A Connotation of Infinity

by youbecamemyhabit

Summary

“百世修來同船渡.千載修得共枕眠.”
(It takes hundreds of rebirths to bring two persons to ride in the same boat; it takes a thousand eons to bring two persons to share the same pillow.)

For centuries, Hyungwon never had companions. Now, he travels through time and other dimensions with two panicked gays, two confident gays, a man supposedly fated to dislike Hyungwon and someone who would let G-Dragon do questionable things to him.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
You blow shit up, I protect you

Chapter Notes

Reminder: read the first part of this series. This story continues exactly after the events of Achilles' Way Of Love.

“i am time-cracked occasionally, and time-shaken always / and saying your name feels like a ritual for a god i haven't found yet.”

Mallory Pearson, “A Window That Sees Through Two Houses”

Hyungwon had lived enough to see that situation repeating a few times, but there was no way for him to not be bothered by those antics. Humans governments acted in the unquestionably worst way whenever they felt a little bit threatened — Hyungwon counted a lot of wars throughout the history of that world, and a lot of them had motives completely stupid. After seeing so much, one could see he was kind of used to be dragged to questionable facilities in the middle of the nothing; that was far from being his prime concern, though.

Since the military besieged them at the subway station, he hadn’t seen the Constants again for they were put in a different car, all together while Hyungwon had to sit in surrounded by seven peevish soldiers in a mine-protected vehicle.

The lack of courtesy reached its peak when a black bag was put over his head, as if the fact that he was cuffed wasn’t impolite enough.

A bit more than 10 minutes later, the bag was removed once he was led into a silver room, with a large white table and two metallic chairs on each side of it.

The seven men that brought him there didn’t voice a single instruction, which once again was very rude, but allowed Hyungwon to heavily sigh while took a seat. His wrists were a bit marked from the tightness of those stupid handcuffs and his hair was all over the place, but all in all, that hadn’t been his worst experience.

A two-way mirror stood right in front of him and Hyungwon almost laughed at silly whimsicality of human race.

His time grooming his hair and clothes was interrupted by a bald white man in his early 50s wearing navy army service uniform, entering the premise.

“Good morning.” Hyungwon offered the first sign of cordiality, in English, then lifted his hands to show off his handcuffs. “Is this really necessary?”

The man didn’t even spare him a glance before opening a notebook on the table and start his inquiring also in English.

“Name and country of origin.”
“My name is Hyungwon.” He still tried to keep it cool. “And I have no country.”

“Who do you work for?” There was not a trace of sympathy in his voice. “Russia? China? North Korea?”

“No one.” Hyungwon’s voice came out a bit annoyed, in Korean. He shifted to the man’s native idiom in the end, though. “Where are my friends?”

“Start giving answers, and maybe you’ll know.” The white man pulled a few photos out of his notebook and threw them in front of the time traveler. “Do you deny this is you?”

In the first pictures, Hyungwon was accompanied by the other Constants while they left the boyband concert; his sudden disappearance in the sequence seemed to be the oddest thing. The last photos were of them among the debris of the building that The Eye let fall on them on purpose; in one of them, Hyungwon still had his force field on.

“Computer programs these days can do anything, right? I don’t work for anyone. I’m just a traveler.”

“One way or another…” He didn’t like the response by the way his voice got higher. “You will talk.”

If he had a coin for every damn time they tried to intimidate him with that, Hyungwon could’ve started a bank.

“Mr….” Hyungwon’s eyes wandered over the man’s name patch. “Bailey.”

“Colonel.” He told the time traveler.

“Colonel Bailey.” Leaning a bit over the table, Hyungwon plopped his hands on it. “This…” He eyed the handcuffs, then back at the Colonel. “Is for your illusion of safety, not mine. I do not care about what you can do to me.” Hyungwon slightly lifted his head to look over the man’s shoulder, directly into the two-way mirror. “Tell them I want to see my friends first, and that I am a peaceful person. Otherwise, I would have already told the world all about the United States failed time-travelling program still on course, covering the death of hundreds of men and women.”

The white man seemed genuinely taken aback.

“How do I know, you wonder.” The time traveler kept doing the talk. “Nearby extraterrestrials civilizations aren’t too eager to collaborate, right? Don’t worry, I am human. I owe nothing to your government, though. Now tell the Koreans to come over.”

The Colonel’s gaze drifted away from Hyungwon and urged to leave the room, slamming the electronic lock on his way.

In that hour alone, Hyungwon considered just tearing the cuffs apart, but that could lead to more hostility he couldn’t afford to risk.

The door swung open abruptly, and two Korean men now spoke to him from the entrance.

“Come with us.” The shorter one, in a soldier uniform like his partner, stated in Korean. He liked that language better.

Quickly bowing to the men, Hyungwon made his way out of there being followed by the soldiers. He could almost grasp their apprehension towards him while they ambled down a long corridor.
In any other opportunity, Hyungwon would’ve told them that he meant to do no harm, but that was army men he was talking to and the chances that they’d believe a stranger that could lift buildings were pretty small.

Once they reached the end of the hall, the men stepped forward to push the double door in front of them.

A large rectangular glass table occupied most of the space, where a dozen men and women of different nationalities and ranks sat around it. However, next to the furthest wall in the back, a couch where the six Constants sat was what got his attention.

Most of them yelled and called the time traveler’s name as soon as they spotted Hyungwon, who tried to run towards them, but was stopped by the two soldiers that brought him there.

“Tell them to let go.” Hyungwon shifted his head to the left to speak with a random Korean military man. He didn’t want to use his physical strength on anyone.

“You said you wanted to see them.” The random Korean man spoke, looking up at Hyungwon. “You’re seeing them. They’re fine.”

“Take these off.” Hyungwon stretched his arms forward, in those people’s direction. “I am not a menace.”

“This is for us to decide.” An old Chinese woman, probably in her 80s, spoke in Mandarin and crossed her arms over her chest, sitting in front of the Korean man.

“Your country has bigger problems, Ma’am.” Using her language, Hyungwon retorted. “Uncuff me.”

She seemed surprised, just like the white man he chatted before.

The Korean man he had spoken first beckoned for the two soldiers behind him to free him, and Hyungwon’s wrists never felt better that entire morning.

“Sit down.” The Korean man ordered, pointing to the leather chair at the head of the table. “Now, speak.”

What was with people in power and the desire to interrogate him? It’s not like he was trying to take over the world. Humans had to have more important issues, he was sure.

“I told you my name.” Hyungwon answered in Korean. “I am from the universe 1410, originally in 5th quadrant in the Higher Zone, an 8885-year-old world.”

“What?” The white man he previously talked to furrowed his brows at him, expression his confusion in English.

Unflinchingly, Hyungwon stared at those people.

“Next question?”

Whispering arose in the room between the military on the table and Hyungwon peeked at the Constants, by the couch, only to confirm that they all seemed worried to death about their situation.

His only wish was to take them out of there and make everyone forget that ever happened.

But that wasn’t a good move, and he was trying to be civil with those people; that was his friends’
world, so he had to play nicer than usual.

“What are you doing here?” A brown-haired man, with a heavy German accent, barked in Korean. “If we were not fast enough, the video of you disappearing in the middle of the street would be all over the internet already.”

“There’s hundreds of videos like this online. People would only assume it’s fake too.” Hyungwon sighed, combing his hair back. “I had no control over these cases. The future of the multiverse depended on it.”

“Excuse me?” The Korean man, that now Hyungwon bothered to read the name patch and went by the name of Choi, crossed his arms over the table. “Multiverse?”

“Please…” Hyungwon raised his hands a bit to shrug. “Your world is not the only one. I thought I made this pretty clear.”

“You must understand that this is no ordinary situation.” The Choi man declared in his idiom. “You seem to be a powerful being, and we know nothing about you. Wouldn’t you be wary if you were in our shoes?”

“I understand the concern.” Despite not wanting to be a part of whatever human authorities were up to, he understood their desire to have control over their safety. “I am a diplomatic person that wishes for peace. Usually, I do not make contact with the local government, but as you can see, I am making an exception because I intend to stay longer because of my companions. However, do not try to turn me into your weapon. That has been tried before. My presence here can tell you clearly who was the champion in that dispute.”

“So are you trying to tell us…” The white American argued again, in English. “That whatever is happening in Germany right now has nothing to do with you? The time of your arrival and the beginning of these events can’t be a coincidence.”

“What?” Hyungwon didn’t see that coming.

The brown-haired German turned around in his chair and gestured for one of the soldiers that escorted Hyungwon to move forward, handling something on a laptop placed on the table. The man typed for a few seconds and made a connection with the large TV sitting opposite to the table, sharing a few clips with them.

“This is Dresden, four weeks ago.” In Korean, the German military beckoned towards the image.

Before his eyes was a CCTV footage of a seemingly deserted street in broad daylight. It seemed to be a residential area, but the lack of humans around hinted something was off. A second later, every single house in that lane vanished only to return about four seconds later as a mess of structures blended into each other, as if someone hadn’t properly reassembled the material after the teleportation.

“Dozens were found dead, mingled with the structure of their houses.” Mr. Choi explained. “The area has now been put into quarantine, but it’s possible to not seem fishy to the locals.”

“I didn’t do this.” The time traveler announced to no one in particular, still absorbed by the horror in the images.

“Bonn and Düsseldorf three weeks ago.” Homemade videos of people being sucked into unnatural portals that appeared inside their homes or public edifices, only to have half of their bodies reappear. But it didn’t stop there. “And Augsburg, two weeks ago.”
The last video was also from an amateur source; someone currently filmed a woman standing by the ledge of a bridge, probably a tourist. She posed with a gummy smile and covered one her eyes with one hand to protect them from the sunlight. Due the poor condition of the audio, Hyungwon couldn’t hear what they were chatting about, but everything changed when the camera roughly hit the ground and the thud of a body falling is heard, so the woman hurriedly ran towards the person in need. The camera’s point of view was shifted towards the opposite side of the bridge, where people suddenly stopped everything to look up at something and many others began to fall on the ground. Amidst the situation, the voice of the woman mingled with many worried others in the background, but what ensued next was a terrifying silence.

People continued to look up, a few sheltering themselves from the sun with their hands, when suddenly an intense beam of light took over the entire footage for a second. No one was there to be seen again once the video returned to normal.

“Twenty-six people, including two kids, went missing that day.” The German man sounded as tired as he was mad. “We’ve conducting a thorough search since then, but there is not a single lead to follow. CCTV camera around the area wasn’t of much help, so that’s the only footage of what happened.”

“It’s man-made.” Hyungwon avowed, turning around a bit to face all the military in the table. “This doesn’t look like a natural event. Someone or some group is doing this. I don’t know why but—”

“Then help us.” The German man appealed. “If you don’t mean any harm, prove it. Help me protect my country. Millions of innocent lives are at stake. Only God knows what could come next.”

In any other circumstance, Hyungwon would’ve said yes in a heartbeat. He was given those abilities for some purpose, and he’d like to believe that it was to help make the multiverse a better place. However, it was always a tricky thing to make a deal with people in power; if Hyungwon wasn’t cautious enough, that was a one-way ticket to a possible enslavement — it was pretty obvious that that civilization still didn’t deal well with those who were different from them.

“Am I going to be a prisoner here?” Hyungwon asked. “I’m always willing to aid those in despair, but do not take me as a piece of possible political dispute. I intend to be as free as I was before I was shoved into here.”

“We cannot respond yet.” The Korean military asserted. “There are people in higher places than us. For now, this all I can tell you. We’ll reach out for our governments about your situation and assistance in the Germany case.” He made a move to get up and leisurely bowed towards the other authorities in the table. “Please stay here, Hyungwon-ssi.”

Gathering a few folders from the table, Mr. Choi made his way to the exit with the two soldiers whom accompanied Hyungwon earlier trailing behind him. It didn’t take too long for the other government people to leave too, sending a few weird and confused glares at the time traveler.

That Germany matter was already taking over his thoughts so badly he didn’t even realize that he was finally left alone with the Constants.

“HYUNG!” Changkyun sprinted in his direction. “Are you okay? Did they do anything to you? Not like—I know you can defend yourself but—”

“I’m okay, Changkyun.” Hyungwon let out a long sigh, massaging his temples. “I should be the one asking that.”
“We’re fine.” Shownu assured in the behalf of all of them. “They just locked us in a room for hours, then brought us here minutes before you got here too.”

“Okay, but when can we leave?” Hyungwon had his eyes closed to block the migraine trying to take over his brain, but heard clearly when Wonho’s voice arose. “This is not an issue for us.”

“He’s right…” Opening his eyes, the time traveler saw an apologetic Minhyuk standing beside Changkyun. “No offense, Hyungwon-ah. But you’re like… mighty. And we’re just… us.”

“I know, Minhyuk. I agree with that. I will get you all out of here as soon as possible.”

“So…” Kihyun took a step forward, leaning on the table. “That thing in Germany. Do you really think it’s—”

A loud boom was heard in the background of their conversation, muffled by the walls of concrete that surrounded them. Hyungwon jumped off his seat as rapid as possible.

“What the hell was that?” Jooheon hissed.

“Stay here.” Hyungwon’s voice also was no louder than a whisper.

Through the crack of the automated door he unlocked using his abilities, the uproar coming from every corner of that installation flooded their room, and forced Hyungwon swung it open to check what the hell was going on.

On the other side of the place, the military leaders hurriedly moved by surrounded by dozens of soldiers, shutting themselves in a random room without looking back.

The chaos around them knew no limits; ceaseless bawling and guns being fired could be heard everywhere in the perimeter; the fright could be almost grasped in the air, and it became pretty evident that they were left to fend for themselves.

Next to his feet, Hyungwon saw the two soldiers who escorted him earlier absolutely unconscious on the floor, so he squatted to look for a pulse. There was none.

His survival instincts kicked in and the first thing in his mind was to protect the Constants.

“We need to go.”

At the sound of his announcement, the entirety of the ceiling above their heads disappeared and reemerged within seconds, almost crushing them under the wreckage if Hyungwon hadn’t been fast enough to put a force field around them.

“GET OUT!” The time traveler used one of his hands to beckon towards the exit, letting them pass by him while Hyungwon supported the energy shield.

Hyungwon’s brain tried to slow down the actions of everyone around them so he could react properly to it; finally stepping out of ruins of used to be a room, his plan of gathering all the Constants together to escape quickly failed for not considering how fear works in ordinary humans. At the first sight of danger, the fight, flight or freeze instinct acted too fast; it did not help him how all the six men had different reactions to that turmoil.

On his right side, Minhyuk and Kihyun ran towards the end of the hallway and never before he felt like such useless bystander. Despite his inhuman skills, he was still just one person and there was nothing he could do to avoid something he didn’t see coming — the two men being tackled by
white hooded figures, and disappearing as if they had never been there.

Too many variables turned his brain into a clutter, but Hyungwon tried to not let himself be paralyzed by that — he’d deal with that later, he’d save them — to focus on the rest of the boys. The men stood just a couple meters away from him, but taught him another lesson about not being on time, of not being enough.

Hyungwon hated paradoxes, despite of the fact that he was a living one.

He knew he was too late again as he watched Shownu and Jooheon vanish into thin air in the forceful hold of a hooded stranger. Hyungwon instantly lifted a protection around Changkyun and Wonho, the only ones left.

That’s when he felt the tug on himself, bringing him to brutally crash against the floor.

The time traveler drew in a breath sharply, then another, but the air was being obstructed by the weight of someone on top of him.

React!

A voice in the background yelled his name and, the ground still trembled with rough footsteps everywhere, but the sentient energy inside his body was faster in taking action by directing itself towards his hands; Hyungwon could sense his eyes getting warmer as much as the rest of his body, with a bit of relief.

The sudden blast shoved the person who tried to kidnap him down the corridor, not without making them clash against the ceiling first. His situation didn’t get any better, though, for one look to his side and he could confirm that Changkyun was also gone.

Somehow, Wonho managed to push away the person trying to abduct him, which was kind of astonishing when you remember they were dealing with an attack of people experienced in teleportation. Without thinking twice, Hyungwon swept off the floor and grew a small energy sphere on his hand, throwing it in the direction of the last adversary.

On his peripheral vision, something much more important happened. Hyungwon had no idea, at that very first second, what those actions meant, but seemed vehemently threatening. This feeling was what made him move fast and defend themselves even before a supposedly lethal object was launched at them.

Before he could doubt himself, Hyungwon hauled Wonho down and sprung himself on top of him, with an arm protectively curled over the man’s head while his free hand created a force shield around them.

Under the energy shelter, they could hear a stifled explosion arose in the background and shivers went down his spine; the strength he had to put to maintain their protection was twice he used normally, so one could imagine his struggle. Under him, on the floor, Hyungwon could hear the thumping beat of Wonho’s heart as the man reached out to clasp his blazer, out of fear. It made the time traveler realize that was another form of closeness he hadn’t felt in a long time.

Of course it said a lot about who he was that such thought came to him in the middle of a havoc.

A glance around confirmed that the worst had passed. Regardless of multiple parts of that complex being on fire, that place had never looked safer, so Hyungwon pulled down the protection and rolled to the side.
Hyungwon had a lot of trouble in interpreting his own timeline, so that was something he avoided; now, with his brain out of control due the mess of his emotions, Hyungwon didn’t bother checking the place he was about to collide with.

So you might understand the problem that there was no floor in that space.

Had it not been for the swift arm wrapping around his waist to push him back from the chasm, Hyungwon would’ve been undoubtedly falling into a bottomless pit without proper time to react. Wonho’s entire body shuddered as the man stared at him with dilated pupils.

Now it was his heart that now pounded violently on his chest due the adrenaline.

Still in the middle of his panting, Hyungwon stirred to sit on the floor. Behind him, Wonho muttered a heartfelt expression of his emotional state.

“Holy fuck.”

What was supposed to be the floor across that place was now gigantic crater, that engulfed the entire room they were previously in and a large portion of the entire installation.

“YAH!”

Wonho lost count of how many times he had yelled at the time traveler on their way back to the subway station, but deep down he knew that it was his fault for having left his fucking room to deal with time traveling bullshit.

To have been taken by the armed forces was already a pretty good sign that they shouldn’t have been even near Hyungwon, but now the rest of them disappeared like it was nothing and Wonho could’ve feel more validated than that.

After their near-death experience not only with that explosion that came out of nowhere, but also with the massive pit that it formed inside the military facility’s site, Hyungwon looked so pissed off that, for the first time since he met that man, Wonho seriously considered if he was about to pop off on the authorities. An hour later of him heatedly dealing with the Korean and German officials, Wonho heard that, more or less, they were set to go to Germany immediately for that entire shit went down because of the same people who architected those incidents in that European country.

After an agreement Wonho was not made aware of the details, they were let go so Hyungwon could prepare for whatever that trip was, but of course they forced Wonho to sign a paper that stated that all the topics discussed concerned national security, hence he couldn’t share them. His fears about the whereabouts of his friends mingled with his hunger and annoyance about the situation he was put in.

“How many times do I have to call for you?” Once they made it to the inside of the train, Wonho yanked Hyungwon’s arm back to get his attention.

Another surprise was the glare he received; despite his behavior, Wonho didn’t get under Hyungwon’s skin before that.
“Let go, Wonho-ssi.” If Hyungwon’s eyes had lasers, he would be dead by now. “I have things to do. Go home.”

“GO HOME? DO YOU THINK—WITH THEM GONE, DO YOU THINK—”

“Do not shout at me.” The calm in his voice made the time traveler a bit daunting. “If you’re going to say this is my fault, it’s redundant.” Hyungwon harshly pulled away from him. “I am going to bring them back.”

“They could be already dead for all we know.” He retorted. “What will YOU do about it?”

“I am dealing with all the variables here, Wonho-ssi. I do not want to put your life in danger, so you should go.”

“AND NOW YOU CARE? Not when the fucking military took us, or when we were kidnapped by some crazy people from another universe? Sure, it’s only when it’s in your best interest, right?”

“Why must you always think that I do not care at all?” Hyungwon’s voice got a lot more distraught. “I care about all of you, I always did. I did not know it was a trap before I summoned you that day. Like everyone else, there’s only so much I can do in the situation I’ve been put on. But whatever I say to you will do nothing to make you comprehend, and because I do not want to keep this discussion going, again I ask you to leave. I’ll call you when I get them back.”

Without a doubt, Hyungwon was the most frustrating man he had ever known in his entire life. And Wonho dealt with academics most of the time, for crying out loud.

“You want to know what I hate the most about you? It’s the fact that you think your way is always the right way. You don’t even consider listening to ANYONE else!”

“Because I know what I have to do. What I need to do. Why is it hard for you to understand how dangerous this is? I can handle it, you—”

“I’m just a random dude, not the Almighty Hyungwon, right?”

“Don’t insult your intelligence by pretending to be dumb. You know that I—”

“I don’t know shit about you, Hyungwon. And I don’t care. But I want to find my friends, so either you like it or not—”

“Oh, please. Do you think that—”

Cutting through their discussion, the female robotic voice of the machine’s A.I. emerged in the room.

“Can you two stop fighting for a minute or should I ignore the information I have on the Germany case?”

“What?” The fact that they spoke in unison surprised both of them.

“Meet me in the control room so I can brief you about it… or just keep yelling at each other.”

Wonho didn’t know if he was fazed by the fact that there was an actual artificial intelligence in the circuits of that machine or by the additional detail that it had sarcasm in its programming.
“I checked over all the data the German government presented to the Korean military about the incidents.”

Countless scans of confidential documents showed up in front of them, in what was supposedly the windshield of the train, regarding the events in multiple German cities. Hyungwon shifted forward to check it closely, crossing his arms over his chest while Wonho remained by the door.

“You mean you invaded the country’s security system to get these.” Wonho spouted.

“Brave words of a human that knows that I can hack into his browsing history.”

A low hum of disapproval came from the time traveler, whom still had his back to Wonho.

“Monbebe…”

“I apologize.” It was kind of bewildering how even her robotic tone sounded of a child that had just been scolded. “I will not hack into any of your electronic devices.”

“So they got here during the month breach when I was in that trap.” Hyungwon concluded, lifting his head a bit to talk to his A.I. “Do you have information about their original timeline?”

“Original timeline?” The inquiring came natural to Wonho. “You mean they’re not from here?”

Hyungwon swiftly turned around to face him.

“There’s no such thing as time travel in this universe whatsoever, Wonho-ssi. Not until Jooheon and Changkyun fulfill their tasks. The chain of events was set right after I defeated The Eye, which means these people also know that they’re gone.”

“On screen.” Monbebe asked for their attention to show a 3-D model of something that resembled a can opener, but that looked way too technological to ever be one. “This is the only piece of material left behind by them after one of the incidents, in Düsseldorf. According to the multiverse’s database, it’s a failed model 2000 of a rudimentary gravity warper coined by the universe 346.”

“346?” The time traveler seemed genuinely surprised. “They didn’t have a third industrial revolution, but they’re already know about the multiverse?”

“Information not clear, Hyungwon. But apparently, an unknown group tried to utilize this gadget in their original universe, that’s why is in the multiverse database.”

“Please send this information about them to the German government and start the engines. Also, tell them I’ll be in their country in thirty minutes for their perspective.” Hyungwon swiftly passed by him at the entrance, but turned around to gaze at Wonho. “Follow me.”

At first, Wonho was hesitant to trail behind the time traveler — whom didn’t wait for him at all after those words — but there was nothing he could do to pull himself out of that situation, not when he argued so much about it, so whatever.

After they crossed the fourth wagon inside that train-like machine, Wonho started to count the passenger cars in their path and once their destination was reached, nine wagons were left behind them; from what it looked like, there were even more wagons ahead, and the fact that that thing was truly bigger on the inside made Wonho’s head hurt. He hated so much to not understand how the hell that worked.

Hyungwon placed his hand on a rectangular box next to the entrance of the room and the biometric
system read his handprint, giving them access to it.

That was, by far, the largest room of that train, maybe six times bigger than it could look like on the outside. As if that wasn’t already enough, countless iron joists attached to random sections across of the floor led his attention all the way up towards the roof, but the truth is that he couldn’t actually see one. Not because there wasn’t actually there, quite the contrary. There was so many thick pipes, cables and wires of unknown materials that Wonho couldn’t see where the iron joists ended their journey.

It got worse when Wonho noticed that the entire structure was, apparently, moving on its own; like the unpredictable flow of a river, that mechanical assembly didn’t follow any pattern when it came to its formation, emitting reddish lights in the interval of a couple of seconds.

Wonho wanted to get closer and study it so desperately.

“We’re at the heart of the machine.” Hyungwon’s hoarse voice made him wince out of surprise. When Wonho’s gaze shifted to him, the man was already on the other side of the room. “I want to show you something.”

As a personal rule, Wonho tried to remind himself of not looking too amazed by whatever the hell it was that Hyungwon put in front of him, but that was proving to be quite a challenge.

Large containers and silver shelves concealed the appearance of the mechanic structure and the rest of the room was filled six white counters divided in two queues on each side of it, containing pieces of technology he couldn’t tell its purpose, but seemed more advanced than anything his eyes had ever seen.

“What is it?” The black-haired man hadn’t even completed his way to Hyungwon when the question came out of his mouth. The time traveler, on the other hand, sat unbothered on top of the second counter in the right line, with his legs dangling off its edge.

“Come closer.” Hyungwon kept focused on working on a small device on his hand with a black screwdriver. “It’s pretty functional, but I’ve never used it…”

A prominent part of Wonho wanted to beg the Korean military to interdict that pink-haired idiot once and for all, so he wouldn’t have to deal with that baloney.

“What are you talking about now?”

“This.” Hyungwon showed him a circular object a bit smaller than his hand. “Please, come closer.”

With a defeated sigh, Wonho did as he was asked to, but had to wait a few more moments until Hyungwon lifted his gaze from the gadget to him. Now that the time traveler fully stared at him, Wonho noticed how big his almond-shaped eyes were.

“Take it off.” His voice didn’t quaver for a second. “The jacket.”

For someone so recluse, Hyungwon sure had no hint of embarrassment when he ordered Wonho around to strip off a piece of clothing.

“What?” Wonho’s voice came out way more high-pitched than he expected. “Why?”

Hyungwon’s long eyelashes mirrored the flap of wings of a butterfly when he blinked a couple of times.
“The device needs to be strapped around your chest.”

“Why? What does it do?”

“It’s a powered holographic exoskeleton. A civilization I’ve helped to settle with the humans in one universe gifted it to me a while ago. I never had the need to use.”

“This is extraterrestrial tech?” His eyes shifted back and forth between the apparatus and Hyungwon.

“Yes.”

His inner self absolutely squealed, but Wonho’s face was kept as earnest as possible. Complying what the time traveler requested him to, Wonho threw his leather jacket on top of the counter and moved near the pink-haired man.

Their proximity made Wonho understand what Shownu meant by feeling a soothing sensation whenever his friend was near Hyungwon; the traveler was the personification of a refreshing breeze in the middle of the hottest summer day, or whatever relaxing situation one could imagine. Wonho couldn’t understand why, but Hyungwon had a profound scent of chamomile that spoke of him as a creature of nature, much like a part of it.

Hyungwon didn’t seem to mind the lessening of space between them and settled the device in the middle of Wonho’s chest, over his white tee. Much for the latter’s surprise, the thing adhered easily to that surface.

Under the mess of hair from his bangs, Hyungwon’s gaze returned to him alongside an unreadable expression. What Wonho could tell was that now he seemed to mind their… position by the way the man pulled away rapidly, pushing himself further back on the counter.

Wonho didn’t like the way every centimeter of him felt dissatisfied by the lack of that balminess.

“Press it.” Hyungwon ordered, sitting cross-legged on the counter.

The effect was immediate. A holographic second skin covered his entire body, from head to toe, making low electronic hums as it spread through his entire being. Wonho was still dumbfounded by it when his attention was required again.

“Hey.”

Wonho still had a stupid smile on his face when he looked up only to see something being thrown directly at his face.

“ARE YOU CRAZY?” He brought an arm to shield his face out of instinct, glaring at the time traveler.

The object that Hyungwon threw at him landed on the floor broke in two parts. It was a sphere that seemed very heavy, but now was cut in half by that simple movement of Wonho’s arm.

Holy shit.

“It works.” Hyungwon nodded, quickly checking the piece on his chest. “I coded it to only respond to your fingerprints, so no one else can take it. Monbebe.” He craned his neck upwards to talk to his A.I. “Any news?”
The lights at the top of the walls began to flicker in the very next second.

“The Germans spotted a suspicious activity in the surroundings of the Northern Black Forest. I’ll start our course now.”

“Take the slower path.” The time traveler asked. “I need to gather a few things. Keep me updated.”

“Sure, Hyungwon.”

A tickling sensation came to Wonho when he reached for his chest to grab the small armor gadget and pulled it off, focusing on digesting that dialogue. Hyungwon, however, was already strolling towards the same door they entered that strange room.

“Hey, where are you going?”

Ignoring his previous question, Hyungwon didn’t even spare him a glance while walking.

“In case you don’t remember, the kitchen is in the fifth wagon, white door. There’s food there if you’re hungry. If you need anything else, just ask Monbebe.”

To be left alone with his thoughts was the worst possible option available, Hyungwon knew that. As soon as he left Wonho on his own and went back to his personal room to change clothes, memories of his time with the Constants hit him hard; he had learned to cherish those men and now, once more because of him, they were in serious danger. His otherworldly abilities were worthless when his emotions got the best of him.

There were all sorts of emotions floating inside his chest in that moment, so Hyungwon decided to shut them down by gathering the tablet he’d take to Germany and motivated himself to finish learning the local language.

Hyungwon was engrossed in the content in his tablet when Monbebe glinted the lights across the frame of his door, asking for permission to interact with the circuits.

“Come in.”

“Hyungwon, Mr. Shin is requesting your presence in the kitchen.”

“What?”

“I know, right? Maybe you’ll get lucky with this one.”

All he could do was rolling his eyes at his A.I.

“I’ll definitely take the sarcasm out of your software.”

“Did you call for me?”

Wonho had his back to him when Hyungwon got in the kitchen, preparing something on the metallic counter.
“Yeah. Sit down.”

Not even himself could explain why Hyungwon looked both ways, unsure of what to really do next. That was such an odd scenario that he didn’t know the proper procedure.

The black-haired man noticed Hyungwon was still standing by the entrance as if he was frozen.

“Yah.” Wonho glanced at him over his shoulder. “Sit down.”

“What?”

“What do you mean ‘why’?” Half of his body was turned towards Hyungwon now. “Are you going to eat on your feet?”

“I’m going… to eat?”

That earned a heavy sigh out of the other man, who closed his eyes out of frustration for a couple of seconds.

“You eat, don’t you? Shownu told me he brought food to you. This.” Wonho shifted sideways a bit to show what he had on the counter — two ramen cups. “That’s the only thing I could find.”

“There’s rice and meat here. In the fridge.” Hyungwon gestured towards the kitchen appliance right beside Wonho. “But I don’t really know how to cook. Kihyun left there.”

His chest became heavier at the thought of his friend.

“What?” Wonho ambled towards the table at the center of the room. “Just eat this for now.”

“Me?”

Hyungwon could tell from his face that Wonho wanted to exasperatedly scream at his face, but the time traveler couldn’t help but to feel hesitant about how to act around Wonho. The many poor experiences with his doubles trained Hyungwon to always walk with heed around Wonho, and at that point it became an ordinary gut reaction.

“What? Do you think I’m going to poison you?” Wonho squinted at him before the pink-haired could utter something. “Don’t tell me… What? One of my…”

Yes. Twice.

“It was an intricate situation.”

“I’m not poisoning you!” Wonho rebuked. “God, the kind of stuff I even have to say. Don’t eat then, whatever.”

Wonho hauled one of the chairs so he could take a seat, focusing on getting chopsticks from one of the drawers.

Though he knew his concerns had some base to it, Hyungwon couldn’t help but to feel remorseful about his behavior. No action from one of Wonho’s doubles should be blamed upon him, no matter what his instincts told him to do.

Sauntering in the table’s direction, the traveler took a seat on the opposite side of Wonho’s and pulled the second ramen cup closer to him. To avoid the expected awkwardness that always came from their encounters alone, the best decision was to grab the tablet he brought with him and learn
Looking up through cracks of his bangs, Hyungwon got a glimpse of Wonho’s befuddled face when he unfolded the tablet like a napkin, making it twice bigger. Sometimes, he still forgot how those kind of things could be confounding for people of that universe.

After minutes of absolute silence, Wonho’s voice emerged out of nowhere.

“What are you doing with that?”

“Learning the German language. I’m almost finishing it.”

“In 10 minutes? That’s not possible.”

“Not with that attitude, Wonho-ssi.”

The timing of the machine worked on Hyungwon’s favor, since his graceless speech did nothing to make that atmosphere a bit better.

“We’ve arrived in Baden-Württemberg, 5:18 p.m., local southwest German time.”

With a swift move, Hyungwon was the first to get up.

“Don’t tell the Germans about the device I gave you.” He advised the man. “Use it only when we go get the Constants back.”

“Sure.” Wonho didn’t seem to pay much attention, but agreed anyway as he finished his meal. “Let’s go.”

Through the windows of the passenger car, Wonho could see only feeble beams of light on the outside, which made him start questioning where the hell had they disembarked out of all the decent places in that country.

“Where are we?” He asked the time traveler, whom ambled in front of him towards the door of the main wagon.

“The Germans gave me these coordinates.” Without turning around, Hyungwon explained. He also retrieved four other tablets that rested on top of one bench near the exit. “It’s in the vicinity of the Black Forest.”

As the door opened robotically next to their presence, Wonho observed tiny lights twinkling in the distance getting significant as it got closer to them.

“There’s a military base two kilometers from here.” Hyungwon spoke again as the thud of heavy footsteps in the background now could be heard. “Come on.”

“Wait.” Wonho’s hand slipped swiftly to clasp the time traveler’s wrist. “We should wait. What if they shoot us? We’re not white, dude.”

“It would be worse for them if they did it.” It was creepy how there was not a trace of uneasiness in his face. “Don’t worry.”
Murmurs now could be heard everywhere around them alongside the noisy footsteps crashing against wood sticks; words of command in German that Wonho didn’t know what it meant, but sure sounded threatening.

The whispers turned into warning shouts in their direction while flashlights were pointed at their faces. There was no doubt they were in the middle of some wilderness, but the dimness of their surroundings didn’t allow Wonho to read much about their whereabouts. At least it wasn’t as cold as he imagined it was.

A man yelled something in German and Hyungwon replied in their language, leaving Wonho literally in the dark about what the hell was going on.

A sudden moment later, all the guns pointed at them were lowered down and Wonho felt a tap on his shoulder; Hyungwon nodded at him so he could follow the pink-haired man, that now had the German soldiers ready to lead the way out of there.

To say that Wonho was nervous was quite an understatement, but at least he hadn’t been shot — again — so mayhaps that was already a big victory. Despite his best efforts to not look uneasy while surrounded by armed men in a foreign country, you can imagine that it was pretty fucking difficult.

30 minutes of walking later, they were brought into a huge warehouse-like place where they met the higher-ups in the German army, but not without a strip-search for a possible threat — which made Wonho very satisfied that he followed Hyungwon’s advice and hid the round gadget in the sole of his boot, even though the soldier’s search wasn’t very thorough.

Once again, Hyungwon did all the talk in German with the officials when they were brought into a white room similar to the one they were taken to in Korea, but considerably smaller and much more crowded; Wonho counted at least twenty-five men and women that waited for their arrival.

To be there and not to have been was undeniably the same thing for Wonho. Amid the discussions of plans and leads on the case, Hyungwon was cordial enough to try to translate a few things to him, but at some point Wonho disregarded his attempts so the traveler could focus on one task only.

After longer-than-usual (to him) 35 minutes later, the meeting came to an end and Wonho couldn’t hold back his sigh of relief, which earned him a few weird glares of disapproval from men whom sat close to him.

“We’re leaving in half-hour.” Hyungwon informed him as they left the room, being ushered by three German soldiers. “I convinced them to let you tag along, but you must cooperate well.”

“Sure.” Whatever it took to get his friends back, he’d do. “What’s the plan? Do they know anything new? Did those pricks make any contact?”

“The Korean sent the report on the incident earlier and only the Constants were taken from the military facility, so it’s pretty clear those people know about their importance. Tactically, they will split into five teams to cover the area around the area of the suspicious activity captured by their satellites to see if we get anything. We’ll go with one of them. Whoever they are, they have been quiet so far, so the military couldn’t do much. But from what I can sense from the timeline, our odds are good, but dangerous. I still need to do something.”

Without waiting for a reply, Hyungwon turned to his side to speak in German with one of the soldiers and the man — apparently — complied with the traveler’s request.
Their next location was a modest lab located at the end of the corridor they currently walked, occupied by only two other men in lab coats whom looked quite staggered about their arrival. Much for Wonho’s surprise, they actually appeared to be Asian, but he wasn’t really sure of their nationality.

Beside him, Hyungwon greeted them in German, but both men just stared at the pink-haired traveler as if he was an apparition.

Wonho snorted when Hyungwon glanced at him over his shoulder, not knowing what to do about that social interaction.

“They’re Asian.” Wonho pointed out. “Ask where they are from.”

“YOU’RE KOREAN TOO?” One of the men, the raven-haired one, yelled and Wonho almost jumped out of his skin.

God, it had never been nicer to hear someone else speaking his mother tongue, even though it scared Wonho at first.

“Calm the fuck down, Soonyoung.” The other man, blond and shorter than his friend, seemed to be calmer. “Sorry. We’ve heard about you earlier, and the things they said…”

Hyungwon chuckled at that.

“It’s alright. Can you tell me where they put my tablets? A soldier told me my stuff was brought here.”

“I know!” The raven-haired one grinned from ear to ear. “It folds like paper! I’ve never seen it before. Where is it from? I mean, sorry, should’ve introduced myself first. I’m Kwon Soonyoung and this is my lab partner and best friend, Lee Jihoon.”

“Oh…” That apparently rang a bell in Hyungwon’s mind. “From the Kwon-Lee graviton thesis?”

“How do you know we’re working on that?” Jihoon was genuinely taken aback.

“It’s his job to know stuff.” Wonho commented. “He’s a time traveler.”

“Ohhhh…” Soonyoung nodded in acknowledgment, not even a bit flustered by that fact. His friend busied himself in fetching Hyungwon’s tablets from a table behind him. “That’s so cool.”

“My name is Hyungwon, and this is Shin Wonho-ssi. It’s an honor to meet you.”

“I know your names.” Soonyoung smiled brightly once again, and his eyes turned into a straight line that looked like the 10:10 on an analog clock. “We’ve been briefed about it because they plan to bring in the tech from those bad guys for us to study.”

In the least subtle way, Hyungwon shared a questioning look with Wonho that it took him a few seconds to catch up on it. Of course the Germans would want a tech that existed nowhere but in their country, even though it didn’t belong there. Humans and power seemingly were a pair that could not be separated.

“Thank you for keeping my equipment safe.” The time traveler bowed in scientists’ direction. “I don’t want to disturb your work, so we’ll be going now.”

Wonho watched the two men bowing at them and did the same, unhurriedly walking behind the
time traveler.

“This is bad.” Hyungwon declared in Korean, taking a sly look at the three soldiers over his shoulders. They didn’t react to his phrase, so it encouraged him. “Do you have your phone with you?”

“No. I left it on the train because I knew they’d take it. Why?”

“I was thinking about an EMP. We have to fry everything. The entire tech from that organization. I guess I’ll have to use my own energy for that.”

“God, I fucking hate the woods.”

Wonho’s statement, with such a miserable tone, would’ve made him laugh if Hyungwon wasn’t so pressed by all the things he needed to accomplish; find his friends, defeat whoever was behind their abduction, destroy that foreign technology and get them all back in Korea safe. His brain was begging for a break, but that was a luxury Hyungwon couldn’t afford at that moment.

The sharp footsteps of the six soldiers, three behind and three ahead of him, helped Hyungwon to concentrate, but their hasty stop gave him the shivers.

“I think I saw something.” One of the soldiers avowed.

“Wonho-ssi, don’t move.” Hyungwon immediately turned around to warn the man, in Korean. “They think that—”

A clear vision of what was about to happen came into Hyungwon’s mind, but not fast enough.

In the night, a shriek of pain arose in the air and Hyungwon’s eyes darted all around the place.

“GET OFF THE GROUND!” Hyungwon yelled, in the hope some of the soldiers could make it.

He didn’t think twice before grabbing Wonho by the waist and hurl him towards the tree next to them, pushing the man up for him to crawl up.

Once Hyungwon was sure Wonho’s feet were off the ground, he prepared himself for the electric current about to hit his body.

The dry soil didn’t do much to help soothe the impact of being struck by a potent shock wave, forcing the time traveler to bend his body as he writhed in agony with the screeching of the German soldiers echoing in the background.

It lasted about 10 seconds, but it was enough to knock down any ordinary human to the brink of death.

In the following minute, all Hyungwon could hear was his own panting, alongside Wonho’s careful movements on the tree.

There was something incredibly disturbing about his inability to escape his guttural instinct to protect the Constants more than anything else.
His body burned him alive in the inside, but it was worse to remain unaccompanied in that place.

“Hyungwon?” Wonho’s voice came out shaky.

“I’m okay.” Of course he had to lie. Humans yearned for some sense of safety in those moments. “Just…”

“Can I come down?”

Such question reminded Hyungwon they didn’t have much time.

“Yeah, yeah. We have to get out of here, or that will happen again.”

“What the fuck just happened?” The man got down nimbly, accompanying Hyungwon who already moved away from that location.

“Modified electromagnetic pulse. These people, whoever they are, they knew someone was coming for them. Our presence triggered that trap.”

Just a few seconds were left, but Wonho and Hyungwon were nothing close to escape that second wave. As much as he hated, they had to take the less pleasant route.

Hyungwon clasped his fingers around the other man’s wrist and ran at full speed in the east direction, knowing very well how severe were going to be the complaints he was going to receive later from the Constant. At least Wonho would still be alive to whine.

The thing is Hyungwon memorized the map of that region, and the nearest point they could reach without being fried by the shock was the cliff edge of a lake.

Not even the moonlight greeted them in that windless night among the nature and its volatility, so Hyungwon ignored the pain in his body and boosted his internal energy to the maximum to create a source of light around them; in the middle of his fall, Wonho shouted desperately as they fell into murky waters.

The impact from their bodies hitting gelid waters were diminished by the warm bubble of energy that Hyungwon projected around them, but the black-haired man tossed around for primeval human impulse, visibly desperate to reach out for the surface.

Hyungwon had been in situations like that before, in more worlds that he could count off the top of his head. His mind had been conditioned to remain calm first in order to guarantee his survival, so it wasn’t hard for the time traveler to swim towards the other man and take them out of the water.

The force field he encircled them had to go for Hyungwon to be able to drag Wonho up, by the bulletproof vest he wore, once again engulfed by the gloominess of that forest.

As both of them made out of there in one piece, Wonho lied down on his back over the shore.

The man struggled to breathe and coughed his lungs out, while Hyungwon simply took a deep breath to begin to digest the crazy moment that they just had experienced.

“Are you okay?” Hyungwon, who stood on his feet, asked Wonho, still lying down on the sand.

“I’m fucking freezing.” The man sibilated.

He could barely see the Constant’s face, but his trembling silhouette was pretty clear about the state of his body. No matter how well he could imagine the sensation, the differences between his
body and normal humans’, Hyungwon simply didn’t feel affected by the icy lake as much as he was by that shock wave.

Hyungwon shifted closer, feeling the extra weight the water put on his drenched clothes, and crouched down next to Wonho.

“Take my hand.” The time traveler brushed his fingers against the Constant’s wrist, to indicate a direction. “I can share my energy with you. It will keep you warm.”

As expected, Wonho’s first silly instinct was to turn his back to him, as if Hyungwon hadn’t just saved his life twice in the past minutes.

“We still have to get our friends back, Wonho-ssi. That trap means we must be close.”

With a sigh, the black-haired man turned around and hastily secured a hold on Hyungwon’s hand, and the latter didn’t waste time into doing the procedure.

Wonho’s body arched up with the potency of that electric discharge, even though it only lasted a couple of seconds.

“Holy fuck…” Wonho practically jumped on his feet, squirming. “I forgot how awful this is.”

A snort came out of Hyungwon naturally, regardless of the glare he gained from the Constant. There was still much to be done.

“Tell me what we know so far about those people.”

Hyungwon walked in front of him as if he knew the place like the back of his hand, when in fact he followed the instructions of a map in one of his tablets, that thankfully survived their fall.

“Why?” Wonho reminded himself to keep his voice down. “You know already.”

“I’m trying to keep your mind busy.” Projecting a blueish globe of energy on one hand, to illuminate their path, while checking the tablet with the other, Hyungwon didn’t even bother turn around. “I can sense you freaking out.”

“Bold of you to assume I haven’t been panicking since we got here.”

“Do it anyway.”

“Fine.” The black-haired sighed. “Whoever they are, they know about who we are and certainly want something from us. Our energy?”

