soft.
Minseok came back just in time to help dry him. Chanyeol couldn’t make himself do anything but stand here, breath hitching, and let them.

“She said to tell you she loves you,” Min said. “Poor things, they were up all night too. They’ll stop by this afternoon to set eyes on you.”

“Sleeping first,” Jongdae said.

“Water for Chanyeol first, then sleeping.”


“Betcha those papers on how to take care of you are already pinned to the fridge,” he said.

“They are,” Minseok said. “And I already set an alarm to wake us up for his next dose of pain medication.”

“Hope you won’t need physical therapy,” Jongdae said. “He’s merciless.”

By the end of this comedy routine, which was accompanied by lotion application, Chanyeol had moved a long way past upset and into unconscious.

He could see what Jongdae meant by “merciless,” though: simply attempting to go to bed was accompanied by a whole process to pile up pillows and wedge them around his right arm. And that was after he was made to drink a large glass of water.

“It’s uncomfortable.”

“Your arm needs to be elevated above heart level as much as possible, Chanyeol.”

Chanyeol looked to Jongdae for support. Jongdae put his hand on Chanyeol’s good shoulder.

“I love you,” he said. “But I also wish to live to kiss my boyfriends another day. Therefore, I suggest that you do what Min says.”

“Are you going to make me sit around with my arm up in the air while I’m awake, too?”

Minseok leaned in and kissed him. Those lovely, catlike eyes never failed to make him feel safe and valued. Chanyeol hoped he’d always have that handsome face close to his.

“Yes,” Min said. “Along with twice-daily cleanings, a high-protein diet, and plenty of hydration.”

“You know what’s full of protein,” Jongdae said.

In the midst of all the confession, upset, and injury, it was nice to know that some things remained the same. He wasn’t capable of smacking Jongdae, so Minseok did it for him. Right in the butt, though, so Dae probably enjoyed it.

Chanyeol could’ve predicted that they wouldn’t need Min’s alarm for pain relief. He woke up when the light in the window was still grey, pain crawling up his arm like an itch made of knives and his shoulder stiff from being propped up at a weird angle. But he did feel less desperately tired (a little). Jongdae was sprawled across his legs and Minseok was curled against his left shoulder. Chanyeol tried to enjoy it as long as possible, before the dry, heated discomfort was too much.
They were so good. Both of them woke up at Chanyeol’s shifting and quiet whimper. He would’ve felt guilty, if he didn’t feel so terrible, not only from the burn and the break but also stiff and bruised.

Water and pills for Chanyeol, a phone call to work for Jongdae. Chanyeol very briefly considered opening his mouth to protest Dae taking the day off, then shut it with a snap – both because he knew they’d frown at him and because he wanted them both close by.

He couldn’t get comfortable in the bed. Ugh, burns were the worst. Jongdae paced with him around the apartment until the meds kicked in, then they piled together on the sofa with Chanyeol in the middle to doze for a couple more hours.

He woke up with his face mashed against Jongdae’s chest, Jongdae’s thumb stroking his jaw.

“Did I drool on you?” Chanyeol asked.

“Don’t care. The power of love transcends even spit,” Jongdae said.

“So romantic,” Minseok mumbled from the vicinity of Chanyeol’s armpit.

Minseok really did treat the whole injury thing like a regimen worthy of the army. Alarms were set for pain meds and cleanings. Cleaning was a whole process that involved the hospital instructions on the coffee table and the full array of Chanyeol’s first-aid kit laid out. Internet videos were consulted. Any protesting and wincing on the part of the injured party were met with sympathetic continuation, no matter how much Chanyeol complained about how it was unnecessary to be quite so thorough.

He wasn’t encouraged by the bag full of supplies that Minseok brought back from his midday drugstore run. Jongdae patted him.

“You’ll heal up without incident or infection, come hell or high water. Minseok said so.”

“Damn straight,” Min said. “Also, Baekhyun’s been trying to get in touch with you.”

Min handed over his phone. There was a call Chanyeol was happy to make – except that it resulted in his as Jongdae’s first fight. That seemed a little unfair, given the whole brand-new love/injury thing.

“How are you feeling, Yeollie?” Baek asked.

“Like a barbecue skewer. Are you okay? When did you get home?”

“Oh, I hung around until Xing got off shift. I had so much oxygen that I got a little giddy. He and I are the station, just to be calm, familiar bodies for the moment. Are you up to coming in, Yeol?”

The answer was obviously no, but Baekhyun wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t important.

“Why?”

“Doyoung’s freaking out and making everybody else nervous. Taeil’s still in the hospital for another day or so. Can you stop by? You know I hate to ask.”

“No, I can,” he said. “I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“You will the fuck not,” Jongdae said while Chanyeol was still signing off the call.

“They just need me to sit with somebody for a minute.”
“No way, Chanyeol.”

Jongdae looked so furious, standing close, his lower jaw jutting out and fists clenched. Chanyeol hated that he was the cause of that burny anger scent. He’d had enough of the scent of burned things lately. But he also was a bit thankful that he’d had another dose of meds an hour previously, so that they were in full force, making a fog between him and upset.

“I love you,” he said. “And you’re my alpha. But you’re not my boss.”

Jongdae opened his mouth, and Minseok put his hand over it.

“I don’t like it either,” Min said, “but we can’t know better than he does how to deal with the fallout from all this.”

Chanyeol hoped Minseok could read the gratitude in his look.

“I need to get my phone, anyway,” he said.

“I’m going with you,” Jongdae said.

“Great, I can’t really walk.”

Dae was silent and grumpy for the drive over, but not so much that his expression didn’t soften, seeing how exhausted and freaked out everyone at the station looked, even the unfamiliar faces of the part-times and rookies.

“Fuck, Yeollie, I’d like to hug you, but I don’t know where wouldn’t hurt you,” Baek said.

They had a nice side hug on Chanyeol’s left side.

“Thanks for this,” Baekhyun said to Jongdae. “You’d probably rather have him locked up safe at home.”

“I know I would prefer that for both of you,” Yixing called out from where he was listening to Yesung’s lungs.

“We’ll just keep him for a second, I promise.”

Jongdae nodded.

“Doyoung’s in the overflow bunk room,” Baek said.

Chanyeol pulled them along with him, Baekhyun agreeing to show Dae where his locker was and empty it out for the time being.

Doyoung generally had a really soft scent, for an alpha – warm and flowery. Chanyeol could smell it from outside the door, overlaid with rage and sorrow. He could hear Doyoung pacing. He went in.

Had he even been home? He still looked sweaty and hollow-eyed. He had obviously been throwing the furniture around a little. One of the bunks looked broken.

“How’re you doing?” he asked quietly.

Doyoung rushed at him, stopping at the last second, staring at Chanyeol’s cast. His eyes were wide enough that there was a rim of white showing above his iris.
Chanyeol reached out his left arm.

“Come on.”

Doyoung leaned in, his face in the crook of Chanyeol’s neck, inhaling deeply.

“Hyung,” he growled.

“Everybody’s okay,” Chanyeol said. “We’re all going to be fine. You got through it.”

Doyoung moaned in the back of his throat.

It was weird to hold him this close. C team was really tight with one another, and Taeil was great at managing the upset of his team’s alphas. Chanyeol would’ve felt less weird if it were Yesung. But he held on, murmuring whatever comfort he could think of and trying to project an aura of calm while Doyoung shuddered and inhaled.

“You want to tell me about it?” Chanyeol asked when Doyoung was quieter.

“I see all those people,” Doyoung said into Chanyeol’s collarbone. “Every time I close my eyes. And the way – the look on Mark’s face.”

“It’s a lot,” Chanyeol said. “You guys are in your first year. All the training in the world doesn’t prepare you.”

Doyoung was good. He worked hard, and it only took him a couple more minutes to pull himself together and ask after Chanyeol’s injury.

“Sorry,” he said.

“You’re fine, that’s what I’m here for.”

Doyoung quirked one eyebrow.

“Is this where I’m supposed to make that speech Joonmyun always does about your firefighting skills?”

Chanyeol rolled his eyes.

“Please don’t.”

When they walked back out toward the office, Doyoung walked up to Jongdae.

“Sorry he smells like me,” he said.

Jongdae didn’t quite growl at him.

Baekhyun and Yixing promised to stop by and check in on them. There was a round of arm-grasping and stuttered well-wishes that ate at Chanyeol’s ability to stay calm. It must’ve been obvious, because Jongdae grabbed his wrist and marched them out to the car.

Back at home, between not having to be brave anymore and opening his phone to see the cascades of frantic texts from Minseok and his family, Chanyeol couldn’t help weeping a little, especially when Jongdae stripped his Doyoung-scented shirt off and rubbed their faces together for a long time.

Chanyeol cried all over again when his family arrived mid-afternoon. To be fair, they all cried too,
even his dad. It took almost 45 minutes for Yoora to gather herself sufficiently to tease him about his cast. That was the point where everything got a little better. Noona was really reliable that way.

To no one’s surprise, Chanyeol’s mom had packed enough food to keep them eating like princes for a week. They stayed for a couple of hours, until Minseok announced that it was time for him to take more medication and a nap.

Chanyeol protested.

Chanyeol’s mom protested.

Yoora stopped what she was saying in the middle of her sentence.

“I knew I liked these two,” Chanyeol’s dad said.

“I told you,” Jongdae said when his family had finally finished their goodbyes, 30 minutes later.

“Min’s merciless.”

“You want to re-enter a state of self-determination and free will, you get better,” Min said.
Second-day malaise was real.

Injury, like illness, was so *boring*. Pain meds made him sleepy, and when they didn’t make him sleepy, they made him weepy, and when they didn’t make him weepy, they gave him a headache just behind his left eyebrow. By the time Chanyeol dragged himself out of a fitful sleep on Tuesday morning, all his bruises and assorted other muscular aches had made themselves forcefully known.

From the burns, blisters, and bruises, his right arm was a mess of colors not approved for healthy skin, shoulder to fingertips, and swollen to boot, skin tight and uncomfortable. His back was wrecked from everything, his leg muscles sore, his lungs achy from smoke. It was like his pain meds would help with either the pain from the break or the pain from the burns, but not both, though for a couple of hours after each dose, at least he wouldn’t care as much about hurting.

The weather was grey, with blustery wind and rain, reflecting his mood. Chanyeol tried not to whine about having to eat his breakfast without chopsticks and using his left hand, with zero success. Even brushing his teeth felt weird. Hell, even peeing felt weird. He couldn’t get comfortable. He wouldn’t play his guitar or his Xbox for who knew how long.

Someone had set the little plastic bag with the remains of his courting bracelets next to his jewelry box. Every time he thought about it, Chanyeol felt sick to know that Min’s had burned up, that Dae’s was cut apart. He shoved the bag into the bottom section of the box, then felt guilty about it, and in the end left it sitting on top of his other jewelry, where it could be sure to cause maximum discomfort for the foreseeable future.

Great.

He couldn’t bear the way Min and Dae kept *looking* at him. Even though he definitely didn’t want them to leave.

The worst part was how his bad mood rubbed off on Minseok. Chanyeol watched it happen over breakfast, the deepening frown and how Min went basically silent. When Min laid the wound-cleaning supplies out in one perfectly spaced, perfectly straight row, Chanyeol looked over at Jongdae in alarm and saw Dae watching Min with his own frown.

Chanyeol hated to be so much trouble. But he literally couldn’t clean and dress his own arm, and they’d be doing this for weeks. And it was already an issue? His apologies died in his throat at the sight of Min’s arched eyebrows and that severe frown. Minseok’s hands were gentle and precise in a way that was anything but comforting. He dampened the gauze so he could pull it off Chanyeol’s arm without hurting him, swabbing off the previous layer of gunk with gestures that progressively got gentler and more precise until Chanyeol was almost shivering with tension.

Minseok stopped. He laid the tweezer full of gauze down on the table, so softly that it didn’t make a sound and lined up next to the tube of antibiotic cream. Then he walked over to the balcony door and stood facing out, without a word.

What the.

Chanyeol looked at Jongdae, who was gazing at Min with a tender expression. He squeezed the back of Chanyeol’s neck, kissed his cheek, then went over to place his arms around Minseok.

Min stood rigid for the first few times that Jongdae ran one hand slowly down the length of his back.
“Come on, babe,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol cradled his arm and attempted not to freak out over what the hell was going on. He watched Min gasp and grab Dae’s sides. Jongdae pulled him into a tight hug and stroked the back of his head.

“It’s okay. You don’t have to be strong, love, everybody’s all right here,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol had to lean back into the sofa and swallow around the sudden lump in his throat.

“Come here.”

Jongdae pulled Minseok back to the sofa by one hand. Min’s eyes were wide now, his frown softer.

“I’m going to finish Chan’s arm. Don’t scowl at me, I watched the same videos you did. If I do a bad job, you can yell at me later. For now, you’re gonna sit in his lap and get a good whiff of him until you believe he’s actually here.”

Minseok ducked his head and stared at the floor, but he didn’t protest when Chanyeol reached for his hand and pulled until he straddled Chanyeol’s lap, head tucked into his neck, the way Dae had at the hospital. When they both sighed at the same time, Chanyeol had to smile a little over Min’s shoulder at Jongdae. He wrapped his left arm tight around Min’s back and tilted his head. Minseok’s breath was warm against his neck.

“Better, right?” Jongdae asked.

Minseok nodded. Chanyeol rubbed his back. About a million times better.

Jongdae wasn’t as careful as Minseok was with the cleaning – the second time Chanyeol hissed, Min tried to get up and take over, despite both their protests.

“No way, babe. I’ll slow down. You need to sit there. Jesus, I’d already been like that for an hour by the time you came in, and I still wasn’t anything like calm. Just fucking hold him for a while, will you?”

“Yeah, Min, just fucking hold me for a while.”

And there, finally, was a glint of humor in Minseok’s eyes.

“What if I’d rather kiss you?”

Chanyeol rolled his eyes.

“I mean, I guess if you have to.”

Canoodling definitely made the whole wound-treatment process way more enjoyable. He wasn’t up for anything that involved jiggling or increased blood pressure, but to have Min’s body close and warm against his, to taste the familiar flavor of his mouth, brought Chanyeol out of his snit and reminded him that he was lucky in ways in more than simply the mildness of his injuries.

“I’m sorry I worried you,” Chanyeol murmured against Minseok’s lips.

Min’s hands curled over his cheeks were so gentle, and his mouth so soft.

“My sweetness,” he said. “It only matters that you’re okay.”
Jongdae wrapped his arm and strapped his cast back on, then crawled around to lean against Chanyeol’s left side, one hand on Minseok’s back, his cheek on Chanyeol’s shoulder. Both of them close and warm. Maybe it was a mixture of lingering fright and medication, or maybe it was just one of those realizations that could hit you out of nowhere.

“God,” he said, though he barely had enough breath to speak. “You guys really do love me.”

How were their smiles so beautiful? They kissed him and kissed him, and Chanyeol didn’t know that it was possible to have a heart so full. For a while, it overwhelmed even all his aches and hurts, just to feel their hands and mouths on him, watch them kiss each other, see their smiles.

What an improvement in mood, to have gone from fretting to mush. They piled pillows and folded-up blankets around until Chanyeol was as comfortable as he was going to get, stretched out with his head against Min’s chest. Jongdae made a round of hot chocolate (coffee for Min), then sat on the floor in front of them and started rubbing his shins. Chanyeol had to grin.

“Legs sore?”

Jongdae snorted.

“Yeah, my surprise three-kilometer sprint didn’t do me any favors.”

“Your what?” Minseok said.

Because of course they hadn’t said, with everything that went on. Jongdae and Chanyeol howled, until finally Jongdae was able to choke out how he had run all the way to hospital to confess, and Chanyeol added all the parts about “woe is me, I know you like Min more,” and then Minseok laughed so hard that he almost shook Chanyeol onto the floor.

“Oh love,” Min said. “How are you such a precious, precious dumbass?”

“Hey!” Jongdae yelled, and then Chanyeol lost his comfy snuggling spot to a brief wrestling match.

Technically, Minseok probably lost, but he got felt up during the proceedings, so it seemed like a victory. Chanyeol wondered how long it would be before he felt up to a little feeling up. It’d be way longer than he wanted, for sure.

They finally watched the last few episodes of Complete Love over the rest of the day. The whole melodramatic thing of rescuing the beta guy from the serial killer made an admirable distraction from bodily pain. And maybe they jeered a little over how the alpha and beta were only allowed to hold hands and stare meaningfully at each other on network TV, but Chanyeol wasn’t the only one sniffling by the end of it, both guys curled around their tiny, grinning omega lady.

Baekhyun and Yixing came over the next day. Yixing had so many nice things to say about how good Chanyeol’s dressings looked that Minseok blushed. Xing brought wound dressings with him that were impregnated with honey, which seemed weird, but Yixing assured him that they were an actual thing, and they only needed to be checked every 2 days instead of twice every day, so Chanyeol was glad to have them. Baek seemed totally fine. Just having him in the room made things seem brighter.

He also had all the gossip, of course – Joonmyun would need surgery, but just a small one, Taeil would be out for a week or so until his lungs calmed down, Donghae was off his ankle for at least a week, and Siwon was going to work his strained back for as much time at home as he could possibly wrangle.
“Meanwhile, I’m back at the station tomorrow,” Baek said.

“Over my objections.” Yixing said.

“Yeah, well, somebody’s gotta be there to keep Sehun from crying into everybody’s lunch.”

“We were lucky,” Chanyeol said.

Baekhyun hugged him gingerly.

“We were,” he said. “Crisis counselor’s coming by day after tomorrow, if you can get there.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

Thursday, both Jongdae and Minseok had to check in with their everyday lives, and anyone would’ve thought that Chanyeol could be left alone for a few hours to hang around at home. Take a nap, maybe. Watch some TV.

Except that without anybody to distract him, Chanyeol couldn’t stop thinking about how much his arm hurt, and it wasn’t time to take any more pain meds. His antibiotics were messing with his stomach, so he didn’t want to eat anything, and lying down made him feel bad. Sitting up wasn’t much better. Letting his arm hang by his side ached. Elevating it made his hand fall asleep and his shoulder twinge.

And his arm was so hot. It wasn’t even the pain as much as it was the heat, dry and prickly, unrelenting. The honey dressing had felt nice and cool when Yixing first applied it, but it wasn’t anymore. No matter how much it might be working to keep his skin hydrated and safe from infection. It was hot.

Minseok was not super excited to get home from the butcher shop to find Chanyeol in the guest room, asleep wedged up against the wall, sitting on the bed draped in blankets with his arm hanging out the open window.

“It made sense at the time?” Chanyeol said.

“What, exactly, made sense?”

“Um. My arm was hot?”

“Jesus, Channie.”

“Okay,” Jongdae said later on, after laughing a lot about Min’s whole description of Chanyeol asleep with his arm hanging out the window, wrecking their heating bill, “but that’s useful to know, right? Cold makes it feel better, can’t we ice it or something?”

“Can’t put ice on it directly, it’ll damage my skin.”

“Minseok literally works with ice. Surely we can figure out something.”

The way they sat with their heads together, the artist and the engineer, trying to figure out how to cool his arm down so he could sleep, made Chanyeol weak in the knees all over again. Made him feel so loved.

He had a doctor’s visit on Friday – depressing, because they put him officially off work for a whole month. But it was at the hospital, so he stopped by to see Joonie, who was bored out his mind. Chanyeol sent Minseok home for the run of Hell’s Heat.
“Jeez, Yeollie, I don’t think this is my speed,” Joonmyun said when Min dumped the books by his bed.


He figured Sehun would thank him later.

Chanyeol got pretty bored as he started to feel less dire. The kinks worked out of his back (helped along by nice boyfriends with strong hands), and while his burns were still relatively miserable, each day they were a little better. The break only really ached when he was tired.

The thing with the crisis counselor was awful and helpful, as such things usually were. Everybody got eyes on Taeil, and Chanyeol wasn’t so completely oblivious as to miss the relief in the hugs he got, or the way Sehun and half of A team jostled to sit next to (read: practically on top of) him.

Min and Dae picked him up from the station, and they spent a couple of really hilarious hours at Min’s studio, messing around with ice. At one point, Chanyeol found himself with his arm stuck into a hole bored through the center of a block of ice, cast propped up on a couple of files so it wasn’t touching. It was more comfortable than he’d been since before the fire.

“Obviously we’re going to keep giant blocks of ice around for the next few weeks, right? Melting all over the floor? Can I have in a little wagon to cart around with me, or will I have to stay on the sofa all day?”

“You’re a fucking brat, is what you are,” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol figured that seeming better enough that Dae was willing to stomp on his foot was just as good as feeling better enough to tease. They went for sushi afterward, which he could eat with his left hand, and it wasn’t until they were almost done that he was back to shifting in his chair with discomfort. But his mood felt better, thanks to being out of the house and moving around for a while, like he wasn’t going to be stuck forever, woozy and hurting.

It gave him a couple of ideas.

“Hey, can you come home early on Tuesday?” he asked Jongdae. “I need a ride to an appointment.”

“Doc again already? Of course, Channie.”

By Monday, his arm was mostly back to normal size, if still gross, oozing, and crazy tender. But just the relief of less swelling was enough to let Chanyeol start to increase the amount of time between pain doses, and that made his persistent headache ease up. He hadn’t realized how tired he was, waking up every 3-4 hours because his arm hurt, his drugged sleep less than restful.

Minseok let him sleep the afternoon away, curled up with him. Chanyeol woke to find that he had put his hand up Min’s shirt in his sleep. Just the sensation of his hand curving over Min’s ribs was enough to increase his heartbeat a little. He tilted his head up and got the languid kiss he’d been hoping for.

“Feeling frisky, sweetness?”

Chanyeol snuggled up closer. Minseok was trapped between him and the pile of arm-balancing pillows, Chanyeol planned to keep him there forever.

“Not quite yet,” he said. “Pre-frisky, maybe.”
Minseok grinned at him, ran his fingertips down the side of Chanyeol’s face and neck.

“I see,” he said. “Shall we make out like teenagers, then? Hands above clothes?”

“It was such a good idea to fall in love with somebody so smart,” Chanyeol said.

Not being able to move around much was obnoxious, except that it made Chanyeol focus on kissing more than he had in a while – the lingering slide of Minseok’s lips and the demanding strength of his tongue. The way he inhaled hard through his nose and rolled his hips closer when Chanyeol nipped at his bottom lip. Min’s hands in his hair pulled just the right amount to spark through Chanyeol and make him growl his frustration at not being able to roll over or get his arms properly around Minseok or – much of anything, really, given how much his arm started to ache from just that little bit of shifting around, until he flinched, and Minseok gave him a rueful smile before one last, quiet kiss.

“I may have to jump on Dae tonight, would that make you feel left out?”

“Actually,” Chanyeol said, and told him about his Tuesday afternoon plans.

“Well,” Min said, looking delighted. “I can certainly wait twenty-four hours for that.”

As a troublemaker, however, Min spent the evening touching both of them, drawing fingertips along an arm any time he moved past either Chanyeol or Jongdae, standing behind Dae with his hand on Dae’s shoulder, fiddling with Dae’s collar. Sitting next to Chanyeol, kissing the side of his face and murmuring about how he hoped Chanyeol would “feel better soon,” then leaning back with a sigh.

“I mean, I feel fine,” Jongdae said.

Did he think either of them had failed to notice that he was sitting with his knees spread out almost to the maximum and his hand resting over his dick? Maybe for an alpha, that counted as subtlety.

Chanyeol tried to remember the last time he had seen Minseok make that face – narrowed eyes that looked past Jongdae’s shoulder, one eyebrow angled, lips pursed. He wanted to grin at it.

“No,” Min said.

It was so fun to watch Jongdae turn pink and blink his eyes rapidly at Min’s command-voice. To watch him fight not to smile and arrange himself into a smaller sitting position, hands clasped together.

Chanyeol looked at Minseok and raised his eyebrows. Min’s mouth quirked, and he nodded.

“Maybe, if you deserve it,” Chanyeol said in his deepest voice, speaking to Jongdae’s left elbow and – he thought – getting the bored tone pretty good, “I’ll consider letting you ride me as soon as I feel up to it.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Chanyeol saw Minseok’s fingers twitch.

It was so hilarious to watch Jongdae have about 17 responses at once: surprise, eagerness, the desire to comment on the really obvious dirty joke Chanyeol had left an opening for, and the knowledge that if he did, that’d probably ruin the whole deal.

“I’m getting another glass of wine, anybody need anything?” was what he finally settled on.

Chanyeol watched Dae take a minute to hunch over the wine bottle, and he and Minseok grinned at one another.
Before he headed to the shop on Tuesday, Minseok put Chanyeol’s necklace and cuff on him. The weight of them made Chanyeol sigh with relief.

“I feel so bad about my courting bracelets,” he said.

Min moved to stand between his knees and placed his fingers under Chanyeol’s chin to tilt his face up and kiss him. Chanyeol tangled his fingers in Min’s belt loop and leaned into the pressure of Minseok’s mouth.

“We’ll get you new ones,” Minseok said, his voice easy and joyous. “And I can’t say I’m not tempted to get you one of those creepy ones that screws closed.”

“I’d wear it,” Chanyeol said, and his voice was rough with an emotion that blew through him as hot as that fire.

Min smiled.

“And I’d throw the screwdriver into the sea.”

“I love you,” Chanyeol whispered.

When he stood up from the next round of kisses, Minseok cupped Chanyeol’s face.

“I haven’t forgotten that we need to talk about rent and your living situation.”

His thumb stroked Chanyeol’s cheek.

“Maybe it’s also time to think about transitioning to something a little smaller than bracelets.”

Chanyeol’s breath hitched, and he couldn’t help clutching at Min’s waistband, he was so happy.

“Thank you for not breaking my heart last week, my love,” Minseok whispered up against his mouth.

Chanyeol kissed him, heart full, sore and soaring at the same time. And Min’s own breath was unsteady when he stood.