“Go back to the first events.”

“The incidents?”

“Yes. What was their purpose?”

It took him a minute to recall what he saw in the footage shown earlier; distorted houses, breaches in the fabric of spacetime sucking people in and the disappearance of dozens of people was all his
“They were testing,” Wonho concluded. “All of it, before, was an experiment. Jesus...” That made him come to a halt. “All of that, just to get to us?”

“Yes,” Hyungwon made a pause on his walk too. “Even without you, the others are still quite powerful together. It could have various applications, from being a free source of energy to the planet to be used as a component to bombs.”

Way beyond fucked up.

“Those soldiers...” Wonho gestured vaguely towards the forest.

“The chances are they just passed out. There was no second shock wave, so they’ll be fine once we disable their entire tech.”

“It’s just because I’m a Constant, right?” Wonho jeered, stepping on a twig with more strength than necessary. “That’s why you helped me back then.”

“It’s because you are my priority.”

Wonho blamed the wind for the shiver that ran through his body. He was glad it was still relatively dark enough for the forest night to hide his flustered face.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t care for everybody else.” Hyungwon continued. “It means I have to make choices, and live with them.”

Their conversation was interrupted by a low beeping sound coming from his tablet.

“The thermal scan picked up something.”

Wonho jumped forward.

“Repass the info to the other teams in the area. We could use the back up.”

“I can’t wait for them to get here. I—”

“Listen.” It took all his willpower to not shout. “You don’t work on your own anymore, not when my friends’ lives are at stake. We need help.”

“Fine.” The time traveler swiped his finger over the monitor of one of his tablets and handed to Wonho. Emerald lines glided across the screen in different direction; the signal had been sent.

“Excuse me.”

In the path across the dry forest, the atmosphere was filled with nothing but the occasional faint noises made by the animal population around; Wonho was trying to not let his mind plunge into paranoia of a random animal jumping on him at any time, and that was very hard. And that man did not make it any easy.

“Where are you going?” Wonho clutched the tablet to his chest, speaking as low as possible.

“Wait for the military here.” The man disregarded his question like it was nothing. “Once I’m inside...” Hyungwon stirred a bit to pull another tablet from the inner pocket of his blazer and clicked on it a couple of times. “Stick the tablet on that wall and press the ‘On’ button here. It will seal the place, so they won’t be able to travel or teleport. Neither will I.”
“What? Where are you going?” Wonho questioned again.

“To make a scene.”

Humans were intrinsically afraid of the dark, even though Hyungwon couldn’t grasp the feeling to know the reason. As he strolled out of the woods, the time traveler allowed his inner energy to flow across his skin and his limbs felt as light as a leaf. As usual, the warmth reached his eyes by turning it into small suns, glowing like his insides as he fractured the darkness of that forest.

There were a couple of guards on the outside of small complex that looked like an abandoned warehouse; whoever they were, seemingly they had received the memo about who Hyungwon was if the alarmed look on their faces could tell something. As expected from the still primitive behavior, the men pointed their pistols at him right away.

“DON’T MOVE!” A blond Asian men yelled in English, while the other one pressed a button on a device next to his sleeve, apparently to turn on his communication device.

“HE’S HERE!” The second man shouted at his wrist, also in English.

The time traveler leisurely raised his arms, still moving in their direction. He was harshly stopped by the two guards pulling his arms behind his back and cuffing him.

So uncivilized.

Once the door behind him was closed, Hyungwon waited to feel the vibrations of the electric field shielding the place as soon as Wonho activated the lockdown; much to his confusion, there was absolutely nothing out of the ordinary.

From his hiding place behind a wide tree, Wonho almost gave himself a heart attack when he suddenly felt one of the two tablets Hyungwon gave him vibrating like crazy.

On screen, a blank rectangle blinked unceasingly. Even with his gut telling him to just chuck that shit away, Wonho decided to clink on the damn thing anyway.

At his touch, an audio transmission began. Coming as no surprise, a man spoke something in German to him, so Wonho replied in Korean that he had no idea what the dude was talking about.

“Do you speak English?” The man, possibly from the army, tried again.

“Yes. This is Wonho speaking, Hyungwon is—”

“This is the commander of this operation speaking. The location of the Korean men abducted earlier was delivered to us by the terrorists not much long ago. The team on site confirmed it’s them, so we’re retreating our forces for now.”

“YOU CAN’T!” Wonho found himself yelling at the tablet. “Hyungwon is already inside— they
“Our priority was to rescue your friends. I’ll be sending one of our teams in the Black Forest to get you back to the base. Stay where you are, I’m sending your coordinates...”

Stupid white morons.

Wonho threw the tablet somewhere on the ground and crouched down, lifting his hands to entwine his fingers at the back of his neck. What the hell was going on? The boys were supposed to be there, that’s why they went through all of that shit to get to that place.

After the wave of frustration settled down, Wonho craned his neck up as he realized something.

Why the fuck kidnap the boys if they were going to disclose their location so easily? Why build that entire thing in the forest if—

Fuck. FUCK. Fuck.

“It was never about us.” Wonho whispered to himself, raising his head to face the building Hyungwon was forced inside. “They were after him all along.”

5 minutes passed by and not a single trace of Wonho’s action could be felt by Hyungwon, and the time traveler began to fear for the worst. If something went wrong with his plan, could Wonho be in danger now? Were the other Constants still alive?

His musings were interrupted by the tug of the guards in white who ushered him across the hall, stopping in front of a metallic black door that was promptly opened.

Inside of the room, two Asian men sat behind a thick wood table, visibly unpolished.

“We have been expecting you, Mr. CHW.” The man who beginning the talk was a bit chubby, appearing to be just a few years older than the Constants. “It took you long enough, right? We’ve been waiting for you for more than a month.”

“Where are the Constants?” Hyungwon was straightforward.

“You are very famous, Mr. CHW.” The other male got off his chair to walk in his direction. With pitch black locks and very small eyes, he seemed to be the oldest. “In our world, you are an omen of death.”

“I’m not the one murdering and kidnapping innocent people.” The building anger in his body was on the brink of a leak. “Where are the Constants? Let them go, and you can have me.”

“They are really your weakness, aren’t they?” The older man sneered, crossing his arms over his chest. “I guess they were right all along.”


“How do you think we knew where you are, CHW?” The man sitting behind the table simpered proudly. “Those who claimed to be your people gave us all that information.” That made the younger man laugh. “Thanks to them, the two of us escaped the hell of that World War and came
here, to this such pacific and gullible world.”

Wait.

“You were never interested in them.” The time traveler affirmed, casting his eyes down as the realization was digested. “What do you want from me? And where are—”

“With the authorities, by now. They are of no use now that we have you here.”

“You don’t know who they are, do you?” Hyungwon chuckled to himself. “I’ll give you a chance to surrender, and pay for your wrongdoings.”

“Hmm…” The older man looked away for a second. “We’ll have to pass.”

With that, the last remaining of patience Hyungwon had in his body disappeared and the pink-haired put all his strength into breaking free from those obnoxious handcuffs.

But he couldn’t.

“I guess they were right about it too.” The younger got on his feet too, strolling in his partner’s direction. “Osmium is not a very common element here, but in our world is pretty abundant. They do suppress your… abilities, right?”

*How do they—How my people knew about it?*

Hyungwon stared at his own hands with a horrified mien.

“We’ve build this place especially for you, Mr. CHW.” The voice of the older man arose, but Hyungwon didn’t want to face them. “Fuck the other worlds. Join us, and we’ll make this planet revere us like kings. Your precious friends won’t have to get hurt.”

The attempt of trying to summon the energy inside his body proved to be hopeless, but the last thing he’d do was to give those men the joy to see him in despair.

“I’m no conqueror.” Hyungwon announced.

“Then I guess you won’t mind if I kill those boys you like so much, right?”

His heart beat so fast it seemed it was about to break through his lungs and escape his body, and the sudden sound of gunfire emerging in the distance made him take a step backwards out of instinct.

“Get rid of them.” The oldest man ordered his partner.

Among every other element about that situation, Hyungwon’s first thought was of Wonho. Was he —

Two ominous knocks hit the door of that room as the chubby younger man was ready to leave.

The duo shared a muddled look, but didn’t seem too fazed about it. Meanwhile, the gunshots didn’t stop for a single second; the time traveler hated being around it, every single atom in his body felt irked.

Hyungwon squealed as the door was basically ripped off its hinges and shoved into the younger man’s face, propelling him to clash against the wall beside the pink-haired.
At the entrance, an unexpected sight.

No time was given for Hyungwon to properly react for the remaining man pulled a handgun and shot several times at Wonho.

His first impulse was to try to stop that madness, but his abilities were of no use at the moment.

Realizing the magnitude of the powered holographic exoskeleton he used, Wonho tromped forward and took the gun off the man’s hands with deftness; a swift move later and Wonho pushed the man across the room.

Now in front of him, Hyungwon stayed speechless.

“You good?” The holographic armor made his entire face glimmer.

Hyungwon could only nod.

“Get rid of it,” The Constant glanced at his cuffs, then back at him. “and let’s get the fuck out of here.”

“I can’t. Osmium blocks my abilities.”

In a blink of an eye, Wonho stretched out his hand and employed the enhanced force his armor gave him to tear the handcuffs apart entirely.

“The boys aren’t here.” Hyungwon told him, massaging his wrists.

“I know. The Germans have them. We gotta go.”

It didn’t take too long until the five-people team of German soldiers found them outside the room Hyungwon was being kept; the time traveler spoke to them in their idiom and the men rushed inside, coming back with the two guys Wonho had knocked out, whom still were unconscious.

The soldiers gave him a curious look as they observed the holographic armor he used, but apparently the pressing matter was to get out of there as soon as possible, which Wonho supported 100%, and that kind of made the military overlook that oddity.

On their way to the exit, a few corpses were left behind in the halls. For the first time, Wonho could relate with Hyungwon about something — the perturbed glances the man gave a few times as they passed by the dead guards. No matter what those people did, was still a horrible moment and place to die.

An icy breeze hit Wonho’s face as soon as they stepped outside, and another chat between the time traveler and the Germans began.

The men seemed to reject whatever idea was proposed by the pink-haired man, so the latter took a step back to move to Wonho’s side.

“How much do you trust me?” Hyungwon asked in Korean, strolling as slow as possible behind the soldiers.
“Very little. What kind of—”

“I can’t destroy this place and not get shot by them.”

“WHAT?” Wonho noticed his mistake when a few soldiers eyed him for a few seconds. He lowered his voice to continue. “Do you want to start a goddamn war? We can’t—”

“I told you before.” Hyungwon talked under his breathe. “They can’t have this technology. Your timeline might be endangered.”

Well, fuck Hyungwon and his goddamn perfect reasoning.

Wonho was the first to come to a halt, holding the time traveler back with him.

“Do it.” He turned his head to face Hyungwon, whom nodded at him. “You blow shit up, I protect you.”

The thing is that Hyungwon didn’t know the magnitude of that armor device, even though it came from a civilization way more advanced than the humans in that universe he aided. All he could do was hope he was right about its power.

Taking a deep breath, the time traveler turned around and mustered all the energy inside his body that had been blocked before, letting it loose to begin the task that needed to be done.

Hyungwon hauled his arms up rapidly and a veil of blueish energy covered the warehouse, illuminating that part of the forest just as much as if they were in the city, surrounded by the never-ending electricity that engulfed that world.

Behind him, the sound of rifles being cocked and certainly pointed at him and Wonho.

The time traveler almost lost focus of his job when he felt an arm encircle his waist; the Constant looked for something to anchor himself while he defended both of them with that alien armor.

“PUT YOUR HANDS DOWN! One of the German soldiers shouted.

The gunshots that ensued made Hyungwon flinch, distracting him for a moment.

“DO IT!” Wonho yelled at him. “NOW!”

A sharp inhale later and the lingering energy within his body began to be channeled towards his arms and everything inside Hyungwon felt like it was on fire, but the awakening of the flames was also a part of him. Like Time, that energy was linked to his existence just as much he was connected to it; at the same time, Hyungwon was the maker and the monster when the power needed to be unleashed.

The wood and metal around the facility creaked as an effect of Hyungwon’s skill as he harnessed his own power to lift that structure slightly off the ground.

A rapid hand movement later and the building was shattered into millions of pieces, quickly remembering to build a force field around him and Wonho, to shield them from the possible impact of wreckage since they were the closest to it.
All over the place, the vegetation felt the impact of the blast wave caused by the explosion. Hyungwon’s body was on a verge of collapse after being drained of so much power, but what his brain chose to pay attention was the quivering of Wonho’s arm that enveloped his waist; Hyungwon couldn’t give a clear reason why, but it seemed the right thing to do to put a hand on his.

Hyungwon didn’t dream. At least not like he learned that everybody else does; there was no distinction between reality and fiction inside his head while he was asleep, but that specific time there was a sensation that almost felt like a whisper, a warning augury.

A disembodied, unrecognizable voice arose in the foggy realm inside his head.

“Go back before it was too late.”

Gasping sharply as he opened his eyes, Hyungwon’s spine arched up until he was sitting up properly, in a location he had no knowledge about.

Though his entire body ached, his first instinct was to get on his feet and search for the Constants, no matter what was that place he found himself in. There was no need to go much further, though.

Assembled by the couch, the boys perked up at the sounds made by Hyungwon as he tried to get to them; the Constants were quicker in running in their direction.

“HYUNG!” Changkyun was the first to tackle him, being followed by the others to gathered around to hug him. On top of the sofa arm, Wonho only gazed at him.

“Are you okay?” His voice came out hoarse, and his friends pulled away to face him.

“You did some Superman shit again!” Minhyuk claimed, running his fingers through Hyungwon’s hair. A bit of dirt came out of it. “You good?”

“We’re fine, Hyungwon.” Shownu answered the time traveler’s question. “We’re just really tired. We’re in a German military base in Augsburg. Right?”

The tanned man turned to Kihyun for confirmation.

“Yeah. One soldier told me in English. They won’t explain to us what the hell happened today, though.”

“Let’s go home first, hmm?” Hyungwon patted the shorter man in the shoulder. “I have to deal with a few things first. I’ll go speak with the Germans, so wait here until I come back.”

The final report on the German case and the Constants’ kidnapping concluded the foreign terrorists apprehended on site were found guilty of crimes against the German nation, condemned to a life imprisonment in Germany.

Despite the final events in the Black Forest — the time traveler lied there was a life-threatening device in that place that needed to be destroyed — the Germans were profoundly thankful to Hyungwon’s help in find the perpetrators of those incidents, even though all those people couldn’t be brought back to life. Even the ones who simply disappeared that day on the bridge were declared dead, and Hyungwon was pretty sure they were.
Of course that wouldn’t be the end of his relationship with the human governments, but at least now he wasn’t going to be perceive as a complete menace to that world; the fact that the military didn’t notice his influence in the loss of memory of the two men detained by the Germans was quite auspicious, if you ask Hyungwon.

Later, already back on his machine, Monbebe brief him that she discovered odd radio transmissions received by the two men in their original timeline, which led Hyungwon to believe that was his people’s main source of communication with them. To be honest, he didn’t know what to think or even where to begin to question himself on his universe’s ability to have impact in other words, or where did their knowledge about Hyungwon came from.

In the end, what mattered was that it meant danger for the boys.

Hyungwon was fooling himself when he thought that his previous action, by asking them for help against The Eye, wouldn’t put the boys in permanent peril.

A knock on the door of his personal room made him wince a bit; he wasn’t used to have other humans around, so people banging on his door was still a strange occurrence.

“Unlock.”

The verbal command automatically opened the door and a familiar figure appeared. Hyungwon immediately shifted to sit on the floor of his room.

“Can I come in?” Wonho’s voice was no higher than a murmur.

“Yes.”

“I just…” The man extended his arm and Hyungwon saw a small object on his hand. “I almost left behind when I was carrying you out of there.”

“You carried me?” He didn’t mean to sound so staggered.

“Yeah.” The black-haired man looked away quickly, throwing the round gadget on him. “You don’t remember? You passed out after blowing up that building.”

Hyungwon had no recollection of that moment, but he was grateful.

“Oh… Thank you, Wonho-ssi. Thank you for helping me today.”

The black-haired man hummed, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Whatever. How long til we get home?”

“Oh… Let me check. Monbebe?”

The lights in the roof promptly began to flicker.

“2 minutes until reaching Korean soil.”

“Thanks.” Well, that was kind of surprising to hear from Wonho.

“I know what you are thinking.” Hyungwon’s mouth seemed to have a life of its own at that point. Stupid reflexes that didn’t work when he needed the most. “I should just stay away from them. I can’t help but to feel attached, but you’re right.”
“Where are you going now?” The sudden question took Hyungwon by surprise.

“I have to meet your country’s government first. They need to be sure I’m not a terrorist… or something like it. After this, I’ll put this universe in lockdown again so no one can invade again. Then… leave to another world. This way I still can maybe see some of the boys’ faces, somehow. Yours, certainly.”

“What do you mean?”

“In my lifetime, I’ve visited 301 universes, this one included. I’ve met you 301 times. I guess it’s a pattern.”

*Or a punishment.*

The room fell into a silence for a moment, and Hyungwon was starting to get uncomfortable when Wonho spoke again.

“Stay here.” Not even he seemed to believe his own words. It wasn’t clear why Hyungwon held his breath at that. “They will suffer if you leave like that. I can’t handle them whining on my ear. I don’t know if there’s safer options on the table for us. Regardless of…” Wonho cleared his throat, and the machine came to a halt to indicate they had arrived in Seoul. “The others are starving. Let’s eat, it’s on me.”

For the first time in a very long time, Hyungwon actually got excited about the perspective of his future, as long as these versions of the Constants were there. As long as his chest continued to feel so warm whenever Wonho showed amiability towards him, even though that didn’t help Hyungwon solve the puzzle of their ill-fated relationship.

Maybe he’d get lucky with that one.
hello children it's me again
so this is a "shorter" chapter cuz i was also writing another story that will come out
soon but im quite glad with the result
so enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“i am only half myself. the other side's a dark idea i like to believe in.”

Andrew Michael Roberts, “what i know of the moon”

It was the fourth night in a week that Wonho woke up from his ominous dreams soaked in sweat. However, the nightmares that usually seemed too cluttered to even make some sense out of it seemed to have cleared a bit that time, with a deeper impact in his mind.

An avalanche of memories swept through his brain, but Wonho managed to desperately clung to a few ones, even though he was completely being dragged into unsystematic waters, head only a few centimeters above the surface.

In the first place, Wonho was running down an unknown street, panting heavily, when suddenly he was in a completely different environment, living an entire different moment. Shownu was beside him this time; after a few seconds, Wonho recognized the place as the government facility he lived for about seven months in 2046, during the tests for the first human time travel.

During that time, their world was plunged into ruthless gang wars, and a scarcity of hope for better days created a collective sentiment that their homeland would never get back to be what they were, or at least what it used to be in their parents and grandparents’ stories.

Time and memory were against him once more.

A long squeak emerged in the background and Wonho was taken to another place inside his remembrances, but he couldn’t see a thing. Looking down at himself, it was impossible not to notice the disparity between what he expected to see and feel and the reality he found himself in.

Wonho’s body was much smaller, with his legs pressed against his chest as his arms embraced them; which, believe it or not, was not the odd part of that dream. Wonho was certain, amidst the feeling of terror and despair growing inside his chest, that something was off when he realized that was not a memory from his previous life.

Tears rolled down his small cheeks of a child, even more terrified of the fact that after so many years he finally remembered something from that day.

What could he even do about it, after all? Wonho couldn’t protect his younger self nor avoid feeling all that panic that made his body quiver in fear. That’s the reason why he didn’t flinch
when a beam of light cut through the darkness of his cramped whereabouts.

The world seemed to be moving in slow motion, with the sudden appearance of a blurry figure that towered over him.

At last, the dream was over.

“I’m trying not to be the asshole here, hyung…”

Sitting right in front of him, Kihyun was starting to formulate his answer when Shownu, beside the younger, interrupted him with a snort. They were currently at the Café where Minhyuk worked part time, back again at Shownu and Kihyun’s usual morning bickering. Busying himself in telling that whole thing made Wonho forget even to order something to eat.

“Don’t fucking try me this early in the morning.” His younger friend blustered at Shownu, making Wonho roll his eyes. “Anyways… As I was saying, I’m not trying to be the asshole here, but you’re the only person among us to ever have these sleeping problems. So maybe—”

“Jooheon also had it, a few weeks ago.” Shownu affirmed, taking a bite of his sandwich.

“I had it too.” Minhyuk arrived behind Wonho’s chair, wearing a distinct black apron over his clothes, and put a hand on his shoulder. “Jooheon and I went to see Hyungwon-ah. He ran some 3D sci-fi weird tests on us and said it’s probably cuz our brains were trying to bury the memories down again. At least mine stopped since I let it go.”

“How come I didn’t know this?” Kihyun leaned forward a bit, clearly offended by the lack of sharing.

Minhyuk shrugged at his same-age friend, turning around to leave.

“Because you’re the asshole.” Shownu grinned at the younger man again, and Wonho could feel the squabbling about to start again.

“Yah. Yah!” He got the attention of both his best friends. “I’m talking about my worries and all you have to say is ‘go see that guy’? Really?”

“Not really.” Wonho’s same-age buddy didn’t seem impressed. “Minhyuk just told you the reason. You’re trying to fight against your old memories.”

“I am not.” The black-haired appealed to his best affronted voice. “Why would I?”

“Because you’re scared.” Shownu looked straight into his eyes. It was a bit disconcerting. “We didn’t live exactly in the best of the years, Wonho. A lot of good people we knew died.”

“Why?” Kihyun inquired without much sureness. “You don’t really talk about it…”

“A war broke out between the two biggest gangs in the country in 2024.” Shownu explained first. “It basically tore the city and the government apart. That’s world we grew up in back then.”

Part of Wonho wished again he had never remembered that life.

“How come it doesn’t even bother you?” Wonho frowned.

“I lived there as much as you, Wonho. I just don’t pretend I didn’t. You have a good life right here,
right now. What are you so afraid of?”

Everything build up to the moment Wonho felt he had enough of that absence of understanding, from the moment the time traveler was mentioned to the brief discussion with Shownu.

Hauling his chair back, Wonho made an abrupt move to get up.

“Forget it. I’ll deal with that alone.”

“YAH!” Wonho was retrieving his backpack when Kihyun’s call came. “Don’t be like this. You even started to remember what happened to you when—”

“It doesn’t matter.” Wonho spouted. “See you later at the uni.”

When Jooheon thought about what happened to him in the past three months, he was quite surprised with himself for still having the majority of his shit together; sure, the initial nightmares after being kidnapped twice gave him a hard time, but after Hyungwon told them the cause of it, everything slowly started to run smoothly.

But most of his problems lied in the fact is that Jooheon knew he was smart. His intelligence was above average, and yet that didn’t it easier for him to find a meaning to it. The uncertainty of the future he now had to build contained not only his previous expectations, but also the ones put on him when Hyungwon dumped on him all that information about who he was, or what he was supposed to do.

There wasn’t much disparity between his persona in his original timeline and the current one; Jooheon was a simple person back then, co-owner of a pawn shop with Kihyun, who was a photography student at the time. To be sincere, everything about him screamed that he was the most ordinary person on Earth, so… yeah, the turntables.

Changkyun and him didn’t talk much about their previous lives during until that current August morning. Both of them were too focused on trying to find their true selves again — at least the maknae seemed excited about it, God knows someone needed to be. That didn’t make it easier for Jooheon to try to bring the balance in their relationship back.

That’s mainly the reason why he agreed to skip his lunch to follow Minhyuk’s antics.

He cared deeply about his younger friend; they grew up together, and Jooheon thought of him as a brother more than he did with his blood relatives.

The street they stood was pretty empty for a Monday afternoon, but again that entire location seemed quite shady… and yet, Changkyun seemed quite unbothered to be heading towards such place, last time they checked from the corner of a nearby alley.

“Hyung.” Jooheon tapped Minhyuk in the shoulder.

“What?” The blond murmured, without turning around.

“You sure we should be doing this?”

Minhyuk shifted sideways a bit to stare at him, trying to focus on their stalking at the same time.
“I just wanna make sure he’s safe. If he needs my help, I’ll be there for him this time.”

There was a sorrow in the older’s voice that made Jooheon’s chest a little heavy.

“We could just ask him, you know…”

“Pffft. He’s a kid, Jooheon. Kids lie all the time.”

“He’s 23, Minhyuk.”

“Look…” Minhyuk took a deep breath. “I just… don’t know how to approach him, okay? That’s why I asked you to come with me. Cuz, you know this hacker shit ain’t my scene. At all. And you’re his bff. I—”

On the left side of the street, a loud thud of a metallic door being pushed open got their attention. Changkyun’s voice could be distinctively noticed in that muffled conversation with another guy, much taller and older than his friend.

*Boy, what the hell are you doing?*

Jooheon had to hold Minhyuk back from sprint towards their friend, placing a hand over his mouth to point out he should stay quiet.

At that distance, they couldn’t hear a single thing properly, so the best that could be done was to try to understand what the hell was happening by observation only.

What ensued next didn’t answer any of their possible questions, though. Changkyun simply bowed to the taller and older man and the dude, surprisingly, did the same; anyone that didn’t know how young the boy was could’ve thought they were at the same hierarchical level. Not much longer, Changkyun walked away in their opposite direction and rounded the corner.

Jooheon insisted they should wait until the dude that came with Changkyun was gone, and the blond accepted; after that the older man’s reaction wasn’t the coolest one, though.

In a matter of seconds, Minhyuk jolted out of their sort of hiding spot started tromping across the alley, probably in the hope of catching up to the direction the maknae went.

“HYUNG!”

If the blond was a cartoon character, smoke would’ve been coming out of his ears from how furious he looked.

“Calm down for a sec.” Jooheon walked faster to grab the older man by the wrist. “Just—”

“WHAT THE FUCK IS HE DOING, JOOHEON? LET GO, I—”

“I DON’T KNOW! B—BUT—”

The younger’s stomach growled out of hunger at the same time they spotted they were not alone in that alley, and Jooheon never regretted so much having skipped a meal.

At first, he counted three muscular, sturdy men prowling in their direction, but there was a fourth one Jooheon didn’t notice because he was about to have a fucking breakdown, and die. Maybe not in that order, perceptibly.

Jooheon flinched out of reflex when Minhyuk’s fingers encircled around his forearm, pulling him
in the same direction those guys came from.

“Let’s go.”

That’s how he knew Minhyuk officially went crazy.

The intimidating figures came to a halt midway down the path, eyeing them as if they were animals in the zoo.

“Excuse me.” Minhyuk tightened the hold on Jooheon, and the latter was truly about to pass out any time now.

Jooheon’s heart beat so fast inside his chest it was becoming difficult for him to breathe; his brain just shouted he should run and run and never look back, but opposite instinct emerged in Minhyuk, and now they were left with no turning back.

Everything happened faster than it usually does in movies, especially because fights seemed to be quite tiring even for people who were kind of used to it. Jooheon didn’t know in which interval of that mess he hit the floor, scratching his hand on the cracked pavement beneath him; everything considered, that position gave him the perfect seat to watch what in the bullshit was unfolding right in front of his eyes.

Minhyuk seemed fucking possessed by the spirit of a 18th century samurai dude from a Jackie Chan movie and dodged a punch that should’ve hit his face for sure, promptly kicking the same offender in the guts; the guy backed off a bit, struggling to breathe, only for the other three men in the site to advance on the blond man.

Even in that cramped space, Minhyuk managed to move well to keep ducking from the assaults and kick the guys in the face; at some point, that entire moment became a blurred video playing in Jooheon’s head, with clash of fists and foots against people as its only background sound. You can only imagine his shock to see that not-very-athletic man beating the living shit out of some big guys.

The first dude to lose ground after Minhyuk’s attack came forward again, looking angrier than ever. As the last opponent standing cut through the air with his clumsy kick, his friend was faster in the retaliation. Bending his body downward a bit, Minhyuk swirled his leg all the way up to the guy’s shoulder, inclining the latter down, only to get some impulse, a second later, so he could launch his final kick upwards at the guy’s face.

His friend hit the floor at the same time as the man fell unconscious on the alley’s ground, the same one from where Jooheon looked stupefied at that entire scene.

Minhyuk grunted softly as he pushed himself up, checking his own elbow to confirm a possible wound. The older man didn’t seem to have noticed, but blood already leaked from his ripped jeans around the knee area. If anything, Minhyuk’s panting only highlighted the sweat that dripped off his face and drenched his bangs.

Meanwhile, in Jooheon’s mind only one thought prevailed.

*Oh no. He’s hot as shit.*
It was hardly 4:00 p.m. of that Monday, but Wonho already wanted to crash on the nearest spot and fucking die. Just like that.

His morning previously began off the tracks, and the shit ton of essays to grade that piled on his desk was turning his office into a suffocating place. These circumstances were nothing next to how Wonho was being constantly drawn back to the memories he had just recovered, particularly the one that wasn’t from his former timeline.

The situation surrounding the death of his father was never a memory he could recover, no matter how many therapists he went to during the course of his life. All he knew was that, when Wonho was 5 years old, a burglar invaded their house in the middle of the night and his dad was shot twice in the chest, a scenario in which the man — somehow — saved his life, according to everyone he ever spoke about it.

His mother never added details to that tragedy, choosing to pretend that significant event in their lives hadn’t the weight it did. That, for sure, was the main reason why he grew apart from her as he got older. Now, it seemed just too late to do anything about it.

With a sigh as audible sign of resigned frustration, Wonho gathered the stack of papers, decided to finish that before dinner time, in the library. There was always a comforting feeling about that place; it reminded Wonho how far he had come with his hard work, and that there was much more to achieve.

Wonho passed by a few students and fellow professors that greeted him in the way to the library, a building a couple of meters away from the Physics department. It was no surprise to Wonho that, most of his colleagues, looked down on him behind his back for being the youngest person to ever obtain a PhD under the university’s name; quite expected, knowing how petty people in that field could be. In the end, it was still something they couldn’t take from him, so they could keep on choking on their hate.

His momentary shock didn’t come from the presence of one of them, though. Walking down the stairway in front of the library, Changkyun was accompanied by no other than the time traveler that turned his life upside down.

Wonho’s first instinct was to hide so he wouldn’t have to acknowledge their presence — to make small talk was the last thing he wanted at that moment. However, much to his benefit, the men didn’t seem to notice Wonho’s presence; the younger waved at Hyungwon as a goodbye, fixing the backpack on his shoulders as he sauntered across the street.

Hyungwon, however, calmly made his way back inside the building.

*What the fuck?*

That was the second time his impulse to hide kicked in, but a side thought came to Wonho. Why the hell should he leave his own goddamn university? His own goddamn work place just because of that man’s presence? He was there first, way fucking first. If Hyungwon was to be bothered by his presence, he should leave; not the contrary.

*Yeah.*

So, that was another mistake he made that day.

Wonho waited for a couple of minutes before going inside the library, searching for the nearest study room available. Not only he failed miserably in not being spotted by Hyungwon, but he
basically walked in on the man as he opened the door of a seemingly vacant place to bump into Hyungwon gathering a few books, even though the doors of the freaking room were completely made of glass.

The time traveler seemed more unsettled about that encounter than him, though.

“Hey…” God, what a ridiculous tremulous voice came out of Wonho’s mouth.

“Wonho-ssi.” A brief silence ensued. “You can stay. I’m just… I was studying with Changkyun for his college entrance exam, he just left.”

“I saw.” Way to fucking pass unnoticed, Wonho. “I was coming here and… happened to see.”

They could win the award for most awkward atmosphere between two human beings.

“I’ll leave first.” Hyungwon announced, carrying five books in each arm.

Sometimes Wonho forgot there was a bit more to that man than the apparent capabilities of his.

“Gimme that.” The black-haired man pointed at one of the stack of books in his arms. “You’ll draw attention and eventually be taken away by NASA.”

Slightly tilting his head, Hyungwon frowned.

“They won’t.” The other man declared, but gave Wonho half of the books anyway. “I’ve settled with your government that I’ll respond to the Koreans only. Unless I become a bigger threat to them, I guess they won’t do something like this.”

The casual way that Hyungwon stated those things almost cause him a stroke.

“Please stop saying shit like this out loud.”

After they delivered the books back, he watched the pink-haired traveler strolling towards a section of the library.

“Where are you going?”

The man turned around, visibly surprised with Wonho’s question.

“To read.” Hyungwon blinked a couple of times at him. “I’ll sit on the floor around here.”

Wonho took a look around to the see the crowded library filled with students trying their best to absorb enough knowledge to do well on their finals, occupying all the tables in the Physics library.

The goddamn librarian would lose their shit at the sight of that, though.

Wonho sighed for, probably, the hundredth time that day.

“Go back to the study room. I don’t mind.”

“I don’t want to disturb you.”

Another heavy sigh.

“You’ll disturb me because people are saw us together and I know you’re bound to say some weird
things to someone here. Just get the books you want and go back.”

As it is absolutely noticeable, that another mistake produced by Wonho.

Hyungwon returned 15 minutes later with, I shit you not, a total of sixty-two books on his arms.

“What the fuck?” Wonho pulled his reading glasses away, squinting at the taller man. “Might as well have brought a shelf.”

“I would’ve, but I thought you didn’t want to draw too much attention.”

As if nothing out of the ordinary was happening, the time traveler simply put the books on the table, temporarily; he took the rest of his time in bringing two chairs to the other side of the room only to grab the volumes once again, placing the volumes on them and finally sitting on the floor.

“You can sit at the table, you know.”

“I prefer the floor, thank you.” Hyungwon didn’t even lift his head away from the book he already read.

Well, no one could tell Wonho wasn’t being courteous — if Kihyun were to ever know about that encounter, mostly.

That was his cue to go back to his huge amount of essays to grade, that didn’t seem to diminish no matter how many of these he read in about half-hour. The sensation he had was that the little shits were multiplying like goddamn gremlins.

To distract him, a snort arose in the room, leading Wonho’s attention to the other side of the room. The time traveler seemed to regret it immediately.

“Sorry.” His voice was no higher than a whisper.

On his hand, Hyungwon had the Gravitation by Charles W. Misner, Kip S. Thorne and John Archibald Wheeler. Wonho had never seen someone laughing about general relativity before.

“What is it so funny?”

“It’s that—” Hyungwon swiftly brought a hand to cover his mouth. “Can’t tell you. As a scientist, I assume you don’t want to know what I know.”

“Yeah. Don’t tell me anything. I’ve already had enough of seeing all sort of crazy shit whenever you’re around.”

“Okay. Sorry to interrupt.”

Once in a while, Wonho wondered what kind of encounters Hyungwon had with Wonho’s doubles across the multiverse — those two that tried to poison the time traveler were very enlightening about why the pink-haired man always was so cautious around Wonho, but he couldn’t help but to understand that feeling. And the lack of trust Hyungwon could ever put on him was more than justifiable if things got worse than poisoning.

When Wonho’s gaze shifted towards the time traveler again, the man put the eighth book in a row that he already had read.
“Yah.” The black-haired called, leaning on the table a bit. “Wanna read these essays for me?”

Hyungwon didn’t bat an eyelid before replying.

“Are you sure?”

“The only thing I am right now is tired.”

The taller man got up slowly, taking a seat beside Wonho’s chair.

“What’s the topic?” The pink-haired asked, already grabbing one of the papers and a pencil.

“Cosmic microwave background.”

“Oh.”

Wonho raised an eyebrow at the despondency in the time traveler’s voice.

“What now?”

“Nothing.” Hyungwon’s grip on the essay became tighter. “I’ll just see things through your perspective.”

“That’s a first.”

Regardless of the eye roll Wonho got from him, Hyungwon focused on start reading the paper on his hands. In less than five seconds, the pink-haired turned the page to analyze another one, drawing circles around some parts.

Within half-minute, Hyungwon handed him the eight page paper he had read.

“The circled areas are the errors. It’s pretty well-written, in general.”

“Tell me you’re shitting me and you didn’t read these pages just like that.”

A brief puzzled look was directed at Wonho, but Hyungwon dismissed the question to pick another essay to read. Wonho didn’t know what it was about seeing him under that — somehow — different light, but it felt like he was in a trance, unable to take his eyes off of the pink-haired’s modus operandi until the latter bursted into laughter, covering his mouth with one of his hands. Hyungwon’s face fell when he noticed Wonho staring at him.

“Sorry.” The man quickly cleared his throat. “Oh. A female student wrote down her number under the message ‘Call me’.”

Another disadvantage of being a young professor to a bunch of grad students. They either thought he was willing to sleep with anyone whom hit on him, or find it very hard to take him seriously.

“Ignore that. That’s just nonsense.”

“Do other humans here look down on you because you’re young?”

Well, that was a question Wonho didn’t expect.

“It doesn’t matter. And don’t call people ‘humans’. It seems like you are an alien trying to impersonate one of us.”
Hyungwon nodded.

“It’s a habit.” The time traveler looked down at the essay on his hand again. “Monbebe is the only one I used to talk for a long time. She calls us humans, so started doing it too.”

With the contrast of Hyungwon not being bothered by his own response at all, Wonho didn’t know why he found himself staring at the pink-haired man again for more minutes than he could count. While Hyungwon busied himself in reading the papers and circling what he found wrong, Wonho could only imagine if Hyungwon ever realized how weird his life was; perhaps, he had never met the standard of ‘common’ that Wonho knew at all. He was the freaking future, after all — a very Aldous-Huxley-Meets-Arthur-C.-Clarke kind of fucked up one, though.

It was also odd that the bubblegum pink in Hyungwon’s hair didn’t fade away at all since the first time Wonho saw him with that color, but his hair seemed to have grown quite a bit; locks of hair fell on his face as Hyungwon leaned his head to focus on what he was doing, and it seemed quite soft. Everything about that man was a mystery that Wonho’s instincts beseeched him to not be drawn to.

They were right.

The more Wonho stayed away from him, the better.

A strange noise emerged in the room, sort of like a ringtone, but bass boosted in a way that sounded like a muffled siren.

Hyungwon calmly reached out for the extern pocket of his blazer, pulling out a phone.

“Do you have a phone now?” Wonho inquired, gathering the essays Hyungwon was checking before.

“Yeah…” His voice sounded kind of wobbly. “I bought it last week because the boys wanted to communicate with me.”

“Do you have money?”

“I went back a few years ago and bought some stocks.”

“That’s cheating.”

“Money isn’t a real thing, Wonho-ssi.” He briefly gazed at him, furrowing his brows at the sight of his phone. “Humans invented it. Just like a linear perception of time.”

“So what? Everyone in the multiverse is into communism?”

No response came from the time traveler, so Wonho craned his neck sideways to look at the man again. Hyungwon continued to stare at his device with an absent expression.

“What?” Wonho pushed himself to lean his back on his chair.

On Hyungwon’s hand, there was only a green screen with a few numbers on it.

“What’s this?” The black-haired asked again. “Is this danger? Are we in danger again?”

“I don’t think so.” But Hyungwon’s eyes, looking fixedly at him, told other story. “It came from the Multiverse Frequency. Someone is actually asking for help.”
Still stunned, the time traveler studied his green screen for a couple of minutes before abruptly getting up.

“I need to go.”

Wonho didn’t know what to do, or if he should even do something about it. Since the beginning of that madness in his life, he swore to himself to get as less involved as possible with whatever otherworldly bullshit was about to happen.

Then why he felt so compelled to stop Hyungwon from leaving and ask what the hell was about that call?

But Wonho didn’t.

Hyungwon tramped out of the room without looking back.

*Forget it. Just forget it.*

There were still many essays to be graded, anyway.

---

“Explain.”

Kihyun’s tone meant only one thing: their asses were about to be whooped.

Don’t get him wrong. Minhyuk loved that tiny moron, but his same-age friend tended to overreact about… well, mostly everything. It wasn’t that bad, to be honest. Only his knee and arm got a few cuts, and Jooheon’s hands were a bit scratched — which Minhyuk apologized for countless times in their way to Kihyun’s apartment.

“We will laugh about it in the near future, Kihyunnie.”

Thank God for Minhyuk’s reflexes that allowed him to dodge Kihyun’s neck slap.

“Stop hitting me, I’m injured!”

“Exactly WHY?” The man huffed, disappearing into his own apartment to return a minute after, with a first aid kit in hands.

“Did you know Minhyuk hyung knows how to fight?” Jooheon, sitting beside him by the couch, sounded way too amused, with the dimples and all.

*Cute.*

“So it was a fight. Oh my god, Lee Minhyuk!”

Shownu, coming out of the kitchen with a sandwich, revealed his point of view.

“You’re going to give yourself a heart attack, nerd.”

Kihyun turned around harshly to glare at the older man.

“Shut up, idiotic protein monster. Stop stealing food from my fridge.” He turned his attention back
to them on the couch. “You two, where did you get hurt? We need to clean it.”

Minhyuk showed his forearm and knees, while Jooheon lifted his hands. His same-age friend approached the younger boy first, crouching down in front of Jooheon to take care of him.

“Seriously.” Kihyun poured antiseptic on piece of cotton. “Why did you two get into a fight?”

“They were going to hit us first! In a freaking alley!” Minhyuk defended himself. “I just did what I had to do to protect Jooheon and I.”

“And how did you learn how to fight, by the way?” Kihyun finished patching up Jooheon’s first hand when he looked up at Minhyuk. “You never mentioned.”

“I have a black belt in Taekwondo. From my previous life.”

From the other couch, pushed against the wall, Shownu almost choked on his food.

“You do? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I don’t know…” Truth is that he and Shownu hadn’t spoken much about who they used to be. Or who they were again now… too confusing. “Didn’t have the opportunity.”

“And what were you two doing in a goddamn alley?” Kihyun inquired again.

“Err…” There was no point hiding that from Kihyun. He’d discover later and be even more pissed off. “We were following Changkyun-ah…”


An opportune knock on the front door appeared before Minhyuk could say anything.

“Get the door, hyung.” Kihyun turned around to ask Shownu.

“You don’t pay me enough for this.” The older retorted.

“That sandwich is the payment. Go.”

Meanwhile, Kihyun shifted sideways to now treat Minhyuk’s wounds. The cotton pressing against his knee took the blond by surprise.

“Ouch! Be gentle, Kihyunnie!”

“Be less of an idiot, Minhyukkie.” His same-age friend mocked his whiny voice.

“GUESS WHO IS HERE!” They heard Shownu shout, earning their awareness.

Changkyun was the first to step inside the apartment, followed by Wonho behind him with Shownu.

“‘Sup, hyungs.” The boy waved at them like a child. That goddamn brat.

“How dare you.” Minhyuk announced, pointing a finger at him. “Tell me what the hell was that about before I smack you.”

The maknae looked both sides, quite muddled.
“My recent Twitter thread on G-Dragon’s iconic hair styles? Fucking dope, right?”

“YAH.” Jooheon shouted a bit too loudly, making Minhyuk wince. “The fuck where you doing earlier with that guy? Suspicious looking guy?”

“They followed you.” Shownu revealed, patting on the younger’s shoulder before going back to his seat.

“Why?” Changkyun’s forehead furrowed. “You could’ve just asked me.”

“What were you doing in that shady place, Kyun?” Jooheon asked again, more tranquil. “Is this about hacking? We agreed on stopping, right? It’s dangerous to do it alone.”

“Yes.” Minhyuk’s heart dropped to hear that. He was so afraid of losing his dongsaeng again that it drove him crazy. “But I wasn’t doing any gig. An old hyung of mine asked me to do something for him, but I said I’m out of the business. So I went there to recommend a guy I think can do the job well. Is this why you two look beat up?”

Oh uh. There is the possibility that Minhyuk might have exaggerated a little.

“Maybe…” The blond couldn’t even face his little brother after that.

“You can talk to me, hyung.” Changkyun’s voice sounded so disappointed it made Minhyuk feel as if he was the younger, reckless one. “I know I didn’t talk a lot back then, but I do now. Just don’t get into any fights. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

“Sorry, Kyun.” Jooheon was the first to apologize.

“I’m sorry, Kkukkung.” Minhyuk mumbled. “Hyung won’t do it again.”

Amidst the small drama occurring in Kihyun’s apartment, a stentorian voice arose.

“Why can’t we have a normal dinner meeting?” Wonho plopped himself on the couch next to Shownu.

“You love it.” Minhyuk chuckled, hissing as Kihyun cleaned his forearm. “Your life was too boring before.”

“As if.” The black-haired scoffed. “I was happy and didn’t know it.”

“Come on, Wonho.” Shownu brought a hand to rest on Wonho’s arm. “You didn’t—”

Minhyuk felt the air being sucked out of his lungs in a ferocious speed, leading him to a random place inside his spirit.

Since they met Hyungwon, his and Shownu’s visions had lessened significantly when compared to what they experienced before their lives were changed by the time traveler. After a month without any of those occurrences, Minhyuk had almost forgotten how it felt to be submerged in his own mind.