“Your appointment’s at three?”

Chanyeol nodded.

“I was thinking that if I get home around four-thirty, that would be fortuitous timing.”

They grinned at each other.

“He’s going to love it, Chan.”

It was a long day, waiting around for Jongdae to get home. They were just getting to the dregs of leftovers from his mom, and Chanyeol was annoyed by the prospect of running out of side dishes and being powerless to renew them. As soon as his arm could take it, he was going to push the freaking limits of his manual dexterity around his cast.

He took his pain pill at 2:00. Jongdae arrived just after 2:30 and laughed to find Chanyeol standing by the door.
“Jeez, who’s this eager to get to the doctor? It’s at the hospital?”

“No, it’s a little farther away, I have directions on my phone.”

Jongdae chattered at him on the drive, passing along some really sweet well-wishes from Amber and commenting on the strangeness of a doctor’s office in such an artsy neighborhood. Chanyeol told him where to park and grabbed Jongdae’s hand for the short walk.

The look on Jongdae’s face when they stopped in front of the piercing parlor was just as stunned as Chanyeol had hoped.

“Gluh,” he said.

“I’m off work for a month and on pain meds,” Chanyeol said. “Seems like a good time.”

“Okay,” Jongdae breathed, considerably higher-pitched than usual.

By the time Chanyeol was done explaining what he wanted, Jongdae was visibly hanging onto the counter for moral support. The piercer grinned at them both.

“Making a declaration?” she asked.

“You got it,” Chanyeol said.

Jongdae whined.

“You sure that’s it?” the piercer said, obviously tickled by Jongdae’s reaction.

“We’ll see how I feel at the end,” Chanyeol said.

An hour into strong pain meds plus a highly experienced beta lady with needles meant that it really barely hurt at all to get everything done. Chanyeol made Jongdae pick out the jewelry, by the end of which process, Jongdae was glued to his side and growling eagerly under his breath. All the jewelry he chose was silver: plain, flat studs for the 3 going up each of Chanyeol’s earlobes; simple rings for the 2 helixes in his right ear and the daith in his left ear; captive-ball rings for his left-ear orbital and right-ear snug. Jongdae held his hand through all of those, and a couple of times he actually giggled. His eyes looked slightly crossed.

When she did the heavy-gauge industrial on the left, Chanyeol held Dae’s hand tight and stared at him. It hurt, but the intensity of Jongdae’s gaze made it hard to concentrate on anything other than the want Chanyeol saw there.

“Well,” she said. “You’ve definitely gone from zero to a hundred, and you did great. Are you done for today?”

And Chanyeol figured, what the hell. His head would already be throbbing, and he wasn’t going to be on pain meds forever.

“Let’s throw a ring in my eyebrow too,” he said. “My alpha can choose which side.”

The piercer laughed at the look on Dae’s face. The ring went in Chanyeol’s right eyebrow.

“When it’s all healed up, that’ll look so good with a chain going across to whichever ear jewelry you pick,” the piercer said, clearly fucking with Jongdae, who moaned a little.

“You’re a jerk if you think I’m not paying for this, Chanyeol,” Jongdae growled at him at the
counter.

Which, you know. It was pretty expensive to get 900 holes in your head all at the same time.

His grip on Chanyeol’s hand was tight on the walk back to the car. When they were both in, Jongdae looked at Chanyeol’s left ear, then pulled him across and kissed him hard.

“Fuck, Channie,” he growled. “Fuck, you look good.”

“They’re for you,” Chanyeol rasped at him. “Never pierced my ears for anybody but you, Jongdae. These are all yours.”

Jongdae’s kiss was rough and possessive, and the only thing wrong with it was that it was in the damn car and they still had to get home.

Jongdae already drove slightly over the speed limit, but Chanyeol was playing with his wrist, watching how his nostrils flared and he kept biting his lip. Chanyeol couldn’t resist pushing.

“I guess if I’d been a little braver, I could’ve gotten my nipples pierced too.”

“Jesus fuck, Chanyeol.”

It was a wonder they didn’t get pulled over for a speeding ticket.

When they were inside the door at home, Jongdae pushed him gently against the wall and tugged his head down, kissed him, hands pulling at the neck of his sweater.

“Tell me you feel up to it, Chan, please.”

Chanyeol sucked on Dae’s bottom lip.

“I feel good,” he said. “Make me feel better.”

What better was there, than Jongdae’s mouth and hands moving over him, Jongdae’s tongue in his mouth, against his neck, on his chest? Jongdae slowly stripping him, body warm against his. Jongdae kneeling over him, chest pressed to chest, his breath harsh in Chanyeol’s mouth while he fucked down onto his own fingers. Settling down onto him with a tipped-back head and a groan, the heat of him so tight.

“Chan,” Jongdae said, leaning in to kiss him. “Baby.”

It sucked to have only one hand with which to touch him. Chanyeol spread his fingers wide so they would wrap around more of Jongdae’s ribs, opened his mouth. Jongdae raised himself up and slammed back down.


Jongdae ducked his chin down and grinned. Leaned in to bite at Chanyeol’s neck. His hands skated up toward Chanyeol’s ears without ever quite touching.

“I love you, baby,” he said. “My beautiful, beautiful Chanyeol.”

It was a little like being drunk, the way his pain medication made things seem slightly far away, but the twinges from his ears and his arm were like extra nerve endings, so he felt strangely sensitive at the same time. Or maybe it was simply Jongdae, over and around him, the hot slide of him, his mouth and his hands, his voice, telling Chanyeol how gorgeous he was, how loved. His hand
working himself until his breath came in gasps.

This second time, Chanyeol could feel it coming: that deep wildness, the overwhelm of Jongdae’s scent of rain-soaked ground. He leaned his head back, watching Dae move over him, the shine of sweat and his dark hair flopping over his forehead. Watching Jongdae’s eyes go wide to see Chanyeol’s jaw broaden and lengthen. Watching Jongdae flush red and his eyes fill when Chanyeol smiled at him with all those many teeth.

“Yes,” Jongdae said. “Give it to me, Chan.”

Chanyeol surged forward and set his fangs into the meat of Jongdae’s shoulder with a growl. He bit down harder when Jongdae cried out and squeezed him, and then again when Dae’s fangs went into him – the base of his neck on the right side, above anywhere he was already wounded, both of them connected at two different places. Jongdae moaned into his shoulder. Chanyeol felt him come – heat hitting his chest, Dae’s faltering rhythm, and the tight clench of his ass. Chanyeol couldn’t help how his bite shifted, went deeper when he came, trying to drive up further into Jongdae, Dae tipping his head back and making a small sound almost like a sob.

And then Minseok was there. His hand was cool against Chanyeol’s neck. He held Jongdae up, stroked his face.

“My loves,” he said, smiling. “Well done, my loves.”

It was so lovely – Min helping them lick one another’s shoulders clean. Min examining Chanyeol’s piercings with a filthy grin, Min placing his hands against Jongdae’s cheeks and kissing him with so much tenderness that Chanyeol felt tears run down his face.

Oh, it was everything, a bit later, to hold Minseok up against him, to kiss his neck and the side of his face while Jongdae swallowed him down, until Min cried out both of their names.

It was everything, how Chanyeol loved them. How he was theirs.
Chapter 63

Chanyeol was grateful for that evening – even if his joy was so huge and trembling that he kept getting misty-eyed. Jongdae’s shoulder looked like Chanyeol had tried to chew it actually off, but he was just as loopy and smiling. Minseok kept touching Chanyeol behind and under his ears.

“Can’t wait until these are healed up, sweetness. To get my teeth on these things,” he said in that voice that made both Chanyeol and Jongdae shiver with delight.

“It’s gonna be a long six to twelve weeks,” Jongdae said.

Oof, they kissed his neck, one on each side, and Chanyeol cursed both his injured arm and his refractory period.

Jongdae wouldn’t be more than a centimeter away from him all evening, smiling up at him. A couple of times, Chanyeol caught him purposely pressing on his bite wound and grinning while he flinched. Each time made a low, fluttering feeling in Chanyeol’s gut. Minseok was warm and soft. He insisted on cooking dinner, and Jongdae fed both of them most of their meals, with lowered eyes and smiles.

“I’m so happy,” Chanyeol said when they were piled together in the dark. “My mates.”

“My Channie,” Jongdae said. “My Min.”

“My loves,” Minseok said.

All of it made a quiet space in Chanyeol’s mind over the next few days, while his entire freaking head throbbed, his arm continued to hurt, and absolutely everything happened all at once.

Wednesday was Joonmyun’s surgery. After the morning’s flurry of texts, Chanyeol was assigned to show up at the hospital toward what they hoped would be the end of the surgery. Chanyeol lobbied to walk over and lost, because Kim Minseok was a stubborn, mean bastard. But he arrived to find Leeteuk putting all his team-leader diplomacy to use around Joon’s family, with Donghae in the background looking wry on his crutches and Sehun standing around with his arms crossed, stinking up the place with alpha irritation.

Chanyeol had met Joonmyun’s parents a couple of times – they were, he realized, a lot like Min’s. Their eyes skated over his earrings with raised eyebrows, and while they were perfectly polite, Chanyeol found himself dismissed quickly. Which was fine. He was there for his team members, anyhow.

Sehun’s grumpy expression lifted briefly while he examined Chanyeol’s ears.

“That’s a hell of a change,” he said.

Chanyeol shrugged.

“I suppose you’re still going to tell me you haven’t gotten married.”

Chanyeol elbowed him.

“You’re just angling for an invitation,” he said. “Don’t worry, you’ll get one if it happens.”

“If,” Sehun scoffed.
It seemed to perk Sehun up to yank Chanyeol’s chain, so he and Chanyeol groused at one another and tried to pinch each other while Joon’s parents weren’t looking during the final hour of the surgery. The doctor came out with a positive report, which he gave to Sehun, despite the Kims’ frowns.

Everybody’s relief at the news was tempered by Leeteuk’s phone call telling him that the firefighter from the other station had died. That meant a busy time of the four of them texting everyone from their station to coordinate getting to the funeral on Friday. Sehun’s expression was pretty bad again after that; he sat with Donghae’s arm around him and Chanyeol leaned against his side for the rest of the wait until the docs would let them back to see Joonmyun.

Joon’s parents must’ve caught him while he was loopy from his pre-surgery meds, because the room the nurse led them to was a VIP room, all gentle florals, with a fancy cover on the bed and a humidifier going with some nice-smelling herb in the steam. Chanyeol was so used to thinking of Joonie as an authority figure that he always forgot how small a person he was – almost as small as Minseok. He made a tiny lump in that fancy bed, his face even paler than usual and his hair flat.

When Joon opened his eyes to see Sehun bending over him, Chanyeol had to hang onto Donghae’s hand for a minute. He had never seen Sehun look so soft. He pushed Joonie’s hair gently off his forehead.

“Hi there, hyung,” Sehun said in a tender voice, and Joonmyun turned his face to get closer to Sehun’s hand.

It was a good thing to see.

Leeteuk hung around long enough for Chanyeol to get a dressing change on his arm, then drove him home, where he found that Minseok’s parents had sent approximately half the contents of a fruit market to him. Min was standing around looking annoyed at the sheer size of the baskets. The card was very shiny, and had a formal wish for his speedy recovery that was super, super nice but also kind of sounded like it had been written by a robot.

“It’s a lovely gesture,” Chanyeol said.

Minseok rolled his eyes.

“It is. And I’m sure they’d be very pleased to hear it described that way.”

Chanyeol knocked Min with his hip, and Min sighed.

“How could they possibly think we’ll eat all this before it spoils? It’s just. Excessive.”

“I dunno, freeze it and make smoothies?”

Minseok huffed. Chanyeol tried not to smile too much, in case the annoyance got transferred to him, but it was super cute that he got so ramped up over something so ridiculous. Also, Chanyeol never bought himself those fancy little bottles of weird juice since they were so expensive, and if he was correct, that cellophane-wrapped clump in the middle was a bunch of fruit dipped in chocolate. He was not about to complain.

Instead, he plucked the wrapped packet out and played up his clumsiness a little. Though, to be fair, he probably wouldn’t have been able to get the ribbon undone one-handed even if he’d tried hard. Minseok gave him a flat look, then took the package out of his hand and cut it open.

Chanyeol waited until Minseok’s eyebrow lifted. Then he made his eyes wide, opened his mouth,
and pointed at it.

Min laughed.

But like the superior mate he was, Min spent the next little while feeding nice pieces of fruit to Chanyeol, and then Chanyeol had chocolate on his lip, and of course Minseok had to take care of that.

Jongdae also demonstrated excellence, walking through the door with a couple of pizza boxes and the declaration that it was an appropriate food for the one-handed.

“I even got your horrible travesty of a toppings combination, Channie,” he said, leaning against Chanyeol and leering. “Since you got all those pretty earrings and bit me so nicely.”

“I have two hands, though. Am I allowed to eat pizza?” Minseok asked.

“You could always put one hand on my dick.”

Because of course that’s what Jongdae said. He laughed on his way to change his clothes and therefore missed Min's sharp-edged smile.

The expression on Jongdae’s face, when Min shoved one hand in his pants in the middle of dinner, never even looking over or pausing while he ate, made Chanyeol laugh so hard that he leaned over and cranged his head on the table. It just got funnier and funnier, how Minseok sat there, calmly eating pizza and making idle commentary about the show on the TV, while Jongdae lost brain cells one by one and eventually dropped his own slice to put his hands in his own hair and tip backwards, groaning. Then stared open-mouthed while Minseok licked his own hand clean.

Nice.

The next morning, Minseok made Chanyeol promise half a dozen times not to take any naps while hanging out windows before he left for the butcher shop.

A nap was for sure in order – he was still less than 2 weeks out from an injury and 2 days out from a dramatic romantic obtaining of multiple holes in his own head. Every time he rolled his head over in his sleep, he woke up flinching from pain, so sleep was in short supply. Then it was back to busyness: he had to spend some time communing with his bank account, then head out for the ATM at the convenience store to pull out the amount of cash he could afford for the dead firefighter’s family.

It felt good to walk, even in the cold, grey weather. Chanyeol stopped at the burger place he liked for lunch. Being out of the house and moving around felt great, though he required another nap after he got back. Then he needed to go next door to grab his uniform and all its trappings.

It was never great to have to pull out all the fancy parts of his uniform. He’d worn the sash, epaulets, and gloves for his graduation, but since then, they only got taken out for funerals. That’s all they represented, anymore: people who went down on the job.

And having spent quality time with his finances, Minseok’s point about the waste of money was clear. He really was using the place as a glorified closet.

Chanyeol sat on his grim, uncomfortable sofa to think about it. “Moving in together” sounded like a huge decision, except that he hadn’t slept there in months. Functionally, he had lived with them since their first official date. So yeah, it merited a conversation, but was it any bigger a decision than his earrings? Than Jongdae’s rut? Than the marks they’d left on each other’s shoulders?
Maybe to other people, those things were light and easy. Maybe other people could bite a lover and move on like it was nothing. Chanyeol knew that wasn’t true for himself.

He knew it wasn’t true for Jongdae and Minseok.

If he “moved in” with them, what would change? Nothing about his day-to-day from the past several months. He’d have more money in his account. Have all his sweaters within reach.

What would he even want to save? He’d moved into this apartment when things were going south with Kris, just because it was close to work and on convenient bus lines to both Baek’s place and his mom’s restaurant. He hadn’t been looking for happiness, just a place to sleep when he wasn’t working. There were the rest of his clothes, the boxes of notebooks under his bed, some books and action figures. He had a few pieces of nice kitchenware, but no nicer than what Min already had. The rest of it, he didn’t care about.

He hadn’t noticed how dim the light was getting until he heard Jongdae yell next door. Maybe Chanyeol’s subconscious was looking out for him, because he had left the door cracked so Jongdae could stomp right in.

“Why are you heeee-eeere?” Dae whined, telegraphing his intention so Chanyeol could lift his cast out of the way before Dae flopped on him.

“I came to get my uniform for tomorrow, but then I got to thinking about why I even keep this place anymore.”

Jongdae’s expression went serious and soft. He sat up, one hand on Chanyeol’s chest.

“Come to any conclusions?”

Chanyeol put his hand on Jongdae’s waist. He loved the way Jongdae looked at him and Minseok – like his heart was full, and he was perfectly content to just gaze at them forever.

“Min mentioned it a couple of weeks ago, that maybe I should give this place up. I dropped my sweaters on the floor.”

Jongdae smiled.

“Yeah?”

“It startled me at the time, but I haven’t slept here in forever. I wouldn’t want to, unless you were here too.”

“I wouldn’t want that either,” Jongdae said. “I know Min feels the same way.”

“So maybe it’s time?”

Jongdae kissed him gently.

“Please live with me, Channie. Be mine, in my house.”

Minseok startled them out of their kisses a few minutes later, sneaking up on them to plop his chin on Chanyeol’s shoulder.

“Having a moment, beloveds?”

“I’m trying to talk him into moving in,” Jongdae said.
Chanyeol felt Minseok’s hand in his hair.

“How convenient, I’ve been angling for the same thing. Let’s go look at closet space.”

There wasn’t a ton of closet space, although Chanyeol got to see Jongdae’s old rock-star clothes hanging in the guest room closet, which was hilarious. And between the two rooms there was plenty of drawer space, as long as nobody minded having to switch clothes around with the seasons.

Even more, it was comfortable to talk about, with them. Chanyeol didn’t feel nervous about the prospect of just staying where they were. It was easy to trust them, easy to trust that this was a thing that would last, and not just because of the way Jongdae traced a finger down his earlobe so gently that it didn’t even twinge.

The funeral was terrible – there was no getting around that. Nobody would consider skipping out, unless they were like Joonie, still in the hospital, and Chanyeol was glad to see the pile of envelopes stacking up on the back table, but it sucked to see all the people in casts and bandages or on crutches, and it sucked to see the firefighter’s family in their black clothes, trying and failing to not cry while person after person came in to bow their respects.

He got a lot of raised eyebrows, sitting at the memorial tables afterward, picking at their soup, and was therefore prepared for the torrent of suggestive commentary about his earrings (see: Byun Baekhyun, possessor of the world’s loudest mouth) the second they were out of the funeral hall and sitting in a bar, minus Sehun, who went straight from the hall back to the hospital like the super-whipped dork he was.

Not that Chanyeol was going to rib him about that: he started watching the clock the instant they sat down and was happy to use his arm as an excuse to bow out in the first group to leave, with Siwon driving him and Donghae home.

And of course Minseok got it – helped him off with his uniform in silence, let Chanyeol lie face-down over his legs, left arm wrapped around his waist, for the hour or so until Jongdae got home. Dae was similarly subdued; he crouched down and smoothed Chanyeol’s hair out of his eyes.

“Okay, Chan?”

“Yeah. It just sucks.”

Not that any household occupied by Kim Jongdae was allowed to be sad or quiet for long. The minute they were done eating, he pulled out a bag and strewed a bunch of what looked like medical tubing across the table.

Chanyeol looked at Minseok, who shrugged.

“That’s not for … a sex thing, is it?”

Chanyeol couldn’t think what else it might be for, but a person could hope.

He was super relieved when Jongdae started laughing.

“Gross, Channie! What the fuck would we even use – no, never mind, I do not have a medical kink, stop worrying.”

“Yeah, a little light choking is fine, but don’t get weird,” Minseok snickered.
“Hey! You guys totally sprung that choking thing on me, I didn’t even have time to process!”

“Oh yeah?” Jongdae said, looking wry. “You didn’t like it, huh?”

The memory of Jongdae struggling against his hand, and the force of his orgasm, was surprisingly vivid in Chanyeol’s mind. And his dick.

“It was – situationally appropriate,” he mumbled.

They both had a big laugh at that one, the jerks.

But as it turned out, Jongdae had a bug in his brain about their whole experiment with ice, so Chanyeol had a highly entertaining evening watching Dae wrap his cast in different configurations of tubing, trying out various little hobby-shop motors to pull cool water out of a bowl and circulate it around his arm. His skin felt more raw than hot by that point, but the fact that the problem had sat in Jongdae’s mind until he felt the need to solve it made Chanyeol wriggly and happy. Seemed logical, then, to interrupt the process frequently for kissing.

“Quit it, Channie, I’m trying to figure out how to make this work.”

“But you’re cute.”

“I am not cute, I am concentrating.”

“Here, sweetness,” Min said. “Shift over a little and I’ll kiss you, if he’s going to be that way about it.”

“Wait, no, that’s not what I meant!”

So then Chanyeol got to get in on the laughing, while Jongdae pretended to pout.

It was good. It drove his brooding about the funeral and the fire out of his mind for a while. He cuddled with Minseok and let Jongdae tinker with his arm, and thought about what he might do with all his furniture, and felt glad.

Even if he did wake up far earlier than he wanted to the next morning, no thanks to one (1) extremely wiggly alpha, digging a chin into his chest and pinching at him while it was still before the freaking sun even rose, whispering,

“Happy birthday!”
“Why are you making me be awake before dawn on my birthday?” Chanyeol groused.

“Yes, why,” Minseok mumbled from Chanyeol’s armpit.

“Going for a run,” Jongdae said, still wiggling the evidence of his morning enthusiasm against Chanyeol’s leg. “I’ll bring you back breakfast.”

Pre-dawn and still mostly asleep was way too early to be thinking about eating. Not that that decreased the satisfaction of tightening his arm around Minseok and tipping his head forward to kiss Dae’s forehead.

“Just coffee,” Chanyeol said. “Something with cinnamon and lots of whipped cream.”

“You got it,” Jongdae said, and kissed him.

Birthday sleeping in with a Minseok clinging to one’s torso was a huge improvement over the previous every single other year of Chanyeol’s life. Jongdae snuck out for his dumb alpha exercising; Chanyeol and Min snoozed blissfully under the nice warm covers for another couple of hours. And by the time they were ready to face the day, Jongdae was clean and not-smelly and they had delicious hot drinks wrapped in tea towels waiting for them.

Excellent.

Also excellent: all the kissing.

Chanyeol would’ve pretended that all of the digging Jongdae did into his whipped cream to wipe it on his face and then lick it off was less excellent, but that would’ve been a lie.

“We had all these plans,” Mr. Super Perky Alpha chirped. “Lunch at your mom’s place, romantic rambles through the woods, and a fancy, delicious dinner followed by hours and hours of fucking.”

Jongdae sighed.

“And then you had to go and get halfway burned up, what an asshole.”

Chanyeol kicked him.

Minseok pinched his ear.

“What Jongdae means to say is that in consideration of your recent heroic public service, we’ve had to downplay your birthday plans a little.”


Chanyeol laughed. He figured he was probably the luckiest dork on the face of the earth to have found two other total dorks to love.

“I guess that would’ve been a little intense for my current sitting-still-and-napping lifestyle,” he said.

“Right,” Jongdae said. “So it’s dinner with everybody at the restaurant. Rest of the day’s your choice, whatever you feel up to.”
He leaned in and waggled his eyebrows.

“I personally am hoping you feel up to getting it up.”

Minseok pounded on Jongdae for a minute.

“Come on! Like you aren’t hoping we get some birthday boning, Jesus!”

Chanyeol was happy to sip his candy-flavored coffee and watch Minseok make Jongdae squirm.

“I guess it’s true that nobody’s been up my ass in like a month,” he said finally.

That was successful at making a couple of boyfriends stop what they were doing and grin.

“See?” Jongdae said.

Chanyeol hoped – and figured – he’d get a rain check on the “hours and hours of fucking” thing, some time when he was healed up and no longer taking prescription-strength medication every 4 to 6 hours.

“What do you think, sweetness?”

“I think dinner with my family sounds great,” Chanyeol said. “And maybe brunch when we’re a little more awake?”

“It’s a plan,” Minseok said.

The “hey what about the boning” expression on Jongdae’s face could not have been more clear. Chanyeol took a slow sip of his coffee.

“And I guess maybe if we spent the day teasing each other, that would be a good prelude for after dinner.”

He sure did like their wicked, filthy smiles.

One of the top five most obnoxious bits about his arm being gross and oozing from wrist to bicep was that he still couldn’t take a shower. Chanyeol liked baths, but being forced to take them every day was a huge pain that only got worse over time. The birthday bath, however, involved Minseok, a washcloth, and about 3 times the usual amount of body wash. It was very slippery, very awesome, and very frustrating. Which Chanyeol had asked for, so he tried to view it as foreplay, with middling success. He sure was clean in all those lower-middle body areas.

He walked into the bedroom to get dressed to find Jongdae examining his scabbed-over shoulder in the mirror.

“It still hurts,” Jongdae said with the world’s fakest pout. “Kiss it better?”

Chanyeol looked to Minseok for support and received only a shrug.

Well. He hoped he had a sweater long enough to hide the goddamn erection he was apparently going to be sporting all freaking day long.

Not that he didn’t spend considerable time kissing Jongdae’s shoulder. He wasn’t stupid. And after he bit down on it (“fuu-uuck, Channie, ah, god”), Jongdae was in need of a long sweater, too.
Halfway through brunch, Jongdae fished his phone out of pocket. He made a face at the message, held his arm out like an old person trying to read small text, then pulled it close and peered at it again.

“Am I reading this right?” he asked, and handed the phone to Min.

Minseok looked similarly nonplussed.

“This appears to say that your brother wants to bring your mom to our house tomorrow,” he said.

“My mom. Who has never been to our house before,” Jongdae said.

“Your brother, who has never been to our house before,” Minseok said.

“What the fuck,” Jongdae said.

“You’ll accept, of course,” Min said.

“Well, yeah. I just. She’s been wanting me to keep her updated about Channie, but.”

“She seriously hasn’t been to your house before?” Chanyeol asked.

“Whose house?” Minseok murmured.

“The house,” Chanyeol said while his ears went hot.

Jongdae rubbed his fingers and smiled.

“She’s pretty sequestered. Pretty much home, church, and her little neighborhood omega card group is about it.”