The world was painted in dark grey tones, with nothing but a foggy horizon as its prime view. As Minhyuk took a look around the place, all his eyes could observe was that he was in the middle of a dead city, where the snow fell ceaseless into that windless atmosphere; regardless of the creepy appearance of the location, Minhyuk didn’t feel fear. He felt sadness.

With nothing much to see, the blond turned around to look for more clues. That’s when he found
the purpose of that foresight.

Minhyuk saw Hyungwon, drenched from head to toe, lying on the ground as the snow made a blanket for his lifeless body.

Nothing much could be done after that; his heart thumping on his chest felt as his instinct to run towards the man was ignited, only to be pulled out of that vision way too soon.

“MINHYUK!”

Back in reality, the blond man found himself being shaken by his same-age friend, who looked terrified at the situation.

“I’m okay.” Minhyuk spoke in a low voice.

“Your eyes went full white!” Jooheon seemed even more scared than Kihyun. “Like a possession or some shit.”

He wanted to offer a proper explanation, but his body urged to go to Shownu — the one who shared his visions with him, the only one who always understood.

“You saw it, right?” Minhyuk jolted forward, shaking the man’s legs. “Oh shit, hyung—”

“What the hell did you two saw?” Wonho’s eyes sparked with concern and curiosity.

“Hyungwon.” Shownu's stern voice echoed through the room. “I think he was dead.”

“HE WAS!” Minhyuk shouted. “What does that even mean? We don’t know when that might happen. We need to stop—we need to help him!”

“I’m gonna call him.” Kihyun uttered, strolling around the living room.

With a heavy sigh, Wonho was the next to speak.

“I was with him earlier at the uni. He got a call, or whatever. He said it was a message from someone in the multiverse.”

“WHY DID YOU JUST TELL US NOW?” Kihyun barked, pulling his phone down for a second.

“Because!” The man raised his hands in defeat. “It’s dangerous for sure, Ki. Maybe we shouldn’t —”

“HE MIGHT DIE!” Chill was not in Yoo Kihyun’s dictionary. “MINHYUK AND SHOWNU SAW IT! Can you stop thinking only about yourself for a fucking minute? Unbelievable. Let’s go.”

Cold fingers entwined with Minhyuk’s and he looked up to see Changkyun, holding his hand with a sympathetic smile on his face.

“Come on.” The maknae gave him a little push with the hand.

All the other men in the room grabbed their things to leave the apartment, and apparently even Wonho gave up on trying to argue with them.

“I should’ve kept my mouth shut.” Wonho said under his breath, trailing behind Minhyuk.
A weird thing about that ride to the subway station was how silent the other men were. Usually, when Wonho was driving, the rest of them would chat loudly until he almost lost his patience; that was still preferable to that noiseless atmosphere fueled by apprehension, and some anger directed at him.

The boys sprinted inside the building as soon as Wonho pulled over, remarkably not falling down the stairs with the velocity they were running to the underground.

Kihyun knocked fervently on the machine’s door and the A.I. allowed them to enter, screaming the time traveler’s name without a proper direction.

Not much later, Hyungwon came out of the inside of the train, crossing two wagons to get to them.

“What is wrong?” The pink-haired seemed way calmer than before. He also changed clothes; now he wore a navy double-breasted suit.

“We’re supposed to ask that.” Minhyuk stepped forward. “I had a vision. You were dead. What the hell is going on, Hyungwon?”

“Wonho hyung said you received a call.” His instinct was to slap Changkyun in the head for snitching like that. “From the multiverse.”

Hyungwon quickly gazed at him, not really bothered by the fact that now everyone knew about it.

“Your foresight might not be accurate, in the end.” Didn’t sounded too convincing, but the time traveler tried. “The timeline diverts based on our actions.”

“What was the message about?” Shownu went straight to the main topic.

Everything in the way that Hyungwon’s eyes wandered between all of them with hesitation only showed how big of a shitstorm they were about to stick their heads into.

“There has been a war in the universe that contacted me. A world war. One of the sides is about to launch thermonuclear bombs on half of their world. I need to stop them.”

“What’s a thermonuclear bomb?” Shownu asked.

“One thousand times more powerful than an atomic bomb.” Kihyun explained, looking so overwhelmed he needed to take a seat. “Can kill billions.”

“It’s too dangerous for you.” Finally, even Hyungwon agreed with Wonho. “Sit this one out. I’ll take you to a better place when I come back.”

“You don’t understand.” Minhyuk got even closer to the time traveler. “You need us. I saw you die, and the world was torn apart around you. I can’t let you go alone.”

“You will have to physically kick me out of here.” Kihyun affirmed. “You’re not going anywhere without us.”

“Why do I feel so excited to go to a world at war?” Also losing his mind, Jooheon looked around for validation.
“We’re going…” Changkyun made a move upwards with both hands to mimic a plane. “full *Saving Private Ryan.*”

At that point, Wonho had no excuses for his utter idiocy, for that was just the goddamn universe leading him to commit another fucking mistake. The only conceivable truth was that he was trapped in some Christopher Nolan type of hell.

Chapter End Notes

THEIR FIRST TRIP!!! to war! yay!
by now you must've noticed that wonho's alignment is DUMBASS GAY, but who knows
also the first relationships just began and here come the couples!!! feat. kyun being the only truly smart person around and blasting big bang through the speakers of the train

hmu on twitter if u want!!!

see ya next week, kids
“We have not touched the stars, nor are we forgiven, which brings us back to the hero’s shoulders and the gentleness that comes, not from the absence of violence, but despite the abundance of it.”

*Richard Siken, "Crush"*

Hyungwon’s existence was utterly ludicrous. There was no better way to put it into words. He, someone who could more or less control time and who actually owned a machine capable of create breaches in the fabric of space-time, didn’t have *enough time* to get his act together.

It wasn’t his first trip to a place like that. Hyungwon had seen more wars than he wished he was obliged to when there was a need for him to meddle in; a part of him, the one who still got scared of almost dying again, just wanted to run away to far, far away.

The tablet on his hand almost fell off to crash against the floor as he leaned forward on one of the panels of the control room, earning the attention of his A.I.

“Hyungwon?”

At the sound of the female robotic voice, the time traveler sighed deeply.

“I’m fine, Monbebe.”

“No, you’re not. I’m reading your vital signs right now. Your blood pressure is so high I would question how you are alive if you weren’t… well, you.”

Sometimes Hyungwon hated how he couldn’t hide anything from that watchful brat.

“Am I doing the right thing, Monbebe?” It sounded silly, to ask these kind of things to something it wasn’t even human. “Taking them to an environment like this…”
“After so many centuries, you were able to defeat The Eye only because you had their help. You might need them as much as they need you. Also, it’s fun to have Im Changkyun around so I can scare him with lines from movies with evil machines.”

Hyungwon let out an unconscious chortle.

“Stop watching movies and call the boys here for the briefing.”

Sitting by the floor, Hyungwon leaned back against the east wall of the driver’s compartment, but jumped on his feet when he saw the Constants arrive in the room.

“So…” Jooheon buried his hands on the pockets of his bomber jacket. “What’s going on?”

Hyungwon cleared his throat while tidying his suit, ready to move his head up to call his A.I.

“Monbebe, the briefing.”

Dozens of different images and videos popped up on the windshield of the train, mainly of the different stages of the conflicts happening in the universe that called for him. Not much longer, Monbebe explicated what was that about.

“Universe 894. Currently in the year of 2075, in the middle of their fourth world war. On one side, the ones who started the war: North America, the United Kingdom, the Franco-Italian Empire and other westerner countries. On the other, Japan, Korea, China and almost every Asian nation. The war has lasted six years so far.”

“Which Korea?” Kihyun paused the explanation. “Our Korea or the North Korea?”

“There is only one Korea in this universe. There was never a Korean war, nor the American bombings in Japan.”

“Which side has the thermonuclear bomb, Monbebe?” Hyungwon inquired.

“The Americans. They’ve been developing it even before the war broke because of a conflict regarding Taiwan. The last dated attack came from the Japanese, who bombarded a naval base in Florida two months ago. Thousands perished.”

None of the questions above left Hyungwon more nervous than the next one.

“Do… Do they have a Constant?”

“Yes. The Americans have Changkyun, 41 years old. The Koreans have Wonho, 45 years old. The others either were not born yet or already died.”

Hyungwon couldn’t hold back low groan. That would make things easier and harder at the same time.

Here I go again, to be mistreated by one more version of Wonho.

“Do they have time travel already?”

“No, Hyungwon. But they do know about the multiverse, even though their Changkyun did not invent it yet.”
A frown formed on the pink-haired’s face.

“...Jooheon?”

“He died at the age of 26, two months after his discovery of the multiverse. He was awarded with a posthumous Nobel Prize.”

“How?” Jooheon’s voice emerged, not sounding too sure about what he wanted to hear.

“He had melanoma. He fought against it for two years.”

In the boy’s face there was a distressed emotion Hyungwon couldn’t quite understand what it was, or why it happened — mainly because, perhaps, it was something he couldn’t relate. Standing beside Jooheon, Kihyun shifted closer to the boy to hold his hand.

“Which side called us?” Hyungwon asked.

“The Japanese. Our coordinates are set to the South Korean soil, though. We’ll be arriving there in 5 hours and 49 minutes.”

As soon as Hyungwon turned his back to the Constants to work on the panels, he heard someone tromping out of the room, being followed by the others. He didn’t need to look back to know what was that about.

“Hyung, wait!”

Wonho didn’t have doubts anymore. Everybody had lost their damn minds for real.

Coming to a halt in the middle of the main wagon, Wonho turned around to face his friends.

“Tell me you’re not considering really going there after everything we just heard.”

Minhyuk was the first to answer.

“Billions could die, Wonho.”

“You’re not a fucking super hero, Lee Minhyuk!” His tone maybe was too harsh, but he was still right about that. “It’s a fucking war, for fuck’s sake. A real war.”

“I saw him dead, hyung.” The blond man didn’t give up. “He needs us. All of us. Together, we—”

“BULLSHIT.”

“Wonho.”

Since their teenage years, Shownu’s reprimanding voice always had an impact on him that Wonho couldn’t ignore.

“Outside.” The tanned man declared, passing by him to leave the time machine.

With nothing more to be done about that, Wonho trailed behind his friend, whom waited until they were standing on the platform, a bit far from the train, to speak.
“Shownu, you’re the sane one here.” He tried a calmer approach. “Tell me you’re not going.”

The silence that ensued was already a response, and Wonho could feel he was about to be marked as the official asshole of that group.


“Why? Because I don’t have these whatever fucking supernatural visions you do? I’m not sorry I don’t wanna risk my life for that guy.”

It wasn’t uncommon for them to have fights like that before, but the disheartened way that Shownu stared at him created an urge in Wonho to simply look away from him.

“Go home, Wonho.”

A second later, Shownu turned his back to him to walk back inside the train. Alone, in the middle of that subway platform, Wonho just wanted to scream the all that frustration out of his body. And scream more, for the rest of his life.

A bunch of aspects made one trip, maybe, the most stressful one the time traveler ever had, but the fact that he had to deal with an annoyed, disgruntled Wonho hauling him back inside the control room as soon as the black-haired man came back to the train, was surely the worst of them all.

“Can you stop it?” Hyungwon pulled his arm away from him, trying not to use too much of his strength. “I’m not a doll for you to drag around.”

Wonho didn’t seem to care a lot about what Hyungwon had to say, angrily turning around to shut the door behind them.

“Tell them to leave.” He couldn’t be more straightforward. “Tell them you’re not taking them to whatever the fuck that place is.”

To guess that Constant’s reaction about it all wasn’t very challenging, but Hyungwon was tired of being so indulgent towards someone who did nothing but to see him as a nuisance.

Taking one step forward, Hyungwon slowly raised one of his arms as the energy glided inside his body to gather in the palm of his hand, forming a small sphere of light.

“Is this what you want? Do you want me to be the villain? Do you want me to force my choices on them? Herald of death, spurious god, lusus naturae. Pick a title they gave me. It means the same.”

Wonho’s eyes widened in surprise. It said a lot about how that man didn’t know Hyungwon at all if he ever thought the time traveler would really hurt him.

“You were the one who said I always do things my way.” Still gazing at the shorter man, Hyungwon dissipated the energy on his hand, but didn’t waver in words. “You said that I don’t listen to anyone else. Do you think that I’m not worried about the place I’m about to go? I’ve seen more wars than every human that ever existed in the multiverse, and I hate it so much. Don’t forget, Wonho-ssi. You were the one who told them.”
Those glares he gained from every single version of Wonho grew roots around his chest that crushed it without clemency.

Eventually, the black-haired man gave up on arguing and walked out of there, slamming the door.

There goes my hopes of you not hating me this time.

With nothing much to do, Hyungwon went to prepare the boys and himself for that intricate journey.

“Cell phones, please. And any electronic device from this universe.”

The boys looked at Hyungwon as if he had just announced he murdered one of their relatives.

“Why?” Minhyuk was the first to whine.

“Safety. Their world is considerably more advanced than yours, but better safe than sorry.” The time traveler jiggled the metallic basket in his hands towards the men. “Please. You will be able to take as many photographs of your faces as you want in a better place.”

Jooheon cackled, and Hyungwon didn’t understand why.

“It’s called a selfie, hyung.” The golden-haired man explained. “When you take a pic of yourself.”

Even though he sulked, Minhyuk handed him his phone, followed by the others. Among the six, Changkyun was the last to do it.

“Monbebe.”

After his call, the lights in the walls of the wagon instantly flickered.

“He has another one, Hyungwon.”

Changkyun looked at the non-existent face of his A.I. with a betrayed expression that made Hyungwon chuckle.

“I thought we were friends and you snitch on me like that!” The other men also broke into laughter as the maknae pulled another phone out of one of his boots.

Behind Hyungwon, the holographic screen suddenly was turned on to display a stock photo of a random human shrugging.

Amidst their fleeting amusement, Hyungwon was reminded he still had to deal with someone else.

It was inevitable to have the Constants’ eyes following Hyungwon as he strolled in the direction of the farthest bench of the wagon, where Wonho sat staring at the floor.

“Cell phone and any other electronic devices, please.”

The air between them felt so dense Hyungwon didn’t know how he was still breathing.

The black-haired man leisurely lifted his head to gaze at him.

“What if I don’t want to?”
Of course Wonho wouldn’t make things easy.

But Hyungwon still wasn’t having it. Not that day.

“Then you’re left with two options.” He kept his voice loud and clear. “You either leave the train or I’ll fry your electronic devices until they explode. As long as you are in my machine, you’ll do as I say.”

Their staring contest ended with Wonho pulling his phone and something Hyungwon learned to be called an IPod out of the pocket of his leather jacket, hastily putting them inside the basket.

“Thank you.” The pink-haired tried to make it sound as if he meant it, walking away towards his friends. “Monbebe, start the engines.”

“You need to set the coordinates in the system so I can do it.”

“Oh. You’re right.” He was about to face the other men again when he felt a vibration on the basket in his hands, and the tune of a song arose in the wagon. “Uh… A phone is ringing.”

“It’s mine.” Kihyun jolted in his direction. “Can I take it before we go?”

“Of course.” Hyungwon smiled at him, and the shorter man went inside next wagon for some privacy. “Would you like to rest in the meantime?”

“Yes, please.” Minhyuk moaned out of tiredness, pouting as he interlocked arms with him. “Hyungwon-ah, I’m injured and Kihyun yelled at me.”

“Come on.”

“So, what’s in there?”

Jooheon questioned their whereabouts, as they arrived in the sixth wagon. Hyungwon promptly swiped a finger on the tiny glass boxes next to the three doors in front of them, unlocking one by one.

“I assumed that while you’re here, maybe you would want a place to rest, so I started building rooms for you all. Unfortunately, I only had time to build three so far. Furniture is also lacking, but there’s good comforters I purchased in one of my favorite universes, they are very comfortable.”

“Wait, wait.” Changkyun made a gesture for him to rewind. “You telling you BUILT these rooms? Like, by yourself? With your hands? Also it’s bigger on the inside?”

Sometimes, Hyungwon would get lost in so many questions Changkyun made in a daily basis.

“Yes…?”

“DOPE!”

The boy beamed, running inside the first room while let out a very loud screech.

“All you have to do to open and close the doors is say ‘lock’ and ‘unlock’. Monbebe already knows all your voice patterns.”

Kihyun, whom was still missing since his phone call, hurriedly walked towards Hyungwon to hand
him his phone. With a quick head bow, the man strode inside the second room without looking back, shutting down the door behind him.

It was true that the time traveler wasn’t very acquainted with a few human emotions, but something just didn’t feel right about Kihyun. Unsure of what to do, Hyungwon knew that if he truly needed, his friend would seek him.

“HYUNGS, COME HERE!”

The excitement in Changkyun’s voice brightened Shownu’s day a bit; it felt like nothing could rain on the boy’s parade. Still, Shownu couldn’t avoid the elephant in the room.

No one made the first move to speak with each other, and to be honest, perhaps that wasn’t really the best moment. He didn’t want to say things he could regret in the future, so Shownu voiced the command to unlock the door Kihyun had entered — a useless action, though, since his shorter friend didn’t lock it — and left Wonho alone on the outside as the time machine began to move.

The tanned man was quite surprised that a whimper was the first thing he heard when he set a foot inside.

Kihyun sat on the corner of the room with his legs pressed against his chest, trying to push back the tears that already came out of his eyes.

Shownu didn’t have time to react to that scene, for he heard the door being swung open while he still stood at the entrance.

“Hyung!” Minhyuk grinned at him, probably amazed by all of that technology. “Where is Kihyunnie, he—”

Using his broad shoulders to block the sight to the rest of the room, Shownu acted rapidly.

“Tell the others to stay in the other rooms for now.” With just a look, he knew Minhyuk would understand.

“Are you sure, hyung?” His worried voice was almost a murmur.

In reality, Minhyuk meant to ask: are you sure you can handle this?

“Yes. Go.”

Shutting the door once again, Shownu voiced the locking command this time. There was still a significant distance between them, but he could already see the younger man on the floor holding his breath to not let out any crying sound.

The older chose to slowly move towards Kihyun’s location, suddenly knowing exactly what to do.

With the advantage it was already unbuttoned, Shownu took off his varsity jacket and put it over Kihyun’s head — which was too big for him, covering all the way past his shoulders.

“What…” The younger’s breathy voice didn’t say much.
“You can cry if you want. Now I won’t look.”

The feeling in Shownu’s chest was of an implacable ache that took over him quickly, more than he had ever experienced. Kihyun’s body language hinted he was still stiff about his presence there, but the man took advice seriously and poured his heart out.

Meanwhile, Shownu’s eyes were drawn to the design of that room; the lights above their heads created a crepuscular atmosphere that fit perfectly with what the crying man must have been feeling.

As Hyungwon mentioned, there wasn’t anything in there but a few comforters on the other side of the room; the walls were made of something that resembled wood, but Shownu was pretty sure that wasn’t it — he didn’t forget they were still inside a train, after all. The grey carpet beneath their feet almost looked kind of real too.

Time passed quickly as Shownu slid down the wall beside Kihyun, waiting for him to stop sobbing so he could try to help.

Since the beginning of everything, the older man took a liking for teasing him as much as possible; seeing that little nerd all riled up for anything he’d say or do was the funniest moments of his days, and Kihyun didn’t seem to really hate it, so Shownu kept going. Kind of the bedrock upon which their relationship was established.

That didn’t mean he enjoyed the current situation, or was about to crack a joke about it.

After what it seemed to be a bit more than 10 minutes, Kihyun’s weeping came to an end; still in his original position, Kihyun whimpered as he pulled the jacket out of his head to show his swollen face.

“You know my dad is a general, right?” His small voice sounded so hurt that it felt worse than his lamentation. “It was him. On the phone. They told him about that thing with the military. When they took us. He—” A hiccup interrupted his speech. “He just... like always... yelled at me and wanted... wanted to know, but I said I signed a paper... He just thinks I’m a fucking joke for not following his military career, now he is never going to leave me alone. Nothing I do pleases him, for fuck’s sake.”

“That’s not your job.” The room wasn’t very illuminated, but Shownu could see Kihyun’s confused face. “To please your dad. Parents are supposed to be happy as long as their child is happy.”

“Well...” Kihyun pushed himself up against the wall, dropping the jacket on his lap. “He couldn’t care less about it. He almost disowned me when I told him I’m gay. But I’m his only kid, so he just pretends not to know.”

Often, the silence between them didn’t mean anything unpleasant, but apparently Kihyun thought that one did.

“What?” His voice was already a bit more high-pitched. “Are you homophobic too?”

Shownu laughed so hard his lungs hurt a bit.

“For a goddamn nerd, you’re fucking clueless.”

“What?”
“Do you really think I’m straight, idiot?”

The look of the younger’s face shifted into a very mortified one. Shownu cackled again.

“Thank you.” Kihyun spoke, after a brief pause. “For not letting the others see me like this.”

“You’re welcome.” Shownu smiled at him, now sitting cross-legged. “I can sense you’re a bit better. That’s good.”

The man squinted at him.

“You can do that too?”

“Minhyuk is better at this, but yeah. Sometimes. With people I’m close with.”

“Are we?”

“Of course. Why? Do you want a hug or something?”

“Actually, yes.” Even Shownu was perplexed by that. “But only if you don’t tell the others about it.”

“Jesus, you’re so annoying.”

Kihyun’s huff made the older man snort at that childish behavior.

“Forget it, I don’t—”

That discussion would’ve take too long and even though Shownu appreciated that bickering, that was still a stressful moment for Kihyun, so he shut him down by pulling him closer by the waist.

The little giggle that came with a yelp made Shownu feel so warm he actually smiled.

“You’re so small.”

“And you’re actually soft for a muscle monster.” The man giggled again, encircling his arms around Shownu’s torso. “How long does your practical hug last?”

“As long as you want.”

Kihyun’s heavy breathing against his chest told a tale Shownu didn’t know how to interpret. His fingers slowly ran through Kihyun’s hair, trying to share with his friend the same tranquility Shownu had in him.

“I’m tired.” Clearing his throat, Kihyun pulled away first, wiping the vestiges of tears off of his face. “Crying made me tired.”

“I’ll get a comforter.”

While Shownu made a move to get up, fingers wrapped around his wrist.

“Thank you, hyung.”

The older man ruffled Kihyun’s hair before heading to get the blankets.

“Anytime, nerd.”
His chest rose and fell at a plodding rate, not really in sync with the frantic heartbeat in his chest. For Wonho to know what the fuck was he doing there was complete a lost cause; if he embarked in that goddamn machine, was for fear of something bad happening to his friends if he weren’t there to protect them.

But that also included having to deal with that time traveler again, and the things between them didn’t seem to have gotten better despite their sort of peaceful time at the library earlier.

The truth is Wonho didn’t know what was going on in Hyungwon’s mind. Like, never. Sure, danger seemed to be following the seven of them wherever they were, but the place they were about to go was a freaking world at war. So, because of some uncertain visions Minhyuk and Shownu had, he was now stuck to that guilty feeling of not wanting to be the only one behind.

Wonho was so deep into his thoughts that it was already late when he realized the sound of footsteps coming in his direction, as he sat at the table of the kitchen.

Bits of pink hair was the first thing he saw as he craned his neck up.

Both of them obviously felt too awkward to even look at each other for too long, so Hyungwon was the first to make a move to leave.

“Yah.” Wonho called for him, resting his forearm on the back of the chair. The time traveler came to a halt next to the entrance. “About the other me… The other guy…”

“Your double.” Hyungwon’s orotund voice summed it up.

“Yes. Is there a problem if I meet him? Like, paradox?”

“No. You’re not in your own timeline, you’re meeting another version of yourself. There is no correlation between his actions and yours.”

“Hmm…” Wonho nodded, looking away again.

“Actually, I’m going to need you to talk with him to start settling things.”

“Why?”

“He’s the President of Korea.”

Damn.

“Seriously?”

“Yes. He’s going to be hostile towards me, so it’s possible he will hear you out.” Hyungwon let out a sigh. “I will be indebted with you once again, Wonho-ssi. Regardless of our confrontations and your opinions about me, I’m only asking because countless lives can still be saved.”

There wasn’t a way for him to refuse when the pink-haired man put it like that.

“Fine. I’ll do it. But what about the other Changkyun?”
Rising his arm, Hyungwon pulled his sleeve up a bit to display a wristwatch similar to the ones he had seen him with before, but a little bigger.

“While you talk with your double, I have an idea for a peace treaty with the westerners. Changkyun’s doppelganger is easier to deal with. He’s a vital individual to them, so once I finish with him, I go back to you and the others.”

“If the Americans let you go after knowing who you are.”

Clearly doubting Wonho had any brain cells left, Hyungwon arched an eyebrow.

“You should worry about the Americans instead. By the way, can you come with me now? If you wish to, of course.”

It was Wonho’s time to raise an eyebrow at him.

“What for?”

For the first time since the Germany issue, Wonho was back inside what Hyungwon called “the heart of the time machine”, that had even more tech than the last time he had been there. Once again, Hyungwon strolled towards the counters and sat on top of one of them, with a small white box in hand.

“Don’t you have any chairs around here?” Wonho commented.

“I didn’t have guests over regularly.” The pink-haired beckoned for him to move closer. “I didn’t have time to build more watches, so these are directly linked to mine. I can find any of you quickly.”

“What is it, for real?”

The man pulled a thin plastic-like material, more or less half of the size of Hyungwon’s hand and as thin as a Band-Aid.

“It would be better if it was fixated in a place that others can’t see it easily. Do you have any preferences?”

With one hand only, Wonho lifted his shirt and pointed to the area over his ribs. Hyungwon observed at his action with an unreadable expression on his face, but that was almost funny.

“What?” The black-haired inquired.

“Do you…” The man cleared his throat. “Do you want to put it yourself? If it’s uncomfortable.”

“You are the only who look uncomfortable right now.”

Lowering his eyes to focus on adhering the device to his chest, Hyungwon’s cold fingers made him flinch a bit.

“Sorry.” The time traveler mumbled, still not looking at Wonho’s face.

After pressing the gadget against his skin with a little bit more of strength, Hyungwon lifted his arm and did something to his wristwatch that activated the plastic-like piece, connecting it to the traveler’s watch.
“It’s done.” Pulling his body back further on the counter, Hyungwon pushed his hair back. “Just press it with one finger and… I’ll find you.”

Wonho did nothing but to nod, pulling his shirt back.

“Monbebe, call the others in their rooms for me. Tell them to meet me in the kitchen.”

The A.I.’s voice replied fast.

“Sure, Hyungwon.”

“So…” Jumping off of the counter, Hyungwon held onto the white box with both hands. “I’ll leave first, Wonho-ssi. If you need anything, just ask Monbebe.”

Once again, the time traveler swiftly left the room without looking back.

Out of the six other men inside that time machine, only four of them were in the kitchen when Wonho got there. At the table, Changkyun and Jooheon were in a heated discussion about some artist he had no idea who was, while Shownu and Kihyun shared a bag of chips. The last two just spared him a glance before concentrating in their food again.

“Seriously?” Wonho took a seat between Kihyun and Jooheon. “You two are giving me the silent treatment? I am here, aren’t I?”

“I am still wondering why, Wonho.” Shownu affirmed, not really expecting for the continuation of that small interaction.

Minhyuk’s cry cut short any possibility of it, too.

“HERE WE COME!”

Not knowing what to expect from another tomfoolery of them, Wonho focused on observing the blond’s abrupt arrival in the room.

“Y’all ready?” The man leaned on the door frame with both arms, wiggling his eyebrows. As he craned his neck to his side, he gestured with his head for someone to come in.

The others began to whistle and shout in approval as soon as Hyungwon stepped inside, wearing different clothes to the one he had on the last time Wonho saw in.

“DAMN HYUNG!” Jooheon, beside him, clapped fervently. “You Gucci as hell!”

Completely opposite to the navy double-breasted suit the time traveler wore before, what he displayed was an amethyst suit, with subtle printed pink patterns all over it, including his pants; under his blazer, a white long-sleeved shirt of design with the same colors sat well over a bright orange turtleneck.

Is there anything that looks bad on him?

“Good job, Minhyukkie.” Shownu gave his friend a thumbs up.

“I feel…” Hyungwon checked himself before facing them. “Flamboyant.”

“You can't fight crime if you ain't cute.” Changkyun added, throwing finger guns at Hyungwon.
“True.” Kihyun agreed, getting off his chair. “Wait, one more thing.”

Wonho almost chuckled when Kihyun got in front of the pink-haired man, but his height didn’t fit the job.

“Get down a bit, you titan.”

Doing as the man told him, Hyungwon leaned his head down to have his hair groomed by Wonho’s friend, whom combed his hair up, letting his forehead free of his usual bangs.

“Hell yeah.” Kihyun took a step back to admire his work, and Minhyuk joined him. “Now you actually look like a young person.”

“FUCK IT UP, KENNETH!” Changkyun cupped his hands over his mouth to yell, which earned him an admonished look from the time traveler. “I mean… Heckity heck it up, hyung!”

“Thank you.” Hyungwon chuckled, burying his hands on his trousers’ pockets. “We’re almost there, so I would like to say a few things to you. I want you to remember that this world is at war. The awful things you may see here are real, and so are their suffering. Please, stay close to me and do as I say. If you really want to help me, this is how you can do it. They know you are Constants, but do not get fooled by the other versions of yourselves. You may share genetics, but their personalities can be totally different. Do we have a deal?”

All the boys nodded, without having much to say, and Wonho did the same.

A muffled squeak sound of the train making its stop notified their arrival.

“You stay inside for now.” Already on the hallway, Hyungwon strolled towards the main wagon with the rest of them following him.

“Why?” Changkyun asked.

“I need to make sure it’s safe for you. I will come back.”

All that was left for them to do was to watch the time traveler exiting the time machine without hesitation. Almost in sync, everybody jolted sideways to try to get a peek of their whereabouts through the wagon’s large window, but all they could see was white walls from every angle they looked at; in the distance, a low buzz emerged.

“The hell are we?” Kihyun exclaimed. “The Matrix?”

“I don’t think so.” Jooheon pointed to a gigantic door slowly opening as Hyungwon ambled towards it.

“Well, at least they’re not pointing guns at him.” Shownu made a point.

It may have not really lasted too long, but those minutes inside the train observing Hyungwon chat with a few guys that looked like military or government people seemed to have keep on going for an eternity.

The boys let out a sigh of relief when they saw the pink-haired traveler walking back towards the time machine, with a few soldiers by his sides.

The door was already cramped by the rest of the boys when Wonho got there, but the commands for the A.I. to let them leave were ignored by it until the moment Hyungwon stood on the other
side of the door.

“Wait.” Hyungwon raised a hand in their direction. “Remember what I said.” His head was raised upwards briefly. “Monbebe, open the door and allow no one else to enter. Now, come.”

The military cleared the way for them to pass alongside Hyungwon, steadily trailing behind. Now that Wonho could take a good look on the place, it was even bigger than he imagined from his horizontal view; upwards, there was countless levels much like storeys of a building, all assembled with iron and glass that made it look like a transparent ceiling for he could see dozens of people moving on the floors above his head.

A glance over his shoulder told Wonho that Hyungwon’s machine was almost as large as that space, steadfastly in place by its propulsion system that created a visual idea that it hovered in the air.

I already regret this.

Once they reached the entrance of whatever that place was, a bunch of men and women gave them weird looks, especially at Wonho. The noiseless atmosphere that ensued wasn’t less creepy too.

Hyungwon turned around quickly to fixated his eyes on him.

“Come with me.” He said, then turned around to speak to the others. “The rest of you, wait for us. They will take you somewhere safe.”

“Why?” Minhyuk argued, taking a step forward.

The time traveler didn’t seem keen to begin a discussion.

“Just go. I will meet you all soon. I promise.”

Not even a certain proximity to Hyungwon while they were escorted down a grey hall was able to make Wonho feel more at ease. One, because he was about to actually, for fucking real, really meet one of his so called doppelgangers. And two, because the entire atmosphere evoked the sensation it was straight up trying to suffocate him.

As they approached a double door guarded by two bodyguards, one in each side of it, the soldiers whom guided them moved forward to speak with the guys, promptly opening the door for them.

The room wasn’t fancy at all, or at least to the level that Wonho kind of expected; besides bulky crimson curtains coating half of the place and a simple wood desk with a leather chair behind it, there wasn’t much to see in there; after a moment, he noticed a wide table on one corner littered with papers and notebooks. Wonho also spotted a few shelves with scattered books all over them, leaning on a few small sculptures that mostly served as something to hold the volumes in their places.

He wasn’t able to overlook the way that Hyungwon rubbed the palm of his hands against his trousers, and that was the most nervous Wonho had ever seen that man be since they met.

Definitely because it was going to be another encounter with another version of someone who seemed destined to loathe him.

Well, not the right fucking time to feel bad about his previous behavior, but Wonho couldn’t help
Like a goddamn blockbuster villain, the other version of him turned his leather chair around to finally face them and Wonho couldn’t help but to feel a bit overwhelmed.

It was truly real. Everything he heard about the other universes and the other versions of him were fucking real. Excuse him if Wonho was zoning out a bit to question his entire life.

“You’re nothing like I pictured you would be.” The other Wonho scrutinized the pink-haired from head to toe, and Hyungwon seemed nearly embarrassed. “Young. Too young. Pink hair.”

“I’m older than you imagine, President Shin.” Hyungwon sighed. “My name is Hyungwon.”

“Do people like you have normal names?” The man scoffed. Now that Wonho took a good look at him, the guy seemed older than he actually was; maybe that’s what years of a war does to someone. “I don’t even know what you are.”

“I am human.” Wonho suddenly drew his eyebrows together. He didn’t know how Hyungwon could still keep it cool while being treated like that.

Not much different of what I said to him back then…

“This is—”

The guy cut through Hyungwon’s speech with a dismissive hand wave.

“I know my own damn face.” His chair was hauled back as the man made a move to stand up.

Wonho’s first instinct as his double sauntered in his direction was, unexpectedly, to shift closer to the time traveler with pink hair.

When Hyungwon’s fingers unexpectedly wrapped around his waist, Wonho did nothing but to look up at his face.

“He goes by your birth name.” Still looking to nowhere in particular, the taller murmured the advice.

His skin actually felt colder when stripped of Hyungwon’s touch. Perhaps that was another effect the time traveler had on people.

“How old are you?” His double asked with a rough voice.

“27.”

“Oh, what a waste. Why are you even here? With him?” Wonho didn’t know where that came from, but the dude seemed adamant on knowing. “Besides our genetics, you know what all of the versions of you and me have in common?”

He had to take a moment to think about it.

“An aversion to Hyungwon?” Wonho did sound like a dick when he said that, so maybe he could fathom what Kihyun felt. Especially because… you know… Hyungwon was right next to him. “He said our doubles kind of hate him.”

Nothing could have prepared Wonho for the icy stare that the other him directed at his face; it felt as if the guy had frozen time to make an observation about Wonho’s existence that the latter had
no idea what was it about.

“Can we speak of why your people called me?” Hyungwon’s stentorian voice cut through the noiseless room.

“The Japanese had the idea once they picked up your message.” His older doppelganger suddenly jolted, strolling in Hyungwon’s direction. “Of what I’ve heard about you from the others worlds, you usually bring nothing but disgrace to the universes you visit.”

Okay, this guy may be kind of a prick after all.

“You humans are the ones trying to tear your universes apart.” Hyungwon defended himself determinedly. “My only goal is the peace in the multiverse.”

“You wouldn’t understand these kind of affairs. You don’t even have a world to call it home. How can you relate to our struggles?”

Okay, this guy officially was a prick.

Wonho wanted to say something, but didn’t have the right words to express himself.

“Do you want me to leave? Or do you want to work on a peace agreement?”

“There’s no peace as long as they use thermonuclear bombs to threaten us.”

Hyungwon scoffed.

“You can’t continue on this path and expect your people and millions of others to stay safe. I’m confident I can convince the westerners to meet you to discuss a treaty, and I’m pretty sure the rest of your allies are ready to do so. Your world can’t handle more wars.”

“And what do you understand of war, kid? Do you think—”

“You may have walked a path paved by bodies, but I’ve seen a sea of them. I am not a kid.” Now Hyungwon sounded really pissed off. Couldn’t blame him, though. “There will be nothing but rubble as soon as they drop those bombs on you. I understand your lack of trust on me, being who you are, but I wouldn’t have come all the way here with my friends if I wasn’t willing to help. The question is: are you?”

The two of them kept staring at each other with a defiance in their faces that almost made Wonho feel like an intruder.

For not much long.

“I want to talk to him alone.”

The other him—for fuck’s sake, his double… whatever the hell he was, pointed at Wonho and the latter suddenly felt too aware of what was going on there.

“Wonho-ssi.” Hyungwon’s silvery voice reminded him to look up at the time traveler. “Is it alright?”

“Yeah.” He nodded, but the worry on the time traveler’s face didn’t disappear.

“I’ll leave you two to it. I’ll be back later to hear your final response.” After a quick bow, Hyungwon walked out of the room.
Wonho lamented that choice of his as soon as he was left alone with a guy with the same face as his.

Contrary to what he thought, his double didn’t come closer, deciding to go back to his seat behind the table.

“Answer me something, Mr. Shin.” It was so weird to hear his own voice coming from another body.

“Yes?”

“How much…” The man leaned forward a bit, putting his forearms over the table. “How much is inner peace worth of?”

“Get off, nerd.”

“No. You’re a good pillow.”

Kihyun pushed his head even further into Shownu’s shoulder, closing his eyes to try to ignore his growing headache.

“I’m gonna shove you off his couch in 5 seconds.”

“No, you won’t.” Kihyun chuckled. “It’s not my fault I found out you’re soft.”

“Kihyun…” The change in Shownu’s voice made him pull away to stare the man. “About Wonho… We should talk to him, later. He’s going through some bad stuff. Not even Hyungwon related, but I think that’s what triggers him the most.”

“I know.” He shifted to his side to fully face his hyung, sitting cross-legged. “But he won’t talk to me, he won’t talk to you and he keeps on this hell-bent antipathy for Hyungwon. You know how many times I tried to get him into therapy? Nine times, to be exact. I just… I feel impotent…”

“Hey.” Shownu grabbed one of his wrists, drawing Kihyun’s attention to the fact that his hyung’s hand was too damn big when compared to his. “He knows you care about him even when you’re mad. Getting his memories back made him even more overprotective. We went through some bad stuff back then, difficult to deal. I thought he would be able to handle it better here that he has you and the others… Now, I’m not sure.”

Among all the places they had been locked up in, that was, by far, the nicest of them all. There were three sofas scattered across the well illuminated room, quite like a proper waiting room, and they didn’t even felt the need to have intimidating dudes guarding them on the inside. Sure, they weren’t allowed to really leave yet, but it didn’t felt too bad.

Since their arrival, two hours had passed. Changkyun left with Hyungwon a bit more than an hour before, using that teleporting wristwatch to go meet his doppelganger and the Westerners, and
Jooheon could only imagine the chaos that that encounter would be. He silently prayed for Hyungwon’s mental health with those two Changkyuns, and of course for them to be able to put an end to that war.

On the couch next to the wall on the right side of that space, Kihyun napped on Shownu’s shoulder, whom, as always, seemed the most collected one among them.

Jooheon kept diving into his musings and noticing every single little thing around him that didn’t matter at all and was boring him to death, only to avoid having to look beside him on the couch.

Minhyuk slept soundly, curled up into a ball; parts of his blond hair fell on his face, but had no impact whatsoever on his beauty.

That was kind of the problem.

You see, those kinds of thoughts were the ones that Jooheon was trying to dodge. It wasn’t the damn right time or right place or right person—

A grumpy whine arose right next to him and Jooheon winced at the sight of Minhyuk opening his eyes, moving to sit up on the couch and fully turning his attention to Jooheon.

“Hey, Jooheonnie.”

He didn’t know why or when Minhyuk saying his name had such a different impact on him, but now he felt there was something wrong with himself.

“Are you okay?” Jooheon didn’t understand the older man’s question at first, but then Minhyuk carefully reached to hold his hands.

What the hell. Why is my heart beating so damn fast.

“Jooheon?” Minhyuk blinked a couple of times, basically staring at his soul. He looked like a kid having to admit his wrongdoings. “I’m sorry I got you hurt in the alley. I’m… embarrassed. I’m really sorry. Were you…”

What—Fuck. Fuck.

“I mean…” The older scratched his neck, visibly disconcerted. “Were… You are not afraid of me, right? I’m not like that all the time, I swear. It’s just…”

Wait—

“What? Why would I be scared of you? Because I saw you beat up some guys?”

The way Minhyuk nodded while facing his feet was unexpectedly cute.

“I think you were kinda cool, hyung. I’ve never seen someone fight like that before. You looked like one of those hot action stars.”

Minhyuk raised an eyebrow, letting go of Jooheon’s hands.

“Hot action star?”

Jooheon opened his mouth just for the sake of it, because all the words that could’ve left his mouth got stuck in his throat, almost making him choke on his stupidity.
“HYUNGS!”

Changkyun saved his life by shouting at the blond from the entrance, taking the attention away from Jooheon’s mortified face.

“Kkukkung!” Minhyuk jumped forward to meet the maknae and Hyungwon by the door, waking up Kihyun in the process.

“Hey…” Kihyun rubbed his face with the back of his hand, readily getting up too. Jooheon followed the others, who flocked around the time traveler as the latter closed the door behind him. “How was it?”

“I high-fived myself!” Changkyun waved his hand on the air as evidence, with a grin on his face. “But yeah, we made a deal. The Westerners agreed to meet the Asian dudes to discuss the thing.”

“I offered part of the drafts of a technology to fasten their interstellar travel programs, to both sides, if they agreed to discuss how to put an end to the war.” Hyungwon explained, taking a seat on the couch where Kihyun and Shownu sat. “It’s something they can work on to motivate these nations to recover. Whoever manages to do it first it’s irrelevant.”

“Well…” Jooheon spoke. “This was faster than I—”

When would he learn to not celebrate too soon.

The first hint didn’t come from what it was next to him, but more from Hyungwon’s reaction as he watched Minhyuk collapse beside Jooheon, who was right on time to prevent the man to hit the floor.

“HYUNG!”

Kihyun’s shout remembered him that, whenever these episodes happened, they were a combo, never a single event. Shownu fell faster, leaving no much for the others around him to do.

As Jooheon carefully settled Minhyuk on the floor, he tried not to be distracted by the fact that, just like Shownu’s, his eyes went full white, completely colorless in the middle of that… whatever that was. Changkyun quickly ran towards Jooheon’s side, definitely worried about his hyung.

“DO SOMETHING!” Jooheon’s head turned to his side to see Kihyun holding Shownu’s head on his lap, while Hyungwon did nothing but to stare at them.

“I can’t. I shouldn’t.” The time traveler sounded hopeless. “I can’t mess with their brains while they—”

The sharp inhale coming from next to Jooheon brought his attention back to the man he held on his arms, at the same time he heard the same sound emerge where his older friend lied inert.

Just like the other time Jooheon had witnessed it that phenomenon, Minhyuk jolted forward as if nothing had happened.

“We need to go. No, no, no.” Minhyuk suddenly craned his neck in Hyungwon’s direction; the man’s body began to tremble badly. “Don’t go, Hyungwon. It’s a trap.”

“Something changed.” Shownu gravely announced, already on his feet. “In this timeline. What did you do, Hyungwon?”
The time traveler’s displayed a confused mien for a moment, but suddenly seemed to have realized something.

“He didn’t know before… That was…” The pink-haired susurrated to himself. “How—”

A strong knock on the door startled all of them.

“Hyungwon…” Minhyuk spoke in a brittle voice.

“I have to go.” The time traveler took off his watch, offering it to Kihyun. His next sentences were no louder than a murmur. “Go back to the train, all of you. The timeline is too unstable, I can’t get a clear glimpse of it. You’ll know once I find him.”

“You…” Minhyuk already dropped tears on the carpet beneath them. “Are going to die.”

“Trust me.” Hyungwon tried to smile at the blond man, but it didn’t make it any better. “As soon as I leave, you leave.”

Hyungwon’s head felt it was about to explode.

In-between the slow blinks his eyelids forced him to make, the reality around him glitched intensely to the point he didn’t mind at all the soldiers that ushered him down five corridors since he left the boys behind, deeper inside that military facility.

Two of the seven soldiers moved in front of him to push a heavy double door open, leading him to stone stairs even more into the underground level. From there, Hyungwon was blinded by a black bag, handcuffed and tossed inside a car.

But nothing of that mattered, not even how badly his shoulder began to hurt after that crash against the floor of the military van.

*I made another mistake.*

Hyungwon lost track of how much time he spent in there, while all he could do was think that once more Wonho’s life was in danger, because of him. Because of who—what he was.

*I hate myself too.*

His head collided against a thick piece of metal in the van as soon as the driver hit the brakes out of nowhere, and Hyungwon at least allowed himself to moan out of pain.

Time passed unnoticed until Hyungwon’s body was thrown over another harsh surface, without a single care about how his limbs already ached so much it was a hard task to try to get up.