“Yeah, I’ve only ever met her at church,” Minseok said. “As someone raised a nonbeliever, I felt like it was a culturally enriching experience.”

Chanyeol could only shake his head. He couldn’t even imagine omegas choosing to be so shut away even in the present day. He was going bonkers from staying at home so much, and it hadn’t even been 2 weeks.

Then he had some trouble with his sausage link, and all further conversation was tabled in favor of Jongdae cutting Chanyeol’s breakfast into small bites and feeding it to him. What a tragedy.

To continue with the day’s theme of surprises, Chanyeol’s phone buzzed while Jongdae was having a post-nap session with his cold water/tubing project. When Chanyeol checked the screen, it was a message from Jongin.

“Hi, Yeollie. Did you block my number? This is Nini, if you deleted it. I remembered it was your birthday today. I know you’re probably still mad at me, but I hope you’re having a happy birthday. You deserve it. <3”

Chanyeol had to take a second. He hadn’t heard from Jongin since before he left for France, and their last conversation had been awful – mostly on his own part. He hadn’t really been in love with Jongin, but he still had responded to the breakup with maximum pettiness, out of sheer jealousy at how Jongin hadn’t just seemed happy, he had seemed more comfortable than Chanyeol had ever seen him.

The conversation that followed was great on both ends, because Jongin sounded ecstatically happy, teaching little kids at a ballet school in Lyon while Kyungsoo worked as a pastry chef. He sent
dozens of photos of the two of them, both looking thrilled and healthy, and their cute apartment, their tiny, fluffy dog.

It eased something in Chanyeol that he could be simply, genuinely happy to hear it all. Even better, when he sent back the photo of himself with Min and Dae, he got a cascade of exclamation points, hearts, and cute bear stickers. Jongin wanted to hear all about them, couldn’t stop saying how glad he was that Chanyeol was happy.

Of course, Jongdae wormed out of him while he was smiling.

“Min! He’s texting with his ex-boyfriend! In our house! On his birthday!”

Chanyeol used one foot to shove him to the other end of the sofa.

“As long as it’s not Yifan, I don’t care,” Minseok called out.

Jongdae pretended to be highly scandalized. Chanyeol figured why have two feet if you couldn’t use both of them to try to pin down one obnoxious alpha. It only worked for a few seconds, but the wrestling match that followed – even if it was a little weird because Chanyeol kept having to hold his cast up out of the way – was pretty enjoyable.

By the end of the afternoon, Jongdae had a little latticework of tubing rigged up, held together by twist ties, that would circulate cold water around Chanyeol’s arm. They even went so far as to take Chanyeol’s cast off (under Minseok’s glowering eye) and slide the tubing over the bandages, and it made a nice, cool sensation that Chanyeol would’ve knocked somebody over for the previous week. It still felt pretty amazing on his still-growing skin.

“You’re a genius.”

“Well. I’m occasionally useful for one or two things,” Jongdae said, grinning.

Minseok made him open his presents early, not that Chanyeol would’ve complained. As he’d guessed, the gift bag had clothes in it, all approximately 200% cooler than anything he would’ve thought to choose from himself. And having Minseok help him on with the slim black jeans and fancy turtleneck sweater that looked like something out of a brochure for a ski resort involved a lot of small, strong hands wandering over his body, in accordance with the whole teasing thing.

“Are you sure we have to go out to dinner?” he asked while Minseok was grinding a little in his lap under the pretext of fixing the neck of the sweater.

“Oh yes. The cake your mom bought is chocolate with raspberry filling and caramel icing.”

Well, damn.

Once Min was done with his clothes and hair (and grousing about how the lurid cast ruined the effect of the outfit, oh well), Chanyeol figured he looked so good that he might as well go out and show himself off for once. Minseok looked like the world’s cuddliest sex god in his own pale blue sweater, oversized and cute, Chanyeol supposed to draw attention from the way his pants clung to his thigh muscles and his dangly earrings drew attention to the line of his neck. Jongdae just looked like danger on wheels, in head-to-toe black, his hair pushed up a little, with tiny red studs in his ears. Maybe it was a good thing that Chanyeol wasn’t up to dinner out at a fancy restaurant – dinner would probably be ruined while he had to fight off everybody trying to steal his boyfriends.

Chanyeol’s ears were too sore still for him to wear any of the ear cuffs, but Min strapped his cuff bracelet around his wrist. When he held his left hand out to Jongdae for his ring, Dae’s mouth
quirked, and he slowly slid not 1 but 4 narrow bands onto Chanyeol’s pinkie, one of which had a round black stone.

“But you bought my earrings,” Chanyeol said.

“Yeah, well. That wasn’t on your birthday.”

“You guys keep spoiling me,” Chanyeol said after the required round of extensive kissing.

“That’s what happens when we love you,” Minseok said.

“True,” Jongdae said. “Also, you’re even cuter than usual when you’re flustered.”

“Correct,” Minseok said.

“Oh good heavens!” Chanyeol’s mom shouted when they walked in the door.

So, yeah. Maybe he should’ve texted her or something about his earrings. Jongdae grinned wide.

“Yeollie, you, uh. Look much better than you did last week.”

He leaned in to kiss her cheek.

“Happy birthday, honey, sorry I screamed at you.”

Chanyeol laughed.

“It’s okay, Mom.”

His mom was nicer than he was. When they went into the party room, she said,

“Honey, our son appears to have become a jewelry thief in his down time.”

Chanyeol’s dad blinked at him for a minute, then sipped at his soju.

“Thank goodness he’s of age and has been keeping company with an alpha lately, we won’t have to worry about any legal culpability,” he said.

It was nice to have a few minutes to sit with just his parents, all of them comfortable after the joking start, his mom patting him and holding his broken arm gently, touching his non-swollen fingers.

“You’ve been eating well? Getting plenty of rest?”

“I’m on an actual nap regimen,” he said. “Minseok takes medical instructions very seriously.”

“It’s true,” Min said.

“Well,” Chanyeol’s mom said.

Then she leaned over and hugged Min with her customary warmth. His surprise was lovely.

Yoora arrived next, along with a whole range of sarcastic facial expressions over all his jewelry. Chanyeol was delighted that she was closely followed by Minjoo and Taejoon. Taejoon immediately spread charm all over the place, and Minjoo made a close inspection of all Chanyeol’s jewelry, then kissed his cheek.
“Like my hairpin?” she said, grinning. “I got it the day we visited your station.”

Chanyeol had forgotten all about that, which just made it funnier.

Baekhyun tried to ruin the whole thing. He and Xing walked in with their arms full of flowers, cards, and small boxes. It took Chanyeol about 30 seconds to move from surprise to a strong desire to stomp on Baek’s foot.

“What’s this?” Minseok asked.

“Just because he’s not there to receive them doesn’t mean Yeollie’s calendar fans have stopped sending gifts,” Baek said, grinning.

Chanyeol didn’t miss Yixing’s grimace.

The awesome thing was, Chanyeol’s mom was in the room, and she had also known Baekhyun since he was 5 years old.

“Byun Baekhyun, have you seriously showed up at my son’s birthday party with the intent to embarrass him?”

Baekhyun stopped mid-step.

“Oh.”

“Right,” Chanyeol’s mom said. “Oh.”

“I just want everyone to know that this was not my idea,” Yixing said.

So that made for a very hilarious start to the evening. It was a small group, but almost everyone Chanyeol would’ve wanted was there, with Joonie still in the hospital and Sehun living at his bedside when he wasn’t at the station. He wouldn’t have thought to invite Minjoo and Taejoon, but they slotted in comfortably, part of the crowd. Chanyeol’s mom had created a feast of all of Chanyeol’s favorite foods, and everyone seemed so happy to be there. He could’ve lay down on the floor with pure joy.

Yixing had brought more of the honey dressings. They took a minute off to the side for a brief medical consultation. As always, Yixing’s hands were gentle, moving swiftly to clean his arm and apply the new bandages.

“These are looking good, Yeollie. I know you don’t think so, since they’re still pretty gross, but everything looks as it should. It’s time to start using your fingers more, even if it stings a little. Feeling all right?”

Chanyeol told him about how he was trying to increase the amount of time between pain pills, because of the headaches, to pleased nodding. Then he told Xing about Jongdae’s project with the tubes and cold water.

“I mean, it’s nice now, but last week, when even my meds could barely touch it? That would’ve been amazing.”

Yixing gazed over at Jongdae, looking thoughtful.

“I think I’ll want to talk to him about that one,” he said. “If we could turn that into a thing that works.”
He trailed off. Chanyeol nudged him with one foot.

“Xing. Are you okay with this now? With Jongdae and me?”

Yixing smiled – that beautiful, dimpled smile that Chanyeol’s best friend had fallen in love with all in one swoop.

“You know I had my reservations at first,” he said. “And you know I would worry about you anyway. But J.D. and I have had a lot of time to grow up since we were together. Both of us. And I’d have to be blind not to see how happy they both make you.”

Chanyeol squeezed his hand.

“Thank you.”

After cake and singing, Chanyeol draped himself over Baekhyun while Min was talking with his dad and Jongdae was making his mom and sister laugh with some story that involved big gestures and wide eyes, with Taejoon laughing his encouragement.

“You good, Back?”

“Oh, Yeol.”

Baekhyun hugged him.

“I’ve been freaking my shit out since the fire, you know? It’s like I have to have as much of me touching Xing as possible at all times. I almost feel bad that I didn’t get hurt.”

“I know, Baek.”

He picked up Chanyeol’s hand, touched the rings on his pinkie.

“You guys stopped beating around the bush, huh?”

“Yeah,” Chanyeol said. “I love them, Baek.”

“Yeollie, I think they almost deserve you.”

It was still pretty early when Chanyeol started sagging, and Minseok’s alarm for his pain pill had gone off 20 minutes before. He wasn’t sad to be packed up by two bossy boyfriends – especially given the way everybody smiled at them, like they were the cutest trio currently going. Which they probably were.

Chanyeol made Baekhyun pack up all the stupid calendar gifts to take back to wherever, aside from the flowers anybody wanted to take for themselves (one each for Xing, Yoora, and Minjoo, two for his mom). His mom handed out bags of food to everyone. Chanyeol caught a moment when Minseok and Minjoo were standing with their arms around each other’s shoulders, looking vaguely stunned.

“I think you’ve been adopted,” he said.

Minseok grinned.

“I think we’ll take it.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t ever want to,” Minjoo said, but then Taejoon said,
“Mama Park, I hope you put some of that amazing cutlassfish in there. I’m going to tell everybody I know this is the best place to get it.”

“Only if you promise to come in again too,” Chanyeol’s mom said, the two of them hugging like old friends.

“Nope, you’re caught now, there’s no escaping,” Chanyeol said.

He never would’ve anticipated that any birthday where he was home by 9:00 would be one of the best ones of his life, but it was.

And no matter how tired and uncomfortable he was, nothing was going to get between him and their mouths the minute they got home. Chanyeol cornered Min before they even took their shoes off, getting his nose up under Min’s ear until his brain was full of mint, feeling Min’s arms around him and hearing that low, husky laugh.

“I guess I’ll be all responsible and stuff and put the food away,” Jongdae said.

Nice of him to make the sacrifice. By the time he got to the bedroom, Minseok was shirtless, Chanyeol was naked, and it was just in time for somebody to take over kissing the birthday boy so that Minseok could get to work sucking on one nipple.

They spoiled him rotten: but when didn’t they? Chanyeol kept closing his eyes, just to feel their hands and mouths on him, just to focus on how much there was to feel: Minseok’s fingers in him, Jongdae’s tongue on him. Hands on his chest, curled over his hip. Min’s lips against his back, Dae’s breath on his neck, the texture of his own fang marks under his mouth. Minseok moving in him, steady and hard. Jongdae’s hand around him, Jongdae’s mouth pressed to his.

His name in Minseok’s groaning voice. Jongdae’s low laugh.

The slow build of pleasure that flowed over and out of him. Minseok’s pleasure that pulsed into him. Jongdae, spilling into his mouth.

Lying awake in the darkness after, with arms around him, bodies pressed against his own, letting himself savor what it felt like to be at home.
Chapter 65

After a busy day followed by a bunch of moving around, it made sense that Chanyeol would have a setback day, sore and tired, but a bummer that it had to happen when they had visitors coming. At least his boyfriends provided premium entertainment by morphing into tiny whirlwinds of cleanliness, running around frantically, as if Jongdae’s mom was going to do anything other than love on him a lot. Jongdae’s tension showed in how quiet he was and how his shoulders kept creeping upward. Chanyeol himself was made to sit very still on the sofa with weird juice and a bowl of fruit near his good hand, his other one occupying itself with Jongdae’s little water machine and a case of the ouchies.

He scrambled to take the tubes off his arm and turn the motor off when the buzzer sounded and so was a little red-faced and breathless when Jongdae opened the door.