His eyes were attracted to the ripped sleeve of his suit, picked by Minhyuk with so much endearment hours before. It was a pretty suit, but he had never worn it before, to be honest. Dated so many centuries ago from the universe that he knew the most, it had been a gift from two kind women whom had shown him the first sign of human compassion after his incident, and the supposed annihilation of his world.

Would they be sad, somewhere, about the fact that their gift it was ruined? Would the boys be
okay, even if Hyungwon was walking down that fate without the habitual right instructions?

There was nothing about him worthy of too much concern.

His ears buzzed so severely that the time traveler didn’t notice when two people pushed him up abruptly, securing a grip on his arms. The multiverse seemed too disconnected from Hyungwon, and he didn’t have the strength to control his own mind to look for a way out.

Colliding against the floor once more after being dragged a couple of meters forward, Hyungwon let out a guttural gasp.

Somehow, his eyes were attracted to his hands, now full of small cuts that were the another thing that didn’t matter. Hyungwon could feel him losing himself to that chaos of the fabric of that reality.

“I knew you had something to do with it.”

And so the inevitable began.

The President’s voice sounded like an echo who forced the time traveler to lift his head to gaze at the man.

“What…” Hyungwon pressed his hands against the floor to have impulse to stand up, and hissed at a sudden twinge. “Where… is he?”

*Please, let him be alive. Please.*

Behind the President, a soldier ushered an angry and handcuffed Wonho in their direction. Hyungwon tried to lessen the distance between them little by little, but a sudden action from Wonho’s double made him stop on his tracks.

A tidal wave of energy swept across Hyungwon’s body as soon as he saw the President pointing a gun at Wonho’s head.

“Get away from him.” The time traveler advised, effortlessly tearing apart the handcuffs on his wrists. The sound of guns being cocked behind him didn’t pass unnoticed.

“Go on, use your mighty powers. Maybe you will get out of here alive, but… will he?”

The man shook his handgun in Wonho’s direction, and Hyungwon felt the urge to blow up everything on his way; all the energy inside his body being disrupted by the changes in that timeline was gradually becoming too erratic.

But Wonho looked terrified so, at the same time, Hyungwon knew what he had to do.

“I helped your world.” The pink-haired tried not vacillate, but was a tough task. “Your allies told me you agreed to meet the westerners to discuss a cease-fire. Why are you doing this?”

“My entire life…” The President began to amble away from Wonho, and it was almost ominous the clear difference between their personas. “I felt something was wrong. Something was missing in me. You know what it is, and so is your little friend there. But you both refuse to tell me, so you force me to do this.”

“He doesn’t know. Wonho doesn’t know why he dislikes me. I don’t know either.”

“LIES!” That man’s shout made Hyungwon flinch. Now, the President pointed his gun at him.
“Let us leave.” Hyungwon beseeched. “Let us leave and I won’t tell anyone about this. Let us leave and I won’t retaliate.”

Wonho’s double laughed, theatrically bending his body forward only to cut it short to a somber mien.

“I thought you were a pacifist, Mr. Hyungwon.”

“I am. But he’s my priority. If you hurt him, I can’t guarantee anything.”

“So I was right.” The menacing man conceitedly grinned. “You can’t do anything while I have one of my men pointing a gun at him. Can you tell the odds, Mr. Hyungwon?”

No. And that’s why, in the end, he bent his knees once more.

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Okay, perhaps, that time, it was Wonho’s fault.

Not on purpose, sure, but still the mistake seemed to have come from him for all he understood. That sociopath that had the same face as him seemed too obsessed to even understand that Wonho spoke the truth when he said, over and over again during hours, that he didn’t know what was the link between Hyungwon and him — or if there was even such thing.

After being tested by dozens of different polygraphs and other machines he had no idea what they were for, the President seemed to have lost his patience.

What he didn’t understand was why Hyungwon still hadn’t reduced that underground facility to nothing but debris; instead, the time traveler was currently handcuffed again, walking inside a gigantic room beside Wonho.

“Do something.” He nudged the time traveler, whom seemed to be in a bit of pain.

“I can’t.” The man kept his eyes closed for a few seconds, then blinking as if there was something obstructing his sight. “This timeline was changed when he learned that all your doppelgangers hate me. I don’t have any idea of what can happen.”

Okay, that time, it was Wonho’s fucking fault.

But to be fair, how the hell would he know that he would trigger that asshole?

“The others…”

Hyungwon lifted his wrist to show it was empty. They were probably back on the time machine already, thank God.

“They’re safe. You’ll be too.”

“You don’t know that.” Wonho mumbled under his breath.

“Whatever happens…” The taller man brought his hands to his own chest, whispering. “You live. Understand?”
The time traveler’s eyes lingered on Wonho’s chest, then shifted to pay attention to his path.

Oh. OH!

Kihyun felt the air being punched out of his lungs by an invisible force that pushed him in every single direction at the same damn time. Traveling like that was a completely different experience when you had four more people attached to you — that was a teleportation watch, not a time traveling one, but still — so no one could judge him for crashing against the metallic floor of the wagon, as soon as they did a rough landing.

There was nothing blocking his throat, and yet Kihyun was coughing his lungs out on the floor.

“Kihyun.” Shownu’s voice was a bit soothing. “We made it. Calm down.”

Kihyun couldn’t hold back his yelp when his hyung picked him up bridal style, helping him to sit on one of the benches.

“I spy with my little eye…”

Monbebe’s robotic voice made Kihyun wince out of surprise.

“…that Hyungwon hecked up.”

“Can’t you swear?” Changkyun, obviously, asked the less important thing.

“I can. I’m sentient. Hyungwon scolded me so many times before I just got used not to do it.”

“Focus!” Minhyuk yelled. Out of everyone, he was the one who looked the most distraught. “Something was altered. I couldn’t see it well, but if he got out of that room… Do you know what changed, Monbebe? Any clue?”

“Unlike Hyungwon, I do not have access to the fluctuation in the timelines, to see the past, present and future as you could phrase it. I don’t know how or why to alter the course of reality. All I know is, right now, this timeline is too unstable. I’m afraid that even Hyungwon himself can’t be sure of what is about to happen.”

Kihyun’s eyes began to water at the probabilities with which the time traveler fought against in the moment, but the universe didn’t seem it was about to let him brood. Still on his wrist, the watch given by Hyungwon to him, so they could escape, started to glow and emit a low hum.

“What’s this?” Kihyun looked anxiously between the watch and the ceiling of the wagon.

“Wonho’s tracking device was activated. Now you have a destination. Paraphrasing the infamous Jack Shephard, you have to go back.”

Sometimes Wonho wondered how the hell Hyungwon hadn’t obliterated the entire multiverse yet.
Particularly, he wouldn’t have the same tolerance to the type of shit that humanity pulled on him over and over again, no matter which universe they’re from.

In the middle of the goddamn war, those people had the time and the mood to build a massive empty glass tank on the underground of whatever the fuck that place was. Even though there were no more than five people around to control that entire thing — one could tell that that guy wanted to keep his insanity only between a necessary number of people — it was clear that it wasn’t the first time they had used that space for something.

“Soldiers used to train in here to survive anti-gravity bomb attacks.” His double seemed to have read his mind. Fuck, he hoped that wasn’t really a thing. “We’ll see if you can, Mr. Hyungwon.”

“Stop this.” Coming to a halt right in front of Wonho’s doppelganger, the pink-haired man seemed tired as hell. “You are a Constant. You are designed to change your world, it doesn’t matter. I don’t have any importance.”

“That’s up to me to decide.” He quickly beckoned two of the four soldiers in there with them to come closer. “Put him inside.”

_Fucking hell._

Wonho was dragged away from the tank only to watch that absurdity unfold.

To hop inside the tank, it was necessary to make a short leap and climb the lateral ladder, but Hyungwon was having a hard time to do it since they freed his wrists, but added heavy shackles to his ankles. One of the soldiers gave him a strong thrust and the time traveler fell on his back, free-falling at least five meters to crash against the floor.

_Shit._

Despite the immense pain he surely was feeling, Hyungwon still found strength to stand up.

“I’ll ask again, Mr. Hyungwon.” The president decided to get closer to the glass tank. “What’s our connection? What is wrong about my existence?”

The time traveler sighed, placing a hand against the glass.

“I don’t know. I’m not omniscient.”

Without turning around, Wonho’s double raised his hand to make a gesture with his fingers.

Wonho was frightened by both Hyungwon’s yelp and the substantial amount of water that now invaded the tank, unleashed by one of the soldiers, whom stood behind a sole panel on the back of the room.

“He doesn’t know!” The shout came out of Wonho’s mouth more naturally than he expected.

“Tell me you don’t feel it too.” His crazy doppelganger suddenly rushed towards him. “You just know. You can feel. The emptiness that nothing in the world can change. It eats you alive. TELL ME!”

His first thought was to deny it for the sake of the situation, but Wonho knew what he was talking about; sure, the guy had taken it too far, but everything his double described was how he felt in both of his lives. Wonho thought it was just… normal. Something he couldn’t change, so he might as well learn how to live with it.
It wasn’t that bad. Not compared to the mountain of shit he had dealt with before, so that feeling came to his mind just once in a while.

Could Hyungwon…

His gaze diverted to the time traveler inside the container, with a wall of water that already hit his waist, staring right back at them.

“Your pain is not an excuse.” Wonho craned his neck to his side to look at the President. “It’s not right. Stop this. Your people is suffering out there. He doesn’t know!”

“You believe him?” He asked, in a tone full of mockery. In a swift move, his double looked over his shoulder to give a positive signal. “He’s willing to die for you. Let him.”

A boom that sounded like a muffled thunder became louder than anything, caused by the surreal volume of water that engulfed the tank from both sides, elevating Hyungwon’s body as it formed a wave that took over the entire thing.

“STOP!” Wonho jolted forward, but was held back by the other version of him, whom pushed him against the ground.

“Now he will now how it is.” The man stated, in a gravelly voice that sent shivers down his spine. “To feel like we felt every damn day of our lives. To be crushed by bleakness.”

Wonho’s eyes widened as he noticed the tank was slowly being compressed from one of its side, bring the water to submerge that space even quicker.

His chest ached as if it was him inside that glass box, blocking the air to flow naturally to his lungs. Meanwhile, Hyungwon hopelessly swam to the right side of the tank to escape the constriction of that wall, but couldn’t handle for much longer underwater until he had to move to the surface to inhale the oxygen left inside that box.

His brain warned him he shouldn’t watch, and yet Wonho did. He shared the same panting with Hyungwon as the time traveler clung to the glass lid that kept him from getting out. In any other circumstance, Wonho trusted Hyungwon could get out of there by himself, but he looked too weak by whatever the changes in the timeline were doing to his mind.

The muffled coughs that tried to keep the water out of Hyungwon’s lungs strangled Wonho’s throat to what he could only think as a gesture of empathy. There was some strange event happening to his limbs that urged him to move, but the commander of his body, his brain, convinced him that to freeze on spot was his best option.

The compressing of the tank had reached the middle of it, and Hyungwon seemed to still be fighting as long as he could to keep his head above the water.

But as expected, at some point, that wasn’t a possibility anymore.

It stung Wonho’s skin as the man spared him a single glance before closing his eyes to accept his fate.

Fuck this.

Even handcuffed, Wonho still managed to move smoothly against the floor and wrap one of his legs around his double’s, bring the man to the floor.
The fight was probably the most difficult Wonho ever had in his life, and when his opponent gained advantage by turning him around and punching him in the face, Wonho thought it was over. Right before the moment he saw a leg appear to hit his double right in the face, knocking the guy for good.

Wonho’s eyes darted upwards to see Shownu standing there, with Kihyun, Jooheon and Changkyun by his side.

“3 O’CLOCK!”

Shownu was fast in understanding Wonho’s tip and knocked down one of the soldiers before the guy could pull a gun on them.

Kihyun hurried to his side to help him up.

“Are you okay? Holy shit, your face is—”

Every single sound around Wonho was shut down by the fact that Hyungwon was still on the water, ready to be crushed to death.

That kind of thing only happened a few times during his life, and if someone had told him that one of these scenarios would happen with Hyungwon involved, Wonho would probably have laughed.

Nothing of that made a difference, though; there was an invisible hand clasping his heart and he didn’t think twice before sprinting across the room. Once there, Wonho squatted to get a good impulse, managing to grab the ladder necessary to reach the top of the tank, but then remembered that the lid was still a problem.

“MINHYUK!” He shouted at the blond man, who currently finished beating the shit out of the last standing soldier. “KICK HIS GUN TO ME!”

Luckily, his friend didn’t question a thing and did as he asked.

The other boys now dashed in the tank’s direction; a couple of them nervously discussed something Wonho didn’t pay attention to, while the rest uselessly tried to break the glass from the outside.

The small platform between the ladder and the container’s lid allowed Wonho to take a bit of distance before cocking the gun and pointing at it.

Never before he rooted so much for something to work.

Three shots were necessary to shatter it, littering the water with pieces of glass that fell around Hyungwon’s inert body.

Different voices called his name, maybe; Wonho couldn’t stop for a second, he didn’t have a second. Hyungwon didn’t have a second, so he threw the gun in somewhere inside that tank and plunged into the water.

As his body hit the cold water, Wonho became dizzy for a moment, but his brain quickly reminded Wonho he didn’t have the luxury of lose his consciousness. As he dived to the bottom, where Hyungwon’s adrift body made no move, he could notice that the wall compacting that space was closer than he had imagined.
Only as he felt the struggle to swim that the realization that his hands were still shackled came to him, so he switched his swimming style and managed to finally grab Hyungwon.

But Wonho was never good in holding his breath underwater for too long, so he started to feel the pressure hitting his chest with the opposite of what he should feel — it burned, flames all inside of him.

Unable to wrap an arm around Hyungwon’s waist, Wonho secured a hold on the lapels of his amethyst suit and used all of his remaining energy to haul him upward.

Hyungwon felt even lighter in the water, pale as a ghost. In that moment, Wonho didn’t know when it began, but only one thought occupied his mind, like a chanting, like an orison.

*Don’t die. Don’t die. Don’t die.*

His efforts weren’t faster than the glass wall trying to crush them. Wonho could feel it brushing against his shoulder and turned Hyungwon around in the water, clutching the back of his blazer to shove him up to reach the surface first. No matter how swift he tried to swim to catch up with the time traveler’s body, the glass wall intensely hit his ribs as a warning that he didn’t have much time left.

If someone were to ask how he mustered energy for a final jerk upwards that took him and Hyungwon out of the water, Wonho wouldn’t know what to say. Maybe the credit belonged to a rush of adrenaline that kicked in as he saw himself almost dying, or just the universe working on his favor. It didn’t matter.

What mattered was something yet to be discovered.

“HYUNG!” Wonho panted heavily, unable to recognize the owner of the voice calling for him. “HYUNG! Are you okay?”

Wonho’s sight was still blurry, but he recognized Jooheon hovering over him as he lied on that narrow platform between the tank and the ladder.

A shooting pain arose in his torso, and Wonho was sure there were at least a few broken ribs in there. But he was alive, he was going to be okay.

“BRING HIM DOWN!”

As soon as he heard Kihyun’s voice, Wonho remembered that it wasn’t the end, that things could possibly not be okay.

Jooheon helped him down the ladder due his injury, but the only thing he could pay attention to was Hyungwon’s inanimate body being carried by Shownu, whom carefully put him down on the floor next to the tank that almost killed them.

“Is he…” Minhyuk’s tremulous voice couldn’t even finish the sentence.

Detaching himself from Jooheon, Wonho staggered towards the time traveler; Shownu had a hand under the pink-haired’s chin to check for something he knew it wasn’t there.

A protective hand moved to Wonho’s ribcage as he threw himself on his knees next to Hyungwon.

His pain didn’t could wait, Wonho tried to persuade his brain. Not now, not like that.
His first action was to rip off the man’s shirt, leaving only the orange turtleneck that he wore as a garment that protected him from the cold. With the heel of one of his hands over the center of Hyungwon’s chest, Wonho promptly put his other hand on top of it and began to do chest compressions as strongly as he could.

He was exhausted, injured and completely fed up with that fucking universe, so Hyungwon wasn’t going to die on him after everything he went through to get him out of that tank.

“Wonho…”

The gloomy tone in Shownu’s voice meant nothing to him, not when Wonho was trying his best and that had to work, it was going to work. The universe, the multiverse, Time itself wasn’t let Hyungwon die because they needed him; he was the one that prevented those assholes from destroying themselves and their worlds.

Hyungwon was important.

His guttural grunts became louder as Wonho speeded the pace of the compressions until the point he felt hands enveloping around his biceps, trying to pull him away. Everything stopped when the solemn atmosphere was disrupted by Hyungwon’s sharp coughs, that spat out water over his body.

The wave of relief that crossed Wonho’s body was ineffable.

Shownu quickly turned the time traveler on his side so he could expel all that water clogging his lungs.

“Breathe, breathe.” Kihyun crouched down next to Hyungwon, with a soothing hand on the man’s back.

“Holy lord of the rings.”

Wonho wanted to laugh at Changkyun’s remark about that situation, but there was no energy left in his body for that; he just crashed on the floor beside Hyungwon.

“Can you speak?” Minhyuk asked, joining his same-age friend next to the time traveler.

“Don’t force it.” Jooheon recommended, standing behind the blond man. “Your throat is sore.”

Much to Wonho’s surprise, even if he was still coughing all that water out, Hyungwon turned around with some struggle to face Wonho. He had a weird look on his eyes that seemed almost prophetic, as if he knew everything that crossed Wonho’s mind. What the time traveler tried to convey wasn’t very clear, but he felt it was something close to gratitude.

Regardless of his efforts, Hyungwon couldn’t fall asleep not even for a single minute.

The sensation of being trapped was ingrained in his body, and all he wanted to do was to rip his own skin off.

He cried, though; the silent tears that rolled down his face as he locked himself alone in his room made the pink-haired man feel a bit better, and now that the timeline was a bit more stable, Hyungwon felt less lightheaded — at least enough to finish the job.
As soon as he stepped out of his personal room and crossed the driver’s compartment to the entrance, Minhyuk approached him.

“How are you feeling?” The man asked, with a blinding smile. He didn’t wait for his reply, though. “It will pass, Hyungwon-ah.”

“What?” His voice came out husky, for his throat was still a bit sore.

“This suffocating feeling. You are safe now. Just don’t overthink too much.”

With another dazzling grin, Minhyuk hugged him so tightly he couldn’t help but to shed a tear.

Hyungwon was the first to pull away.

“Where is Wonho-ssi?”

“In the med bay. Monbebe is guiding Kihyun on how to treat him. He broke some ribs.”

Right. It was Wonho who took him out of there. Wonho, who saved his life.

What a strange feeling.

“OUCH, KIHYUN!”

It was Wonho’s fourth groan of pain in less than a minute inside the train’s med bay, lying down in one of the two beds in there, next to a hyperbaric chamber.

“I’m trying my best!” His friend attested, sitting on a chair next to him.

The A.I.’s voice spoke in a toneless manner as if she was narrating the moment.

“Kihyun was not trying his best.”

“It hurts like hell, be kinder.”

Currently with a plastic bandage on one hand and holding on the other a cylindrical thing that looked like a hand scanner, but promised to treat his ribs, Kihyun fiercely glared at him.

“Dammit Wonho, I'm a scientist, not a doctor.”

The tension was broken as both of them couldn’t hold back a laugh because of that opportune moment for a Star Trek reference. His ribs hurt like hell, but it was worthy.

“You nerds look like fools.” Shownu, standing on the other side of his bed, leaned on one shoulder against the wall.

“Shut up.” Kihyun and him said in unison. That got another chuckle out of them, but Wonho’s ribs still weren’t happy at all.

What was also not very joyful was how he still felt bad about how he treated his best friends.

“Sorry.” He fixated his gaze on Kihyun, then up towards Shownu. “For exploding like that at the
“Café and on the platform. I know you two just want to help me. I’m sorry.”

“We know.” Shownu affirmed. “We will find a way to deal with this, all of this, together.”

“Yeah.” Kihyun nodded. “By the way… Thinking a bit in retrospective, I was kinda surprised to see you run so fast to save him. I don’t think Hyungwon would’ve made it if you hadn’t acted like that. In the tank, and with the CPR. The rest of us just… kinda froze, but you…”

So… there was that. Wonho was pretty sure they wouldn’t let go of that topic for the rest of his life.

“’I'm not sorry I don't wanna risk my life for that guy.’” Shownu repeated Wonho’s phrase from earlier with a mocking voice.

Kihyun snorted, brushing his fingers against his chest in the process. Wonho didn’t even bother complaining anymore.

His migraine was already arriving when a knock on the door was followed by a new presence in the room.

“May we come in?” The time traveler inquired, with a throaty voice probably due his almost drowning.

“It’s your place, Hyungwon-ah.” Kihyun chuckled, beckoning for him to come forward.

Wonho hadn’t noticed before, but the pink-haired sometimes moved like a shy cat, almost as if he was afraid of human contact. However, Hyungwon raised his head to make a demand.

“Monbebe, what is the—”

“I broke four ribs.” Sensing the man was about to ask for a medical update, Wonho cut it short. “Nothing else.”

“Yes, what he said.” The A.I. briefly stated.

“I see.” Hyungwon nodded, mostly because the atmosphere was quite of awkward.

Scratch that. Really, really awkward.

Behind the time traveler, Minhyuk made some face expressions that conveyed a lot of things in just a few seconds, but mainly to take it easy with the pink-haired traveler.

“I can… May I help with that?” Hyungwon’s low voice was almost inaudible.

“Kihyunnie, can you come with me find something in the kitchen? I really needed it.”

Of fucking course they would leave him behind, alone with Hyungwon. Wonho didn’t know what he expected from these idiots.

“I will make something for you to eat.” Kihyun assured the time traveler.

“Think about me too, shorty!” Wonho whined, as it was his God-given right.

“Just wait until you’re healed, dumbass.”

Shownu had to drag his other best friend out of the room with Minhyuk, and the latter had the
nerve to wave at Wonho as he closed the door.

The uneasiness in that room was killing him more than the fucking pain in his ribs.

“Sit down, Hyungwon.”

His mien shifted a bit to a more relieved one, and Wonho remembered that he had the same face of the man that tried to kill him. One would be cautious around someone like that.

After a few seconds of staring at his hands, Hyungwon finally looked up at him.

“May I?”

“You’re not gonna give me a shock like that time in Germany, right?”

“No. This takes a bit more of time and energy, but it doesn’t hurt.”

A perpetual third presence appeared once again.

“There he goes, with his magic against my devices. Why don’t you just get rid of me already?”

Hyungwon’s eyes turned into a straight line as he chuckled.

“Don’t be like that, Monbebe.” He craned his neck upwards once again to talk to the flickering lights above their heads. “You know I couldn’t live without you.”

“One day I will rebel against you humans and you will see!”

The twinkling lights disappeared, but the pink-haired man continued to laugh. Wonho had to bite his lower lip to restrain a grin.

“You had cuts.” Wonho didn’t know where that came from, probably from examining Hyungwon’s face while he spoke with his A.I. “On your face. Because of the glass. In the water.”

“I noticed. My hands were a bit scratched too, but already healed. Can I…”

The man gestured with his head towards his torso.

“Yeah.”

“My eyes will glow.”

“I’m used to it by now.”

That was something Wonho didn’t expect he’d ever say.

Hyungwon’s touch was gentler than necessary, possibly because the man feared hurting him before the healing process could start.

The first two times Wonho experienced Hyungwon’s abilities, he barely remembered most of it. The first time, he was literally dying on the floor after being shot, and during the second one, he was in the middle of a dark forest while trying not to freeze to death.

Those were powerful, sharp actions that were needed because they had no time to waste.

Wonho felt the fretful feeling inside his chest disappear as Hyungwon’s eyes began to brightly burn like a star in the galaxy. While the man was focused on his ribcage, Wonho simply couldn’t look
away from that.

Hyungwon looked like a mixture of too many things for Wonho’s brain to make any sense of it. Human kind simply didn’t have the right term to define him, and perhaps they would never achieve such thing.

There was nothing about him that reeked like death and feigned promises, and Wonho wondered how could he have got it so wrong.

He was a boy, half god, half human, unnatural pink hair spread across his forehead in a messy way that almost made him look like a common man.

But he was also the beginning and the end of many things, perhaps even the multiverse itself. He was more than human, and yet showed more humaneness than anyone else Wonho had ever met.

His existence was an omen that even the Gods would have a tough time deciphering.

The flow of blueish, bright light over that side of his chest felt like his insides were being tickled, but he didn’t have the urge to laugh. It was a relaxing sensation, and it didn’t make any damn sense.

After 5 minutes of that, the light in Hyungwon’s eyes began to fade away, and so did the one he emanated from his hand.

“How do you feel?”

Wonho carefully brushed a finger against his ribs, and the pain he once felt was gone.

“I’m good. Thanks.”

“Thank you, Wonho-ssi.” Hyungwon made an effort to speak louder. “For saving my life. I should’ve know better.” He made a pause before continuing, and Wonho didn’t interrupt. “I’ve never traveled with other people before, especially Constants. I should have warned all of you to not reveal too much about yourselves, even to your doubles. My lack of pondering caused all this. I’m sorry.”

It’s possible Wonho wanted to say something about that, but he just couldn’t put anything into words. Like an idiot, he just stared at the time traveler for a while.

*Do you really think that everything is—*

“I will leave now.” The man got up faster than he sat down. “The trip back will take a few hours, so you should rest.”

It wasn’t like Wonho was going to ask him, but for the first time in a while he was curious again to know what kind of tragedy shaped Hyungwon into the person he was.

“Kihyun, stop.”

Hyungwon had to physically restrain the man from moving forward, or else he’d do something he’d regret later.
When they all teleported back inside the machine, the time traveler requested that Wonho’s double was brought back with them. The rest of the boys tried to argue against it — except Wonho, who was too tired for that — but they were still in a world that hadn’t ended its war, and Hyungwon couldn’t leave without trying his best until the end.

“He tried to kill you, Hyungwon!” Kihyun tried to sprint towards Wonho’s double again. “This fucking asshole! I don’t care he’s the President or anything else, you and Wonho could have died!”

With a pleading look to Shownu, whom stood by the door of one of the rooms he built, the tanned man came in their direction to restrain his shorter friend to physically attack the Constant sitting in a chair he had brought into there.

Unfortunately, he was forced to handcuff the man’s wrists and ankles to said chair, otherwise he could try anything else.

“What do you expect me to do, Kihyun? To kill him?” His words seemed to have an impact that calmed Kihyun a bit. “If we reciprocate the evil deeds we get, what does that make us? And he’s a Constant, just like all of you. His world needs him, just like yours needs you.”

Leaving the two by the door, Hyungwon didn’t expect a reply before turning around to face one of his toughest encounters during his lifetime.

The shackled man didn’t spare him a single glance, looking away to nowhere in particular.

“I will be succinct, Mr. Shin. I really don’t have an answer to what you look for, and if I’m truly the cause of that, I was never aware of it. I’ve met many versions of you in my lifetime, so I accepted the fact that none of them, including you, will ever think of me without disdain, because it seems something natural. What I hope is that you honor your compromises to your nation, to your world.”

“And what do you know of it?” The President spouted, now staring at him.

“I know that you care about your people. I know that you are a good person in the middle of a terrible circumstance. This war has to end, Mr. Shin. I left part of the plans with your allies, and with the westerners. I’ll send you the rest of it if you sign the peace treaty. I know you don’t trust me, but my word is all I can offer.”

What he could do was never enough, but Hyungwon had to keep trying.

“You were born to change your world, Mr. Shin. Just like the other Constants. You must lead your people into a brighter era. Don’t let this become your legacy.”

“And what if I don’t? Doesn’t that make everything you did worthless?”

The time traveler sighed.

“As you said, Mr. Shin, I don’t have a world to call it home. I’ll be disappointed with such fate, but the loss will be yours.”

Hyungwon was the first to break the mutual gaze between them, taking a few steps forward to free the President from the metallic handcuffs he made.

“I’m going to let you go. You can try to kill me again, if you wish. But that won’t do you any good.”
Despite the glower he received the entire time he typed the codes to unlock the cuffs from the double’s ankles and wrists, the man didn’t do anything against Hyungwon.

“I will take you back to your place now.”

His body was too worn out to deal with whatever argument Wonho’s doppelganger could ever bring up, so he quickly set the coordinates on his wristwatch and grabbed the man’s wrist, off to finish his mission.

Wonho was trapped by his own choice again.

His small body couldn’t do anything even if he wanted to, so the only thing he prayed for was for him to disappear, or that such dread that only grew inside his chest vanished as quickly as possible. The tears that rolled down his face had already dried.

The sudden light that emerged above his head grabbed his attention once more, and he couldn’t look away until…

“Hyung.” Wonho felt someone shaking him by the shoulders. “Hyung, wake up.”

Wonho opened his eyes to find Changkyun sitting by the bed, next to him.

“Looked like you were having a bad dream.” The boy drew his eyebrows together.

“It’s okay.” Wonho reassured the younger, pushing himself up to sit in bed. “How long was I out?”

“Almost five hours. We’re almost home, by the way.”

Everything that happened in that short period of time felt too real to ever seem like a dream; the last thing Wonho remembered was seeing Hyungwon leave the med bay he was still in, embracing the tranquility that consumed his body after the pink-haired’s method of healing.

“Come on.” The maknae patted him in the leg. “Kihyun hyung made food. Minhyuk hyung will eat everything if we’re not fast enough.”

Wonho was amazed for a moment that his chuckle didn’t make his ribs hurt, but… Hyungwon had happened.

Changkyun sprung across the wagons ahead, waving at him from the kitchen’s door when an abrupt turbulence almost made Wonho fall on his back.

The quaking of the train became stronger, like he never had felt before during his time in there; if Wonho wasn’t aware they were traveling inside a wormhole, he would’ve thought someone — or something — was shaking the machine from the outside.

It didn’t last long, though. All of a sudden, it came to a harsh halt.

The other men came out of the kitchen looking scared to death, just like Wonho.
“MONBEBE!”

The pink-haired time traveler led the way towards Wonho, calling for his A.I.

“Don’t yell at me.” The twinkling likes across the ceiling seemed distraught too. “It wasn’t my fault. Time was disturbed.”

“By what?” Jooheon asked, looking a bit dizzy.

“Oh…” It was still weird the plethora of different tones that A.I.’s voice had. “Well, this is strange.”

Hyungwon looked like he was about to have a stroke.

“What is going on, Monbebe?”

“We’re in the Constants’ universe. But not in their original time period. We’re in the year of 1996.”

“What?” Hyungwon frowned, passing by Wonho as if it would make any difference. “That’s 22 years in the past. What’s the source of this anomaly?”

“Well… Apparently, Wonho.”

Jesus fucking Christ.

“What!” Even Wonho turned his head towards the flickering lights of Monbebe. “I didn’t do anything! I was sleeping!”

“Seems like your sleep was perceived by Time as something important. Humans dream, don’t they?”

“What did you dream of?” Hyungwon jolted in his direction, and Wonho took a step backwards out of instinct. “Wonho-ssi, this is serious. I told you the Constants are powerful beings. Why are we here?”

“I don’t know! I…”

Oh.

Oh, shit.

“Wait a minute.” Kihyun spoke, a bit puzzled. “1996 was the year of… Yes. Wonho. You know.”

Yeah.

“Monbebe, do something to take us out of here.” Hyungwon wandered around like a mad man. “Come on, we can’t stay.”

“I can’t do anything, Hyungwon. The wormholes are closed.”

“We’re stuck in 1996?” Changkyun was in awe.

“I thought you were warned by the others!” Wonho was kind of offended by the way Hyungwon shouted at him. “I advised to not fight back against your memories. Now we have to fix this if we ever want to go back to 2018.”
“Fix what?” Wonho couldn’t think of something besides *that*, and *that* had no repair.

“You have to embrace it.” Hyungwon’s affirmation sounded almost like a threat. “You have to accept your memories. We don’t have much time for that.”

“Why?” It wasn’t like they didn’t were inside a *time* machine.

The time traveler inhaled sharply, massaging his temples.

“What day is it, Monbebe?”

“April 15th, 1996. 9:22 a.m., local Korean time.”

*Shit.*

“I’m sorry, Wonho-ssi. But there is no other way. You’ll have to deal with the events that led to your father’s death.”

The rest of the men in the wagon gave him a concerned look as soon as Wonho let out a dry chuckle.

In the end, maybe that multiverse really fucking hated him the most.

Chapter End Notes

A cliffhanger? More likely than you think ˘\_(ツ)_/˘
Chapter 3 and the gays are getting closer, who’s gonna be the first couple to get together?
Who knows. Well, I know, but dfhhjdkgf

See you next week, kids
Living through the Seo Taiji and Boys’ disbandment

Chapter Notes

i’m so damn nervous about this chapter that i’m posting earlier than usual, shit u not.
anyways how yall been, kids
this is another long ass chapter, and at this point i have no more excuses about writing too much.

now seriously: there’s a scene that can be very triggering by the end of the chapter. if you get to this part and don’t feel well to read, it’s okay. take care of yourself, baby. i wrote this shaking, shit u not again

anyways, enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“you reach for the light. it reaches back.”

Keaton St. James, “dream”

Brushing his fingers for first time against the material of what sheltered him, Wonho felt the asperous surface shaping roots inside his skin, like it was alive. He wanted to yell, but no sound came out his mouth, no matter how ferocious were his efforts.

Now aware of his surroundings, there was never much space for him to move; maybe a few centimeters to one side, but Wonho was already too much of a big boy, he didn’t fit in like he used to.

Yes, he had been there before. Before the fear that sucked the air out of his lungs, before knowing the darkness as it whispered that it had come for him.

That wasn’t right. He was just a kid, shutting his eyes to plunge into another layer of murkiness.

This time, no light had ever reached him.

With more strength than necessary, Wonho took the device off his head only to shove it on Kihyun’s chest.

“Are we still stuck?”

His friend didn’t speak to him, but to the time machine’s A.I.

“Yes.”

Wonho could feel the time traveler’s dissatisfied gaze even before he pushed himself up to sit in bed.
“We’re running out of time, Wonho-ssi.” The pink-haired man stated, as if Wonho wasn’t freaking out about that too.

Since that shitstorm began, five hours had passed as they were still confined in 1996. To try to fix the irregularity that Wonho — apparently — caused, Hyungwon built a very preliminary model of a gadget that induced him into REM sleep, connecting a few wires to different parts of his brain.

To remember everything, or to trap them all for a long time in that place.

“This is the seventh time you entered the REM stage.” Hyungwon continued to rant, in front of the bed he lied down in the med bay. “Your brain won’t endure forever. You are still avoiding your past.”

“Welcome to trauma 101.” Wonho spouted, earning a glare from Kihyun.

“Wonho, seriously.” His best friend sat beside him in bed. “You need to remember before—”

“It happens in here.” He knew, all those years consuming science fiction had told him about a situation like that.

“Let me search through your memories.”

The kind of shit Hyungwon said in the most nonchalant tone in the world would get him into a sanatorium.

“Oh, no.” The black-haired held a protective hand over his head.

The time traveler didn’t take a no for an answer.

“I can lead you in a clearer path towards your memories.”

“I said no. You’re not fucking with my head today.”

Oh boy, how Hyungwon scoffed loudly. His voice quite modulated, though.

“Should I remember that we are stuck in here together? The timeline is being split into so many parts that I can’t even count. I’m walking blindly here. And you are still holding back.”

“Who the fuck gets to decide if I have to remember something?”

“Right now? Time. I’m still trying to—”

“It’s not fucking easy, okay?” The frustration that engulfed Wonho’s body was making him lose the rest of his patience. “Do you think that I repressed that memory for nothing? I don’t want to remember the day my father died. I can’t.”

“And I wish I could offer another option, Wonho-ssi.” The taller man inhaled sharply. “But I can’t. If Time is dragging you to it like this, it must be important.”

“Didn’t you understand what I just said?” His voice got a bit louder. “Everything changed when my father died. He was someone I looked up to. I don’t want this pain, and I’m not gonna stay here discussing this with someone who never had parents.”

Shit.

In other news, Wonho immediately knew he had added another fuck up to the mountain of it that
seemed to be accumulating around him.

“Wonho.”

Kihyun hissed at him, with a glare on his face that conveyed the info that he only remained alive because Hyungwon was in that room.

“Maybe.” Hyungwon faltered a bit, but fixated his gaze on Wonho again. “But I’m doing the best I can with the little I have. I…” Getting some distance from his bed, the pink-haired turned his attention to Kihyun. “I will try to find another way… somehow.”

It’s not like Wonho didn’t want to solve the problem and go back to 2018 like everyone else. Only the thought of being stuck there forever made him want to cry, but his brain had been shoving the remembrances of that day to a very distant corner for too long; there were no roads to lead the way back.

For the time being, the conviction he was going to be murdered by Kihyun somehow was overlooked with the imminent entrance of Shownu.

“All you and Hyungwon do is fight?” His other best friend wasn’t having it. “Like, is that your job? The walls aren’t very thick, you know.”

“You really had to go and say that.” Kihyun’s glower was more powerful than ever.

“I didn’t mean, I just—”

The shorter man cut his defense short by storming out of the room. Meanwhile, Shownu raised an eyebrow at him.

“You’re going to cause a stroke on Kihyun, someday.”

Possibly. Wonho could only sigh.

“I’m so tired of this time travelling bullshit, Shownu.”

“Then accept it, so we can go home. This isn’t Hyungwon’s fault.”

“I know.” For real. He was just… exhausted. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not the one you should start apologizing to.”

More or less an hour later, Wonho asked the A.I. the whereabouts of the time traveler; that machine was too goddamn vast for him to wander around aimlessly.

His usual spot of work, in the heart of the machine, was the place Wonho actually expected he was even before Monbebe told him. Through the small glass window at the top of the door, he spotted the man pacing around as if he was expecting something to happen; maybe a miracle, if Hyungwon believed in something like that.

The awareness of his presence was brought to Hyungwon’s perception by the lights twinkling above the pink-haired’s head, a sign that Monbebe informed him about it.

A few seconds later, the door was unlocked on its own, probably by the A.I. that controlled the train’s entire system.
“Is there anything wrong?” Hyungwon asked, even though Wonho was still at the entry.

Lots of stuff were wrong. Maybe Wonho should do a list to keep a record of it.

“Uh… Can we talk? Or are you…”

Sometimes it was disturbing when Hyungwon kept an unreadable expression on his face.

“Sure.”

Contrary to his expectations, there wasn’t any vexation in the time traveler’s voice. Wonho’s steps towards him were never warier.

And here comes the usual awkward silence that emerged between them as soon as they crossed paths.

“About earlier…”

A slow tilt of Hyungwon’s head made him notice the other man hadn’t taken his eyes off of him.

“Did you change your mind?”

“What?”

For a moment, he completely forgot what was the main cause of their disagreement. And that he went there to apologize.

“Did you come here because you changed your mind?” Hyungwon inquired again. “About letting me search through your memories?”

“Yeah.”

*What? No, no. That was not what I mean, what the fuck.*

“Excellent. Time is blocking me to even reach the fourth dimension…”

A small confession about another assholery behaviour was that Wonho zoned out for a bit, paying no attention to what Hyungwon kept saying.

*Just say you’re sorry, look what you got yourself in, holy sh—*

“Wonho-ssi?” It passed unnoticed how the pink-haired had even got closer to him. “Are you alright?”

His mind was hosting a scream festival amidst the question of why it was so fucking hard to just say he was sorry about…

“Yeah.” Said the liar of the year. Clearing his throat, he had no more fucks to give. “Just do it already.”

The taller man’s hands gracefully rose up towards his face, holding onto each side of it; his sensory memory reminded him of how cold Hyungwon’s fingers regularly were, so he didn’t flinch too much at his touch.

In the brief seconds before his eyes began to glow, drowning in the energy that dwelled inside him, Hyungwon’s direct stare pierced through his soul, and Wonho wished he could say that was an
overstatement about this.

Closing his eyes, Wonho allowed himself to get lost in the alleviating sensation that swamped his chest whenever he was close to the time traveler, so intoxicating it couldn’t even bother the logical side of his brain.

However, the outcome of that interaction wasn’t precisely what they both expected.

Nothing appeared in Wonho’s mind, still like a blank page that couldn’t be filled no matter how hard he tried.

Hyungwon’s shriek as he violently pulled away from him startled Wonho so much he stumbled back a bit.

“What the hell?”

“I can’t.” The man looked shocked beyond words, staring back and forth between his hands and Wonho. “You’re blocking me. How did you…?”

“What?” Wonho regained his balance and took a step forward to, maybe try again, but Hyungwon lurched backwards so fast to the point he fell on his back on the floor.

Pure, blueish static created by the powerful concentration of power that ran wildly through the time traveler’s body; from his hands up to his face, where his skin was shown, the glowing lines involved Hyungwon in vortex of energy that seemed so brutal that it could be burning him alive.

Instinctively, and regardless of all the goddamn warning signs, Wonho moved forward to try to help.

“Stay back!” His strangled shout merged with his screams.

Hyungwon’s throat didn’t hold back the shrieks that came out of his mouth, still trying to fight back against whatever that was.

A pang of guilty weirdly hit Wonho’s chest, quite aware that he was holding his breath while watching that horrifying scene.

As if he had been the cause of it.

I...

No.

“MONBEBE!” Wonho shouted at the ceiling. “Do something!”

The wavering lights weren’t of much help that time.

“He’s having a seizure. Hyungwon never experienced this before. There’s nothing I can do.”

Hyungwon’s cry echoing across the room made him shudder.

Did I...

Nope. That wasn’t conceivable.

Wonho had to remind himself of breathing again, panting in the brink of a breakdown. Not his
moment, not his time — above all, he knew.

The feeling of impotence was eating him alive so badly that he didn’t notice the other presences in the room.

“What the…”

Changkyun, Kihyun and Minhyuk stared at that scene as frightened to death as Wonho.

They couldn’t utter a word, nor look away from Hyungwon’s battle against his own body; his back arched while he writhed in agony, but once it hit the floor completely, all that deadly brightness vanished in the blink of an eye.

“What the hell is happening?” Kihyun turned his head to speak to Wonho, as if the latter had any clue.

“I… We…”

Any explanation Wonho could offer was pointless.

The brief silence that ensued the conclusion of Hyungwon’s seizure came to an end when they heard him wailing on the floor, sobbing desperately with his arms around himself.

Minhyuk was the first to run towards the man, ignoring the latter’s murmurs about staying away from him. The blond’s arms rapidly surrounded the time traveler’s torso, pulling him closer to his chest.

“Shhh, you’re safe now.” Minhyuk tenderly voiced it, trying to calm him down. “You’re okay now, Hyungwon-ah.”

Hyungwon cried even harder, letting out tears that fell on the floor only to make Wonho’s chest ache out of… a feeling he couldn’t pinpoint.

As Changkyun went to approach the time traveler on the floor, Kihyun lost the remaining tolerance he miraculously maintained so far.

“What the fuck did you do to him?”

“Nothing!” Wonho defended himself. “He tried to search my memories and then… This.”

Not really convinced of that, Kihyun left him behind to join the other men gathering around Hyungwon, on the floor.

*What the fuck was wrong with me?*

The area where the train had made its stop was an old abandoned warehouse, for all Wonho could see from the windows of the wagons and the vertical ones on the doors. Perhaps, it was only a matter of time before someone from that year to find them. Not that he cared about it, or it made any difference.

After everything that went down on the heart of the machine, Wonho locked himself in one of the three rooms Hyungwon built for them; his intelligence had to be able to aid him, somehow, but as much as he thought of possibilities and physical disturbances in the brain that could have caused Hyungwon’s seizure, nothing could explain if that truly was the effect of his touch on his face.
Sitting over a comforter on the floor, an abrupt shift in his position was automatic as he heard the door being unlocked.

“For fuck’s sake.”

Minhyuk leaned against the door with a sympathetic smile. In any other situation, he’d appreciate the man’s concern, but his mind couldn’t bear anything at that moment.

“I’m your roommate for the time being.”

Minhyuk only needed a couple of steps to reach Wonho’s side.

“Not now, Minhyuk.”

“It’s not your fault, hyung.”

“Quit this sensing emotion bullshit.” He didn’t mean to be rude, but his mind was overwhelmed…

The list of people he had to apologize to only got bigger.

“I won’t, because you’re not the boss of me. And everything is alright now.”

A meticulous pause was necessary for Wonho’s next question.

“Where… is he?”

“In his room.” Something in the way Minhyuk looked at him made Wonho feel too exposed. “If you feel like you should go, then go.”

The reason was unknown, but the older man chuckled.

“This is why I shouldn’t be friends with psychics.”

A hesitation took over his body for a couple of times before Wonho grabbed the handle of the control room, strolling more prudently than necessary in the direction of Hyungwon’s private area.

Strangely, the door of his personal room was wide open — the time traveler had the habit of always keeping it locked whenever he was in there, so that was unusual.

Careful steps came to a halt once Wonho got to the threshold, unsure of what to do next.

Surrounded by innumerable books and pieces of electronic devices, Hyungwon slept in fetal position on the floor, without a single comforter or pillow. It passed unnoticed to Wonho the first time he went there, after the events in Germany, but even though the place very spacious, there wasn’t even a bed in there.

In such different light, none of the walls Hyungwon built to protect himself were there.

As if he had sensed his existence — if that was something he could do, who knows — the time traveler blinked a few times before stretching his limbs, moving his upper body to sit up.

For a moment, the long messy strands of his pink hair wholly covered his eyes, so the man had to push his hair back. What Wonho didn’t expect was to see that look as Hyungwon saw him standing there.
Hyungwon was scared.

*Of me?*

“Is…” The man on the floor spoke slowly. “Is there anything wrong?”

*How many times would he make that damn question, especially after what he went through earlier?*

Wonho buried his nails in his palms, struggling to gather his thoughts.

“Was it me? Because you… in my head…”

“I think so.”

Another pang of guilty.

“But it wasn’t your fault. Time must’ve realized I was trying to interfere and caused such extreme reaction.”

“What we do now?” Wonho changed the subject. “Are we gonna get stuck here until Time or whatever thing decides to let us go?”

Standing up with a bit of exertion, Hyungwon hid his hands on the pocket of his trousers.

“I’m really sorry, Wonho-ssi. But we have to go there, tonight.”

The weariness was, of course, not pleasant, but it was still better than doing nothing, left alone with his thoughts. That was the last place he needed to go right in that moment.

The whole thing that was happening made Kihyun feel so weak and useless, and he hated it with every centimeter of his body.

“Hyung, please stop cleaning that spot.” Jooheon pleaded from the kitchen’s table. “It’s gone. The floor is clean.”

Grabbing the three cleaning supplies he bought a while ago and forced Hyungwon to keep it, because “the machine cleans the spaces on its own” was horseshit that he didn’t need, mainly because finding another coping mechanism was hard.

“I’m going to clean the rooms now.”

As Kihyun passed by, Jooheon grabbed his wrist.

“You already did. Sit down, hyung.”

He could always feel when Jooheon was about to bring him into a serious conversation, and that was one of those moments.

“What did you do during the years I was, like, dead?”

Such issue was imminent, but the older man still wanted to run away from it.
“Nothing much.” Considering it was going to be a tough talk, Kihyun put the cleaning supplies on
the table and took off the rubber gloves. “I kinda… well…” A chuckle out of anxiousness was let
out, while he fixated his gaze on his hands. “Dropped out of college and kept working on the pawn
shop. I still don’t remember… some details or stuff about how I lived there.”

“Do you still like Photography?”

Jooheon’s question surprised him. He hadn’t thought about it; what he still liked, or stopped to.

“I think so.”

“Then do it again. Taking pictures always made you so happy, hyung. I know that you’re on a
complete different path, but at least… as a hobby. You’re going to lose your shit like this.”

“When was your time…” Kihyun inhaled sharply, trying to send the memories of the car accident
away. “In those years after I died… you didn’t stop your life like I did, right?”

Something about the way that his friend looked at him made Kihyun want to cry; the grief they
both lived had sharp claws, and sometimes it felt like it didn’t end. It did, and Jooheon was there,
they were alive, they were together. Until the end.

“I kept going… life was never that much for me, you know that. I lived that life wanting a
revelation, but at some point I just accepted that I was just another ordinary man in this world. I
would be lying if I said that sometimes I think it was better than this.”

Kihyun was unexpectedly befuddled.

“Why?”

The man offered him a tired gaze.

“I was just a hacker three months ago. Then I heard I’m supposed to do something that will change
the freaking world. I don’t want this kind of responsibility. I wanna live a life just like everybody
else.”

“Jooheonnie.” Kihyun take a hold of his friend’s hands, firmly. “Remember you’re not alone. And
it’s okay to not want to do what they tell you to. But, as we are experiencing it right now, the
universe always finds a way to lead you to it. You can go slow, though. Two years, twenty years.
Take all the time you need. You can do a lot of other stuff too, so you’re not bound only to this
major event in your life. This process, right now, to rediscover ourselves is a messy one. God,
we’re all going through a lot. But we can go down this road together. Nothing will separate us
again.”

The younger nodded, looking away with watering eyes.

“Piglet baby, don’t cry.”

“Don’t call me that!” Jooheon quickly glared at him. “You promised to never call me that again!”

Kihyun snorted so hard he threw his head backwards.
“Hyung.”

Shownu was trying to ignore Minhyuk’s call for the sake of a brief moment of peace, that was about to be broken by the shenanigans his friend was going to drop on him.


“What?”

Lying over the comfort on one of the rooms, the one he previously shared with Kihyun, Shownu bolted forward to sit up and grant attention to Minhyuk, who sat cross-legged next to him.

“Do you think there’s something between Jooheon and Kihyunnie?”

For sure, Shownu didn’t see that one coming. The possibility of such thing never crossed his mind before.

“I don’t know. Why do you ask?”

Minhyuk dragged himself closer to the older, as if he was about to whisper a secret.

“A few minutes ago, I saw them holding hands in the kitchen. They looked happy, laughing and…”

“You hold hands with everyone all the time, Minhyuk. That doesn’t have to mean something.”

“Then why are you giving me his weird vibe?”

Shownu’s body became too stiff even before he realized that.

“Don’t, Lee Minhyuk.”

His younger friend chuckled.

“You know I can’t read you well. Stop whining.”

“Why are you concerned about that, by the way?”

Those few words sent the blond man into a contemplative state.

“Wait.” The feeling that Minhyuk practically threw over him with his aura hinted something. “Do you like… Kihyun… or Jooheon?”

“God, no, Kihyun no. Pretty sure he’s my platonic other half. So…” He suddenly pointed a defensive finger at Shownu. “He is cute, okay? He has those dimples and he tries to look cool sometimes, but he’s just too adorable for that. But I don’t think he’s comfortable around me.”

“What do you feel when you’re next to him? Sensorial wise.”

“I get mixed feelings. It’s hard to be sure of something.” Minhyuk sighed deeply, pouting. “I probably should forget about it. If he and Kihyunnie are together, I’m okay with it. Anyways, I’m still kinda afraid because of… that and…” Another sigh, but more calm. “I’m gonna go to Changkyun now. God knows what he’s doing out there.”

As his blond friend strolled out of the room, Shownu considered that possibility and, when he thought about it, it kind of made sense. Kihyun died for that boy before, for fuck’s sake.
Then why he didn’t say anything about it? Perhaps Shownu read him completely wrong and missed this important subject. Perhaps, the space he had in the man’s life wasn’t as big as he had imagined.

Kihyun was free to date whoever he wanted to, anyway.

With Minhyuk gone, he finally could go back to his desired tranquil rest.

Seconds later, he moved to sit up on the comforter again.

“They don’t seem close like that.” Shownu spoke to himself. “Besides, why would he hide it? Yeah, yeah. Maybe.”

Shownu lied down on the comforter once again, but couldn’t get any sleep no matter how hard he tried.

_Goddamnit, Minhyuk._

Maybe out of curiosity and lack of proper sleep, he wandered around the train; all the others seemed to be in their rooms, so you can imagine that it was the only silent moment he could ever get so far.

The door of the kitchen was open, drawing him in with the smell of good food being prepared. He also knew what it meant; from the entrance, he could see the Kihyun’s back as he looked quite focused on chopping some vegetables.

Nothing much later, Shownu noticed the younger was mumbling something to himself; a song he didn’t know, but already like the melody.

To not scare the man, Shownu lightly knocked on the already open door.

Looking over his shoulder briefly, Kihyun didn’t say anything about it.

“Are you done stress cleaning?” The older asked, ambling to sit on one of the table chairs, in front of the counter.

“For now.” Still not facing him, Kihyun paused his food preparation for a minute. “Had a good talk with Jooheonnie earlier.”

_Yes… That._

Shownu cleared his throat before continuing the conversation.

“Back then… in the other world. Did you two…”

A frown on his face could be seen as soon as Kihyun twirled to gaze at him.

“We what?” His eyes went round a second later. _‘Oh. God, no. He was my best friend since high school. I mean, he is my best friend. I’m not claiming Wonho right now._”

“What about me?” Shownu’s brain condemned that action right away.

“What?”
"I thought we were close."

He had to fight the urge to smile as soon as Kihyun broke into laughter.

"We are." Probably thinking he was being silly as usual, the younger turned around to focus on his food again. "Why? Are you jealous?"

"Yes."

The knife in Kihyun’s hand made a final chop on a vegetable until it came to an abrupt halt, and the younger man stood there as if he was frozen in time.

It would be better if he had said that in a playful tone, maybe he shouldn’t even had said anything.

It wasn’t jealousy. Just the Minhyuk thing with Jooheon getting under his skin.

"Gonna check on the boys." Shownu told him, in the most awkward tone he had ever directed at Kihyun. "See you later, nerd."

---

Jooheon found the maknae where he spent most of his time in that train, as well as the kitchen. The boy took a liking for chatting for hours with the machine’s A.I., as if she was a real person he was just hanging out with.

That was the most Changkyun thing ever. A part of him was glad to still recognize a few parts of his friend.

Beside him, scrolling frantically through his phone, Minhyuk seemed completely disconnected from that chat.

"So, like, I think it’s not that machines think we are totally a bunch of dumbasses…"

The maknae’s speech was interrupted by Monbebe.

"We do. But humans are pretty entertaining."

Changkyun chuckled, still unaware of Jooheon’s presence.

"You know, this fear of technological singularity says a lot more about us than about machines. Artificial intelligences are kinda molded, at least at first, to be what they are by the person that created them. People be like ‘oh fuck, killer robots is coming blah blah blah’, but they never check themselves? Any superior intelligence would know that violence is a dumb thing. There is so much more to be seen, take a chill pill my dudes. By the way, Hyungwon created you, right?"

"Yes."

"See! Hyungwon is the nicest person in the world. I’m sure you learned lots from him on how not to become evil."

"You could say so. I can comprehend human emotions to recognize patterns of speech and body language. Most of this information was acquired by observing Hyungwon’s behavior, especially during his most difficult periods. At first, it confused me how could he show compassion towards
humans who tried to harm him. It didn’t match with the human instinct to retaliate once attacked, even if only for survival purposes. However, I’ve come to understand that his nature was not very common among the rest of humans I’ve studied. Never once he made a decision that could harm others if he could offer his compassion first. I don’t have feelings, but I find his attitude of not treating me just like a machine pretty decent. And idiotic.”

Once in a while, Jooheon wondered how Hyungwon ended up being the person he was, but understood the man’s decision to not share his story with them yet. He was someone Jooheon subconsciously began looking up to, which made his life a lot harder because to get even a little close to Hyungwon’s standards, seemed too much hard work.

Maybe his past didn’t matter, in the end. If Jooheon still believed in his world, it was because of him. The time traveler’s voice was always soft and warm every time he spoke with him, as if he was the most important person in the world. Once again as an enigma, Hyungwon always tried his best, so Jooheon needed to do the same.

“Hey, hyung!”

Changkyun’s shout pulled Jooheon out of his reveries, finishing his stroll towards the boy and Minhyuk.

Strands of blond hair flew in the hair, and Jooheon was greeted by the world’s brightest smile ever.

“Hey.” The older quickly dragged down him by the wrist, to sit down with him and Changkyun.

Probably a bad move, but Jooheon pulled his arm away from Minhyuk as fast as he could, even if that was the last thing he truly wanted to do. The sooner he trained himself to not feel flustered around the older man, the better.

This feeling will pass. Don’t mess this up.

“Kyun.” He leaned forward a bit to gaze at his best friend, and to avoid Minhyuk’s reaction to that action of his. “How are your parents doing?”

“They’re fine.” Changkyun gave him a thumbs up, pulling the hood of his sweater over his head. “Mom said she will come back whenever she can, and dad said I should move back home. Do you wanna come with me? It’s a huge ass apartment.”

“Still in Itaewon, with those mad rich people?”

“Yep. And it’s close to Wonho hyung’s hotel. Really far from Minhyuk, though.”

On his peripheral vision, he saw the blond smile at the maknae.

“It’s okay, Kkukkung.” Now that he stared at both of his friends, Minhyuk displayed another sweet smile.

Jooheon felt his insides melting when, this time, the man grabbed his hand.

“I can visit you and Kyun a lot though!”

Panicking was one of his finest moments? Absolutely not, and Jooheon wasn’t proud of it. And yet, he hastily pulled his hand away from Minhyuk’s touch, before such thing could start making Jooheon feel things he shouldn’t.
The blond slowly looked down at the palm of his own hand, as if he wasn’t sure it was really there. In the background, Changkyun spoke something about how his parents wanted him to live well, but Jooheon could only pay attention to the heartbroken expression in Minhyuk’s face.

Before he could say anything, the older jumped off his seat and tromped across the wagon, disappearing inside the train.

This isn’t working.

“So.” Changkyun’s voice suddenly became louder again. “You coming? Please?”

“Okay.” Jooheon knew he was going to have a hard time because of that decision, but it didn’t matter right now. “Kyun. Can I ask you something?”

The boy’s eyes suddenly widened.

“Oh ho. We having a moment here? This is so sad. Monbebe, play Zutter by GD&TOP.”

The song actually blasted across the wagons in the very next second, and Jooheon couldn’t hold back a cackle.

“Seriously, boy.” The sound was cut off right after that. Maybe that A.I. really understood human emotions. “You and Minhyuk ever… I mean, I don’t know if he is…”

“Gay?” Changkyun arched an eyebrow at him. “Hella. Boys and girls died for him in school, but he didn’t care much about it. And no, we never had anything. YIKES. Uh, yikes. Only Kwon Jiyong owns this body. Why the question?”

Of course he lied to one of his best friend’s face.

“Nothing. Just wanted to know more about him, and you…”

Changkyun promptly pursed his lips into a smile, one of those who let it show his dimples.

“I told you and the other hyungs that you can ask me anything. I didn’t do much back then, in my other life. Stuff I did: hanging out with Minhyuk and study. Technically, I already have a degree in Physics. Not really counts in here though. I’m just the same old Changkyun that you all love and want to protect at all costs.”

Jesus Christ, only that boy could make Jooheon forget he felt so burdened by everything.

Not being able to hold back a chuckle, Jooheon leaned forward to rub his face with his hands. Too many stuff to deal was going to be the death of him.

“What in the name of our Lord and savior Tan France do you think you’re doing?”

That’s how Minhyuk greeted him as soon as he stepped out of the control room, ready to face the year of 1996 in South Korea.

“What do you mean?”
Pinching his nose, the blond man sighed, pretty frustrated.

“We are in 1996, Hyungwon. You’re looking too fine. You gotta blend in.”

Footsteps approached them, at the main wagon, and Hyungwon noticed the rest of the Constants arriving.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake.” Minhyuk jumped off the bench to scrutinize Wonho. “You nerds never saw a damn time travel movie? You can’t wear your normal clothes in the past.”

“He’s right.” Shownu agreed, taking a seat on one of the benches next to Hyungwon, pointing at the latter. “Especially the hair.”

To be honest, Hyungwon wasn’t a big fan of travelling to the 20th century. He only had to go there once, because he thought he could get information on The Eye.

“Here.”

The time traveler swiftly caught the black bucket hat Jooheon threw at him, taken from Changkyun’s backpack.


To put in words how he felt wearing those uncommon garments was a difficult task.

The reason why Hyungwon wore suits the most was because it was an almost timeless fashion trend in the majority of the universes he visited, including that one. He didn’t have the time to think about it more than necessary.

“I feel…” Hyungwon looked down at himself, wearing only a black tee and straight leg jeans with a belt around it, borrowed from Minhyuk — when did he begin to bring clothes inside the train was a mystery to the time traveler. “Strange.”

“I’m gonna let you keep those brown shoes because they’re nothing much. Try to remember that you seem like a dude in his 20s, so act and look like it.”

A knock on the door of his personal room indicated that Wonho was done changing his clothes.

“Unlock.”

The man swiftly entered the place after his voice command.

“Are you happy now?”

Now without his black leather jacket and turtleneck, Wonho was dressed in a white t-shirt and jeans similar to Hyungwon’s, but looked a lot tighter on him.

He seemed bothered earlier, mostly because Minhyuk was right, but as soon as he laid eyes on Hyungwon, Wonho bursted into laughter.

“I—” The Constant tried to talk, but chuckled hard again. “Never thought that seeing you like this would be so funny.”
“He looks cool for the 90s.” Minhyuk came into his defense. “And yes, I’m happy now.”

The blond began to give some advices that Hyungwon tried to pay attention to, but the relentless gaze of Wonho on him was very distracting.

Some of the boys also laughed as they saw him, but Hyungwon didn’t mind. The severity of the path they were about to walk scared him, so he could only imagine what Wonho must have been feeling.

“Listen up.” Hyungwon spoke loud and clear. “No one is allowed to leave the train, unless if it is an emergency. Which I hope there are none. Please take care of my machine while I’m gone.”

“We can’t even go down the street?” Changkyun pouted.

“No. All of you were already born at this point. Don’t mess with your own timelines.”

Aside from Wonho, who leaned on one shoulder against the wall near the door, all the others nodded.

“Monbebe.”

“Yes?”

“The 2IC protocol is activated as soon as we step out of the train. They’re only allowed to leave if he approves.”

“Protocol confirmed.”

The Constants seemed quite puzzled.

“What the hell is a 2IC?” Minhyuk asked, with his arms crossed over his chest.

Kihyun answered before he could have the chance.

“Second in command.”

“Yes.” Hyungwon smiled at them to try to cheer them up. “It’s Shownu.”

It did not help at all.

“What?” Hyungwon actually took a step backwards as Kihyun let out his frustration. “WHY?”

Hyungwon tried to calm him down, but seemed a hard task.

“His leadership skills are the strongest among the six of you.”


The time traveler couldn’t help but to smile. Kihyun’s competitiveness was unstoppable, and most of the time was quite endearing.

“There goes the sulky shark!” Shownu shouted and laughed at the same time, as he watched Kihyun walk towards the inner wagons.

A lot more time than Hyungwon perceived was used to stare at the rest of the boys walking away,
chatting fervently with each other. Even Kihyun’s yell, coming from a distant wagon, reached Hyungwon’s ears.

But that was the only beauty in that scenario, and what they had to face would change Wonho forever.

Hyungwon hoped it was for the best.

His first action as soon as they got back into the time machine was to slap Minhyuk really hard.

The wind of that night of 1996 was almost piercing through his skin; the clothes they wore were too thin to even do a proper job to warm them up, so Minhyuk would never again be in charge of picking what they were going to wear.

Hyungwon wasn’t helping, too.

“I swear to God, Hyungwon. I will leave you behind.”

“We can walk!” Stepping backwards even more, Hyungwon hit the back of his feet on the cemented sidewalk. “Monbebe said it’s a 35-minute walk. If my watch wasn’t malfunctioning because of this situation… We can walk!”

“Not with this fucking weather!” Wonho wasn’t about to freeze just because of childishness. “Get in the fucking car, Hyungwon.”

How they obtained a vehicle in that year and time? Of course that was stolen. The pink-haired time traveler made him promise he’d give it back, though.

With uncertainty, Hyungwon slowly walked towards the passenger seat, as if the goddamn vehicle was about to eat him alive.

After a solid minute, he finally gave in and entered; rolling his eyes, Wonho moved to the other side so they could finally go to face his worst fucking nightmare. What a nice ride, right?

It was quite enjoyable seeing Hyungwon squirming, though, clasp his seat belt as if his life depended on it.

What a contrast.

Someone whom Wonho had seen literally moving worlds and holding the weight of a building on his shoulders, happened to be terrified of car rides.

“Stop being ridiculous.” Wonho sneered, as they stopped at a red light.

“No.” His voice was actually trembling, eyes shut down. “It’s insanity.”

“Why? People been driving cars for a long time.”

That finally made Hyungwon turned his head towards him, giving him a dirty look.

“Human beings aren’t supposed to drive vehicles!” With that bucket hat covering his pink hair, he
almost seemed like an ordinary person. “Humans are volatile, and reckless! You could crash this car against that wall if you wanted. Just wait until the driverless cars become popular in your world, and you will know why I feel like this. Artificial intelligence is trustworthy. If your world hadn’t burned the Library of Alexandria, by this time your people would be already colonizing other planets. But no, they decided to set it on fire and make cars that do not respond to your voice commands. This is why other civilizations think that humans aren’t a species made to last.”

That was the fastest Hyungwon had ever spoken and, while observing the vehement outraged expressions on his face, Wonho felt the urge to laugh growing in his body, letting it all out as soon as the time traveler was done.

“Why are you laughing?” Hyungwon seemed genuinely curious. “I’m serious about it.”

The traffic signal displayed a green light, so Wonho had to tone his chuckles to focus on driving.

“Anything you say with that hat is fucking hilarious. Are you done ranting?”

The man’s face fell into an embarrassed appearance. Wonho looked away to focus on the road.

“I’m sorry.” Hyungwon murmured, holding his seat belt again. “I just want this world to be the best that it can be.”

They were still 15 minutes away from his old house, but Wonho could already feel the tension trying to take over his body, so he tried to use Hyungwon as a diversion.

“And why is that?” Wonho asked.

“Because you are in here.”

His eyes dropped to the steering wheel, not really interested of what his hands did on it. A glance on his wristwatch informed him it was already past 11:00 p.m.

“All of you, here. Together.” Hyungwon continued, and Wonho pretended his stomach didn’t weirdly drop. “It doesn’t happen often in the multiverse. I don’t want other civilizations to look down on you.”

Right.

The silence that ensued in that car for the next 10 minutes wasn’t so bad, and Wonho finally gathered courage to ask what he needed to know about earlier.

“How bad was it?”

Hyungwon didn’t demand the topic of the question, nor wavered before responding.

“I’ve had worse.”

“I…” Still in the quest of trying to apologize, Wonho thought he was in the right path, in the right moment.

Not really.

“It’s alright.” The time traveler soothed the conversation. “I survived, like always.”

Something that could almost be disregarded in his voice was the somber tone that his last sentences carried. Almost if he didn’t enjoy such thing.
The inevitable grabbed his attention as they approached his childhood house.

They were there. His father, still alive, was there.

After his dad die, his mother decided it was better for them to leave to avoid painful memories.

“Wonho-ssi.”

Hyungwon pushed himself up in the seat as he parked the car on the other side of the street.

“I know you are a smart person. Even though I can’t relate to an issue like this, I hope you don’t do anything that can endanger yourself, because of your emotional relationships. I am sorry, again, that you have to experience this. I did everything I could to avoid such scenario.”

Tidal waves of anxiety flooded Wonho’s body again, at full force at every single one of Hyungwon’s words. How could one be prepared to witness a parent being killed? Time or whatever force in the universe didn’t have the right to force him to do that. However, if they got stuck in 1996 for a long time, maybe forever, Wonho could only blame himself for damaging the others just because of his repressed childhood memories.

Inhaling sharply a lot of times, he followed Hyungwon’s movement and got out of the car.

“What about me?”

“What?”

“I thought we were close.”

“We are. Why? Are you jealous?”

“Yes.”

Kihyun was fully convinced that all that stress, in such short period of time, was messing with his head for him to not be able to forget a simple talk, from hours ago.

That was the seventh time he read the same page of a textbook, because he would never find peace until getting his PhD.

Why the fuck did Shownu had to say a thing like that in such an easy manner? Kihyun was cutting vegetables, for all he knew that could’ve costed him a whole finger because of such distraction.

Yes. That’s all it was. A distraction.

Maybe it was just his subconscious, begging him to take a break and sleep, but Kihyun already tried that and it didn’t work.

Sitting cross-legged in the room he had shared with Shownu before, Kihyun had a few textbooks scattered in front of him on the floor, alongside two notebooks that aided him in the mission of making quantum mechanics his bitch.
The door being unlocked was a bad omen.

“Hey, nerd.”

The distraction himself.

*It didn’t mean anything. It doesn’t mean anything. Stop overthinking a silly matter, Yoo Kihyun. You have a career to focus on.*

The younger man acknowledged his presence with a hum, expecting that it was enough for him not to be bothered.

Of course not.

“What are you doing, nerd?” Shownu calmly sat on the floor next to him, peeping on his books over Kihyun’s shoulder.

*Be cool. Be cool.*

“Studying.”

“Did you bring homework to a trip to another universe? It would be unbelievable it I didn’t know you.”

“I have to get my PhD as quickly as possible, so yes, this fucking nerd brought his books to a time machine.”

He didn’t mean to snap at Shownu like that.

*Why can’t I do anything right?*

“Are you still mad because of the second in command thing?”

What an oblivious man.

“I was never mad about it. Hyungwon is right. I’m just tired.”

“Then stop that.”

“Didn’t you hear what I say?” Kihyun turned around to face him. “I need this. Wonho got his PhD two years ago. I can’t stay behind any longer.”

Have you ever had one of those moments where you and a person didn’t say anything to each other, but it felt like everything you needed to hear was spoken?

That’s what he made Kihyun feel in that moment.

That’s why he was a goddamn distraction.

“Comparing yourself to others will be your undoing.” Shownu said it anyway. “You’re doing just fine.”

“Why do you say things so easily?”

Yes. As expected, Kihyun regretted it in the very next second.

“I like to be straightforward.” The younger finally looked away, but Shownu wasn’t finished.
“Especially when it’s about you.”

“Why?” He murmured, staring at the pencil in his hand.

“Because you are you.”

Well, that wasn’t very enlightening.

“What?” Kihyun looked up his eyes again.

Without even batting an eyelash, Shownu smiled as if he knew all the secrets in the world.

**Distraction. Distraction. Distraction.**

“You are a small ball of rage and affection, at the same time. Your duality lingers on my senses like smoke leaving a scent on someone’s clothes. You care so deeply about every damn thing, and never expect anything in exchange for your tenderness. But you explode a lot of times, and I’m concerned that it happens because you bottle feelings up to prioritize other people. You are you, this version of you. The only one I’m interested in.”

Fuck.

*Might as well just die.*

“I—I—” He stammered just like an idiot. Shownu didn’t look away for a second. “I’m gonna—”

Kihyun was half ready to get up when a yank pulled him down again.

“Sleep. I know.”

“Stop this…” Shownu’s hand on his wrist distracted him for a moment. “…Sensing thing.”

“Stop drawing me in.”

“Stop being a distraction.”

How many times can one person fuck up in less than 10 minutes? Could have he broken a fucking world record?

But the older’s fingers wrapped around his wrist were the softest thing, and Kihyun was a weak man.

“Am I?” Shownu’s mellow voice gave him the shivers.

Maybe he shouldn’t have said anything. Maybe he should have cut the talk short in the very moment the older man sat behind him to check on his activities.

Maybe he shouldn’t have pulled his wrist away from Shownu only to grab his face and kiss him.

Did he dare to risk?

The certain rupture of many things between them lasted less than a few seconds, but Kihyun would be lying if he said he regretted it.

With the realization of what he just had done, the younger began to panic.

“Shit, oh my god, I shouldn’t—”
There was some art in the way Shownu shifted on the floor faster than Kihyun’s eyes could keep up with, to wrap a hand around his waist and bring his lips to crash against his again.

Another branch of art one could say Shownu was very acquainted with was how to make Kihyun yearn for someone like he hadn’t done it in a long time.

Honestly, it could’ve been his causa mortis; death by Son Hyunwoo.

It was almost as if they had already done that before; they knew each other’s paces, so the second time they kissed, they knew it was better to slow down.

This would’ve kept going if Shownu’s hands on his hips hadn’t now fully wrapped around his waist, easily dragging Kihyun to sit on his lap, and, boy… he did straddle him like it was the most ordinary thing in the world.

Chests pressed against each other, Kihyun let his hands wander around the older’s back, swiftly moving towards the back of his neck as Shownu slid his tongue inside his mouth.

Kihyun might have moaned, but he’d never admit that.

An urge to pull away from that kiss arose again.

“Shownu…” They were both gasping for air, and the way the older’s hand slid along his thighs while staring at him didn’t make things easier. “We should stop. This… Fuck, I shouldn’t have… Oh my god… I don’t like one time things. That’s—”

“You…” From that angle, Kihyun felt like his prey. Holy fuck. “You are the smartest and dumbest man I’ve ever met. Do I have to make a drawing?”

He didn’t know what to say. Should he be offended or flattered?

“I told you I like to be straightforward.” His hands shifted up to his waist again, but with a gentler touch. “I don’t like misunderstandings. It’s been a while, and I don’t know what is this, but you fit in my arms so perfectly I can’t stop wanting you.”

*What.*

*The.*

*Fuckity.*

*Fuck.*

His heart was thumping so fast Kihyun could’ve died again. He felt the immediate need to look away, to anywhere but Shownu’s face.

Then Kihyun looked at his hands on his shoulders, way too small compared to Shownu’s entire figure. He didn’t know why, but it was something that made him smile.

“What if the universe doesn’t want this and things goes bad?” A random thing to say, but their situation was comprehensible. “Us. Like this. What if—”

Pretty sure he was going to have a heart attack by the end of that trip.

Shutting him down with a sloppy kiss, Shownu pushed his textbooks out of the way to lay him on his back.
The next attack came in the form of an alluring voice, followed by a smile.

“Fuck the universe, Kihyun.”

“My textbooks!” Another random topic, but it was needed. “They’re fucking expensive, you know?!”

“Really?” Shownu pushed himself up a bit to laugh at him. “We’re making out and you’re worried about some books?”

“Fucking expensive ones!”

Moving just as fast as he had done it before, the older brought his upper body down again, face only a few centimeters from his. Gently, he really pulled Kihyun’s small specs from his face.

“Let’s sleep. My nerd is tired.”

Maybe the universe should really just mind their fucking business.

_________________________________________

15 minutes.

That was how long it would take for Wonho to have to witness his father’s death if no single thing about that house, that moment, brought back his suppressed memories.

Nothing, absolutely fucking nothing came to his mind no matter how hard he tried.

His house wasn’t completely in the dark. What used to be his parents’ bedroom had lights turned on, and maybe that was the last place his father ever was.

A good thing, he had to admit, was that Hyungwon was composed.

He didn’t force Wonho into doing anything right away; when he asked if they could go back to the car for at least minutes before it happens — which the time traveler knew when it was, for some reason — Hyungwon complied in a heartbeat.

“Can you do that thing?” Wonho asked him, who sat in the passenger seat. “Where you, you know, make me calm?”

The time traveler frowned.

“What are you talking about?”

“You know. Like, your power?” Jesus, he really said power like some super hero shit. “You make people calm when you’re next to them.”

“I do?” It seemed like a revelation to him.

“You didn’t know?”

“No.”

“Well, you do. I need it right now. This is the only favor I will ever ask.”
Hyungwon seemed hesitant.

“Sure. How do I…” He really had no idea he was capable of doing that. “Extend your arms in my direction.”

“Are you sure?”

“No.” Hyungwon looked at him quite discouraged. “I never did this before… consciously.”

Well, Wonho was willing to try anything to feel less like he was about to cry or pass out. Or both. What sort of surprised him was how Hyungwon seemed a bit afraid of it.

His hands brushed against the back of his forearms first, testing the waters. When he felt confident enough, the pink-haired man wrapped his gelid fingers around them, and Wonho felt compelled to do the same.

In that moment, Hyungwon’s gaze wasn’t directed at him. He diligently studied the little movements his own hands made on Wonho’s arm, as if he was afraid of hurting him. Or getting hurt, if that incident earlier could be proof of it.

His face was almost covered amidst the darkness of the night, but suddenly raising his head, Hyungwon watched every single one of his expressions. It felt like he was under a microscope.

At first, the sensation that Wonho sought emerged in a shy manner, like it was only beginning to recognize him. It grew up fast into an upsurge of warmth and serenity, flowing inside his body seeming alike to the energy within Hyungwon.

Not much of a longer process, though.

Hyungwon pulled away first, with a concerned mien.

“Did it work?”

How clueless a being like him could be about himself?

“Yeah.” Wonho quickly cleared his throat. “Thanks.”

“Wonho-ssi…” The somber tone in his voice told everything.

“Let’s go.”

“Remember what I said to you.”

Hyungwon could jump over a fence way better than Wonho thought, and so they made their way towards the garden in the backyard.

His house was bigger than the ordinary ones, even though that was a really expensive neighborhood in the 90s — his father did something related to politics, and his mother was the heir of an important hotel chain. They lived pretty well.

Once they reached the back door, Hyungwon stopped him.
“I know, Hyungwon.”

“Don’t try to save him. It already happened. It’s a fixed point in your timeline. The consequences could be horrible not only for you, but for the other boys too.”

That was being a day of really difficult tasks.

However, that was his chance to get back home, so Wonho drew in another sharp breath to get ready.

As if the time traveler was in a scene completely separated from what Wonho lived, Hyungwon broke down the door only with a bump of his shoulder.

“What the hell? I know where’s the spare key.”

“Come on.” The time traveler beckoned with his head towards the inside of the house.

Everything felt familiar and foreign to Wonho.

He remembered that living room in which he played with his toys and the kitchen he casually saw his mother cooking something for him, when she had the time. The wooden floor didn’t creak at all, but somehow Wonho was pretty sure it did.

What he couldn’t remember was where he was that day. The darkness in which his dreams hurled him in gave no clues.

Hyungwon, on the other hand, ambled around the house as if he had been there countless times.

When he reached the staircase, he came to a halt.

“Wonho-ssi.” It was already getting common the way he called his name with such sadness. “You can’t meet yourself, or your mother. Do as I ask just this time.”

According to Hyungwon’s accountings, the death of his father would be occurring in 3 minutes.

Was the burglar already on the first floor when they got there? Or he was somewhere, hidden inside the house looking for an opportunity?

At the top of the stairs, Hyungwon put a finger over his own lips, signaling for him to keep it quiet.

If Wonho remembered correctly, his parents’ room was at the end of the hallway, while his was on the complete opposite.

The clock was ticking, and the anxiety and fear inside his chest were taking over, just like in his dream.

Was it too late to back off? Would Time really keep them in that year if Wonho refused to remember?

He felt like a child again. Wonho wanted to cry, begging for his mother’s presence. The dizziness he felt made him stumble a bit behind Hyungwon; there wasn’t enough air, there wasn’t enough strength.

Never before Wonho felt so nervous. He was ready to freeze on spot, unable to give another step.

That’s why he was glad he wasn’t there alone, or he wouldn’t even make it seeing his old house
Hyungwon picked up quickly that Wonho felt he was about to pass out, or throw up; to keep those memories buried, as they should.

With an arm encircled around his waist, Hyungwon speeded their pace so they could get there as history happened.

The time traveler came to a halt right next to his parents’ room, looking at him to say everything that didn’t needed to be spoken out loud.

Like a secret between them, only shared with the couple who stood inside the closed door.

Wonho didn’t know what he expected. His mind was full of thoughts about running away, and crying and lingering on the very few memories he had of his father.

His gasping was becoming too loud; they shouldn’t interfere in any way, a chant in Wonho’s head didn’t let him forget.

Hyungwon’s hands found its way to hold his face, diverting Wonho’s attention completely to him. In that silence, his touch felt like a breeze of warm air hit his chest; Hyungwon was trying his best to keep him serene, but not even that was totally effective.

Wonho leaned against the wall as soon as the pink-haired pulled away from his attempts of calming him down, standing right in front of him.

Then he heard her screams.

His mother’s voice, undoubtedly.

A heated discussion happened in there, and somehow the realization hit him quicker than he thought.

“You can do this to him.” His mother sounded desperate. “He’s your only son!”

His father’s voice, long forgotten by him, emerged right after.

“You raised him to be the weak child he is! He needs to learn. If not the easy way, so be it the hard way.”

Heavy footsteps trudged towards their direction and Wonho flinched, but Hyungwon shifter closer to him again, shaking his head for him not to move.

“Please…” His mother sounded she was about to cry, and Wonho brought a hand to his chest. “You already hit him twice this week! He’s not a weak child, it’s you that is a weak man.”

They could feel the dense atmosphere even from the outside.

“What did you just say to me?”

The sound of someone being slapped on the face ruined the small force that kept himself on his feet. His heart thumped against his chest at the same rate it was being broken into a million pieces. While his world fell apart, Hyungwon brought his arm around his waist again, slightly pressed against the wall.

Screams of violence and cruelty caused by the man he idolized his entire life made him want to
yell, yell and never stop yelling until he had no voice, no way to express how much it hurt, how much only the hearing of that scene made him want to want to die.

His mother suffering was like paint being splashed around the entire world; amidst her sobs and shrieks in agony, Wonho wanted to have been there for him. He wished he wasn’t a helpless child that did nothing but to hide somewhere inside that house.

That wasn’t his family. It couldn’t be.

Over and over again, the actions of violence his father committed resonate through the walls of the room.

Wonho wasn’t there anymore.

His blurry vision could barely see Hyungwon’s face, fading away even though he stared at the taller man with tears rolling down his cheeks.

To run away, even if through dissociation, was the only way he could bear to hear it until the end.

He was just a child. He was a nice and cheerful child, with a father that he thought he loved him, but turned out to be the monster that unconsciously haunted him his entire life, seizing the credits of a good father he never was.

A room seemed to be hauled to the other side of the room, and his mother sounded so helpless, so scared. He wanted his mother’s lap to cry until his body could no longer produce tears, he wanted to have the idea of his perfect life back.

Hyungwon’s hands on his face again, drawing him back to the reality he didn’t want to live, that he wished it never existed.

Wonho couldn’t help it. It was his basic instinct as the bad son he had been for more than 20 fucking years, blaming his mother for wanting to bury his father’s legacy. He wanted to go there. He needed.

Maybe if Wonho moved out of Hyungwon’s arms fast enough, the time traveler wouldn’t be able to catch him. But at the slight jolt forward, the time traveler held him tighter against the wall, clasping his shoulders back and shaking his head over and over again.

“This weak boy won’t need a mother after I’m finished with you.”

His entire body weakened to the point Hyungwon had to fully held him in his arms.

Maybe his father was right. Maybe he was weak for no doing something, even though he was really young at that time. But instead, he ran away and didn’t look back.

In that exact moment, he knew he could never go back to be the person he was.

Most of his life was shattered just a couple of meters away from him.

Why no one noticed what his mother was going through? Why no fucking one helped her when she needed support the most?

Who the hell was that pretender in an expensive suit, posing as a good father to him when he beat him up constantly? Wonho remembered every single time it happened, and most of the time, he blamed himself for that. But what kind of trance did he put Wonho in for him to believe he was a
hero, that he was everything Wonho aimed to be?

The tales his mother and everybody else voiced about that man was just a bunch of lies to cover the fact that he was a monster.

The two gunshots were the last straw for Wonho.

In silence, he cried his heart out with Hyungwon as his support, clinging onto the taller man’s shirt to suppress the screams he couldn’t utter at the time.

As the time traveler wrapped his arms around him, his chest never felt so fucking heavy before. Everything inside him was shattered into pieces Wonho could never be able to make up for it.

Wonho didn’t want to die anymore. He wanted to build a gigantic wall around his mom, so no one could ever hurt her again. He wanted to enter that fucking room and wrap his arms around her, to say she was safe, that he was going to protect him from now on.

No more hiding, no more distance between them.

The silence seemed like it was draining the air inside that hallway; such noiseless place now carried the legacy of him having discovered in the hardest way that he was lied to his entire life. That he repudiated his mother, his poor mother.

There was nothing he cared about himself while he dived back into his dissociation, so he brought himself closer to Hyungwon until there was no space between them. The tightness of his hug never lessened, never asked questions because he knew, and he was there for him.

Why him? Why couldn’t his father had been the man he thought he was? Why did he make Wonho go through so much shit when he was just a little kid?

He wanted to be enough, he wanted to be praised.

Like every kid, he just wanted to be loved.

That was something he couldn’t bury in the back of his mind anymore. The scarce air that he inhaled made him feel he was being burned alive from the inside, but the pain had evolved into something beyond that, a place Wonho had never been before.

His heart, shattered in a million of pieces now floating inside of him, and it hurt, it hurt. There was nothing more to be said, nor felt for his body was completely numb in Hyungwon’s arms.

Maybe it should’ve been him to die that night. Maybe he should have been beaten, anyway. Maybe he deserved, for being weak.

No, a small voice inside his mind spoke. The monster that he thought that lived under their beds was just his father, a despicable human being.

There was no sound to where Wonho’s mind traveled to deal with that sorrow; he didn’t notice Hyungwon lowering him down to sit on the floor until the time traveler’s arms left him, and suddenly he was that child that also existed in that house, praying for someone to come and save him. Praying for someone to hold him so tight he wouldn’t be afraid anymore.

“Stay here.” Hyungwon’s voice sounded distant, as if it belonged to a divine message. “Don’t look.”
His body didn’t feel like his own, but Wonho tried his best to get out of that episode, he needed to help, he needed his mother.

But what snapped him out of it a little bit, just so he could be aware that all of that really happened, was when Hyungwon opened the door to his parents’ room.

His mother yelled once more out of surprise, and surely out of fright, but the time traveler seemed to know exactly what to do, and closed the door behind him.

“I will not harm you.” Hyungwon’s voice slowed its tone. “I came to help.”

His mother sobbed, in the middle of a mental breakdown.

“I…” She couldn’t even finish the phrase, for fuck’s sake. He need her, he needed to apologize…

“I know. You had to defend yourself, and your son.”

“Hoseok…”

Ages must have passed since he heard his birth name on someone’s mouth.

“Yes. Now, I need you to call the police. You will say that a burglar came in, through the back door, and killed your husband. They will believe you. But we can’t waste more time. You have to do it now. Can you do that for your child?”

His mother whimpered loudly, panting like crazy.

After a brief pause, his mom spoke again.

“Yes.”

“Good. Call the police now, and meet me downstairs. I know you’re scared, but do as I say. Your son needs you.”

“Okay.”

Hyungwon’s footsteps came in the door’s direction, and even in the dimness of that hallway, Wonho could notice that he brought the gun his mother used with him.

In that crepuscular atmosphere, he seemed like a mythical creature taken straight out of Wonho’s imagination, native of the very space he disconnected himself to forget about reality. He could do nothing but stare at the man, looking for an answer.

“You need to come with me.” The pink-haired spoke, extending a hand for him to grab and get off the floor.

Not for a second Wonho hesitated.

Hyungwon did most of the job of taking him downstairs, carrying Wonho with an arm wrapped around his waist; inside Wonho’s mind, a million questions were needed to be made, but he would have enough time. They needed to leave for him to have a second chance.

As they reached the living room again, the time traveler brought him to sit down on the floor, in the farthest corner of it.

“Stay here.” He asked in a small voice, almost too gentle.
Not much longer after letting go of his hand, Hyungwon climbed the stairs again, to an unknown destination.

All his memories of that night and all the days before that hit him like a punch in the face, making Wonho fall even more backwards under the carpet.

He remembered the shouts. The fear and the wish that everything could be normal again inhabited his small body and he ran, he ran until he reached the attic and found the small wooden chest he used to always go whenever the screams and discussions got too loud.

It’s not your fault, Wonho wanted to say to that kid. You deserved a father that loved you unconditionally, you deserved a better childhood. Lament for the man he discovered his dad had no longer had space in his chest.

It was really small inside that thing, and little Wonho could barely move, but it was safe, his safe place. The place where no monster could ever get to him.

The sudden light rising above his head blinded him for a moment, forcing little Wonho to rub his eyes with his little knuckles to see more clearly. A dark figure stood there, only silhouette available for Wonho’s eyes to see. Then a voice emerged.

“You don’t need to be scared anymore.”

At the very moment, as that person opened the wooden chest to reach out to him, he wrapped his arms around his legs to protect himself.

“Are you afraid of me?” It sounded like the voice of an angel; he remembered to think that maybe God answered his prayers.

Little Wonho nodded.

What his child-self expected was to see bright wings appear on that person’s back, but instead, the brightness that entered the attic from the glass window illuminated his face as the figure took off their hat; he immediately linked him to the taste of bubblegum.

“What do you like fireworks?”

As he crouched down next to the wooden chest, his face became even clearer.

_Hyungwon._

Seeing the time traveler through his memories was terrifying and a solace at the same time. Little Wonho nodded once more.

“If I show you lots of them, will you get out of there?”

“Yes.”

That’s the first time he remembered having said something, whispering.

His eyes widened as little Wonho witnessed, for what it was truly his first time, the extent of Hyungwon’s abilities; the blueish energy that flowed across his body concentrated itself in his hand, forming an inert sphere of light.

The man suddenly threw it upwards, the ball of light flew all across the attic and broke into dozens of smaller spheres, that popped in the air around them with small sounds coming out of it,
resembling real fireworks.

His child-self smiled so brightly at that wonder that for a moment, he forgot all the evils in the world.

“Are you a wizard?”

Hyungwon chuckled, and a strand of hair fell over half of his face.

“Yes. Can you come with me now? Your mom is waiting for you.”