His brother sailed through like he owned the place, followed by Jongdae’s mom and a small, pretty woman with an amused expression. Kim Jongdeok was polite enough during introductions, though he stared up at Chanyeol with eyebrows almost as expressive as Jongdae’s when he was annoyed. Jongdeok was taller than his brother and broader – but not as tall as Chanyeol, and not much more broad, despite having a neck like a bull. He watched Jongdae hug their mom and his mate, Aera, looking indulgent, and nodded disinterestedly at Minseok. Every time his eyes flicked up and down Chanyeol, his eyebrows twitched.

“Well, little brother,” Jongdeok said when the greetings were done, “We’re all here to see how you play at being grown –“

Chanyeol had straightened and squared up before even half of that was out, with Min radiating charisma beside him. Chanyeol knew that if he looked down, murder face would be in full force. Jongdae’s teeth were bared, and Mrs. Kim’s lips were pressed together.

But Jongdeok looked at Minseok and Chanyeol standing together, at Jongdae, around at their bright, clean living room. Back at Minseok and Chanyeol. Opened his mouth, then shut it again. Furrowed his brows and cocked his head.

Aera stepped forward and took his arm, leaning in to place her chin on his bicep.

“Oppa. Didn’t we pass a fancy coffee shop when we were almost here? I’d kill for a decent latte, it’s been ages,” she said in a voice pitched for maximum cute.

Jongdeok stared down at her, then blinked rapidly.

“Yeah, sure,” he said “Anybody else want something? Mom? Dae, just text me everybody’s order, I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

He wandered vaguely back out again. Aera and Mrs. Kim both laughed.

“Hopefully by the time he gets back he’ll have put his brain back to work,” Aera said. “I’m sorry, Jongdae, he was about to be a pain.”

“Um, no,” Jongdae said. “It’s fine.”

Aera poked him.

“Don’t you be a pain too. Find out what coffees everybody wants and text him so we can settle in for
our chat.”

That made everyone smile, finally, and the second Minseok and Mrs. Kim had given Jongdae their orders, they hugged each other close and didn’t stop for a long time.


Chanyeol had to hang onto Jongdae’s hand for a second, it was so sweet.

Of course, then Mrs. Kim turned all her sweetness on Chanyeol, holding his hurt arm tenderly in her hands and giving him a whole lecture about how he was very impressive but he needed to look out for himself and not scare everyone, etc., that Chanyeol had already heard almost word for word.

“How much did my mom pay you to say that?” he asked, and Mrs. Kim laughed up at him.

Minseok made him sit back down, which made the ladies look worried, until they found out that it had been Chanyeol’s birthday, upon which Mrs. Kim fussed at Jongdae and kissed Chanyeol’s cheek. She sat next to him on the sofa, holding his cast in her small hands. Jongdae looked like he was going to melt like a stick of butter. Minseok dragged the desk chair out from the guest bedroom.

“Oh no, that’s for me,” Aera said. “I get to sit next to Mom all the time. It’s you guys’ turn.”

Chanyeol figured that Jongdeok must not be too bad, if this was the omega he’d married. Minseok sat on the other side of Mrs. Kim, with Jongdae perched on the table, smiling at them all.

“That was a nice trick with the coffees,” Jongdae said.

Aera laughed.

“I’m only three days out of heat. He’s still very firmly wrapped around my tiniest finger,” she said.

“Daughter!” Mrs. Kim squeaked over everyone’s red faces and laughter.

Aera wore a collar, of sorts – but Chanyeol couldn’t tell what it was made of, having a pattern that matched her skirt. It had a simple fastening, in the front.

“Son,” Mrs. Kim said when everyone had calmed down. “I notice this nice omega of yours has a little more jewelry than when I first met him.”

Jongdae gave a loud, sappy sigh that Chanyeol liked so much that he echoed it. They smiled at each other like the gooey nerds they were.

“We’ve recently had a number of happy and dramatic declarations,” Minseok said. “To go with all the fright and injury.”

“I don’t think I approve of fright and injury,” Mrs. Kim said, and patted Chanyeol’s cast.

“Definitely not,” Jongdae said.

It was lovely to sit and chat comfortably, to watch how Jongdae smiled at them. Aera had a lot of questions for Minseok about his sculpture work. Jongdeok returned about halfway through that, proving Aera’s point about his brain activity by not taking over the conversation as soon as walked through the door, but instead handing out coffees, standing behind his mate with a small smile on his face while she quizzed Min.

“Are you an artist too?” Chanyeol asked when she stopped for a breath.
“Oh no,” Aera said.

“Yes,” Jongdeok said.

“I just make clothes,” she said. “Which I love, don’t get me wrong, but I wouldn’t call it art.”

Jongdeok rolled his eyes. It was funny to see such a Jongdae expression in a face so much broader and (in Chanyeol’s 100% not-biased opinion) less handsome.

“Sure. And that whole silk-screening setup in our kitchen is what?”

Aera touched her collar and blushed, then scrunched her nose up at him. He smiled down at her.

“Dae, I’m sorry,” he said when he looked up. “When Dad called me a few weeks ago and told me about Chanyeol and how you hold rank now, I literally laughed when I got off the phone. I walked in here like an asshole, like I was going to throw you down and sit on you. It was rude. It’s gonna take some getting used to, but I respect your harem, man. So just snarl at me if you need to, I’ll try to do better.”

Jongdae flapped his mouth for a bit.

Mrs. Kim looked extremely smug.

“Thanks,” Jongdae said eventually.

“There’s not a lot to see, but let me show you around,” Minseok said.

Everyone very kindly pretended not to see the way Jongdae climbed on Chanyeol and started inhaling the minute they were across the room.

“I don’t even know what’s going on here,” Jongdae murmured.

“Pleasant family time,” Chanyeol said, and pinched his side.

Jongdae sat back to glare at him, then leaned in for one swift kiss.

Mrs. Kim hugged him close when she came back over.

“Bit by bit, son,” she said. “You’ll see.”

Jongdae frowned, but he couldn’t hold onto it, what with the way his mom was holding onto him.

Not long after that, the two brothers got into a highly technical conversation over Jongdae’s water thing, rumbling at each other and passing the tubes back and forth, muttering about suction and water pressure with their heads close together while Mrs. Kim hung on Minseok’s arm and smiled at them.

It was good: everybody was friendly, they had some nice coffees, and they didn’t even stay too long. By any measure, Chanyeol figured it was a victory. And really, really nice that Jongdae’s mom would leave her home just to check on him.

When he woke up from his post-visit nap (so many naps, they were getting to be almost as bad as the baths), Chanyeol got to stand in the hall and watch Minseok and Jongdae talking quietly, Dae leaned against Min’s chest. It was so calm, and so quiet. And he didn’t feel a bit weird to walk over and sit with them.

They slotted into a nice routine for his remaining 2 weeks off of work. Minseok and Jongdae went
back to their usual schedules, and Chanyeol complained a lot about how boring it was to sit at home and recover. A couple of times, Baekhyun came over when he was off work and Yixing was at the hospital, which made Jongdae have Facial Expressions the first time he arrived home to find them rolling around cursing at each other over the gaming system: Baekhyun particularly, when Chanyeol dropped his controller and reached out for the customary post-work affection. He took his revenge by going off on a riff about Chanyeol’s fetish for business casual clothing that made Jongdae laugh and Chanyeol retreat to go stand next to Minseok for support.

As long as he kept his hand really moisturized and didn’t push it too much (i.e., no guitar yet), being able to use his right hand improved life significantly without hurting too much. Chopsticks were a challenge with his cast curving over his thumb, but he was practicing. Being able to stop taking pain meds helped too, and every day the area of gross, oozy bits was smaller, leaving behind a lot of itching.

“Can’t I at least have lotion that smells nice?” Chanyeol groused one afternoon.

Minseok glared and stabbed with one finger at the line on the instructions from the hospital about the need for super plain, boring, sticky lotion.

At least Min put it on for him.

The second time Baekhyun came over for the afternoon, he stayed for dinner, which Chanyeol was wiggly-happy about until Jongdae got tired of watching Chanyeol struggle with his chopsticks and started feeding him. Baekhyun grinned at them for a minute.

“I know you said you were super serious about this way back when we met, but it’s cool to see that you guys finally stopped dancing around how gross and sappy you are.”

Super serious about?

When they met? Back when they went to Baek’s apartment?

“What,” he said.

Back when he was tying himself up in knots about being too gushy and feeling too much?

And Jongdae told Baekhyun that they were super serious?

“What what?” Jongdae said.

“Sweetness, was it not obvious?” Minseok added.

“What does that mean, you told Baek you were super serious?”

Baekhyun shook his head and grinned. Minseok and Jongdae looked at each other, then back at him.

“Love, we sat at your kitchen table the morning your heat broke and basically said, ‘that’s our mate and we’re keeping him forever, right?’.”

Chanyeol stood up.

“We literally had a conversation when I came to dinner after that about how I was trying to keep everything really light and emotion-free!”

“Uh,” Jongdae said. “Wasn’t that in like an ‘oh ha ha but that’s impossible’ ironic kind of way?”
“I worried for months that I was going to drive you guys away with my excessive mushiness!”

Minseok put one hand over his face.

Jongdae stared like Chanyeol had lost his mind.

Baekhyun threw a napkin at him.

It hit him in the face.

“Hey, Chanyeol,” he said. “If either one of them had said the word ‘mate’ to you right after your heat, on a scale of one to five, one being ‘absolutely’ and five being ‘what the fuck I’m buying a ticket to South America and never coming back,’ what’s the chance that you would’ve bolted and spent the next year crying to me about the creepy neighbors that you thought you really liked but who turned out to be possessive weirdos and you were all tortured and stuff because you still wanted to kiiiiissss them?”

Minseok opened two fingers and peeked between them.

Chanyeol hated Baekhyun.

“You just told me you loved me like two weeks ago!” Chanyeol shouted at Jongdae, because he couldn’t think of anything to yell at Baekhyun other than variations on “you might be right but you’re also stupid,” and he wasn’t about to admit that.

“Well yeah,” Jongdae said. “Mating’s one thing, I wanted to take care of you forever from about the first time I kissed you. Love’s fucking terrifying.”

Which, all right. That was valid.

“Oh my god, they are both so dumb, they totally deserve each other,” Baekhyun said.

“I know,” Minseok said, sounding happier and sappier than Chanyeol had ever heard.

“Over at my house we’re a bunch of emotionally stable betas with lots of sexy times,” Baekhyun said, and winked at Minseok.

Chanyeol and Jongdae growled in unison.

“I’m sure that’s lovely,” Minseok said to his plate. “However, I like ‘em enthusiastic and a little dumb. Not to mention which, Jongdae lets me dominate him, Channie’s hands are big enough to jerk all three of us at once, and they’re two of the most talented cocksuckers currently living.”

Chanyeol had to lean against Jongdae’s shoulders and clap his hand over his mouth while Baekyuns mouth and eyes went wide.

“I love you,” Baek rasped finally.

“I know,” Min said, and patted his arm.
Chapter Notes

Can you believe this thing??

I had no idea, when my friend said "you know, there aren't enough a/b/o fics with anxious caretaker alphas in them," that I would end up spending 10 months writing this gargantuan beast.

So, this is not my first run through the fields of fic - it's not even my first Ao3 account! But the welcome I've found here has been so warm. It's been so, so fun to have you guys along with me for this very silly ride. I'm so VERY glad that you've enjoyed wolf Channie's romantic adventures as much as I've enjoyed writing them. Thank you for your comments, your kudos, your kindness, and your stories. I value them all, and I hope to see all of y'all around, on my stories and your own, in the future.

Thanks again, everybody. xoxo

(would it be weird to yell SARANGHAJA?)

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Chanyeol got better, in accordance with Minseok’s orders, without incident or infection. The first time he got to take a shower after the doctor’s clearance, he was so happy that he hauled Jongdae up into the air, legs around his waist, and fucked him until the hot water ran out. And didn’t even mind that they had to put off the hair-washing.

He kind of hated to go back to work, no matter how glad he was to get to talk to people and leave the house. He’d gotten out of the habit of sleeping 3 nights alone in the bunk room every week, and it sucked. He also didn’t love being stuck on station or driving duty, but that only lasted for a few weeks.

Baekhyun, having become a fixture of days off, made the comment one day in Jongdae’s hearing that if Chanyeol was going to move in with them, better to have that talk with the landlord while he still had his cast on and could look all noble and pitiful. That this turned out to be correct was even worse than all the pestering that preceded it. But anyway, he had until the end of the year to move all his stuff over and figure out how to get rid of his furniture. Jongdae voted for renting a truck and dumping it in the river and was overruled.

Sehun brought Joonmyun over for a wine-club dinner before everybody got busy with holiday stuff. Joonie was still on crutches and off work, and was so obviously thrilled to be doing something social that he talked nonstop, until he was simultaneously talking about some travel show he’d been watching and struggling with the cork of a wine bottle and almost fell off his stool.

“Hyung, quit it,” Sehun growled.

He grasped the back of Joon’s neck in a harsh grip, and Joonmyun exhaled, slumping a little. He looked up at Sehun with a dopey smile and leaned his head against Sehun’s side.
“Mm hm,” Minseok hummed under his breath at the stove, and winked over at Chanyeol.