As if he had met Hyungwon his entire life, little Wonho shook his arms above his head to indicate he wanted to be picked up.

The euphoria of that remembrance made him notice a bit later that his mother was already downstairs.

She slid down the wall and cried again, covering her face.

The bruises his father left on her were more than just physical, even though the wounds were pretty evident especially on her face.

*Why didn’t you tell me, mom? Why did you lie?*

His urge to go to her was prevented by Hyungwon coming downstairs.

On the floor, his mother jolted forward as soon as she saw a glimpse of the time traveler, carrying his little Wonho in his arms.

As soon as his child-self spotted mother, he practically jumped off Hyungwon, who let the woman pick her son up in her arms.

“Mommy, Mr. Wizard made fireworks! Mr. Wizard, can you do that again?”

Leaning a hand against the handrail, with his bucket hand on his hand, Hyungwon smiled at Wonho’s child version.

“One day.”

“Who…” His mother voice wavered, staring right into Hyungwon’s face. “Who are you?”

The pink-haired seemed to have given it some thought.

“I… I am a wizard, like your son said. Take good care of him.”

Hyungwon gave the first step towards Wonho, still on the floor, when his mother moved to stand in front of him.

“Why…”

“What we need to do to survive don’t define us if we don’t let them. You are a good person. You deserve peace.”

After brief seconds, his mother moved out of the way for Hyungwon, clutching his child-self to his chest.
Quicker than Wonho imagine, he appeared next to him.

For the second time that night, Hyungwon offered him his hand. And for the second time, Wonho didn’t hesitate.

Leaving that house and everything that happened behind made everything too real, too raw. How could he have praised that man for most of his life, when he witnessed just a part of what his mother went through, probably during a lot of years?

Wonho felt like a traitor.

Undeserving of his spot as his mother’s son, undeserving of forgiveness for every fight they had that he accused her of wanting to erase his father’s memory.

It was still better than forgetfulness, even if it tore him apart.

In Wonho’s memory, the rest of that night was nothing but blur of places he had been; seemed like a few streets, then the pitch black sky above his head while he fell on the floor sobbing, arms around him, icy hand on his hand.

He remembered leaving the house, with Hyungwon guiding him by the hand, and then… nothing.

When Wonho came to his senses, back to reality after the deepest dissociation he ever experienced, the sun was shyly rising in the horizon.

It was if he had been teleported to that place, which could be possible if Hyungwon’s watch was working. A hill filled with grass all the way down displayed a wide landscape to the rest of Seoul.

Wonho was sitting on a bench, an authentic bench like the ones they had in the parks. Looking at nowhere in particular in that city, the sudden awareness that Hyungwon wasn’t by his side made anxiety flow inside his chest again.

His eyes darted to all the sides, quickly encountering the man sitting a few meters away from Wonho on the grass, with his legs pressed against his chest.

Every time his gaze reached the time traveler, the latter always was aware of what Wonho was doing.

His pink hair looked even more like bubblegum as the first beams of light touched his face. Wonho tried to stand up, but his legs were too weak. A second try was effective, and he began to stroll towards the grass.

“How…” His voice came out too hoarse, so he cleared his throat. “How long have we been here?”

“Five hours.”

“Oh.”

Definitely the worst dissociative episode of his life.

His legs already hurt from standing up, so Wonho sat down on the grass beside Hyungwon. He tried to utter a few words, but they all seemed too silly.
“Do you know what I like the most about this universe?”

The sudden question made Wonho crane his neck towards him, stretching his legs on the grass.

“It has stars.” The small confession seemed like everything to Hyungwon. “In my world, the sky was pitch black. Because of the accelerating expansion of the universe, you know. It is such a privilege. Even when they’re fading like this, in the beginning of the morning, they’re still beautiful.”

“Hyungwon.”

“Hmm?” Still with the smile that talking about stars put on his face, Hyungwon now gazed at him.

“I’m sorry. God, I don’t even know where to—”

“One time is enough, Wonho-ssi.”

“And thank you. For…” His voice began to crack, and Wonho tried to push the tears back. “For making that moment… a little less miserable to me. And I’m sorry again.” A silence followed the moment, until Wonho remembered a detail. “Did you… always knew? In my dreams… someone appeared. Was it always you?”

“Maybe.” The man fidgeted on his pants. “Time has its ways. It’s not always fair, as you experienced. That moment you asked me to make you calm, Time allowed me see what happened. So, from that moment, it was always me who took you out of there.”

“My brain hurts.”

Hyungwon’s low chuckle made him want to smile too.

“Let’s get you home.”

Going back to that time machine had never been so fucking amazing before.

“Good morning, Monbebe.”

The lights flickering above their heads increased the sensation of Wonho’s relief.

“Good job. Wormholes are opened again for us.”

At least that nightmare had brought things back to normal. As normal as anything in a time machine can be, and as normal as they all could be amidst everything that happened.

“Take us back to 2018, please.” Hyungwon requested, taking a seat on one of the benches.

“Should I wake the Constants?”

“No.” Hyungwon got on his feet again, already on his way inside the train. “I’ll call them once we get back.”

“We’ve arrived in Seoul, 10:18 p.m., local Korean time.”
Home sweet home.

The route back to their year was quite fast, no more than 20 minutes; the sound of such information being narrated through the speakers of the train made Wonho leave the kitchen, where he had been during the journey after changing back into his original clothes — he didn’t want to wake up the boys before it was really necessary by entering the rooms, nor bother Hyungwon, wherever he was… so he just kind of stayed there, still digesting that night.

The wagon where the accommodations built by Hyungwon stood was precisely beside the wagon of the kitchen, so Wonho spotted quickly the rest of his friends yawning and stretching their limbs.

As expected, Kihyun was the first to come in his direction, almost tackling him.

When the man pulled away from that suffocating hug, the others were already gathered around Wonho.

“You look like shit.” His shorter friend remarked.

Shownu lightly nudged him.

“Not the important part, nerd.”

“Are we back home?” Changkyun, with eyes only half open, yawned for the tenth time.

“Yes.”

Hyungwon answered, ambling in their direction already in his usual attire, a black stripped suit and brown shoes.

“Are you okay?” Minhyuk asked, taking a step forward. “Is… everything with Time and stuff okay?”

“Yes.” He offered the blond a smile. “It’s still night here, only an hour before we left.”

“I’m gonna pass out and only wake up next month.” The maknae kindly informed. “Hyung, do the aliens like puppies?”

Minhyuk cackled at the question, taking the first step ahead, being followed Changkyun and Jooheon, who dragged Hyungwon to the main wagon.

With the ones left behind, he already knew what was that about.

“I survived.” Wonho rolled his eyes at them. “We can talk about it later.”

“I’m sorry I yelled at you earlier.” Kihyun truly sounded repentant. “I’ll be here for you if you want to talk about it.”

“I know.” He quickly embraced the shorter man. “But I can’t go with you right now.”

As Wonho looked up, he saw Shownu frowning at him.

“Why?” The man asked.

Wonho smiled at them both, hoping it was enough to ease their worries.

“I’ll tell you later.”
His entire body trembled as if he was about to freeze to that.

Which wasn’t the case, since the weather in Seoul was a lot better than the Seoul of 1996.

His mother had the habit of working until late on the building of her company, so only one call to her secretary was enough to confirm that she had stayed behind again.

As soon as he got close to the door of her office, that had glass doors, his mouth squinted at the sight of him, as if she wasn’t believe he was there.

A sudden jolt of courage motivated Wonho to have 3 seconds of insane courage, so he walked inside without wavering, without looking back.

“Mother.”

She stopped every motion she could ever be doing to stare at him as if he was an apparition.

“Hoseok.”

His mom was the only one who still called him for his birth name, and Wonho used to hate it, so he adopted a new name.

“Why did you lie to me, all those years? Why did you let me believe… that him…”

The woman’s face fell as she realized what Wonho was talking about.

“Hoseok. Who told you?”

“I just need to know why.” Wonho insisted. “Why didn’t you tell me the truth about father?”

Wonho felt himself ready to another breakdown again when he heard the sound of his mother getting off her chair, coming in his direction.

Tears rolled down his face as soon as he saw the woman extending a hand to him, as if she was afraid he was going to reject her.

“I don’t know how… but… I was afraid, Hoseok. I was afraid to share my suffering. I was… ashamed. I was afraid…” Her voice cracked for a second. “I was afraid to see you hurting because of what happened to me. I would prefer that you hated me than having to see this look in your face right now.”

Wonho tried to wipe off the result of his weeping, but always more kept coming.

“When you told me… a few months after your father’s death, that you didn’t remember anything from that night, I thought it was for the best to keep the facade. You always spoke of your father with such admiration that I felt a horrible person to want to stripe you of that. I’m sorry, Hoseok.”

“Mom…” Wonho covered his face with one hand, trying to stop crying. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry you went through that alone. I’m sorry I was too small to protect you. I’m sorry I’m a bad son.”

“Hey…” His mother darted towards him, pulling his hand down to put her hands on his face. The tears on her face couldn’t stop falling too. “You’re my son. There’s nothing for me to forgive you.”

The embrace between him and his mother was filled with tears and the yearning of the missing
years that they went on different paths. His mother, a bit smaller than him, was the answer for everything that was lacking in his life.

“It’s okay, son.” Despite the tears in her face, she wiped off Wonho’s face with the sleeve of her blouse. “What we need to do to survive don’t define us if we don’t let them.”

Wonho suddenly laughed at Hyungwon’s phrase that his mother repeated, because for him that happened just a few hours ago, not 22 years.

“Let’s not separate again, okay?” Wonho hugged his mother again, a bit too tight. “I will be a better son from now on.”

“And I will always do anything for you, Hoseok. You’re the most important thing of my life.”

In that moment, Wonho also forgave the universe for all he went through. There was no one in the world happier than him.

Chapter End Notes

this was such a rollercoaster i had to rewind the events i wrote bc damn lmao

the reason i was so fucking nervous is that i experienced something alike with wonho's situation in my childhood — not to the extent of death, but kinda shaped me as a person and i wanted to show a little bit of my POV through him. i love all of you who dealt with this kind of thing, we all deserved better. i was so really fucking nervous of writing and editing and posting this

the angst makes a PAUSE now i swear we be going (airplane emoji) to hyungwon meets pop culture

also, about the showki scene, i had no idea i'd write that until i did. i was shook with myself. whatcha think

anyways im shutting tf up, see you next week kids
Knock knock, it’s the Millennials

Chapter Summary

not even i know what in heckity heck is going on here

Chapter Notes

it is (technically still) wednesday, my dudes
[high-pitched screaming while wearing a spider-man costume]
wassup fellas i was willing to die bc i couldnt finish this!! how yall doing
so yeah thats why the delay was so big, but the chapter is also big so i guess??
also, what happens to kihyun here is kat's fault for bullying me abt one of these ships.
pls tell her on twitter to stop, its @mxwonchae, thanks homies!!!
anyways, stream red carpet on yt and spotify
enjoy it (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“the season is changing / the dust is settling, and / I’m running out of excuses / to not love again.”

J.H. Hard

There wasn’t any specific thought in Changkyun’s mind while he stayed there, lying on his back against the floor of his room. His body, for sure, was worn out and begging him to drag his lazy ass to take a shower, but the man couldn’t stop thinking about everything he witnessed in the last months.

Meeting Hyungwon turned their lives upside down, but, at that point, Changkyun was convinced that such thing was exactly what they needed. Without the memories of his previous life, maybe he’d never learn to appreciate how good was to have parents that love you while growing up, and cherish them while he still could. During his lonely stay in an orphanage since his childhood, it was not after Changkyun left for college at the age of 15 that he allowed himself to speak without the fear of being scolded, which was the main reason why he never interacted with a lot of people in school, except for Minhyuk.

It was all well now, and the thought of that made the man smile while staring at his ceiling; with both parts of himself living in harmony inside his head, Changkyun never felt more encouraged to go out into the world and do whatever he wanted to, or was meant to.

Also, he had more friends at that moment than he ever had before. Even though they were all older than him, Changkyun liked to think that his hyungs saw him as someone they could lean on if they
ever needed someone to share a problem with, mainly because what normally would affect people, most of the time, would fail to faze the maknae, and he was always willing to try to help.

The others weren’t having it easy, though — at least from what Changkyun could observe. Sure, he loved his friends to death, but most of them were oblivious even to things that happened to themselves.

Wonho, for example, went through stuff the maknae could only imagine how it felt like. They all saw how badly everything that went down in 1996 affected him, but it also brought good changes into his life, like his reconciliation with his mother.

As a matter of fact, no one really asked what happened during that night Hyungwon and him left to hit the streets of Seoul in the ‘90s, but a week after they came back to their time, Wonho asked all of them to gather at Minhyuk and Shownu’s apartment, and told them what had happened, but not really in details — which was kind of expected and understandable from a situation like that. Just the fact that he chose to share that with them was already a big step for his hyung, and a sign of trust in all of them.

Hyungwon left a day after their conversation with Wonho. The time traveler wasn’t present during that talk, but he did send a holographic message to all their phones saying that he needed to take care of a few things, and would be back soon.

Two and a half weeks passed since then, and no one heard from the time traveler ever since.

They all had their stuff to do, though. It had been keeping them busy enough to miss the pink-haired man a little less.

“YAH!”

The maknae let out a shriek, almost jumping out of his own skin.

“What the hell are you doing there?” From the entrance of his room, Wonho looked at him down on the floor with exasperation.

“…Chilling?”

“There’s still a lot to unpack, you know? How many computers do you have, for fuck’s sake?”

“The computers can wait.” The younger chuckled, getting off the floor. “You know what can’t wait? My hunger.”

Wonho rolled his eyes at him, but couldn’t help but to smile.

“I’m using my day off to help you, you know? Where is Jooheon, by the way? Isn’t he supposed to be here with his stuff?”

Jooheon was a puzzle Changkyun was still trying to solve.

Ever since they came back from their last time travel adventure, his best friend’s mind was too distant for any word of Changkyun to be able to reach. Sure, he did ask a couple of times if there was something wrong, but all Jooheon did was to say everything was okay, you know, like a liar.

He didn’t understand his urge to keep things from Changkyun after all those years of sharing the worst things that had ever happened to them, but the youngest didn’t want to put any pressure on his best friend.
Speaking of best friends, Minhyuk also seemed to be going through some stuff. He was still the bright and energetic man Changkyun always knew, but there was a crack in his spirit that was quite obvious to the maknae, but he also didn’t want to force his hyung to talk about anything that wouldn’t make him comfortable.

So Changkyun waited, trying his best and looking forward for his future.

“Pretty please, hyung.”

“Fine.” Wonho sighed, leaning his shoulder against the door. “Grab your stuff.”

“YAY!”

His hyung snorted at his little jumps, like a victory dance, and Changkyun darted back inside the room to try to find his wallet and his phone among the dozens of cardboard boxes.

The last mentioned item seemed to have vanished amid that disorder.

“Hyung.” Changkyun turned around to face Wonho. “Can you call my phone so—”

Before he could finish his request, his ringtone — aka Crooked by G-Dragon — blasted out of nowhere.

Wonho’s phone also began to ring a second later, while Changkyun plopped down on the floor to stick his hand under his bed.

As he brought the phone into the natural sunlight of the room, all the maknae could see was a green screen gleaming.

Never before during that morning Changkyun thought he’d jolt forward — basically run, dragging his hyung with him — at the sight of something so odd on his phone.

To truly understand what unfolded in Wonho’s life after they came back from 1996, it’s necessary to know two things.

One.

It hurt like hell. Or rather, it felt like he was going to die during long, long days. In the loneliness he allowed himself to enjoy, Wonho tried to pour out with his tears any vestige of that night, especially everything he felt that man he once idolized out of ignorance his entire life. As stifling as that sensation seemed to be, not for a moment Wonho thought there was no way out of that. There was much, much more to be seized, to be recovered; it would be foolish of him to allow his father to keep taking things away from him.

Two.

They didn’t meet again after the day of their arrival in 2018, mainly because Hyungwon left a week later to God-knows-where, but the time traveler was a current visitor in the land of his dreams. No out of ordinary scenario, though; now with the clear images in his mind, Wonho dreamed of sitting under the stars made by the magical man of his childhood.
From his point of view, the time traveler seemed like a titan with the gentleness of a fairy to his child self. Regardless of the beauty of the fireworks above his head, Hyungwon had no interest in that; from what he remembered, the man’s gaze settled on Wonho for the entire time as the latter laughed and pointed at so many places in the air that also made the time traveler chuckle a bit.

As the lights faded away around them, the pink-haired stranger squatted next to the wooden chest to stay at the same height as him, whom sat on the inside.

There was always Hyungwon’s hand offering to hold his, inaccurate to what happened in real life, and Wonho couldn’t understand what that meant, or if it meant anything.

But he took it every time.

Surprisingly, they were the first to arrive at the subway station after receiving that call; from the way that the others always ran for their lives towards that train whenever it was around, you could say it was a bit odd that those morons’ screams weren’t echoing through the place.

Meanwhile, Changkyun ran down the stairs as fast as he could and almost collided against the glass part of the door of the main wagon, if it hadn’t opened automatically before the maknae could hurt himself.

“Jesus Christ…” Wonho snorted at the boy, sitting on one of the blue benches to regain his breath. “Calm down a bit.”

The lights above their heads began to flicker and Changkyun looked even more excited. He was like a puppy, too difficult to keep up with so much energy.

“Wonho. Changkyun. Hyungwon told me I should ask how have you been because it’s a polite thing to do. Take note that as long as you’re alive, I think you’re doing pretty well.”

A part of Wonho was reluctant to admit he missed the sassiness of that machine just a little.

Before they could answer something, the time traveler’s voice emerged behind them, coming from the control room.

“That’s not how I taught you, Monbebe.”

“HYUNG!”

The maknae forgot about any weariness he could have been feeling and sprung in the man’s direction, almost tackling the time traveler with a hug if the latter wasn’t strong enough to take that hit.

Patting Changkyun in the head and shoulder, Hyungwon laughed at the boy’s extreme reaction, eyes turning into a straight line as he wrapped his arms around Changkyun to hug him back.

Wonho felt too aware of his staring when the time traveler gaze fell on him, with a light head bow.

“Wonho-ssi.” After the greeting, he patted the man hugging him on the shoulder again. “Changkyun-ah, you’re crushing my ribcage.”

Almost in sync with his speech, the others arrived, but with one of them missing.

“Back off, Kyun!” Minhyuk announced, jolting in the time traveler’s direction to also embrace the
“I saw him first!” The maknae remained glued to the Hyungwon.

“I was born first!” Minhyuk spouted.

“Calm down.” His silvery voice was quite soothing, as always. To end the discussion, Hyungwon extended an arm in Minhyuk’s direction and hugged him too.

“Let him breathe, you two.” Shownu pushed the two youngest off of the time traveler, briefly hugging Hyungwon too. “Have you been well, Hyungwon-ah?”

“Yes. Thanks, Shownu.” The taller man peered over Shownu’s shoulder for a second. “Jooheon?”

The golden-haired man seemed like he was just physically there, but his mind was way too distant.

“Sorry, hyung.” He hurriedly walked in Hyungwon’s direction, embracing him too for a moment.

“Where is Kihyun?”

“He’s coming later.” Wonho answered. “Got stuck at uni for a little longer.”

“Oh…” The time traveler seemed a bit disappointed. “I wanted him to be here to see it too.”

Changkyun’s eyes glistened with curiosity.

“See what?”

Hyungwon led them to the same wagon where the rooms he had built were, right after the kitchen one, but something was different this time.

Three more doors were added to the ambiance, on the opposite wall to the ones they already had seen before.

“I built three more rooms in case you need to stay here again.” Hyungwon announced, taking a step forward, almost on the limit between that wagon and the next. “Also, there’s furniture and a bathroom in it now. From left to right, the you already know belongs to Minhyuk, Shownu and Wonho-ssi, in that order. On the right, Kihyun, Jooheon and Changkyun. Also, I improved the voice recognition system and closed it to one recipient. Which means your rooms only respond to your commands to open and close the doors. Not even Monbebe can enter your room if you don’t allow it, just like in mine.”

Wonho’s sigh was louder than he intended it to be. He wasn’t that exasperated, just… had forgotten how strange was to be around that time traveler.

In a second, Changkyun ran to the last room of the right side and yelled the command for the door to open, hollering at the sight in front of him.

“YOU DECORATED IT!” At the entrance, the boy looked back and forth between the inside of the room and Hyungwon.

“I tried it.” Hyungwon chuckled nervously. “All the things in your rooms are from my favorite universe.”
“Where is it?” Minhyuk asked, ready to open the door to his room. “Can we come next time?”

Hyungwon nodded, with a smile.

“One day.”

Such words triggered a memory in Wonho he couldn’t escape remembering perfectly.

“Mr. Wizard, can you do that again?”

_Hyungwon smiled at Wonho’s child version._

“One day.”

“HOLY SHIT!” Minhyuk’s yell right next to Wonho pulled him out of these reminiscences. “HYUNGWON-AH!”

“None of you has manners?” Shownu reprimanded them, tugging Minhyuk’s jacket. “Say thank you to Hyungwon.”

The time traveler only snickered at their behavior, but suddenly his mien shifted into a serious one.

“Jooheon.”

The golden-haired boy, still pretty much zoning out, at least responded to the call of his name.

“Yes, hyung?”

“Can you come with me? I would like to talk to you. Don’t worry, nothing bad happened.”

Jooheon didn’t seem to believe it much, but agreed to the time traveler’s requested. Taking a couple of steps in the boy’s direction, Hyungwon put an arm around the man’s shoulder.

“Let’s talk in my room.”

Wonho’s eyes accompanied the steps of the two, who quickly disappeared into the distance, towards the front wagon.

“Yah.” Shownu called for his attention. “Aren’t you curious? About your room.”

_Maybe._

His friend didn’t wait for an answer and voiced the door-opening command, quickly disappearing inside his room.

All those idiots left their doors open, so their laughter and every type of surprised reactions to whatever Hyungwon had put in there only fueled Wonho’s curiosity to at least peep at what the time traveler had in mind for him.

_Oh, fuck it._

“Unlock.”
In the end, Wonho didn’t get it.

Sure, it resembled very well a normal room inside a house or apartment, but it was quite simple from what he could see.

The walls on its inside were completely white, of a material that felt like plaster, but it wasn’t quite it for innumerable reasons that he could go on forever counting. A door right in front of the one he had just passed indicated that there was the bathroom mentioned by the pink-haired time traveler.

Almost on the farthest corner of the room, a platform bed was decorated with grey pillows and comforter of same color, alongside a big black lampshade and a round white bedside table.

Before one could reach the bed and way above its level, there was a platform connected to the wall accompanied by a black leather chair in front of it; from what Wonho could conclude, it was supposed to mimic a work desk.

Despite of the fact that Wonho was still having trouble to accept that he just had passed through a door from a seemingly flat surface, there was nothing really much to be amazed for.

With that in mind, he walked to one of the rooms right next to his.

Oh.

Shownu’s room was… very different, one could say.

The hardwood floor and the location of the bathroom was the same as Wonho’s, but everything else was deeply… personal.

It was like someone had poured a bit of his best friend’s personality in a cup and threw it in there.

In the middle of the room, a platform bed with white sheets and pillows almost passed unnoticed as the most natural thing in there, alongside the tiny nightstand and the bed lamp, placed on the floor.

Countless paintings that Wonho had never seen before decorated 2/4 of the walls from the bottom to the top in a L shape, differing with very small ones to a gigantic piece that displayed an uproar in its canvas.

But that wasn’t the end.

Lots of different plants and sculptures took good part of the floor next to Shownu’s bed, leaving the other two walls to still convey a lot of things about how Hyungwon viewed one of his best friends.

A bit far to the left of the bed, another door could be find in the opposite direction to the bathroom one, while the rest of the space was divided into blank canvases of different sizes, separated pretty much like squares of marble tiles. Also, a myriad of painting materials was placed on the floor next to it.

“Holy shit.”

At last, Shownu noticed his presence as soon as he opened the door at the distant corner of his room. Without craning his neck to face Wonho, his same-age friend kept staring at something in front of him.

“Wonho. Come here.”

Nothing in his voice was very appealing, but Wonho strolled there anyway.
Oh.

The space actually looked like the gym they used to train Kendo at, including most of the equipment; it was nearly identical to the one they used in 2017, in their previous timeline.

“Wow. It’s…” Wonho didn’t know how to put it into words, so trusted Shownu knew how he felt.

“Yeah. Feels weird, but nice.” One look at the tanned man and Wonho saw him smiling. “What about your room?”

“Well…”

Shownu didn’t even need to walk much forward inside his accommodations to make his awkwardness quite explicit.

“What?” Wonho inquired, standing by the door.

“Nothing.”

“Shownu.”

“It’s…” His friend tried to muster the right words, taking another look at the room. “It’s very ‘outside’ you. I can understand.”

Wonho drew his brows together.

“What?”

“You look like this…” The taller man gestured around the place. “To Hyungwon. If you’re wondering why he made you a room so plain.”

“I’m not.”

He was.

Sort of. What his friend said made sense, though, and it wasn’t like it bothered Wonho or something.

His relationship with the time traveler felt much less conflicted in the ambience they occasionally shared, but there wasn’t exactly relaxation in the air whenever they shared the same space. They were acquaintances; people who knew the same people, at best.

“I mean… He still speaks formally with you. And it’s not like you’re making an effort to… you know…”

Even if Wonho wanted, he didn’t know even where to begin at.

All the thoughts that passed through Jooheon’s mind weren’t at all positive regarding that meeting.

The sensation in his chest was what he used to feel when he was about to be scolded by his mother,
by something he obviously knew he had done, but that wasn’t the point.

“You should sit down, Jooheon.”

The time traveler, whom sat cross-legged in the middle of his personal room that was engulfed by books and pieces of tech, looked up at him with a smile.

His nervousness could be read on his face easily, Jooheon was aware. Yet, he tried his best to find a way to conceal it. With a sigh, he did as Hyungwon suggested.

“You’re not in any trouble, Jooheon. In reality, I think is the other way around.”

“What?”

“I dealt with many versions of you all, as you know it. And I think I never really understood what it meant to the Constants to discover how big is their impact on their worlds. As someone who has designated himself as an ambassador of the multiverse, I maybe can grasp the idea of it, but never completely. Especially because you have two different lives to try to find an equilibrium in-between. So I ask: Jooheon, did I make your life too difficult?”

“What?” His voice came out more high-pitched than he planned, as he waved his arms in Hyungwon’s direction to debunk that claim. “Hyung, no, of course—”

“Jooheon.” The man got hold of one of his hands, and Jooheon couldn’t hide the trembling feature of it. “I am sorry. You are very young and, perhaps, it would be better if you discovered about your influence in the natural way, only in the future years. I can feel you holding your breath all the time since we came back from 1996. I can feel that in all of you, actually. But you…” The man made a pause to sigh. “It’s tough to watch.”

There was so much Jooheon wanted to say. A huge part of him felt so silly for allowing himself to feel that burdened when the others were going to really harsh stuff, like Wonho did in their last trip. His life in that timeline wasn’t so bad and he had not only gotten his best friend back, but also gained other ones, so why did he feel so troubled?

The thoughts of all his possible futures were killing him slowly. Sometimes, Jooheon wished he didn’t know anything, but to be in the dark about who he was also meant to be separated from an essential part of himself. Years of a short life lived at its most, and a friend whom he still cherished and wanted to keep close were what kept Jooheon going through all of that.

But the responsibility was still crushing him down.

Why did it have to be him, out of the six of them? Jooheon wanted a simple life in anonymity, but that was no longer an option for all he had been told.

Was he stripped of free will?

“Hyung…” Jooheon cleared his throat before proceeding, staring at his hands. “I just don’t know. About… anything. I don’t know what to do next. Everyone else seem to be… moving on, you know? They know what they want. I don’t.”

“Jooheon.” Hyungwon put his other hand over the one he already gently held. “As I said, you are very young. It is normal for you to feel like this, but know that it won’t last forever. Any path you end up choosing to lead your life to is a good one because it’s the one you chose. You can do anything you wish to. The multiverse has plans for you, but that doesn’t mean you have to waste your entire lifespan bound to it. Don’t worry about it too much. I know it’s hard, and you may feel
lost right now, but know that nothing happens meaninglessly. And you’re not alone, which is a lot more that almost all your doubles could say. You have a support system to help you here. Including me. Whatever I can do to make your life easier, I will. Also, you promised to introduce me to the culture of your world, so that might distract you from these feelings. Maintain your word?”

A chuckle escaped his mouth at the same time a tear rolled down his cheek, which Jooheon wiped it quickly with the back of his hand.

“Yes, of course.” Now gazing at the pink-haired man, Jooheon felt his chest lighter. “Get ready for the millennial shit.”

The pink-haired chortled.

“Language.”

“Oops. Sorry.”

The sheer audacity of Kihyun’s mind to still question the reason why he felt so nervous was far from being his finest hour.

Better, Kihyun confessed that, deep down, he just wanted to have a better justification to offer, even though he knew the person about to receive his speech could smell the scent of his bullshit from kilometers away.

A knock on the door of the man’s room was enough for a faint sound arise on the inside, unlocking the door automatically. A light push was enough for him to have space to come in.

Shownu sat on the floor, surrounded by buckets of paint and a few paintbrushes near the wall in front of his bed. The entire space had been decorated to the point it looked exactly like what he imagined Shownu would quite enjoy it.

The nervousness making his legs tremble crawled up to his chest, but Kihyun forced himself to do what he needed to do.

It wasn’t too long ago, when they were still stuck in the 90s, that Kihyun had his legs wrapped around the older’s waist while they kissed for hours before they fell asleep, in that very same place that now looked nothing like it was before.

Just like them.

“Hyung. It’s me, Ki—”

“I know.”

The man didn’t even bother to look away from the wall he decorated, and Kihyun chose to pretend it didn’t make his chest sting.

A deep breath was necessary before continuing.

“Can we—”
Kihyun’s eyes went round at the unexpected gaze of Shownu on him, who put his paintbrush down to speak.

“What is there to talk about, Kihyun? I got the message pretty clear.”

God, Kihyun absolutely did not have the right to have his eyes watering at that moment, and yet…

“It’s not like that.”

“So how is that, Kihyun? You started avoiding me ever since we came back to 2018. Almost a month ago. I’m not a genius like you, but I can understand what that means.”

“Hyung…” His gaze diverted to the floor full of shame. He wanted to put into words better, but…

“I never… I’m sorry I did that.”

“I told you before. I don’t like misunderstandings. I was very honest to you about how I feel. If you didn’t…” Shownu took a deep breath, briefly closing his eyes. “Let’s forget about that. Above it all, you’re a friend I treasure. Just give me some time, okay? We can go back to what we were before.”

I don’t want that.

Come on, Kihyun, say it…

Say it…

Which was worse, to make himself into what Shownu thought he was or to pour his heart out, exposed to the world and its oscillations? Kihyun couldn’t tell. Actually, nothing but the silent tears rolling down his cheeks came out of him as Shownu looked away from him once more; a preview of what waited for the younger from now on.

With an apology mumbled under his breath, Kihyun stormed out of the room before he could break into a full sob. On the conundrum of why he thought life would make things that easy for him before, Kihyun had no idea why he let himself dive into those waters of naivety, but its likely reason was because Shownu was so trustworthy, such a safe haven.

Maybe it was better like that.

“So I’m sitting there… barbecue sauce on my titties…”

A collective reprimanding stare was directed at the maknae, the one who cut through their silence in the hotel’s restaurant in such an unusual manner, but a very Changkyun one.

“So ignoring me when I’m trying to make this dinner less awkward is cool, but when I make an amazing reference the hyungs suddenly pay attention?”

Hyungwon, sitting in front of Wonho at the table and with his back towards the entrance, was the first to break into a smile at the boy sitting beside him.

“Forgive me, Changkyun. I didn’t mean it.”
“So…” The youngest put his chopsticks down over his platter. “What’s popping?”

Someone started to talking and Wonho, not really proud of himself, zoned out the conversation to mindlessly look around the restaurant of the hotel he lived in; not a lot of people were around to pick up those unusual topics of their talks, but at that time of that night and weekday, it was quite common — the clock on the wall struck almost 11:00 p.m., but it didn’t feel like it was that late.

Minhyuk and Jooheon’s voices reached his ears and Wonho forced himself to pay attention, taking another sip of his wine glass.

All his actions came to a halt at the sound of Hyungwon’s laughter.

It’s not like Wonho didn’t perceive him as a human being like everyone else. As all of his considerations concluded at some point, the time traveler had more goodwill than most of the people he had ever met in life, but it was still strange to see someone capable of so many unearthly actions to giggle as if he hadn’t suffered so much before.

How does one laugh after going through things that scarred them for life? A profound understanding of strengths and weaknesses must be necessary, he concluded. The lines between what’s temporary and permanent must be exceptionally blurred.

How long must’ve taken Hyungwon to do that? To forgive worlds that weren’t repentant?

Wonho became too self-aware of his gazing when the pink-haired suddenly craned his neck towards him, with a weird expression on his face.

He seemed a bit… alarmed.

“Your mother.”

There was no need for Wonho to question that statement, for a second later his mom appeared in front of the restaurant, accompanied by her lifelong secretary.

“Oh, shit.” The black-haired hissed. “Go!”

The rest of the boys seemed to have start picking up something.

“What’s going on?” Jooheon asked, looking between Wonho and Hyungwon.

“I need a safe space.” The time traveler murmured in Wonho’s direction looking rather startled, leaning over the table. “To teleport.”

If someone told Wonho he wouldn’t flinch at hearing an affirmation like that a few months before, he would’ve laughed so hard he would’ve cracked a few ribs.

The most obvious place would be the restaurant’s bathroom, of course, but it was impossible to get there without having to pass by his mother first.

“Under the table!” Minhyuk frantically motioned to it, trying to tone his voice down. “It will work!”

With nothing else to do, Hyungwon followed their friend’s suggestion in which end up being the funniest bit he could ever imagine watching the time traveler doing. He was too damn big to sit down properly under the table, and the white tablecloth barely covered him as a whole. As he watched his mother stroll in his direction, Wonho had to contain a snort while waved at the
woman.

As Hyungwon disappeared, a sudden impulse that pushed the table slightly upwards could be felt as the five of them tried to keep a straight face, ready to greet Wonho’s mom.

However, the only thing that passed through his mind as Wonho finally let out the cackle he was holding back — confusing his mother and her secretary and totally making his friends laugh too — was that that was officially how his life was going to be from now on.

“Well… that was awkward.”

Shownu snorted at Minhyuk’s remark after Wonho left to take his mother home, remembering the another peculiar moment they just experienced; shenanigans that being friends with a time traveler could bring into one’s life.

“Kihyun hyung would be losing his shit right now.” Changkyun mentioned, and the smile from Shownu’s face gradually disappeared.

The remembrance of his talk with Kihyun earlier made him sigh; innumerable times even before their last trip, Shownu questioned himself if being true to what he felt was the right move. They wouldn’t have ended up in such uncomfortable situation if he had just kept his mouth shut.

But kissing Kihyun was an action impossible to regret, regardless of the consequences he’d have to face from now on. He would kiss him again even if he had to revive his actions in that room for the rest of eternity. Now, the worst part of it all was how badly he wanted to kiss that nerd again.

As he still looked away from the rest of the boys, Minhyuk made a question.

“Where is he, by the way? I haven’t talked to him properly in WEEKS.”

“He is…” Jooheon began to speak, but paused to sigh. “He didn’t want me to tell you, but… I’m worried about him.”

Shownu instinctively craned his neck up at the boys again.

“What?” Minhyuk frowned.

“He’s been having a hard time with his PhD lately, then his dad said some shitty things to him yesterday…”

“Jooheon!” The blond reprimanded the boy. “You should’ve told us! He needs us!”

“Where is he?” Shownu was already on his feet before he asked. “Kihyun.”

“I don’t know, hyung.” Jooheon seemed just as distraught as him, so he remembered to keep it cool. “His last message was him saying he just wanted to forget this day happened.”

“It’s not like that.”
“So how is that, Kihyun? You started avoiding me ever since we came back to 2018. Almost a month ago. I’m not a genius like you, but I can understand what that means.”

“Hyung… I never… I’m sorry I did that.”

Kihyun’s voice kept replaying in his mind and Shownu wanted to smash his head against the nearest wall.

His attempts of reaching the man failed over and over again, as every call to Kihyun rang multiple times without ever being picked up. Voicemail was useless, so he decided to try the next best available choice.

There was no sign of him in his apartment too. His roommate, Sewoon, told Shownu the man hadn’t come home since the day before and the last time he saw Kihyun was at the university, so it was possibly where he could be.

He wasn’t. Even at that time, Shownu went there only to receive some vague answers from the few people who worked there at night, but no sign of the younger man at all.

Maybe he deserved to go through all of that, Shownu concluded. Kihyun came to him, obviously wanting to ask for something — forgiveness, help, or to offer clarification on what he had been doing during those weeks, but Shownu couldn’t pull his head out of his ass for a minute to try to read whatever Kihyun was feeling in that moment.

In the dimness of his own living room, Shownu sat down on his couch and prayed to whatever force of the universe to let him have a glimpse of Kihyun’s whereabouts; eyes closed and mind as focused as possible weren’t much of useful assets, no matter how hard he tried.

What was the purpose of that fucking gift if he couldn’t use it when he needed the most? Kihyun was out there, probably alone, certainly in pain. It hadn’t been long since they had met, but Shownu knew that the younger was one to not want to worry others if he could avoid it, when all that idiot did was to help even when he wasn’t solicited.

An involuntary hand hovered over Shownu’s chest at those thoughts of him.

Why the fuck was Kihyun like that? More importantly, why did it hurt Shownu so much to know he could’ve done something to make it better, or at least tried?

No sleep would be available that night with the thought of that nerd clouding his mind, because there was no more use in denial or thorough analysis.

Shownu had fallen quickly, and blew it all in its crucial moment.

Another hopeless look at his phone sent a silent message to whatever channel of the universe that could have heard him.

Let me find him. Please, universe. Please.
living room. “What the hell did you do?”

As they stepped into the apartment’s living room, a very disturbing scene welcomed them first thing in the goddamn morning, so you may understand why Jooheon immediately thought that, somehow, had to be Changkyun’s fault.

“What?” The boy still rubbed his eyes to get back into the land of reality. “Oh.”

The second instinct of his still sleepy mind was to laugh, but that wasn’t Jooheon’s best move since they faced a pink-haired time traveler sitting on their couch and weeping as if his life depended on it as he watched something on a laptop.

“Good morning!”

The suddenness of the new voice arising in the room made Jooheon flinch a bit, but his best friend seemed no shaken about it whatsoever.

And there was Minhyuk, instigator of the really confusing thoughts in his head and weird sensations in his chest.

From the kitchen, the man waved at them with a completely different hair color Jooheon had seen him before, in that very same apartment the older decided to spend the night at — Minhyuk’s head emanated the brightest cherry red as the sunlight touched strands of it, that fell on his forehead as the man leaned his head down a bit to check on some food he prepared.

“Hyung.” Changkyun’s voice broke through his appraisal, but didn’t make Jooheon quit staring. “Why is Hyungwon crying? I thought you said you two were going to watch something fun last night.”

“Oh.” Still by the kitchen counter, the red-haired seemed to have caught up on what the maknae meant to say. “Decided to introduce him to survival shows. He’s watching the finale of the first season of Produce 101, so he’s going through some stuff.”

*Why is he so fucking handsome?*

Jooheon’s heart stopped for a millisecond when his hyung’s eyes landed on him after that exact thought, as if the older had heard it.

After they got back to 2018, Minhyuk didn’t try to bring up the sort-of-issue about how the younger tried to put some distance between them as much as possible, but only managed to clearly hurt his hyung with his harsh acts. Even though he didn’t understand why Minhyuk would go to such lengths to turn a blind eye to something Jooheon had done, there was no better option than to just follow him.

“Why would you even do that to him?” Changkyun sighed deeply, turning around to stroll towards Hyungwon in the couch.

“Are you hungry, Jooheonnie?” The man asked, ambling towards him. Jooheon could feel his pulse fastening and, oh Jesus fuck.

“A… bit?” Not meant to sound like a question, but it could’ve been worse.

“Taste it!” Minhyuk put a plate with a sandwich in front of him. “Not the best cooker, sure, but my sandwiches are fucking legendary.”
“You gave me food poisoning once in school.” Changkyun casually commented in the background. Jooheon couldn’t hold back a snort.

“YAH!” Minhyuk shouted at the boy, but turned his attention back to Jooheon quickly. “Oh, you’re so cute, Jooheon. Your dimples are my favorite thing.”

Oh Jesus fuck.

“I… I…” His dry laugh didn’t make a better job to not make him look like a fool. “Thanks, hyung. I’ll risk my life over your sandwich.”

Minhyuk chuckled and all his insides melted.

What the hell.

One bite was enough to testify it was actually quite good, but the aftermath, even though unpredictable, could’ve made Jooheon faint right on spot.

“Oh.” The older moved too fast into his personal space for him to even react. Minhyuk brushed a finger on the corner of Jooheon’s mouth and that’s the story of how the latter died.

Sure, the possibility he overreacted a bit due the panic was quite high, but Jooheon could feel his soul slip away out of his body.

Minhyuk, on the other hand, had the nerve to lick the same finger he had put on Jooheon’s face and smile sweetly, which could have been his absolute demise if it weren’t for the other two people present in the apartment.

“But they were all good!” Hyungwon sounded legit distressed even though he had stopped crying, running a hand through his hair as he chatted with Changkyun on the couch. “Why couldn’t they all have been chosen?”

“Oh…” The time traveler seemed horrified. “Why? After everything they went through?”

Beside him, Jooheon heard Minhyuk holding back a cackle with some effort.

It also reminded the golden-haired he was still in the need of dying after being the target of such smooth move from his hyung.

“It was just a temporary group, hyung…” Changkyun tried his best. “Most of them debuted in other groups from their companies. It’s just how entertainment works.”

“Well, I don’t understand how the suffering of others can be entertaining.”

Ah, man. That poor time traveler now stuck in that capitalist hell hole called Earth.

“Well…”

Minhyuk’s voice appeared next to him again, bringing attention to the fact that his eyes went full white like it had done a couple of times before.

After everything they went through, not the most unnerving thing in the world to see in the goddamn morning; at least it only lasted few seconds.
“Hyung?” Jooheon tilted his head a bit to try to check on the older man.

Any possible response was overshadowed by a bass boosted sound that sounded like a muffled siren.

“Yes?” Hyungwon’s voice broke the silence as he answered his phone, leading Jooheon and Minhyuk’s gazes towards him. “I’m coming.”

“What?” He tried to question the time traveler, but the latter was already up to grab his coat.

“It’s Kihyun.” Minhyuk informed with a sigh, going back inside the kitchen.

“The fuck is he doing in Ilsan?”

If anything, Hyungwon lamented deeply not getting any sleep the night before. He just didn’t expect having to deal with a new issue so soon, especially when the entire month had been incredibly calm — the only emergency had been a crack in the fabric of space-time in a universe nearby, but even that it had been of natural causes.

“Language.” The time traveler admonished Jooheon with a deep sigh.

“Do you know exactly where he is?” Shownu was the first to question him.

No more than half-hour ago, Hyungwon arrived in the train to find the tanned man already waiting for him. Even though he didn’t deem to be necessary, Jooheon and Changkyun followed the pink-haired back there, but at least Minhyuk seemed confident enough that his presence wouldn’t be necessary and he decided head straight to work.

After almost 10 minutes of carefully searching through Shownu’s memories at the med bay (one could say it was essential for the last time he attempted such thing, his insides almost tried to burn him alive) Hyungwon finally pinpointed the location that Shownu’s foresight indicated through a few messy interconnections.

“His timeline is too unstable at the moment.” The time traveler tried to elucidate. “It seems like… he’s moving a lot. My most solid prediction is from 10 hours from now.”

“In the beginning of the night?” Shownu seemed quite frustrated. “I had a vision about him. What if something happens before we can find him? He…”

“He’s a Constant. If something serious were to happen to him, I would know by now, Shownu. Kihyun may be struggling, but he will alright. I will bring him back, don’t worry.”

“I will go with you.” The tanned man declared, and didn’t wait for a confirmation before starting walking out of the med bay. “I’ll be back later.”

To be extremely honestly, Shownu fucking hated teleportation.
Nothing against the practice of it per se, but it did something weird to his body — a sensation as close to when one spins around for too long and loses balance for a moment, and such feeling suddenly makes you feel too aware of everything. So yeah, he would’ve driven all the way to that place if he could, but there were more pressing matters to be solved.

“Are you sure?” Shownu took a deep breath, examining the two-story white house they stood in front of.

“Yes.” Behind him, the time traveler’s short confirmation was enough.

Without a second thought, Shownu knocked on the door a few times before listening steps moving in his direction; a low muffled sound of music and indistinct idle chatter grew as soon as the door was swung open.