So there was a thing Chanyeol had never wanted to know about his team leader’s romantic life, even if he was thrilled for them. Four bottles of wine among 5 people and an excellent dinner made for a cheerful night.

The whole holiday season was like something out of a drama. They had plenty of cold, blustery days sitting on top of one another on the sofa watching Strong Omega Kim Joseok, which was really funny and made Chanyeol feel wriggly that the adorable lead actor reminded his mom of him. They went to an incredibly stiff holiday “party” at Minseok’s parents’ house (read: mansion), which wasn’t fun, exactly, other than watching Jongdae frown and hover around any time Chanyeol got close to Great-Grandfather, and other than pulling Minjoo aside to give her a jewelry box, which made her cry.

“Oh shit, don’t beat me up,” Chanyeol said to Taejoon.

“He won’t,” Minjoo sobbed, “or I’ll beat him up. You’re a jerk, Chanyeol.”

But she said that last part with her wet face pressed up against his suit jacket.

The suit was new and very precisely tailored, and he hadn’t let Jongdae or Minseok see it until they were getting ready for the party. He figured that he was providing a valuable relationship service by giving them something to focus on other than how formal and boring all of Min’s aunts and uncles were. Considering how often his ass got surreptitiously felt up over the course of the evening, he felt pretty successful.

And thank goodness, because he wasn’t technically supposed to spend that much time out of his cast yet and it wouldn’t fit under the jacket, but by the time they got home, Minseok was too riled up to fuss at him much. Not that avoiding the lecture had been Chanyeol’s intention by leaning forward to grope Min from the back seat for the whole drive home. He just wanted to make Min crazy. The drawn-out and delightful process of having his suit taken off of him by his boyfriends was interrupted for a brief bout of cast placement before they got down to the sexing, but nobody minded.

By the time they went to Tao’s much fancier (and more fun) party, the holes in Chanyeol’s earlobes were healed up enough to change out the plain studs, and someone (two someones) got slightly overexcited in the earring-purchasing department. Because the party was at a fancy hotel and Luhan was going to screech at him no matter what he looked like, Chanyeol consented to let Minseok and Jongdae do him up as they pleased.

It made him bonkers: because Jongdae was in charge of jewelry, and he kept making this eager little growl under his breath while he slipped earrings into Chanyeol’s ears (of the six, four were dangly), and he bit the nape of Chanyeol’s neck after fastening on a necklace. It was a lot of wriggly alpha in one’s lap while still wearing only a post-shower towel. Especially when said wriggly alpha refused to do anything about the problem in one’s lap that he caused.

“Forget it,” Dae said. “We booked that stupidly expensive hotel room, I’m not using up my energy early.”

“Your energy gets used up? Since when?”

Jongdae grinned.

“Blame this on Min and his ideas about anticipation.”

Totally fair, given that that’s what went on for the next 30 minutes or so, as Minseok dressed him in
skinny jeans and a dark green, slinky shirt with half his chest hanging out; smudged something dark into the outer corners of his eyes; and curled his hair. After all that, even Chanyeol admitted that he looked good enough to wreck, but Min had to add to it by brushing something sparkly over the visible parts of his chest.

“What’s that?”

Minseok licked the tip of one finger, dipped it in the sparkly stuff, and stuck it in Chanyeol’s mouth.

It tasted like chocolate.

“I’m going to get fucked eight ways to Sunday, aren’t I?”

“Oh, I feel certain that no one’s ass will go unplowed before we come back here,” Min said.

“Correct,” Jongdae yelled from the bathroom.

Honestly, by the time they were all ready, Chanyeol was, as usual, ready to just abandon their plans. Did he need to know that Minseok owned a velvet sports jacket? Yes. Yes he did: about 3 months previously, because he had missed many opportunities to run his hands all over it. Did he need Minseok to be wearing it over a halfway-unbuttoned shirt of his own and a half-dozen necklaces, plus freaking curly hair? No, he did not. He needed Min to be wearing none of that. Preferably no clothes at all.

Not to mention Jongdae, all in close-fitting black and tousled, looking like their own personal vampire, wearing numerous rings. And the pointy shoes.

Somebody had better get bitten by the end of the evening, and Chanyeol hoped it was him.

He thought his chances were pretty good, given that the scent enhancer was packed in his bag.

He wasn’t going to wear it to the party, he wasn’t an idiot.

Chanyeol hesitated a little at the door to the hotel ballroom: it was a much larger crowd than he was used to, people packed together and loud music. But he had Minseok’s arm around his waist and Jongdae holding his hand. And a hard plastic cast on his right arm to whack people in the face if they needed it.

They fought through the crowd until they found Zitao, who looked like a predatory cat wearing haute couture and smiled brightly at them, and Luhan, who wore non-athletic gear for once and gave off the aura of a high-fashion angel until he shouted,

“Minnie! You look hot enough to set this place ablaze, good thing you brought Channie with you. Is his hose big enough to put out your fire?”

Chanyeol watched Jongdae roll his eyes.

“Lu’s been having fun with the champagne fountain,” Zitao said.

“It’s never-ending!” Luhan chirped. “Channie! Come see.”

“Please don’t instigate any fights,” Jongdae said.

Luhan placed his fingers delicately on his throat.

“What? Me?”
“Please, Lulu,” Zitao said.

Luhan tossed his hair.

“I’ll try,” he said.

Chanyeol let Luhan drag him around in part because he was headed toward the impressive snack table and in part because he kept catching sight of Min and Dae, pressed up close against one another, and it made a thrill low in his belly to watch them. Once, champagne glass in hand and Luhan chattering at him, Chanyeol watched Jongdae lean in with his mouth close to Min’s ear—whether to speak or to kiss he didn’t know, and his mouth watered.

The party was fun: Luhan let him go hang out with (on) his boyfriends often enough to satisfy him while also gradually building up a network of all the omegas in the room. Maybe it wasn’t the most emotionally healthy thing in the world to feel so satisfied knowing that he looked super hot with his gross ex somewhere in the room, but oh well.

And maybe it was rude, once Luhan’s omega team-building reached critical mass, for all of them to take to the dance floor and make a minor spectacle of themselves, but what else were parties for? Anyhow, it had been years since Chanyeol had done anything like it. He was no dancer, but it didn’t take any kind of talent to be a safe body to grind up against in a crowd. And the end result of all that was Jongdae grabbing his arm and yanking him out of the crowd and out of the room to a dark, cold balcony.

So Chanyeol didn’t mean for Kris to catch him out there, one hand curved around the ass of each of his boyfriends, with Minseok’s mouth on his neck and his tongue down Jongdae’s throat.

But he wasn’t sorry about it.

If that made him petty, so be it. Once Dae ground against his thigh and he felt Min’s hand slip down the back of Dae’s pants, he forgot about it.

“I’m done with this party,” Minseok growled.

“Same,” Chanyeol mouthed up under Jongdae’s chin.

“Aaa-ah,” Jongdae said, from either Chanyeol’s teeth scraping down his neck or whatever Minseok was doing with his hand.

They sort-of gathered themselves sufficiently to say goodbye to Zitao and his sweaty new limpet.

“Byeee, have fun getting fucked!” Luhan yelled.

“You too!” Chanyeol yelled back.

That was probably the champagne talking.

“You’re full of yourself this evening,” Minseok growled from the far corner of the elevator, looking up through his stupidly hot curly bangs and making Chanyeol shiver.

“Out there dancing with all those other omegas,” Jongdae rasped from the other far corner.

His head was tipped back against the wall. It made his neck look long.

“Everybody was watching, Chan. All of them. You taller than the rest, catching everybody’s eye. The woman next to us wouldn’t stop talking about how she wanted to fuck you.”
Chanyeol was a little drunk and a lot worked up; he could feel his clothes against his skin. What he wanted was their hands.

“You’re going to fuck me, though,” he said.

Oh, their smiles: both of them slow and sharp.

“Yes,” Minseok said.

Things that were stupid: cameras in elevators and hotel hallways.

Things that were great: fancy hotel rooms that did not have cameras but *did* have locks on the door and absurdly large beds. They hadn’t even seen the room before, checking in before the party and having their bags put in the room for them. Chanyeol barely got a look at it, though, before Min climbed him like a tree: but only briefly. Then Min grabbed his hair and yanked his head back.

“I’m going to be in the middle,” he said.

“Okay.”

Minseok got down off Chanyeol and backed away.

“Any other orchestrations for that, babe?” Jongdae asked.

His arms wound around Minseok from behind, his mouth against Min’s neck. Chanyeol stayed where he was, against the wall, staring down at them, until otherwise instructed.

“You’ll have me,” Min said. “Channie won’t come, because he’ll take me after I have him. You’ll get him ready.”

Jongdae growled, low and long, a sound that made Chanyeol’s hair stand on end in the best possible way.

“And who gets you ready?” he asked, then drew his tongue up the side of Minseok’s neck.

“There’s no need,” Min said.

He shook his hair out of his eyes and stared at Chanyeol.

“I’ve been ready.”

Chanyeol watched Jongdae’s hand move; Min tipped his head back and hissed. Jongdae swore.

“Channie,” Jongdae growled, “our Min’s wearing a plug.”

Chanyeol found it necessary to step forward with rapidity and press against Minseok.

This was a thing he had no experience with, and wouldn’t have thought he’d find so compelling, if it weren’t Minseok: their perverted angel, their anchor, the most beautiful of them. The thought of him, prepared for them all these hours, made Chanyeol tremble with want and admiration.

“When?”

Minseok leaned against him, and Jongdae against Min. Chanyeol wrapped his arms around them both.
“Just before we left,” Min said. “My loves. Take me apart.”

Which they didn’t right away, of course, because Jongdae had to prep Chanyeol, and it wasn’t like he was going to do so without a lot of peripheral kissing and commentary. When he didn’t have Jongdae’s tongue in his mouth, Chanyeol watched Minseok move around the room, piling the pillows on the floor and digging a bottle of lube out of their bags. Once Minseok started to strip, Chanyeol caught Jongdae’s eye and nodded; they watched him, Chanyeol shifting restlessly against Dae’s fingers while Minseok slowly pulled those clothes off himself, smirking at them.

Min climbed onto the bed and kissed Jongdae, rough and messy. Chanyeol thought he could spend another 50 years watching them and never grow tired of it.

“Are you ready for me, sweetness?” Minseok asked, looking down at Chanyeol but with his hand still on the back of Dae’s neck.

“Please,” Chanyeol said.

He was so glad Min wanted him face up, so he could see Minseok’s face – first the way he closed his eyes and tossed his head, sliding into Chanyeol’s ass, then the way he bent forward, looking stubborn and panting hard with whatever Jongdae did with the plug. Jongdae grinned, and Min made a small, low sound. Then he leaned in farther, one hand on Chanyeol’s chest. Jongdae laughed under his breath. Chanyeol felt them both move against and in him, then Jongdae grabbed his knees and used him for leverage, driving into Min at a fast pace.


“No promises,” Chanyeol said, and undulated against Minseok’s body.

He ran his hands down Min’s torso, up again, then grabbed his hair and pulled. Minseok cried out and bucked against Jongdae’s rhythm, his own thrusts a little erratic.


Minseok moaned. Chanyeol smiled and licked his lips, pulled a little harder at Minseok’s hair.

“Gonna fuck you, love,” he said.

He squeezed, and Min moaned a second time.

“Do that again, Channie,” Jongdae said, his grin sharp over Minseok’s shoulder. “We have all weekend. Let’s make him come. You ready, baby? Clamp down on him – now.”

Whatever Jongdae did, when Chanyeol clenched, Minseok made a high, strangled sound and tossed his head. His fingers dug hard into Chanyeol’s sides.

“So fucking –” he said.

He inhaled sharply, moaned and shuddered, making Jongdae laugh.

“There you go,” Chanyeol said. “Give it to me.”

God,” Minseok said. “Oh god, yes.”

Chanyeol held his head so that he got to watch Min’s face scrunch up, then his eyes open wide. Chanyeol stretched his legs out and found that with Dae’s cooperation, he could trap them both against him, Min thrashing and Jongdae making the filthiest little laugh Chanyeol had ever heard.
“Your turn, Chan,” Jongdae said before Minseok had even stopped trembling.

Minseok groaned, and Chanyeol was not at all sorry to find himself immediately thereafter with his right arm wrapped around Min’s chest, thrusting hard into the heat of him, sliding against his back, murmuring how beautiful Min was, how hot, how perfect, while Minseok squirmed and swore. Chanyeol was glad to be just drunk enough that he didn’t pop off immediately. By the time he came, Min was reduced to a sharp, high sound on every thrust, and he dropped face-down onto the bed the minute Chanyeol let him go.

“So fucking beautiful,” Jongdae said.

He stroked Min’s hair while Chanyeol kissed Min’s back, licked at the sweat there. Finally sat back to stare at the come streaked down Min’s thighs, his and Jongdae’s. He stretched out beside and leaned in to fill his head with the scents of mint, rain, and sex.

“That was a good start,” Jongdae said.

Minseok shuddered.

“But I’d hardly call that wrecking.”

He pushed; Min and Chanyeol both rolled until Min was spooned up against Chanyeol’s chest.

“See?” Jongdae said. “You’re hard again. Does it even count as wrecking if you’re not too tired to get it up?”

Minseok growled.

“I don’t think so,” Chanyeol said.

“He looks pretty grumpy, I think you’d better hold him, Channie,” Jongdae said, as if asking him to pass the salt.

Min didn’t resist when Chanyeol pulled his arms up over his head and trapped one leg between his own, though he growled briefly, until Jongdae’s hand got going. Between the two of them, they kept up a steady stream of talk, Chanyeol with his mouth against Min’s ear, Jongdae punctuating his encouragement and admiration with kisses. It took longer the second time to get Minseok to shudder and clutch at Jongdae’s shoulders; longer still the third time, the two of them with their hands all over him in the shower until Chanyeol dropped to his knees and worked until his jaw was sore.

“Couple of evil assholes,” Min murmured afterward, leaned against the sink half-heartedly brushing his teeth.

“Yes, babe,” Jongdae said. “We learned from the best.”

Minseok looked so cute, dopey and so tired that he let Chanyeol tuck him into the bed and pile the covers up around his face so that the only thing hanging out were his curls and his round cheeks.

“’M not cute,” he mumbled while Chanyeol kissed his face.

“You’re the cutest, actually,” Chanyeol said.

Chanyeol would’ve happily snuggled in for his own sleep, but Jongdae pulled him away to take advantage of the huge tub – not big enough for all three of them, alas, but plenty of room to soak with Jongdae sitting between his legs, leaned against his chest, being soft and nice until he wasn’t,
and then Chanyeol’s hands were busy making Dae come and covering his mouth so all his noise wouldn’t wake up Min.

“Your turn tomorrow,” Jongdae said when they tucked themselves around Minseok.

About mid-morning the next day, Chanyeol realized that had been less a promise than a threat. He got fucked 19 ways to Sunday (on Sunday) and bitten twice, to boot. So yeah, maybe he had a little bit of a hitch in his step on the way out of the hotel, but: worth it.

That was the beginning of endless family Christmas stuff in and around Chanyeol’s work schedule. Chanyeol went to church with Jongdae and his mom twice – the first time to be nice and the second time because he liked the sappy way Jongdae smiled at him after they’d stood next to each other singing for an hour. There was a dinner with Min’s parents, who were easier to talk to when it was just them. A little. There was a raucous party for half his parents’ neighborhood at the restaurant.

He got off work on Christmas Eve just in time to sprint home, change, and jiggle his way through a cab ride to Jongdae’s parents’ house. His arrival didn’t break up a fight, but he could see the relief on Minseok’s face when he walked in the room. It was easy to team up with Aera and Mrs. Kim to make a smiling, unruffled wall of omega to get them through dinner. Mr. Kim was barely civil to Minseok, and it clearly weirded Jongdae out entirely that his father made him sit at the head of the table. Everybody breathed a sigh of relief to head out for the late-night mass – Chanyeol assumed even Mr. Kim, who stayed home. Singing the carols standing next to Jongdae was so lovely, and it turned out that Minseok also had a great singing voice. Jongdae was super adorable and cuddly afterward.

Which made it a little weird when he announced the next day that what he wanted for Christmas was a spanking. But who was Chanyeol to say no to that protruding bottom lip and Min’s wicked grin? It was less weird than choking, if much more time-consuming. Chanyeol wouldn’t have thought that he had any interest in more than the odd butt smack, but he had to admit that there was something satisfying about the sound of his hand making contact, the size of the red mark he left behind, and all the noise Jongdae made. Even afterward, half of Dae’s complaints ended in giggles.

Of course, he also tried to use his soreness as an excuse to get out of helping Chanyeol move his things over to the apartment.

“You can’t fault me for trying!” he yelled when Chanyeol picked him up and literally hauled him next door to help pack.

“Sure I can,” Chanyeol said. “Especially if you make me so annoyed that I refuse to ever do that again.’

Jongdae shut up and went limp.

“I’m so proud of you, sweetness,” Minseok said.

He had to work on New Year’s Eve: always a frantic shift, because civilians needed to not be trusted with fireworks, ever. But when he was finally able to check his phone around 4:00 a.m., he found a video message time-stamped at midnight that was just Minseok and Jongdae shouting “we love you! we love you!” for 2 minutes straight.

“Gee, do you think they mean it?” Baekhyun drawled behind him, and the startle was probably the only thing that kept Chanyeol from crying, so he only hit Baek a little.

Among all the many other firsts from Chanyeol’s past months: the same day that he got a reminder
email from the clinic about his contraceptive shot, Minseok cornered him to ask about his upcoming heat. Because of course Minseok had set up a phone alert from it. Chanyeol hugged on him a lot.

“It’s just being organized, Channie, it’s not a big fucking deal,” Minseok said in a futile attempt to be allowed to move out from under his very large and very in-love mate.

“Nobody ever cared to pay attention before,” Chanyeol said between the kisses he was applying to every centimeter of Min’s face.

“Because, as we’ve established, you always dated assholes,” Min said, and finally gave in to the inevitable make-out.

The day after he got his shot, Jongdae sat up straight at dinner and said,

“Heeeyyyyy, isn’t your heat coming up soon? I’ve got a knot with your name on it, Channie,” and waggled his eyebrows.

Chanyeol had to lie down on the floor for a minute.

“Did I say something wrong?”

“No,” Chanyeol said. “I just have too much love to resist the force of gravity right now.”

“Ah, okay, carry on,” Jongdae laughed.

With so many reminders, this heat didn’t take him by surprise. Chanyeol knew it was coming as soon as he woke up in the morning. He walked to work to hang out for a couple of hours and help out around the station before his time off, then wandered home in plenty of time. His old apartment was still empty (for which everyone, including the future tenants, were probably grateful), and he had to laugh at the hazy memory of climbing the stairs in his work gear, halfway out of his mind already and with no idea how his life was about to change.

The simmer dialed itself up while Chanyeol fussed around the guest room, tossing pillows and blankets around until they satisfied that grumbly need in the back of his mind to be safe and comfortable. He didn’t need to pile snacks within arm’s reach, because his mates would take care of him. He didn’t even make much of a nest, because he was already safe and comfortable.

“Come home,” he texted them, and started taking off his clothes.

“what’s wrong” Jongdae texted.

“Are you seriously this dumb right now?” Minseok sent.

There was a pause. Chanyeol folded his clothes and set them aside.

“OH,” Jongdae wrote.

“ON MY WAY.”

His first heat with them had been as much fun as any he’d had, but it had been surprising and new. This one – spent with people he loved, who loved him, and who knew him inside and out – was a whole new category. He never felt frantic, because even when he was outside himself, he trusted that they would take of him. But he cried a lot, because they were taking care of him, with so much desire and sweetness that half the time Chanyeol spent hanging off Jongdae’s knot, he was sobbing. It broke after only 3 days (“aw, I definitely could’ve gone another three,” Dae said), leaving
Chanyeol tired and more gone for them than ever.

There was also a new sensation deep in his chest, that he first felt when he woke up the immediately after his heat broke, the two of them curled over him like they had been the first time. And like they were most mornings. Chanyeol sat with that feeling for a while, a settledness that was wholly unfamiliar but not scary in the least.

It was probably that feeling that spoke through his mouth in late January when he said,

“What do you guys think about making this official?”

That he was immediately tackled by two boyfriends at once was a pretty positive answer.

The only big point of contention in planning their shindig was that Minseok’s parents had a hard time accepting that they wanted to hold their registration ceremony at a small, unhip restaurant that wasn’t big enough for the entire Kim army to descend en mass. Ultimately, they had to agree to a big engagement party. Min’s parents almost certainly regretted it, though, because Chanyeol’s alpha grandmother and Minseok’s great-grandfather brought the absolute worst out in one another.

There were love songs to the moon out on the balcony. Chanyeol totally heard Taejoon humming along under his breath, and the only reason Jongdeok didn’t join them was Jongdae standing on his foot.

“Oh my, Yeol,” Chanyeol’s mom whispered to him while they stood in the corner judging the hors d’oeuvres, “all of them just try so hard, don’t they?”

Which was about the nicest way anybody could put it.

The registration ceremony itself was so far beyond anything Chanyeol could’ve imagined that it felt like a dream. C team volunteered to man the station so that all of A and B team could be there. Everybody brought their instruments for the party afterward. Jongin and Kyungsoo flew in all the way from France, and their gift was that Kyungsoo made the cake. Soo and Chanyeol’s mom became friends for life during the baking process, and something about both being tiny alphas with chips on their shoulders made Jongdae like him immediately, too. Chanyeol’s mom took one look at Jongdae’s mom, who hung back behind her mate, looking nervous at the crowd, and immediately reached out with a gentleness that made Chanyeol misty-eyed to see. His dad was a true hero, using his powers of conversing on any number of boring topics while also keeping whisky glasses full to manage Jongdae’s dad like a champ.

There wasn’t a whole lot to a civil registration ceremony: mostly just signatures, seals, and a ring exchange. But it was enough that they acquired an actual crowd of weepers: Chanyeol’s mom, Jongdae’s mom, Baekhyun’s mom, Yoora, Minjoo (and Taejoon), Aera, Eunmi, Zitao, Jongin, and Yixing. It was enough people that Minseok’s mother felt the pressure and dabbed delicately at the dry skin under her eye.

Joonmyun swore he didn’t cry, despite his suspiciously red eyes. He tried to blame it on his leg being tired from more standing than he was yet used to. That was nice, because it stopped Sehun mid-lecture about how he had predicted the whole thing months earlier and sent him scurrying for a chair for Joon.

Chanyeol didn’t cry. Sliding a ring onto Minseok’s finger, feeling Jongdae slide one onto his, watching Min finally officially hook his guy, Chanyeol felt too happy for anything other than smiling.
until his face hurt.

“This is so lovely,” the registrar from the mating ministry said after they had signed the contract (exclusive, lifetime) and stamped their seals. “It’s like that show *Complete Love*, did you ever watch it?”

They always counted it lucky that they started off married life by laughing until they had to hold each other up. Leaving out the part where Chanyeol fell snowboarding on the third day of their honeymoon in Japan and bruised his tailbone, putting him out of sex commission for the rest of the trip. For many years, that was Baekhyun’s favorite story. To tell everyone. Everywhere he went.

Not that they didn’t have their down times and fights – when Jongdae tried to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders, for example, or when Chanyeol got to feeling insecure about something.

Once they went so far that Chanyeol actually packed a drama bag and left, though when he got off at the bus stop near his parents’ house, Jongdae was already waiting for him, and they had a whole earnest apology-slash-kissing session right there in the bus shelter.

The worst fight by far involved Chanyeol in a hospital bed again, 5 years later, Chanyeol saying, “It’s just a small break, it’s no big deal,”

and Minseok shouting, “There’s no such fucking thing as a lightly broken back, Chanyeol!”

and bursting into tears.

Nobody knew what to do for a second. The whole idea of Minseok crying was nothing Chanyeol had ever imagined. He felt worse about scaring Min than he felt about his broken back. Two and a half damn months at home and another 2 of light duty were enough to give Chanyeol a horror of going back onto the 3/4 schedule. His arm had stopped forecasting rain with a deep ache only a year or so before – the thought that his back would now do so kind of proved Minseok’s point.

He liked teaching at the academy, anyway, and the whole course of study that preceded it.

He liked even better that, after Chanyeol hadn’t been in the field for a little over a year, Minseok asked them whether they might like to adopt.

Then it was Minseok’s turn to be tackled by two husbands.

Jongdae’s dad made an unsurprising amount of noise about “bloodlines” and “obligations” that pissed Chanyeol off even more than Jongdae for the entire 2 years it took for them to get approved and find a child. He tried to glower his way through the adoption ceremony, until Chanyeol put his faith in his daughter and plopped her into Mr. Kim’s arms. Heejin looked at him, growled, and bit him on the cheek with all 4 of her teeth. After that, all 3 of her grandfathers doted on her, even if one of them preferred to talk to her over video chat, where she was less sticky. And a couple of years later, everybody welcomed Yeosang with unreserved joy – so much so that Minjoo went into labor just as Heejin was insisting that she should get to sign the adoption papers too, which made for a lot of excitement all at once.

Half the time, Chanyeol could barely believe his life – how loved he was, and how much he loved. Time only made Minseok and Jongdae more perfect to him. He had a terrible habit, whenever he got drunk, of making a very earnest speech about “true companions and lovers” that always embarrassed the shit out of both his husbands and anyone who was listening.
He still meant every word of it.

At their twentieth anniversary party, Jongdae didn’t just tell the story about Min and the ice swan. Everybody groaned about it (especially their kids), but he held Chanyeol’s hand and told the story about the time he barged into a strange omega’s apartment during his heat, too.

“And it turned out perfect,” Dae said.

“Damn straight,” Minseok said.

Maybe it was additionally embarrassing, the way Chanyeol pulled them both into his arms and kissed them. But he couldn’t make himself care about that. Not with they way they both looked at him, all those years of love shining in their eyes.

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