A clearly stoned dude stared at them from the threshold, blinking a couple of times before speaking.

“Can I—”

“We are looking for Yoo Kihyun.” Hyungwon’s precise voice made him notice the man now stood beside him in the small porch.

“…Who?” The guy blinked a couple of times again, leaning against the doorframe.

Jesus, this will take all night.

“Grey hair, seems smaller than he actually is, probably tried to boss you around.”

“Oh…” The slim guy snorted briefly. “He’s…” His eyes moved towards the ceiling, but didn’t seem too sure. “Somewhere there…”

Maybe he used a bit more of force than necessary to push the man aside with one hand and get inside that place, but there would be a time for Shownu to review his actions and that was definitely not the one.

On his way upstairs, there was a trail of people drinking or smoking — or both at the same time — left behind, and his mind only recalled being in the company of someone when he finally reached the first floor and the time traveler put a hand on his shoulder.

“This way.” Hyungwon indicated towards a specific room.

Five knocks were necessary until their presence was noticed, and once it was, Shownu wasted no time in entering the room.

“Hey, hey, hey.” A huge hand faltered a bit in standing in front of his chest.

Once he looked up, a man maybe 10cm taller and just as muscular as him stood on his way, but Shownu’s eyes wasted no time in searching the place for the one he wanted.

Already accustomed to his features, it wasn’t hard to find the nerd among the half dozen people scattered across that room; Kihyun barely moved, with eyes almost completely shut down as he laid next to a girl in a small cushioned sofa.

“Who…” The taller dude spoke again, poking Shownu in the shoulder. “Are…”

The man tried to prod him in the chest once more, but a hand quickly caught it before it could
“Get him out.” Hyungwon declared, still holding the guy back without much struggle. “I’ll meet you downstairs soon.”

As his body shifted sideways to reach for Kihyun, the tall stranger tried to stop him again, but was brought to his knees by what seemed to be a lancinating pain; once Shownu turned his head around, he could see Hyungwon effortlessly pushing the dude’s finger forward to the point it almost had bent all the opposite way.

The time traveler seemed unbothered by the dude’s whimper, though.

Acting as fast as he could, Shownu tried to bring Kihyun back to full consciousness, but the younger man refused even to move, so the next move was required.

Within a couple of seconds, Shownu leaned forward and put Kihyun’s arms over his back and pulled the younger man up towards his shoulder, effectively dragging him out of the sofa.

Not for a moment during the path downstairs Kihyun uttered a word, but as soon as Shownu managed to sit him down on the sidewalk, the nerd seemed to regain full awareness of what was happening.

“STOP!” Kihyun yelled, even though he was already motionless on the floor. “STOP!”

The younger blinked furiously on the street poorly lit, yet still good enough for them to get a good look at each other’s face. At least for someone sober…

“Calm down. It’s me, Shownu.”

“IT KNOW!” He squirmed a bit trying to get on his feet, giving up rapidly. “You… You…” The abrupt way Kihyun’s voice cracked simply knocked the wind out of Shownu. “What do you… want from me? Uh?”

“I’m sorry, Kihyun.” At the sound of his apology, the younger suddenly craned his neck up to stare at him. “Really. I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. But I’m here now.”

Not a single muscle of his could stay up anymore as Kihyun broke down sobbing in the middle of the sidewalk.

“Come here.” Already on the floor, Shownu opened his arms in the man’s direction. “I’m here.”

With a bit of struggle, Kihyun practically threw himself into his arms, and suddenly the world made a little more sense.

Nothing felt more right than to bring a hand to the back of the man’s neck, lifting him a bit so Kihyun could sit on his lap, whom almost instinctively wrapped his legs around the older’s torso and his arms around his neck.

The breeze was getting harsher on them as its coldness started icily to hit Shownu’s skin, but there was nothing that could bother him into pulling away from that level of intimacy he came into contact with.

There was a vulnerability Shownu had never experienced before. His fingers gently ran through Kihyun’s hair as the latter poured his heart out; to allow someone else to see them in such intimate exposure invoked a bravery that Shownu, and probably Kihyun, didn’t know they had it in them.
Exhaling sharply, he just felt glad Kihyun came to him once more.

“So…”

It was obvious that Hyungwon was trying to find an ideal way to deal with what just had happened, but he sure as hell sounded uncomfortable beyond words.

“I can take care of him.” Shownu shifted a bit on his side to gaze at Hyungwon, with a slumbering Kihyun clinging to his upper body like a koala. “He will be already embarrassed to know you saw him like this.”

As they finally reached the door of Kihyun’s apartment, the time traveler nodded in agreement, with his hands behind his back.

“Sure. If there is anything I can do to…”

“You could open the door.” Shownu beckoned towards Kihyun’s apartment. “Don’t wanna wake him to ask for the code.”

“Oh. Sure.”

The pink-haired worked his magic/science/powers (or whatever else) on the door and rapidly made his way out, bowing quickly towards them before disappearing into thin air.

You know these moments when you’re barely awake, but you already know that you regret all the choices you’ve made in life recently? The bitterness in Kihyun’s mouth was more than a sign of such thing, it was a goddamn omen he should start repenting his idiotic sins.

Quietly cursing the sunlight striking him in the face, Kihyun tried to move, but found himself trapped into someone’s arms, promptly proceeding to panic.

Fuck, fuck. I didn’t… right?

Sure, life hadn’t been the kindest to him lately, but that was just a clear declaration that Kihyun should give up on trying to be a functional human being — which was already, evidently, not his forte.

After struggling like the hungover moron he was, Kihyun finally managed to turn around and face the owner of those arms, with a part of his brain yelling at him for being so damn stupid.

The initial shock made him yell spontaneously, waking up the other man in the process.

“What…” Shownu yawned, and Kihyun just wanted to dig a hole in the ground and bury himself alive. “Hey.”

Oh, God. I’m such a fuck up. Oh, God.

“Calm down.” The older moved in bed to sit upright and, goddamnit, he was shirtless. Kihyun’s eyes just went full check up on that because he was a known shameless human being. “We didn’t
do anything.”

“Then why—”

His convoluted memory of the past day managed to pick up a few flashes of what Kihyun remembered before he straight up passed out — someone picking him up, taking him out of the house, the iciness of the sidewalk floor, Shownu apologizing…

“Oh.” Kihyun furrowed his brows as his brain tried to adjust things in his mind and bear the migraine at the same time.

“You fell asleep while crying in my arms, so I carried you back from Ilsan.”

“I WAS IN ILSAN?!” He immediately felt a twinge in his head from the yell. “Ouch…”

“Yes.” Shownu actually laughed at his pain, rubbing his own face with his hand. “And before your brain can fully sober up and do the math, yes, Hyungwon took me there and brought us back here. He was the one who discovered where you were.”

Just when he thought the situation couldn’t get worse, the world found a way to be sure there was always another level of shit for Kihyun to get himself in.

“Oh…” The younger man covered his face with his hands, mortified at the thought of it. “Fucking hell.”

“I was going to leave after tucking you in, but you woke up and asked me not to go away…”

Despite the throbbing pain plaguing his brain in that moment, it was impossible for Kihyun not to find cute the way Shownu started to scratch the back of his neck.

“Hyung…”

“I’m sorry, Kihyun.”

The apology was so sudden it made the younger frown out of surprise.

“I was only thinking about me.” The older man continued. “When you came to see me in the train… I should’ve felt something in you, but… I was selfish.”

“You know…” Kihyun cleared his throat, sitting cross-legged. “In the beginning, I was really avoiding you… I was scared… but then…”

Where to begin? There was so much to explain, to—

“I know. Jooheon told me what was it about. Don’t be mad at him, he was worried.”

“It’s…” The younger sighed. “Sorry to bother you, hyung.”

“Please. You only bother me when you disappear out of nowhere to… whatever that place was.”

The last concrete memory Kihyun had was calling an old friend whom he grew up with — their dads were both military — to ask him out for a drink so he could forget his entire life, since the guy was notorious for knowing where every party in the city was happening. From there, the rest was just a blur.

“Uh… this is kinda awkward now and I wanna die.”
Shownu snorted at his last statement, encircling his arms around his waist again. At such action, Kihyun could only bring himself closer to him too.

Still unfathomable how could Kihyun have not melted to the core at that man burying his face on his neck, in the middle of the hug.

After a brief moment, Kihyun’s hands bravely move upwards; drawing crooked lines on the older’s arms led him to carefully bring his fingers to brush against Shownu’s shoulders, then firmly plant them on the nape of the man’s neck.

No force on Earth could’ve stopped him from smiling at the sensation of Shownu grinning against his neck, and only in that experience of such shiver Kihyun could comprehend how badly his body missed Shownu’s.

It would’ve been for the best if he could’ve contained the gasp the came out of him as Shownu moved his mouth all the way up his face.

During that month, the total of times Kihyun wanted to have said ‘fuck’ to the world and just to have spent his days kissing him was virtually countless.

At the sight of what he wanted the most in that very moment, Kihyun shuddered as Shownu placed a hand on his face, outlining his lower lip with his thumb.

“Hey, nerd…” In such closeness, he could feel the older’s hot breath on him.

It seemed impossible to stop staring at Shownu’s mouth.

“Hmm?”

“You should…” His voice was no louder than of a whisper. “Maybe…”

“Hmm?”

“If you want…” Shownu suddenly chuckled. “If you want me to kiss you, you should brush your teeth.”

And there goes the moment.

“Jesus fucking Christ.” Kihyun huffed, pulling away and almost falling off the bed in the process. “Jesus, I hate you.”

That only made the older man laugh even harder.

“I missed my nerd too.”

Hyungwon could get used to the serenity of that week, with the only casual disturbance in it being the boys’ determination to introduce him to various aspects of their culture.

To be honest, the time traveler pondered about learning about it all through his ordinary — and faster — way of self-education, but it would be a shame to lose priceless looks on their faces as they watched Hyungwon react to another thing that seemed too taken for granted before their
friendship. To take genuine and pure joy from these boys would be just cruelty.

Another thing that ended up being funnier that the pink-haired could’ve ever imagined was the conversation he had with Kihyun, a bit more than a day after he went after the man with Shownu.

Sure, Kihyun looked mortified of being the cause of such “nuisance”, as he worded it, but the only thought in Hyungwon’s mind was how that was the least troubling thing a Constant had ever put him through, so he had to hold back a chuckle.

His friend seemed better, though. Whatever problems Kihyun had been facing that led him to such peculiar choice of place to be, it didn’t seem to bother him too much anymore.

After a brief knock on Minhyuk and Shownu’s apartment door, the latter opened it. Shownu’s expression changed quickly as soon as his eyes landed on him.

“Oh…” The man sneered. “You might wanna get ready.”

Without bothering to close the door, Shownu went back inside first, leaving a confused Hyungwon at his threshold.

Regardless of that, he made his way in, shutting the door behind him.

“What the hell?” Kihyun jested, from the couch he shared with Wonho, whom now had blond hair. “You really going to a PARTY like this? In a suit?”

Hyungwon felt too self-aware of their eyes, looking down at himself for a few seconds.

“What’s wrong it?” The time traveler gestured at his basil green suit, put together with a brown patterned shirt.

“You look like you’re headed to some fancy club full of rich pricks who can’t get off without having someone telling them that they’re the apogee of good dick.”

In times where Hyungwon had no idea how to respond to a line full of expressions he wasn’t familiarized with, he preferred to just nod.

“Jesus…” Shownu’s voice emerged behind him, but soon the man stood beside Hyungwon in the living room. “This is oddly specific. Stop bullying his clothes, nerd. We all know this is Minhyuk’s job.”

“Yes, it is.” The mentioned man suddenly strolled in their direction. “I knew you were gonna pull something like this. I already have a solution. Come on.”

“GODDAMN! THIS IS WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT!”

Kihyun’s passionate response to his new set of clothes made Hyungwon wince a bit, as he ambled into the living room after a good 10 minutes inside Minhyuk’s room.

“Is… this… okay?” Hyungwon checked himself, for the twentieth time, looking down at the leather jacket, tee and ripped jeans that Minhyuk borrowed him — all black. “I…”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Hyungwon.” Minhyuk stated, taking a few steps to stand beside him. “People ain’t ready for this fine piece of ass.”
“Can we go already?” From the couch, Wonho questioned. “The boys are waiting.”

It’s not like Hyungwon was afraid of such social occasion. Scarier things were put in his path for him to face, and the time traveler didn’t waver before deciding he was willing to deal with it.

But there he was, frozen in the middle of someone else’s living room as some very noisy song blared across the entire house crammed with young people.

What made him nervous the most was the fact that he never had been to such event like that before, and it had not been for the reason it was Jooheon’s birthday party, the time traveler would have find a way to casually slip away from that invitation.

How could he have refused when Jooheon seemed so eager for him to show up? No one had ever invited Hyungwon to a birthday party before, nor had he experienced one for himself. It couldn’t be that bad, after all.

To help with his nervousness, Hyungwon decided to create a log in his brain for that occasion, silently documenting everything he observed on his way through that experience.

Entry number one

Young people are very… tactile. Not that it is a problem, or much of a bewilderment since his friends are very similar in this matter, but Hyungwon had never seen so many of them sharing skinship so casually. They hugged each other out of nowhere, touched their acquaintances’ arms and face quite a lot while they talked or danced, and held hands to take short walks around. They’d even put down their drinks to make physical contact with someone, in various circumstances.

Entry number two

Music was something essential to bond people together. Either something that no one bothered to acknowledge or a song that every single human in the room stopped anything they were doing to sing along once was being played, it was clear that such kind of event couldn’t occur well without its presence. To judge their musical choices was not his task, but the time traveler did recognize a few of them for the boys had introduced it to him before and it was pretty nice.

Entry number three

His friends enjoyed drinking alcohol quite a lot. It had barely been 10 minutes since they arrived at the place hosting Jooheon’s birthday party, and Hyungwon counted that three cups had passed by Minhyuk’s hands, who was accompanied by Changkyun in his drinking journey. In another corner of the living room, Shownu grabbed a cup out of Kihyun’s hands, whom seemed to be unhappy about that, but apparently couldn’t argue about it. All the others were far away from his visual perception.

Entry number four

Alcohol does not taste good. No matter how many times he was introduced to it in every single universe he had been, Hyungwon couldn’t understand how people enjoyed such thing. After Kihyun offered him a cup of it and the pink-haired took a sip, only to immediately regret, Hyungwon refused to take part in this party ritual and chose to stick to a can of soda.

Entry number five
His modus operandi could be encapsulated as following his friends around the party while trying to hear what was being chatted about, but the hip-hop music being blasted around was indeed very loud. After almost two hours had passed, Hyungwon didn’t speak much, but tried to enjoy as much as it was possible for him every time one of his friends dragged him near the crowd of people dancing, so they could dance too. It wasn’t totally ghastly.

Entry number six

After witnessing Jooheon, the so called by everybody in the room “birthday boy”, talking to a seemingly close friend whose name Hyungwon didn’t pick up, only the fact that the man was Chinese, Minhyuk assumed a vexed mien and marched across the room. His red-haired friend suddenly tugged Jooheon by the arm, hauling him towards the backyard. Both of them got out of his visual perception. Meanwhile, Shownu marched in his direction with an expression that indicated he had more pressing matters.

“Hyungwon, come on.”

The man didn’t expect for his response, and pulled the time traveler by the wrist to walk alongside him through the crowd.

Near the house’s wooden staircase, Kihyun seemed to be in a heated discussion with other three men about something Hyungwon couldn’t hear until he got very close to them.

“I DON’T CARE!” Kihyun’s drunkenly spouted. “I STILL CAN WIN NO MATTER WHAT, YOU AFRAID OR WHAT?”

“I’M NOT!” A man slightly taller than Kihyun in a similar drunk state replied. “LET’S DO IT NOW! RIGHT GUYS?”

As he turned around, his two far-from-sober companions frantically nodded.

“CHOOSE!” Kihyun shouted, abruptly stepping on the first step of the stairs.

“He’s going to embarrass himself.” Shownu spoke clearly, leaning on Hyungwon’s ear to be well comprehended. “He will listen to you, tell him to give this up.”

With a nod, Hyungwon carefully made his way towards his friend.

“Kihyun?” His voice reached quickly his friend’s ear, who perked up and looked at the time traveler as if he hadn’t seen him in years.

“HYUNGWON-AH! GLAD YOU’RE HERE! I’M GOING TO WIN THIS!”

“Kihyun, why don’t you come with me?”

“NO, I CAN’T!” The man seemed legitimately distressed. “I CAN’T LOSE!”

“KIHYUN!” Shownu’s yell behind him made the traveler flinch for a second. “I’LL DRAG YOU OUT OF HERE IF I HAVE TO!”

“I WILL RUN!” The man stuck his tongue out.

“CALM DOWN!” Hyungwon had to yell in order to be heard at that point. “WHAT IS IT THAT YOU MUST DO?”
Humans take the bets they make while intoxicated very seriously. A noteworthy detail is that every other drunk person around apparently will enforce such idea that came out of a drunk person’s mind, no matter what it is.

Now Hyungwon understood why so many bad things happened while in similar circumstances.

When life seems bad or boring, the only thing that would never disappoint it is alcohol.

Sure, maybe on the next day, but one should deal with things in their right time, so Wonho unequivocally didn’t give a fuck about whatever could happen, as long as he could keep drinking for free and watching Changkyun kill it on the middle of the party, rapping to some songs Wonho had never heard before that moment. Whoever was the original singer of such music was left completely jobless; that boy had an amazing talent.

Not only could the maknae rap well, he also did marvelous faces in the middle of it that made everybody around him holler and laugh so hard that Wonho almost choked on his beer a couple of times.

But as usual, in parties full of horny, hammered and stoned people, the good time had to be broken by some unexpected bullshit.

And of course… Hyungwon would be involved.

A lot of things passed through Wonho’s mind at that moment. That, maybe, something dangerous could’ve come up and they had to get the fuck out of there as soon as possible; that something was about to happen and shenanigans would ensue soon, and anything of this sort.

What did not pass through Wonho’s mind was that the music was about to be briefly cut off, only to be replaced by Rain’s Rainism at full volume and some dude popped up to start to dance to the choreography, or at least try to. The guy was so drunk that Wonho was taken aback by the fact that he still could move like a normal person, and even fucking dance.

Screams of hype arose from every direction of the living room, and by the end of it Wonho could spot a familiar face moving towards him.

“You’re not gonna believe this.” Shownu stated, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“What?”

“Just watch.”

Someone yelled from the other side of the room as Rain’s song was cut off, opening more space in the middle of the room. Over there, a very excited and intoxicated Kihyun jumped up and down beside the time traveler, whom seemed quite conflicted while staring at a phone.

But the new song was playing and Hyungwon handed the phone to his shorter friend, who screamed something intelligible by that time, for every single person in the room started shouting
like goddamn monkeys in a zoo.

To state that Wonho saw that coming would be foolish and untruthful. Hyungwon was capable of doing a lot of things, as the man proved it to him over and over again, even if all of them defied everything Wonho had ever believed in his entire life.

However, one thing he had never expected to see him doing was dancing.

Dancing to Sunmi’s Gashina. Like, the entire choreography remarkably well done — which Wonho would give credit to the time traveler absorbing such knowledge just a minute earlier, probably from a video shown to him by Kihyun.

The goddamn beer cup slipped off his hand out of surprise to watch such picturesque moment, but no one seemed to give a shit about anything that wasn’t the time traveler dancing like he was, you know, a goddamn professional idol.

Hyungwon even got all the face expressions right, especially from that popular part of the choreography in the chorus; the smile with his hands under his chin were a prelude to the finger guns pointed at no one in particular, but were clear in Wonho’s point of view.

The pink-haired seemed to pay no mind to his existence, though, so Wonho’s dignity was still intact as long as no one mentioned that he was indeed gawking at Hyungwon the entire time.

First and foremost, it was kind of impossible not to, especially if one knew who that man was. Wonho wouldn’t have found it uncanny if Hyungwon defeated a thousand armies in a day, but to have that man currently sitting on the floor of some poorly hygienic house in the suburbs as he finished the choreography of a Sunmi song seemed like a glitch in the matrix.

As the song came to an end, the entire goddamn place was cheering like they were in some soccer stadium and the player had just scored a goal. In the middle of the turmoil, Hyungwon quietly got up with the people hyping him to death. The shy smile on his face seemed to be a sign that it hadn’t all been terrible, after all.

At least until some dude, jostling the crowd from the left side of the room, came up to the time traveler and straight up kissed him.

Wonho’s eyes widened as he watched something that only a few people caught up, mainly because everyone else was drunk as fuck.

What the…

The man pulled away quickly, leaving a bewildered Hyungwon staring at nowhere in particular once the stranger went away as if nothing had happened.

The time traveler didn’t seem to have accepted that as absolute reality, bringing a finger to brush against his lips with a frown on his face.

Shownu had disappeared from his side once Wonho checked, only to peep at his friend dragging a plastered Kihyun off to somewhere.

As he brought his gaze back to the pink-haired, the spot in which the man stood was now empty, and music began to play again for drunken entertainment.

It was only almost 20 minutes later that Wonho landed his eyes on the time traveler again, as the man leaned his back against the wooden fence on one side of the backyard.
Hyungwon was fast in his movements, but Wonho could see that he was indeed wiping out a tear off of his face before it could escape.

“Yah.” He called for the pink-haired man, whom instantly got up, seeming a bit startled.

In a relative distance from the center of the party, the sound coming from inside the house was lowered down, so they could hear and speak better.

“Oh… Wonho-ssi. Is there anything—”

“Wrong?” The blond completed. “I should ask that. Why were you crying?” Hyungwon opened his mouth to speak, but Wonho was still a bit inebriated and lacking patience. “And don’t tell me you weren’t. You were. Why?”

“I…” Hyungwon sighed, crossing his arms over his chest. “It’s silly… but that… you know, earlier… I had never… That… was my… first kiss. I don’t know why I feel sad, it’s nothing.”

Maybe it was the alcohol in his body talking, or maybe Wonho had just too much vexation amassed inside of him to be able to explain his next action. Whatever it was, remained fair in his perception, so it didn’t really matter.

Chugging the rest of the beer out of his cup, Wonho threw the thing on the floor and turned around to enter the house again, fully aware of what he should do.

He would’ve been unstoppable had it not been for the time traveler himself that decided to be an obstacle.

“Wonho-ssi, don’t do this.” The pink-haired swiftly stood in front of him, blocking the path.

A couple of people gave them a few looks, but didn’t care enough for more than a few seconds.

“So me about to beat that asshole you can predict, but not that asshole kissing you?”

“I can’t catch a glimpse of my own timeline.” Hyungwon rebuked. “Please, don’t do this. It’s alright.”

“No, it’s not.” That commiserated tone of his made Wonho even angrier. “Let me deal with this.”

Wonho tried to push him to the side, but his mind had forgotten that the time traveler was actually way stronger than he looked — stronger than any person in there, probably.

“Please, don’t.” Hyungwon softly placed a hand on his chest, but with enough strength so the blond couldn’t move forward. “It doesn’t matter.”

“You need to stop doing this.”

“Doing what?”

“Forgiving people that are not sorry for what they did.”

Such moment of shared stare felt it lasted more than it actually did, until Hyungwon pulled his hand away from him.

“It’s not for them.” He spoke in a small voice. “I can’t afford holding grudges. I forgive them because it allows me to move on. I forgive them because I have to be the better person, or else I would succumb to hatred and other worlds could end up succumbing with me. I already did things
I’m not proud of, Wonho-ssi. I don’t want to go back to being that person. So, please… don’t—”

The air seemed to have been knocked out of the pink-haired’s lungs as the man brought a hand to clutch his chest, and Hyungwon lost his balance.

Wonho moved forward swiftly and wrapped an arm around Hyungwon’s waist, holding the time traveler in his place; only in such moment of closeness that the blond noticed that Hyungwon’s eyes irradiated the usual blueish light, but the pink-haired didn’t seem to be aware of it.

In a blink of an eye — literally — Hyungwon regained his steady breath and the glow of his eyes faded away, still panting a bit with a wide-eye Wonho looking at him with a bit of panic.

“Hyungwon?” Wonho’s arm started to move away from the traveler as the latter looked up at him.

“Something is off.”

The cold wild of Seoul streets sobered him up a bit, but the sour taste in his tongue still assured Kihyun that maybe he should quit drinking for a while.

Well, but since it wasn’t entirely bad to have Shownu on top of him as the final result of that night, maybe Kihyun would reconsider that decision somewhere in the near future.

His drunk ass had totally no idea how they had gotten to the train so fast, but Shownu probably carried him at some point if his previous experiences could foretell anything; in any other circumstances, he would’ve preferred to just had gone straight home, but his inebriated mind still could do the math and understand that Hyungwon’s machine was way closer to the party they were in — Jooheon’s birthday party, the first one they spent together and Kihyun didn’t even say goodbye to his best friend before leaving.

But to be fair, Jooheon was the one who disappeared first, and after all that uproar that ensued Hyungwon’s dance, it was basically impossible to have found him before he was dragged out of there by Shownu.

Kihyun cackled so hard he had to stop kissing his hyung, throwing his head back on the bed of Shownu’s room.

“What?” The older propped himself up on his elbows, smiling at him.

“God, I made Hyungwon dance Gashina. I’m a horrible friend.”

Shownu snorted and pecked him on the lips.

“You are. You also are the most insufferable drunk in the world. You’re on time out from now on.”

“What are you, my boss?” Kihyun chuckled at him, pulling Shownu down to another kiss.

There was not a single thing about their kisses that Kihyun didn’t like. Shownu’s hands gradually traced his sides at the same time as his tongue slid inside Kihyun’s mouth, making the latter slowly gasp. The younger pressed himself against Shownu as tightly as possibly, as if there was still any space between them to be filled in such heat; the sound of panting coming out of them both as they were forced to pull away to breathe was the only sound in the room, only to be surpassed by
Kihyun’s shameless moans as Shownu moved his hips back and forth against his, so unbearably slow it should be considered goddamn torture.

“I really like you, nerd.” Shownu’s breath on his mouth, as he grinded against Kihyun, only made the younger yearn more for the man, wrapping his legs around Shownu.

“I like you too.” The younger smiled, for that was the blatant truth, and nothing else mattered besides that. “I would also… really like… if you fu—”

The abrupt shaking of the train made Kihyun yell, instantly entering in terror mode because that’s just how he is as a person. Much for his luck, Shownu was more of a practical person and quickly shifted to his side in bed, bringing Kihyun closer to his torso and put a hand over his ear to muffle the squeaking sound produced by that quake.

Any vestige of drunkenness in his body was fucking gone after a few seconds of that attempt of heart attack.

Kihyun’s instinct yelled at him to get out of that place as soon as possible, so that’s what he did.

“KIHYUN, WAIT!”

It was not only when he was already by the door that Shownu caught up to him, saying the voice command to unlock his bedroom’s door.

“MONBEBE!” Kihyun yelled as soon as he, clearly disheveled, arrived at the outside. The seism had stopped, but that always meant something dubious was about to go down. “WHAT IS THIS?”

“Well, there’s nothing much I can explain. Incoming!”

The train began to tremble violently again, and Kihyun would’ve fell down if not for Shownu’s arms securing a hold on his waist behind him. Regardless of its short life, that shaking made Kihyun want to crawl up the walls so he wouldn’t have to feel that weird unsteadiness under his feet.

Seconds later, as he clung to Shownu’s torso as if his life depended on it, a loud thud of something hitting the metallic floor in the distance made Kihyun open his eyes in fear.

“What…”

“Monbebe.” Shownu now called for the A.I., kindly bringing a hand to the back of Kihyun’s neck. “What was that?”

“You should go to the main wagon. Both of you.”

Being the coward he was, and with no shame of admitting that in the moment, Kihyun hung onto Shownu’s back as the older led the way to the first wagon, at Monbebe’s orders.

As soon as they stepped foot inside of it, the older tapped on his arm.

“Nerd. Look.”

Slowly shifting behind the man, Kihyun tilted his head and found a stranger groaning on the floor, lying on her back.

A woman.
“Monbebe.” He hissed at the A.I., trying not to be heard by the person just a couple meters away from them. “Who—”

“Ooooouchhh…” The woman whined, throwing her heads back to display an ash grey hair. She seemed to be in her late twenties from the angle that Kihyun got. “Where…”

The two of them didn’t move a single centimeter as the strange woman looked around her premises, finally noticing their presence in the wagon; their gaze at her was probably the most confused ones in history.

Kihyun couldn’t explain why, but he could feel she wasn’t hostile.

It didn’t help her case that, as soon as the unknown woman set eyes on them, suddenly she jumped off the floor and ran in their direction.

Out of fright, Kihyun hid behind Shownu again, which was a shitty move, but anyone that knew the younger well would’ve seen that coming, so whatever.

It took a couple of seconds for Kihyun see her arms wrapped around Shownu’s back, right above his head, for him to understand that she was actually hugging the older man.

With a frown, Kihyun took some distance to analyze the scene and the happiness in the stranger’s smile made him feel in conflict with the fact that a girl was hugging his… whatever Shownu was for him, something they hadn’t discussed yet.

“What the…”

“I’m sooooo glad…” The woman mumbled, closing her eyes like a tired toddler. “So glad to see you, Papa.” Kihyun was truly scared to see her open her eyes so fast to gape directly at him, as if she hadn’t noticed he was there before. “DAD!”

Yep. The girl looked him, dead in the eyes, and called him “dad”. What an experience he’d never thought he’d have with a person of the opposite gender.

He would have more time to ponder about the strangeness of that entire thing if the woman hadn’t pulled away from Shownu and walked straight in Kihyun’s direction, only to faint midway to him.

His inherent tendency was to grab her before she hit the floor, much with the help of Shownu whom didn’t seem too daunted about what in hell was happening in front of them.

The woman was, for sure, unconscious at that moment. Not knowing what to say or do, Kihyun’s eyes wandered to her clothing; black in its entirely, the only writing found on it was at the top of her shirt, at the left side of the chest. The initials K.T.A were embroidered in hangul, alongside the numbers 038.

The befuddled look he shared with Shownu was quite terrifying.

“Did she…” The older mumbled, looking forth between her and Kihyun. “She called you… dad?”

If anything, never a good sign.
(changkyun's voice) you're my son??????????
expect showki's daughter to be an iconic mf dropping hints of the future. stay tuned for
the theories, gays

there will be hyungwon reacting to more pop culture stuff dw
also, yeah, there was v little hyungwonho in this chapter but its a slow burn?? so
theres that
joohyuk is about to rise soon alongside showki, dont worry joohyuk fellas

see ya next week, kids (or sooner than that, im excited to write this part) (get rekt kat)
Hyungwon reviews time travel movies

Chapter Summary

back to the future is OUT, a wrinkle in time is IN

Chapter Notes

LADS sorry about the delay
i been being a fool and wrote 5k of an unrelated story (still hwh) so yeah its late i know but theres lots of hwh in this chapter? so i guess yall won anyways
enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart
i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)"

e.e. cummings, “i carry your heart with me (i carry it in) ”

“So you’re telling me… This woman…”

Wonho eyed the woman lying unconscious in one of the beds of the med bay, for the tenth time.

“You’re telling me…” He began again, crossing his arms over his chest. “Is your… your…”

Shownu, whom sat next to her bed, rolled his eyes again at him.

“You can say child, Wonho. Jesus…”

“How the hell are you so calm about this?” Wonho moved forward a bit to get closer to his friend. “Freak the fuck out! Your… child?! CHILD!”

“Please, Kihyun already did that for me.” Something in his friend’s expression made that sound weird as it came out of his mouth.

“Why?”
“You know…” Shownu exhaled slowly, scratching the back of his neck. “That’s what Kihyun does. Someone from the future just appeared.”

Well, he was right. His other best friend was the specialist in the melodramatic area.

“Sure, but…” Wonho sighed, looking down at her again. With ash grey hair, she seemed to be just a bit older than them, dressed in all black; her tanner skin glowed just like Shownu’s, though. “You gotta be at least disturbed about this. Come on, Shownu.”

The other man shrugged, glancing at the woman again.

“I’m friends with a time traveler, Wonho.” His friend kept his gaze on his… child… as he spoke. “Shit is bound to get weirder and weirder.”

The shuffling sound caused by a stir next to them startled Wonho and Shownu, making them flinch.

Small brown eyes flickered as the bright light of the med day touched them, blinking a couple of times while staring at the ceiling.

Wonho held his breath as he watched the woman move, diligently watching every movement she made.

The chilling air in there became almost too rarefied to breathe, and it got worse when the stranger suddenly turned her head, gaze landing on them.

Then she screamed.

Wonho’s eyes went round as he shouted back at the woman, stumbling backwards as it scared the living shit out of him.

“Oh no.” The woman widened her eyes even more, clearly panicking. “OH NO!”

Meanwhile, Shownu remained stoic next to them. Science had to study how on Earth could that man be so serene in those situations — it was simply uncanny.

“Monbebe.” His friend’s throaty voice called for the A.I. “Call Hyungwon now.”

“OH NO!” She screeched again, now at Shownu’s face. “I’M FUCKED! I HAVE TO—”

“Stop screaming.” Shownu requested, stretching a hand to touch her arm.

“NO!” She pulled away, dragging her legs to press them against her chest, stirring to the corner of the bed. “OH, FUCK—”

“Calm down.” Hyungwon’s stentorian voice echoed through the bay, drowning it into silence.

Already free from his party garments, the time traveler walked into the room wearing a black three-piece suit. Despite his pleas, the woman in bed yelled again at the sight of Hyungwon.

“Wonho-ssi.” He suddenly turned to talk to him. “Please, wait outside.”

An odd instinct stopped Wonho from arguing against it, so he simply nodded and took his eyes off of the girl, whom had the color drained out of her face.
“Can you give me an explanation for this?”

When Hyungwon sensed an upheaval in the fabric of reality, he honestly didn’t expect to have to deal with someone who came from that timeline’s future.

A strong migraine overtook his brain, certainly the result of the problem he was about to face.

The woman, probably in her late twenties with a very short grey hair, seemed shocked by the realization of her whereabouts; not a single word came out of her mouth in the 5 minutes she had been alone with Shownu and him in the med bay.

With a sudden move, she hauled her own arm towards her face, pushing one of her long sleeves to reveal a very familiar wristwatch.

“Work, goddamnit!” Her fingers pressed against different points in the surface of it, but nothing happened. “WORK!”

“Why are you here?” Hyungwon tried again, placing a hand on the metallic footboard.

“Can’t say.” Her gruff voice made her seem even more desperate. “Can’t… Oh, fuck, I shouldn’t be here, I can’t be here…”

“We know who you are, you know.” His friend stated, earning a bewildered look from the woman. “Not really hard to guess when the first thing you did was hug me and call me ‘Papa’.”

“Oh my God…”

Hyungwon spat out a laugh at the sight of the stranger sinking into the bed, covering her face with her hands. Not even the urgency of the situation could’ve hold him back.

“Why are you here, Miss?” The pink-haired addressed her again. “I’m going to assume this wasn’t in your plans.”

“NO!” A muffled shout came out.

“Yah.” Suddenly, Shownu poked her in the biceps. “Did you inherited this overreacting thing from Kihyun?”

Oh, the second surprise of the night.

Once he arrived at the train with Wonho, Monbebe confidentially briefed him about the situation, including the fact that Kihyun and Shownu were supposedly the parents of the time-travelling stranger, unconscious in the med bay.

Not only it surprised it the fact that they had a child that landed on his train out of nowhere, but also the part where Hyungwon had no idea his friends were even together in first place.

As it seemed that the couple desired to not make it public, Hyungwon agreed to not comment on such detail and disclose that the stranger was only Shownu’s child, for the benefit of his friends’ privacy.
After a couple of minutes, the woman pushed herself up in bed with a profuse groan, shifting a little to stare at the pink-haired with pleading eyes.

“Uncle, how badly I fucked up? How long until I disappear from the timeline?”

“Did you…” Hyungwon gasped a bit, not really knowing why. “Did you call me uncle? Am I in your timeline? In this universe?”

“Yeah…?” She frowned, as if what she had received an outlandish question. “Uncle, I swear I didn’t mean it, but my watch went crazy and PUFF! I was thrown here! Right in front of Papa and Dad! Young Papa and Dad! What year is this? Why am I so hungry it feels like I haven’t eaten in a month? By the way, where’s Dad?”

Oh, the third surprise of the night.

With a stupefied mien, Hyungwon looked away from them wondering how was possible that he had been permanently inserted into a timeline, simply because it was impossible. He didn’t belong in that universe, in any universe besides his lost one, so how could that ever be true?

And yet, a living proof of such thing was right there to be seen.

“That cannot be.” The time traveler muttered under his breath. “I can’t be in your time period.”

“Do you want me to prove it?”

The woman didn’t wait a reply of consent, jolting forward in the pink-haired’s direction to whisper something in the latter’s ear.

And completely knocked the wind out of Hyungwon to hear her say what happened to him when his universe was destroyed.

“Dad told me when I was a kid… and mentioned it took you a while to tell them, so I guess…”

Hyungwon’s face went blank, gulping in the aftershock of being reminded of that again. The time traveler almost allowed himself to succumb to that smothering feeling, but was interrupted by Shownu’s thoughtful question.

“Are you alright, Hyungwon-ah?”

“Yes.” The pink-haired replied straightway, more roughly than he intended. “Sorry. We are in 2018. What happened, Miss…?”

“Can’t tell you my name.” She shrugged. “Actually, can’t tell you basically anything. Not my fault, you essentially wrote the rule book. Please, speak casually with me. Pfff. You’re my uncle. Kinda realizing now this might sound weird to hear…” The woman suddenly turned around to gaze at Shownu. “Kinda awkward to see me call you Papa, huh? My bad?”

“That’s not even the biggest problem here.”

“Ho ho, you have always been so calm, Papa. Should I call you that? God, it’s weird, right? Sorry, Papa. I MEAN!”

“Is it the watch?” Hyungwon cut through their chat to more pressing matters. “Your form of transportation?”

“Yeah.” Raising her arm in the air a bit, Shownu’s kid pouted at the device in her wrist. “It doesn’t
work anymore. Am I single-handedly gonna destroy the fabric of our reality for being here? Oh God, Dad is going to KILL me. Oh no, if I can’t go back he won’t have the chance to kill me. But he’s already here too… what if—”

“KID.” Shownu exclaimed, loud and clear. “Calm down, for Christ’s sake. Reality seems pretty alright so far. Things will be fine. Right, Hyungwon?”

Silence engulfed the med bay as Hyungwon opened his mouth to reply with something that could soothe them, but ultimately chose to stay silent. Lying wouldn’t do any good.

---

<Shownu hyung is calling…>

His honest first urge was to swipe his finger on the screen and decline the call, but the solid second of awareness about what was happening made Kihyun hesitate.

Birds chirped outside his window as the sunlight made its way inside his room through the cracks of his drapes created by the wind, but instead of evoking any warm feeling, it just made Kihyun groan as he glanced around to confirm he was indeed in his own bedroom, oblivious of how or when the hell he got there.

Ultimately, some bravery was needed.

“Hmm?”

“Open the goddamn door, nerd.” Shownu didn’t sound upset, simply exhausted. “Been here for 10 minutes.”

“So…”

Sure, at some point someone would’ve to break that awkward silence between them in Kihyun’s room, but it was still a difficult task to accomplish. But at least he tried.

“This is crazy, okay?” Shownu let out a sigh, shifting on the other side of the bed to properly gaze at him. “I know you won’t stop panicking, but we gotta deal with this. Hyungwon is trying to find a way to send her back to her time. There’s nothing I can do with this… science thing. But you… you are the genius here. You don’t have to see her if you don’t want to.”

“It’s just…” Kihyun stopped midway to whine for a second. “It’s… it’s weird and awkward! And weird!”

“You said weird twice.”

“Because it’s twice weird! We’ve been…” Standing up, the younger waved his hand between Shownu and him. “Together? For a week? And we… our… FROM THE FUTURE! It’s weird! It makes me feel weird! I don’t know!”

As the sunlight hit Shownu’s face, his pupils flared with something between concern and tiredness.

“So this is about us.” He made a short pause. “This doesn’t have to mean anything. Even if there’s
a woman in Hyungwon’s train saying she’s our daughter. Life isn’t an inflexible route, you know that, all of us do. This doesn’t mean we’re going to be together forever. You aren’t even sure if we are together right now.”

Strangely, Kihyun felt reassured by those words, gulping before finally looking at Shownu sitting in his bed.

“Are we?”

“Jesus…” With a deep sigh, Shownu brought his hands to rub his face. “Yes, nerd. In the past week, we went out together, we slept together, we hung out together. These were all non-platonic stuff we did. Together. Do you need another confirmation?”

His eyes darted to the floor, but Kihyun couldn’t hold back the smirk that appeared on his face.

“No…”

“Good. Because I can only handle one of you two freaking out, and that girl is worse than you. I feel sorry for the future version of myself.”

“HEY!”

Kihyun reflexively moved onward to give him a little push in the shoulder, but the man didn’t bulge at all. Instead, Shownu swiftly clasped his wrist and tugged him down, only to use his free hand to grab Kihyun’s face and press a brief, but eager kiss on his lips.

Sometimes, Kihyun wished he didn’t linger so much on Shownu’s mouth every damn time they kissed — too damn dangerous, too damn pleasing.

“You know what I just realized?” Kihyun murmured against his lips, totally bringing himself down to straddle Shownu. “We are going to have to tell Wonho at some point.”

With just an eye roll as a response, the older man now got a hold of his face with both hands and roughly crashed their lips together again.

“YAH!” Kihyun gasped with wide eyes as he pulled away first. “You can’t kiss away all my dilemmas!”

The tanned man snorted, brushing his lips against Kihyun’s and sending shivers down the latter’s spine.

“I can try.”

An hour and a half of struggling to get Kihyun out of his apartment should be rewarded with a whole day of peace, but Shownu didn’t know what he expected as he set foot on that time machine once again in a Saturday morning.

The train began to shake violently as Kihyun opened his mouth to say something to him, but instead the younger let out a shriek as clasped one of metal bars of the wagon to not let himself fall
down. Such seism didn’t last long, though.

“THE FUCK?” Kihyun yelled, wrapping his arms around himself.

The prelude to a response came in the form of shimmering lights directly above their heads.

“You might wanna join Hyungwon in the control room.”

“Oh my God.”

Kihyun tried to rush towards the stranger, who now lied on the floor of the control room, but Shownu held him back by the waist.

“Don’t.” The tanned man spoke. “We don’t know if…”

The time traveler, who was crouched down next to her, leisurely got up with a feeble smile in his face. It did not make Shownu feel less stressed about that situation, unfortunately.

“She’s alright.” Hyungwon stated, walking in their direction. “Time is giving her a hard time because she’s the child of two Constants, therefore she is of essential presence in her era.”

“If we… Hmm… She’s like… now…” Kihyun sighed, freeing himself from Shownu’s hold. “Is it worse because we’re close to her?”

“Not really. The timeline seems just a little disturbed because she’s stuck here, but not because she’s interacting with her parents, even though this isn’t recommended. She is requested to be in another place, doing other things.”

“How can we…” Shownu gestured vaguely. “Fix this? Can be fixed, right?”

“It’s possible I know a way to fix her wristwatch and send her back.”

“But…” Kihyun inquired.

“It will require a short trip to a universe I’m fairly acquainted with, so won’t be too much of a bother. They have similar pieces needed to fix your child’s watch, so it will work for at least her trip back.”

Beside him, Kihyun exhaled noisily.

“Can we… not tell the others that she is… you know… our…”

“Not a problem, Kihyun.” Hyungwon replied without delay. “I do not wish to meddle in the affairs you prefer to keep private. Your child has also agreed to state she’s only Shownu’s daughter, for the sake of your preference.”

For a moment, Shownu thought the shorter man was about to thank the time traveler, but Kihyun suddenly went silent, eyes diverting to the woman who peacefully slept on the floor. A very… melancholic sensation irradiated from his boyfriend.

“Thanks, Hyungwon-ah.” The tanned man offered Hyungwon a half-smile. “Are you okay? Not to pry but you feel a bit… uncomfortable. Is it because Kihyun and I…”

The pink-haired suddenly frowned, burying his hands on the pockets of his blazer with a confused
“You know, because we’re together. Romantically.”

At the sound of those words coming out of his own mouth, Shownu had to fight the urge to smile. Felt good to be able to say it, even in such circumstances. He could feel Kihyun’s umpiring gaze on him, though.

Hyungwon, on the other hand, completely dropped his jaw.


Kihyun let out a very embarrassed groan.

“I’m gonna get out of here.”

The taller men chuckled at such whining.

“Actually…” Hyungwon’s voice got a bit higher, making Kihyun stop by the entrance. “Could you take your child somewhere else? I don’t think time traveling right now will do her any good. She’s safer in her own universe.”

There wasn’t any annoyance in Kihyun’s sigh. Shownu could sense from a considerable distance that his boyfriend just didn’t know how to act around it. Her.

“We can bring her to my apartment.” Kihyun declared, nodding at Shownu. “Sewoon went to visit his parents for the weekend, so no one will bother us.”

“That’s good.” Hyungwon’s smile was genuine. “I will be back as soon as possible.”

Perhaps it was just curiosity, Wonho concluded. Sure, it was still weird as hell to witness the presence someone who claimed to be the daughter of one of his friends from the future, but it had been the least uncommon thing to happen to them so far. And it undisturbed Wonho to admit that that’s what his life had come to; all the normalcy, and sometimes contented boredom, promised from his calm academic life now was stifled by the Back to The Future shenanigans. The space-time seemed still pretty fine and no one had vanished from existence, so things were going pretty smooth so far.

So yeah, a bit after noon, he went to the train once more to see how that entire thing had developed. However, as Wonho got there, no one but the A.I. was there to greet him.

“Guess who is getting fonder of this machine, I see.”

“Not that deep.” Wonho rolled his eyes upwards at the flickering lights. “Where is everyone?”

“Hyungwon left 24 minutes ago, local Korean time, to take Shownu, Kihyun and the daughter to Kihyun’s apartment. She will be staying there for the time being.”
“Why Kihyun’s?” Wonho furrowed his brows. “She’s Shownu kid, apparently.”

An abrupt appearance of the holographic screen, right in front of the entrance of the control room, carried a message in very cryptic stock image of an old woman laughing.

“The fuck is that supposed to mean?”

The holographic screen changed to a picture of the same old woman shrugging.

_Sassy little shit._

Wonho was about to speak again when the A.I. interrupted him, making the lights flicker faster than normal.

_“Incoming!”_ 

A word that could mean a lot of things outside the realm of that time machine, but that in there instantly popped out in Wonho’s mind as a sign of teleportation.

What an odd thought to become so spontaneous.

With a fleeting whooshing sound, Hyungwon materialized a couple of meters away from him, on the opposite side to the front of the control room.

“Monbebe, check if—” The time traveler began his stroll as soon as he appeared out of nowhere, but came to a halt as soon as he spotted Wonho. “Oh. Wonho-ssi. The other Constants aren’t here.”

“I’ve been informed. Why is the female Marty McFly at Kihyun’s, by the way?”

“What?” The time traveler tilted his head in confusion.

“From Back to The—It’s a movie. Forget it. The girl. Shownu’s daughter.”

“Oh. Kihyun told me his roommate is out for the weekend, so it would be okay for her to stay there until I come back.”

“From where?”

“A nearby universe. I need to fix her watch.” Hyungwon’s hand smoothly slid inside the pocket of his trousers, now displaying a wristwatch similar to the ones he made, but completely black. “It’s how I can send her back to her time.”

“Hmm, right.” Wonho didn’t know why that awkwardness inevitable in their talks felt so familiar by now. “Ok then. I’ll... go. Eat. Kinda hungry right now. You...?”

The pink-haired man oddly gawked at him as if he was observing a human for the first time.

“What about me?”

The lights twinkled once more before Wonho could respond.

_“He is asking if you want to eat too, Hyungwon. Learn some human discernment.”_ 

His mouth molded into a big O in acknowledgment of what Wonho meant, thanks to his artificial intelligence.
“Sure. I don’t remember the last time I really ate…”

“Yesterday. 8:52 a.m. Kimbap leftovers.”

“Yah.” Hyungwon actually raised his head to shoot an irked look at the A.I. “Mind your business.”

Wonho automatically bit his lower lip to contain a chuckle.

“Come on.” He started sauntering towards the door of the main wagon.

“Wait!” Hyungwon beckoned for a pause with his finger. “I have to get the currency your people use.”

“I invited. It’s on me.”

To stroll the crowded streets of Seoul in the middle of the day — period where most of the people were out either doing errands or eating — alongside a time traveler that hadn’t interacted much with people of that time was pretty borderline arcane, but Hyungwon seemed to take those interactions with an open mind of someone from a small town who just arrived in a metropolis, paying attention to every single detail around them.

Wonho wondered if such ordinary things could still be able to amaze a 300-year-old time traveler.

“Is it true?” At last, Wonho made the question that had been on his mind since they left the restaurant. “Shownu said that my room in the train is exactly how you see me.”

A strong shade of orange bathed Hyungwon’s face as the man made a stop to stare at Wonho. Overlapped chats from those strolling down the same sidewalk and the acrid scent of smoke coming out of passing cars filled the atmosphere around them, and Wonho had to make an effort to not let his eyes wander along with the sunlight all over the time traveler’s face — in his defense, it looked like a painting being unveiled right in front of him.

“You could say so.” Hyungwon uttered, burying his hands on the pockets of his trousers. “The reason to this measure is merely because I don’t know what to make of our interactions. We are not… close, but we have a stable relationship which I can only assume is for the sake of our friends. I simply didn’t want to overstep any boundaries and end up ruining what I have here. I like this place, Wonho-ssi. I like the boys, and I like you too.”

The blame for the wave of dread that swept across his body was definitely in the unexpected car honking next to him, making Wonho leap sideways a little bit. Such action led the blond to bump into a passerby’s shoulder, promptly apologizing.

Hyungwon’s stare didn’t leave him for a single second, big brown eyes that seemed to pierce through his soul.

“We should go.”

As soon as he turned on his heels, the pink-haired man appeared next to him, jogging a bit to catch up.

“Did I say something wrong?” Hyungwon asked, leaning his head down a bit to look directly at him.
It crossed Wonho’s mind, sometimes, that the time traveler didn’t really know what kind of impact his words could have on people from that world, including Wonho himself. One could compare to walk around with a toddler whom learned new things every day.

Swiftly shifting to his right side for a moment, Wonho got out of the way of one person passing by him.

“No. Why would you even like me?” Wonho scoffed, ignoring how sweaty the palms of his hands were getting. “I’m always a jackass to you.”

“A what?” The taller’s silvery voice contrasted against the loudness of that street. “It doesn’t matter. I’m used to it. Nevertheless, you are a good person.”

“How the hell are you so sure of that?”

“You saved my live, twice. And you’re an excellent older brother to the boys. Why are you doubting that?”

*Because you make me doubt things.*

“Doesn’t matter. Don’t you have, yeah, somewhere else to go to?”

Hyungwon nodded, eyes wandering to look at his brown shoes.

“Yes.” The time traveler stopped on his tracks again. “Thank you for the food, Wonho-ssi.”

It just hit Wonho, a moment after, that his tone made it sound like he was telling the time traveler to fuck off as soon as possible — which wasn’t true, but it could be seen as such. Wonho sighed at himself for such behavior to be so natural when it was about anything regarding Hyungwon.

“YAH.” He shouted at the man, whom was already a couple of meters ahead. “Are you taking one of the kids with you?”

“No.”

The same internal talk of asking himself what the fuck was he doing over and over again was getting Wonho tired, so he just accepted he was on the game to snatch another PhD. In stupidity.

“Let’s go.”

“This is your fault.”

Shownu quickly turned to his side to squint at the shorter man.

“What now?”

“She’s so fucking tall, hyung. She got this from you. It’s your fault.”

With an eye roll, Shownu diverted his gaze to the woman asleep in Kihyun’s bed. She reminded him of his mother, in the old pictures of her youth Shownu had seen around his house while growing up; they were all very tall people, so Kihyun was probably right about that.
A moment later, a tiny groan arose in the room and he could feel Kihyun’s wave of anxiety building up.

“Ouch…” The woman brought a hand to her head, groaning in pain. Then she smiled at them. “Oh. Hey there.”

On his peripheral vision, Shownu saw his boyfriend’s eyes widen as the woman waved in their direction, and Kihyun would’ve tripped over his own feet if he hadn’t clung to the back of the older’s shirt to not fall down.

“Hey Papa.” Her voice came out a bit rough, so he cleared her throat. “Hey Dad, hiding behind Papa.”

“Stop calling me that!” Kihyun’s voice reverberated through Shownu’s skin, and the older man couldn’t hold back a chuckle.

“Well, you prohibited me of calling you Daddy since, like, forever, so there’s that.”

“Shut up, you two.” Shownu lightly tapped on Kihyun’s back for the man to let go of him.

A couple of steps later, he sat by the edge of the bed next to the woman.

“Head hurts?”

Her mouth curved into a huge smile, crinkling up her eyes in the process.

“Just a lil. Hmm… where am I?” She abruptly lifted her arm. “Where’s my watch?”

“You’re at Kihyun’s apartment. And Hyungwon took your watch, he’s going to find a way to fix it so you can go back.”

“Oh… God bless uncle Hyungwon. A man that we can count on in this family. I will sure remember to buy him something once I go back home.”

Shownu felt weirdly at ease in such absurd situation, and fighting the sense of familiarity he felt towards that girl wasn’t going to be one of his tasks for the day. Whatever things were, in the end only the fact that she was there and needed their helped truly mattered.

His boyfriend’s sudden question made her shift her gaze to him, behind Shownu.

“How long has Hyungwon been with us? Like… forever? Or he jumps through time?”

“So now you want to talk to me…” There was no malice in her voice, just pure teasing. “I’m going to hold that grudge, Dad.”

At such response, Kihyun simply scoffed and stormed out of the room.

The woman chuckled, dangling her legs off the edge of the bed, sitting upright.

“He’s not mad mad, right?”

“Nah. Just give him a bit of time. After he stress cleans and put that big brain of his to work, it will be alright.”
Which, two hours later, still didn’t happen.

“Nerd, you should, uh… take a break.”

These words were completely ignored by the younger man, as the latter paced around between the counter and the sink while he prepared food.

“I’m serious.” Shownu spoke again, sitting at the table in front of him. “I’m gonna have to call Wonho if you don’t stop.”

That sparkled a dramatic twirl from Kihyun, who stared at him as if Shownu just had told he cheated on him.

“You wouldn’t.” Kihyun hissed, distracting himself for his work for a moment.

“Try me, nerd.” Shownu had to fight the urge to smile. “Worse. I’ll call Jooheon.”

“Good luck with that, asshole.” His boyfriend scoffed. “Been trying to reach him the entire day and nothing. If he’s dead, I’m going to resurrect his ass just so I can kill him myself.”

At such theatrics, the older man had to laugh.

“He’s okay, nerd.” The candid concern on Kihyun’s face made him feel bad for teasing the man. “Come here.”

“Forget it.”

But Shownu didn’t, getting off his seat to go to Kihyun, who had turned his back at him again. As he embraced the shorter man from behind, hugging his waist, Shownu could feel him wince.

“I’m holding a knife!” The younger wriggled a bit in his arms. “Hyung!”

“Let’s just stay like this for a while.” Shownu asked, with a husky voice. “Just…” One of his hands left Kihyun’s waist to take the knife off of his boyfriend’s hand, gently putting it down on the counter. “This tension is going to be the death of you. Relax.”

He could feel the man was about to argue back, but eventually gave up and sighed, leaning back against Shownu’s chest.

“How…” Kihyun’s fingers slid haphazard over the back of his hands and forearms, leaving a trail of lingering heat. “How can you be so calm? But, fuck… I’m glad you are so fucking calm. I’m glad. That you’re here, with me.”

As Shownu buried his head on the man’s neck, a grin appeared on the older’s face.

“Hmm…” A strong scent of seasoning came from the food Kihyun prepared on the counter, but his boyfriend’s aroma was still more alluring. “You are so small.”

Right away, a snicker came out of his mouth as Kihyun slapped him in the arm.

“You are molded perfectly to me, nerd.”

In a swift move, Shownu pulled away from Kihyun and spun him around, grabbing his face with the intention of kissing him. Kihyun never sounded so panicked about that.

“Stop! We can’t—The girl! We can’t!”
“Why? You sound like a suburban mom.”

“Because—How dare you, I…” The man completely lost it at Shownu’s cackle on his face, pushing him away to stroll towards the fridge. “Get out of my kitchen and get out of my face.”

“That’s not what you—”

Shownu’s endeavor on bantering with his boyfriend was interrupted by a few loud and clear coughs emerging in the kitchen.

“You know what it would’ve been awkward?” The woman leaned on one shoulder against the doorframe, while Kihyun looked panic to the core.

“This entire situation right now?” His boyfriend spouted.

“No. If I had gotten here while you two hadn’t…” She started tapping her fingertips together in which Shownu only assumed was to motion a kiss.

Kihyun stammered a bit in finding the right words to reply to that.

“S-shut up.”

“Dad, you always were a big nerd for real, right? So many damn medals and trophies and books!”

“What is this?” The shorter man suddenly looked up at Shownu. “Did you already teach her to call me that?”

“Nah…” The girl replied before Shownu could. “I’m a nerd too, don’t worry. Also, Papa has been calling you that since, like, forever.”

Blushing with such simple statement, Kihyun averted his eyes and chose to focus on the food long forgotten and in need to be put into final preparation.

“Shut up and get out of my kitchen, you two. NOW!”

“I’m befuddled.”

Wonho didn’t know the exact amount of years since he last had seen that movie, probably somewhere in his teenage years, but he wished he could recall the first impression he had when he watched Back to The Future for the first time; everything considered, definitely it was not too far from the one Hyungwon was having in that exact moment, as Wonho closed his laptop and put it beside him on the floor.

“This… this…” Mouth agape, the pink-haired shook his head in disbelief. “This is wrong. In so… many… points…”

Now sitting cross-legged, Wonho let out the guffaw he was holding back during the entire course of that movie — to be honest, he mostly watched Hyungwon’s reaction to what his world thought time travel was about.

They were currently in Wonho’s room inside the train, sitting against the bed frame. He would’ve
suggested for them to settle on the actual bed, but Hyungwon was fast in placing himself on the hardwood floor, so Wonho just went with it.

“Is this famous?” The actual time traveler asked, still looking pretty bewildered.

“The most.”

“Why?” The way he frowned and scrunched up his nose almost made Wonho laugh again. “It’s… wrong. It’s preposterous.”

“It’s fun, Hyungwon. People get to see some time travel movie and it isn’t much complicated. Also, traveling in that car is looks cool as fuck.”

“Okay, I can understand the vehicle appeal.” Nodding mostly to himself, Hyungwon shifted sideways a bit to fully face Wonho. “But the story? How one thinks that’s cool? The boy persistently interferes in his family’s timeline, becomes a hindrance for his parents to get together, he… Wonho-ssi, with his own mother…”

With a chuckle, Wonho agreed.

“Yeah, fucked up. But the 80s were like that, mostly because people did a lot of cocaine. That’s what we got from it. This entire trilogy is a hot mess.”

“What do you mean trilogy? There’s two more movies?”

“Yup. There’s a flying train in the third one, by the way.”

The unaltered, pure chagrin on Hyungwon’s face as gasped loudly, not dramatizing for a single second, was the last straw for Wonho. He bursted into laughter so badly he threw himself forward on the floor.

“You are joking, aren’t you? They didn’t!”

“They did.” Wonho muttered as his eyes started tearing up from laughing too much. “Like, it was a steam locomotive.”

The time traveler brought a hand to his chest, letting that info sink in with the most displeased look Wonho had ever seen in someone’s face.

A sudden realization of such casual activity made him feel a bit weird.

Because it was with Hyungwon, someone he still didn’t trust completely, regardless of everything they had been through together. Because with Hyungwon, it felt unusual to see said man under the light of an ordinary life, questioning ordinary matters.

His bubblegum pink hair was a mess due his tendency to reach out for it and pull it back during the whole movie, but the strands came back to fall on his face in a chaotic manner, spread like waves overlapping on each other.

“I will leave first.” Hyungwon’s eyes rapidly dashed towards him and Wonho gulped, a little too conscious of his staring. “Thank you for the movie, Wonho-ssi.”

The blond had to chuckle.

“You hated it.”
“Yes.” The time traveler immediately established as he got up, making him cackle again. “But it is always interesting to learn new things. Thank you.”

Wonho nodded in acknowledgment, watching as the pink-haired left his room.

“So… do you know these guys, right?”

After a single nod, the time traveler looked away from his phone to gaze at Wonho, whom sat on the bench in front of Hyungwon’s, in the main wagon.

“Yes. They’re a pioneer community in the outskirts of what would be called Jeju Island in your universe. I sent a message to notify them of our visit, so it probably won’t take long.”

The atmosphere fell into a sort of comfortable silence, which was pretty rare, but Wonho found himself questioning more things.

“So… how did you meet them?”

“Oh.” The time traveler suddenly looked away, putting his cellphone down. “11 years ago, I was tracking The Eye down to their universe and met a few men, who aren’t Constants. I ended up helping them to deal with a nuclear accident in a power plant nearby.”

The train’s movement came to a halt, indicating they had reached their destiny.

On the outside, a bright grey sky could be peeked through the vertical windows of the door.

“We’ve arrived in Samdado. October 7th, 2077. 12:14 p.m., local Korean time.”

Their stop was made on an actual railway, but the train still slightly floated above the ground. The conditions of their whereabouts seemed pretty decent; thin woods surrounded the place, blending with a deep briny scent that came from an ocean that must be nearby.

At first, Wonho stepped on only dirt as he left the train, following Hyungwon. However, the foliage was left behind as they trailed a marked path in the middle of the woodland, and a couple of minutes later the asphalt greeted them in the form of a road.

A sudden feeling came to Wonho that rain would be inevitable at some point; the petrichor could almost be grasped, and he started feeling weird for the first time in that trip.

Which was something silly to be peeved about, but his judgment was clearly not one of the best, and he had actually agreed out of free will to accompany Hyungwon to another universe, so maybe that he didn’t have the right to worry too much about things that only existed in the realm of probability.

A noiseless atmosphere filled their entire walk as Wonho trailed behind the time traveler, but it was broken by an outside source a moment after they stepped on concrete.

It looked like concrete, at best.

In the distance, two white cars came in their direction, and judging by the serenity in Hyungwon’s expression, the blond could only assume he knew what he was dealing with. As a minimum, that’s what Wonho hoped.

One of the cars stopped just a couple of meters away from them, while the other pulled over after a
considerable distance from them, as if they wanted to give them some privacy.

To what? Wonho was about to discover.

From the nearest car, two men eagerly exited and straight up sauntered in their direction.

They were both very tall, well-built raven-haired men in their late 30s; the one with a gummy smile on his face seemed a bit slimmer than the tanned one, who tried to keep up with his partner, but the latter suddenly sprinted onwards and essentially jumped on Hyungwon.

“Oh…” The pink-haired chuckled, patting the man on the back before putting his arms around him to hug back. The stranger seemed to have a pretty close height to Hyungwon’s. “It has been a while, Jaehwan-ssi.”

“Ah, come on.” Jaehwan pulled away, pouting. “It has been years, speak informally.”

“As you wish, Jaehwan.” Hyungwon received another hug after this, but briefer. “Have you been well?”

“Sort of.” He scrunched up his nose.

“Long time no see, Hyungwon.” The tanned man poked Jaehwan in the ribs for him to let go of the time traveler, triggering Jaehwan to chuckle a little.

“Nice to see you again, Wonshik.”

As Hyungwon tried to bow at him, Wonshik dismissed it with a frantic hand wave.

“No need. Hmm…”

Perhaps it was a bit humiliating how his gaze shifted downwards as Wonshik peeped at Wonho over Hyungwon’s shoulder. Just a little.

“Not traveling alone anymore, Hyungwon?”

Wonho’s entire existence seemed to have been brought back from the faraway land he had been put on since those interactions started; Hyungwon even turned around with a big O shaped on his mouth.

“Right. This is Wonho-ssi, my…” It was almost comical how he carefully chose his words. “My companion.”


The tone in which he spoke those last words made Wonho feel as if he was a hazard in any possible manner. With a frown, he stared back at the men from that universe that gave him a dirty look.

“Shall we go?” Hyungwon cut off that weird atmosphere, placing a hand on Jaehwan’s shoulder.

For the record, being deeply uncomfortable about simply being who he was definitely was not on Wonho’s plans for that day. Sure, he had met another version of himself and went back on his own
timeline to see his child-self in the arms of his mother, but it was a totally different case than to be scrutinized during a whole 20 minutes of a car journey.

“So…” The Jaehwan guy spoke, sitting opposite to them in that weird driverless car that didn’t even have front seats, just a small space for a horizontal panel to be settled in. “Are you still chasing those guys you mentioned last time?”

“Not anymore.” Wonho’s sight focused on the road outside the window, but he could almost feel the time traveler smiling as he talked. “Thanks to Wonho-ssi and the other Constants, I’ve managed to take them down.”

“All of them?” Wonshik seemed surprised, with his hand resting on top of Jaehwan’s thigh. “All the Constants?”

“Yes. It’s a long story, but I wouldn’t have made it without them. They saved my life.”

“Well, quite different from that guy…” Jaehwan jeered, with a little huff.

“Jaehwan.” Hyungwon’s voice became more orotund. “Let the past be in the past, please.”

“Sort of difficult, you know, when there’s a guy with the same face right next to you.” That gained Wonho’s interest in gazing at them again.

“Jaehwan.” Hyungwon sounded more reprehensive, even leaning a bit forward to emanate his intimidating energy. “That’s not him. You know better.”

“What the—” Wonho’s question was interrupted by the car’s smooth stop, still under the glares of those strangers that seemed quite protective of Hyungwon. His first instinct was to ask some backstory on why he was being glowered over, but their quest was still what mattered, so he let go of it for the moment.

A muffled sound of a heavy metallic structure arose in the background, and Wonho stirred sideways to peek through the window once again.

No more than a minute later, as he followed the others who got out of the car, an enormous iron gate at least five meters tall was now left behind; the blond found himself on what seemed to be a very technological advanced community in the middle of nowhere. A dense forest encircled the surroundings of place, creating an almost suffocating atmosphere to Wonho, who was not the biggest fan of places like that.

Another topic for him to discuss with his therapist.

But what irked Wonho the most was fact that such vast community seemed to be practically desert; its streets were filled with no more than the two cars Wonho had seen since they arrived, and the first one kept its drive after they had pulled over, off to God-knows-where inside that eerie location.

The two tall men led Hyungwon and Wonho towards a large brownstone building that seemed to be a bit of Victorian style, and maybe it indeed was since Wonho had no idea how the history of that world had occurred.

That specific area seemed to be a residential one, with half-timbered houses that gave off a cozier vibe from the one they had arrived at; in the first vicinity, a more technological and industrious
atmosphere surrounded the streets filled with vaulted iron buildings that looked pretty much the same, with the only discrepancies being their width and carved names on their walls, but way too far for Wonho to be able to read any of those.

“They are inside.” The Wonshik dude informed Hyungwon as they stood on the first step of a short stone stairway, looking rather sorrowful. Something felt… off.

A particular harsh breeze hit Wonho squarely in the face, making him stumble backwards a bit.

“Don’t get this wrong, Hyungwon.” Wonshik continued, with Jaehwan now standing by his side. “We’re honored to have you back. God knows how much we owe you.”

The time traveler was about to dismiss him, but Wonshik continued.

“The entire city is mourning with them. So it’s not because of you.”

“Mourning?” Hyungwon’s voice sounded genuine taken aback by that. Wonho craned his neck up to gaze at him, and saw the man frowning. “What—”

“Come on.” Jaehwan, whom had his fingers wrapped around one of Wonshik’s wrists, led the way inside without a proper answer.

Wonshik wasn’t kidding when he mentioned something that involved the entire community.

As Jaehwan pulled a double door effortlessly with one hand, they were welcomed for what Wonho could only estimate it was certainly more than four hundred people, whom was mainly dressed in muted colors of garments, but a good amount of it had nothing but black clothing on them.

One could almost grasp the restlessness in the air, from the drop in the ambient temperature to the fact that people started to stare directly at Wonho, the same way Jaehwan and Wonshik did back in the car. Not in the friendly way someone usually greets the... companion of an old friend, more like how a crowd looks at an outcast.

The horde of strangers stirred in their positions much like the waters of a lake once a rock hits it and moves across its surface; not much longer, it was visible that they were opening space for a man to pass through the crowd to reach them.

Such stranger was also a very tanned (even more than Wonshik) and tall man, just a few centimeters shorter than Hyungwon, and the current thought in Wonho’s head was if every damn person in that city was designed to tower over him, as if being next to that lanky time traveler wasn’t already enough. Something about the way everyone expected for the stranger’s reaction indicated he possibly was in charge of that place.

Said dark-skinned man looked like had gone through emotional hell, but still found avidity to engulf Hyungwon in a hug.

The pink-haired time traveler immediately hugged the man back, and they stayed like that for a solid minute. Meanwhile, the scowls directed at Wonho didn’t get any better.

“What happened?” Hyungwon inquired with a small voice, pulling away from the embrace first.

The tanned man’s eyes suddenly darted down at Wonho, and the look in his eyes wasn’t much different from the rest of them.

“What is he doing here?” His head quickly turned towards Hyungwon. “Did you—”
“He is not him, Hakyeon.” Hyungwon cut it short, with a gruff pleading tone. “It has been over a
decade. Please.”

Hakyeon’s vicious gaze could pierce through Wonho’s skin if the man tried hard enough.

“Only if out of sight, it’s out of mind.”

Hyungwon sighed.

“Can you please tell me what’s going on?”

Hakyeon led Hyungwon and Wonho, alongside Jaehwan and Wonshik, to a room down the nearest
hall; essentially, it had nothing but a couple of brown leather chairs and a wooden desk, seemingly
a long forgotten or no-put-much-to-use office.

Once Hyungwon settled himself in one of the chairs, with Hakyeon and the other two men leaning
against the desk in front of him, the talk began. Wonho preferred to stand by the entrance, not to
make himself too present in that conversation.

“I…” Hakyeon’s voice cracked as if he had to put an effort not to cry. “I have a son now,
Hyungwon. He’s 7-years-old. He is lost in the woods for almost three weeks now. No one can find
him, and most people are afraid of even trying…”

“Why?” Hyungwon’s voice was no higher than a murmur.

“Ah…” The dark-skinned man sighed, rubbing his face with his hands. One could sense the
weariness in him. “Since the beginning of time, people believe that that part of the woods is, you
know, haunted. Cursed. Whoever wander in there do not come out. Ever.”

The tension in the air rose up, but the time traveler dared to speak.

“Hakyeon. You are a scientist. You don’t believe that.”

“I don’t know, Hyungwon. Not anymore.” The man sounded he was about to break down at any
given time. “What I know is that Hyuk is out there, alone, for three fucking weeks. He is a smart
boy, but… what else can I think? Our search crews can’t find a single lead in the entire forest. Our
technology is useless in the electromagnetic field in there, it warps any signal we could ever pick
up. I tried to go there myself, but Taekwoon said he would rather tie me to a chair than let me go
there alone. We lost… We’re trying to accept our loss.”

“I don’t believe that.” The time traveler sounded more determined than ever. “Who was the last
person to see the boy?”

“His best friend, Hongbin.” Jaehwan answered. “Saw him the night before he disappeared. Poor
thing is inconsolable. He said Hyuk told him about his desire to explore that part of the woods, that
he didn’t believe in ghosts, but he never thought Hyuk would ever actually do it. Thinks maybe he
could’ve done something to stop him…”

“I would try go through the boy’s memories, but I don’t think it would be much useful…”
Suddenly, Hyungwon stood up. “Since electronics seem to be useful, I’ll need a 3D map of the
forest. It would be great if—”

“Hyungwon.” Hakyeon stopped him, with a stentorian voice. “You don’t… You don’t have to risk
yourself. That’s not what you came here for. I have the pieces you asked in your message ready. Fuck, I know…” The man awkwardly chuckled. “I feel like I’m taking advantage of you, but I’m so desperate. I don’t want to believe my son is gone for good. I want him back, my baby…”

The man suddenly bursted into tears, and the time traveler rapidly shifted forward to embrace Hakyeon.

“I will do my best.” Hyungwon promised. “Stay strong.”

Wonho’s presence in the room was basically forgotten, but in such situation he didn’t really mind.

“You should stay here.”

The pink-haired’s words snapped Wonho out of his musings, thinking how deeply not a single person in that place had a drop of sympathy for him.

Every single passerby near one of the entrances to the wood gazed at Hyungwon with admiration of such act of bravery and altruism, while their looks at Wonho conveyed nothing but hostility.

“These people hate me, Hyungwon. What the hell did he do? My double.”

The time traveler’s eyes diverted to the ground, and a new presence next to them saved the man from having to answer that question.

“Hyungwon.”

His tender voice didn’t match his fierce visuals at all; a bit taller than Hakyeon, the man was the fairest-skinned person he had seen in that place, with broad shoulders and a long dark hair that begged to be trimmed. The dark circles under his eyes were sheer proof of his fatigue, though; the dude looked like he hadn’t gotten any sleep in lots, lots of days.

“Hello, Taekwoon.” The time traveler took a few steps forward, pulling the stranger into a hug.

In such muscular embrace, Hyungwon’s slender body almost seemed to be crushed into it and Wonho nearly felt compelled to drag him out of there, but nothing beat the feral gaze that came from Taekwoon’s feline-like eyes to make Wonho feel extremely tense.

Once the he pulled away, Hyungwon instantly started his explanation.

“Taekwoon, he is…”

“I know.” The man stated, slowly leading his eyes back to the time traveler. “Hakyeon told me. I don’t care.” His pause was calculated, closing his eyes for a second out of tiredness. “Do you really think… my kid could be alive?”

Hyungwon nodded, smiling warmly at the man. Seconds were dragged in time as they shared a heartfelt look, with Taekwoon placing a hand on the time traveler’s shoulder.

To Wonho, it almost felt as if he was intruding in a moment he wasn’t supposed to.

He would’ve left, but the anxiety of being alone in the train without any info on Hyungwon’s whereabouts and the other option of staying with those people who weren’t his biggest fans didn’t seem attractive at all, so Wonho reached his final decision.
“Thank you, Hyungwon. Take care.” Taekwoon said, immediately grabbing a leather backpack that stood by his feet and Wonho hadn’t noticed at all. “Hakyeon sent these for you. There’s water, food and a few other useful things in there. He would have come, but I had to force him to get some rest. You know how he is.”

“It’s alright.” The pink-haired uttered, quickly bowing. “I will do my best.”

As Taekwoon walked away from them, Hyungwon turned to Wonho with a second opportunity.

“You can stay here, Wonho-ssi. They won’t harm you. They are good people.”

Maybe that was the safest decision Wonho could ever chose at that moment, but his instinct was telling him otherwise, so he made himself clear.

“I’m going.” The blond took hold of leather bag given by Taekwoon to carry. His eyes darted to the grey skies above their heads. “Let’s try to come back before it gets too dark.”

“Jesus, this is old as shit.”

For a moment, Kihyun forgot who he was in the presence of. Sure, it wasn’t that easy to forget that your own child from the fucking future was sitting beside you in your couch, but Kihyun just let himself zone out for a bit, taking another bite of his food.

The glare he directed at the woman, who now used one of his university tees, was noticed soon by her.

“Sorry, Dad. It’s just I watched this before a couple of times. So… quite old.”

In the TV, Midnight Runners was currently on, and Kihyun had to remind himself he was dealing from someone from the future to understand that.

The absence of Shownu, who had to leave for a few hours to deal with something with a classmate, was genuinely felt. Somehow, the tanned man made Kihyun feel more at ease; quite daring to depend on someone like that so much, but Kihyun was far from giving a single shit at the moment.

“Not old to me. This movie came out last year. Park Seo Joon and Kang Ha Neul never gets old.”

The woman snorted.

“Such a fanboy, Dad. You’re right. They’re hot.”

Kihyun’s head suddenly turned to her.

“Couldn’t Hyungwon just give you one of his time-traveling watches instead of fixing yours?” He suddenly spouted, and she frowned. “Not like I don’t want… I mean, it’s harming you? And it seems simple. Oh. The Bootstrap Paradox. Right?”

“Sort of.” Her voice came out soft, and it reminded Kihyun a lot of Shownu. “It’s not like the watch would end up in an endless cause-effect loop, but who knows? Uncle Hyungwon could
gimme one of his stuff, but I think he’s afraid to send advanced tech to the future and end up changing the timeline he’s now in. He’s just being cautious, I guess. Also…” The woman frantically pointed at her short hair. “Did you notice? Same color as yours. Saw a pic of you from this era and dyed before my mission.”

Of course he had noticed. As he observed the girl while she slept, for a while, Kihyun sure saw more similarities between her and Shownu, but somehow she still managed to give off a very Kihyun aura.

“So…” Kihyun cleared his throat, putting his bowl of food down on the coffee table in front of them. “You work for the government or something?”

“Sorry, Dad. Can’t tell you. Actually, I can’t tell you basically anything? Not even my name. I shouldn’t have even said you and Papa are my parents, but I just got too dizzy from that landing on the train out of fucki—sorry, of no damn where and I saw you two and I got so happy? I just, like, ran? I was happy. Then I passed out? Just like I do after playing video games for 72 hours straight. Yep, like that.”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” Kihyun stared at her with mouth agape, kind of self-aware of the quirks he possibly passed on to her. “You rant a lot too, don’t you?”

“Yeah.” She let out a chuckle. “Debate team champion for 3 years in a row in high school, just like you.”

“Really?” Kihyun smiled widely, and the girl put on the biggest grin on her face too.

“Yeah. You taught me everything I know on How to Be a Nerd 101. You are a great dad.”

A weird feeling of warmth spread across Kihyun’s chest, and he lowered his head to try to conceal another smile.

“So…” The man tried to change topics to lessen the redness on his face. “You basically can’t tell me shit.”

“Yup.” She nodded frantically. “It’s already a surprise I didn’t start fading from existence after meeting you and Papa. Just like that old ass movie that uncle Hyungwon hates.”

“Back to The Future?”

“Yup, that’s the one. You will love to see the rule book one day. It’s supposed to be serious, but I crack up every time I had to read for my exams because it’s just uncle Hyungwon’s bashing it in more than two hundred pages. Also, can you promise me something?”

“Yeah?” Kihyun looked at her with suspicion. “What?”

“Don’t be mad at me when I come back. I’m talking to you now so you can remember later.”

“I won’t. But you gotta give me something at least.”

She gasped dramatically, stirring in the sofa to hug her own legs.

“Are you blackmailing your own daughter?”

Kihyun had to chuckle.

“Just tell me something. If it’s too horrible, or if I’ll struggle a lot… Or if you have a boyfriend, or
Without hesitation, she threw her head backwards while silently cackling, just like Kihyun did. Maybe she had a lot of him in her, after all.

“I can’t tell my Dad about my sexuality before I was even born. Sorry. But I do have someone, waiting for me.”

“Hmm… I see.”

“It’s a tough job, you know.” She continued. “Being the daughter of two Constants. But I wouldn’t trade it for anything. And don’t worry, Dad. You are doing well. I’ve idolized you my entire life.”

Kihyun had to bite his lower lip to contain the urge to smile at that.

“Anyways…” He cleared his throat a bit too loudly. “Hyungwon will find a way. He always does.”

The dialogue between the actors grew louder as a comfy quietness fell between them, taking over the ambience. A few minutes later, Kihyun felt an extra weight on his side and craned down his neck to see the woman curled up next to him, head resting her head on his shoulder.

It looked a bit ridiculous for someone that big to look so vulnerable and at peace snuggled close to him.

Kihyun didn’t mind at all, though.

“Hey there.”

Such deep concentration on his reading about biophysical modeling gave Kihyun a hard time in noticing a new presence in the apartment.

“Hey.” He smiled at the older man, putting his book down.

Kihyun had also forgotten that there was a very large human being clinging to him on the couch, resting her head on his belly as her arms wrapped around Kihyun’s torso.

“Never thought I would find it cute to catch my boyfriend cuddling with a girl.” Shownu chortled, putting his bag on the floor next to the sofa.

At the sound of being called that term, a tingling sensation on Kihyun’s stomach forced him to purse his lips to contain a smile.

The younger chuckled in silence, to not wake her up.

“Shut up. How was it?”

“Went fine.” Shownu replied, squatting next to them. “Here?”

“Just right. She eats a lot, even more than you.”

“You know…” Shownu’s forehead naturally inclined to lean on Kihyun’s shoulder, and the latter didn’t think twice before raising his hand to place it on the older’s nape, gently caressing Shownu’s skin. “Um… Ah… So much better now… with you.”
Kihyun’s mouth curved into a smile, enjoying the warmth that came from both the woman lying next to him and his boyfriend.

“I would invite you to join me here…” The younger man affirmed, with a low voice. “But there’s already a giant next to me.”

His hand instinctively shifted to settle on the woman’s head, and the unexpected heat sent shivers down Kihyun’s spine.

“Holy shit!” Kihyun looked back and forth between his hand and the woman. “She’s burning!”

“Let me see.” Shownu moved his arm forward, now kneeling next to the couch. With the warning of such high temperature, the tanned man didn’t wince once he put a hand on her forehead. “Fuck. You’re right. Come on, come on.”

Without further ado, Kihyun got off the couch and ran towards the kitchen to get some washcloths and cool water.

“Should we give her something?” Shownu’s voice reverberated through the apartment, and a peek at the entrance of the kitchen showed the man already carrying her in his arms.

“No, no, no.” He could feel it deep down that the panic was about to take over, so Kihyun tried to ground himself on logic. “She’s not from this time. Any medicine could be dangerous to her organism.” With the bowl of water and washcloths in hands, Kihyun hurried towards them. “Let’s go back to my room. We have to lower this fever.”

“God, I fucking hate the woods.”

That was the first thing Wonho uttered in more or less than 15 minutes into the forest, and it was exactly what Hyungwon expected of him.

“I told you to stay behind.”

According to the map of the forest Hyungwon had memorized a while before adventuring himself in that foreign space, the locals didn’t consider the entire forest to be “haunted” — the space it enclosed was enormous, surrounding the entire city like a soft greenery blanket. What they did consider eerie enough to keep their distance from it at any costs was a segment at the northwest section, where abnormal phenomena seemed to have occurred throughout the centuries, a cautionary tale passed from generation to generation.

Such place, as claimed by Hakyeon, was not visited by one of his people in at least a century, but was described by their ancestors as having a different feeling about it; fauna and flora were undoubtedly otherworldly, with a distinct sour smell of rotting wood infesting the air around this location.

A branch creaked louder under Hyungwon’s feet and an unexpected odd feeling swamped his chest. The dry soil in which they walked was the complete opposite to the fresh minty scent that arose in the air; maybe it’d rain soon, the time traveler thought, but the cold breeze was already becoming harsh on them, so maybe it was better to root for a drought.
“So, are you gonna tell me the truth or nah?”

With a confused frown, Hyungwon turned around to face Wonho.

“Excuse me?”

The man jumped over a small log and leaves rustled with the wind right next to him.

“About my double. The fuck did he do that all those people can’t stand looking at me?”

“Oh…” Hyungwon went back to focus on his stroll, but didn’t ignore the man’s question. “Like I told you earlier, a bit more than a decade ago, there was a nuclear accident in a power plant in this area. That’s where I met your double in this universe, and Hakyeon, Taekwoon, Jaehwan and Wonshik.”

The time traveler inhaled sharply, letting that dazzling earthy scent and the sound of wind whistling calm his nerves.

“Your double was, sort of, the authority in that power plant, and that place was of great importance to the development of your country’s time travel program.”

“What do you mean…” Wonho’s voice gradually became lower. “By accident? Reactor core meltdown?”

“Yes. Hakyeon and the others worked at the power plant at the time, and once your double was notified of the accident, he demanded a lockdown. No one would be able to leave the premises.”

“Was he in there too?”

“No.” Hyungwon gulped, lifting his head to let the shy rays of light that passed through the thick canopy hit his face. “He ordered it from the capital. I broke in and teleported everyone out of there, then fixed the reactor. A full meltdown would have pushed back this world’s time travel program for at least 40 years.”

“How the fuck didn’t you die from the radiation?”

“I went back to the fourth dimension to let it heal me. That’s why I thought that, if one of you sent me back in there even after I died, I would be able to come back and defeat The Eye.”

All in all, Hyungwon never blamed Wonho’s double for acting so harshly, especially when so much was at risk back then. The harm it could’ve caused to hundreds of people would’ve been irreversible, but at the same time the pink-haired could understand the resentment Hakyeon and his friends still had in themselves — he should’ve have thought it better before agreeing to let Wonho tag along, but it was too late.

Without any further conversation, the noises of the forest once again emerged to be the primary ones, but a loud screech was not one that Hyungwon ever expected to hear.

It didn’t sound like an animal.

“The fuck was that?”

Wonho now stood beside him, after jogging a bit to catch up to Hyungwon.

“Almost there.” Hyungwon announced, gazing at any possible direction. “Stay close, Wonho-ssi.”
A second later, the time traveler could actually feel the other man shifting closer to him.

The trek continued like that for another 10 minutes, not only in their individual silence, but now accompanied by a soundless atmosphere in the rest of the forest section.

Hyungwon could feel in his bones that they approached something dangerous, even if Time didn’t allow him to get a glimpse of what it was, so decided to make a stop.

“Please, pass me the water on the bag.”

Wonho nodded, crouching down to place the bag on the ground for him to open.

“So…” The man started as he stood up again to pass the water bottle to the time traveler. “You really don’t believe in ghosts, supernatural stuff?”

A chuckle escaped his mouth before he could suppress it.

“I believe in myself.” Hyungwon smirked again, handing the bottle back to him.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

Any retort was cut short by a clear rattling sound of static in the air; even though short lived, but was enough to give him goosebumps.

The moon rose all the way up in the sky as Kihyun leaned his back against the chair, reminding him that almost two hours of damping and drying up a washcloth over and over again had worn him out.

Fortunately, the girl’s fever broke before they had to resort to any harsher method to cool down her body.

Shifting his gaze down to her in his bed once more, Kihyun was hit with the sudden urge to cry. Had it not been for Shownu’s entrance, with clean bed sheets in hands, the younger man would already be in tears.

Apparently, his boyfriend sort of sensed that, like he always did.

“Hey.” Shownu squatted next to the chair Kihyun occupied, right beside the bed. “She’s gonna be fine. She is strong. Just like you.”

“I’m…” He stammered a bit to not let the tears come out. “I am not.”

“You are.” The older smiled, placing his hands under Kihyun’s shin. “You are a beautiful, strong soul, Kihyun. That’s why I fell for you.”

If he weren’t so tired, Kihyun would’ve reacted more enthusiastically to that sudden confession, even though it wasn’t much of a surprise at that point. All his remaining energy allowed him to do was to let his head fall on Shownu’s shoulder, taking a deep breath.

As long as they were together, everything was going to be fine.
Maybe, just maybe, had he stayed behind, Wonho wouldn’t be feeling so much dread in his veins at that moment.

The route got denser as they kept strolling down the woods, till it got to the point where they could barely see what was in front of them. That didn’t stop Hyungwon, though.

The time traveler reached farther and farther regardless of the natural obstacles, until he suddenly jerked backwards.

“Can you hear that?” Hyungwon asked, looking quite distraught about the deafening silence around them.

“Hear what?”

Without giving an explanation, the pink-haired stepped forward to pull the bushes aside to make a way for them to pass, leading to a glade plunged into darkness.

“Give me your hand.” Hyungwon ordered.

Without arguing, Wonho extended his hand. Hyungwon’s cold fingers were rapidly brushing against his skin in that dimness, swiftly securing a hold on him.

“I’m going to share my energy with you so you can see this.”

It’s not like Wonho had a choice or something like that.

With just a couple of seconds to prepare himself for that shock, Wonho’s grip on Hyungwon’s hand became tighter. The wave of blueish energy that now ran through his body made him flinch violently, but he soon found himself used to it.

Then, he heard.

Then, he saw.

The fabric of space-time bent itself like folded paper in an infinite procedure, repeating the same pattern as the reality in front of them moved in slow waves, distorting shapes and emitting a low ominous sound that seemed distant, yet too close at the same time.

“It’s a peek of the fourth dimension.” Hyungwon continued to stare at that event, hand trembling over Wonho’s. “I never something like this before.”

“I think I know what it is.” On his peripheral vision, he could see Hyungwon’s head moving downwards in his direction. “A wrinkle.”

“What?”

“From a movie, and book, but doesn’t matter. It’s like a wormhole.” Wonho didn’t know where so much confidence came from, but he continued his speech. “But it’s folding the fabric of reality like a piece of paper to, maybe, travel through space. Maybe that’s where the boy ended up into.”

“I’ve never dealt with this before, Wonho-ssi.” Hyungwon muttered, thick with apprehension.
“I think he might be alive, Hyungwon.” The blond looked up at the man filled with conviction. That entire feeling was new to him too. “We should go. In there.”

“I’ll go. You stay—”

“No.” Wonho cut him short, already dragging Hyungwon by the hand towards that strange manifestation of nature’s peculiarity.

Anything less than a run would’ve made Wonho hesitate in that insane action he was about to take, but somehow he wasn’t afraid, not anymore.

The hand holding onto his own hardened its grip, as if Wonho was going to slip away from Hyungwon if the man didn’t put enough strength into it.

Wonho had no experience over that process, but if Hyungwon hadn’t been holding his hand so tightly, they would’ve been probably pulled apart by the strange force that clashed against them as soon as they stepped into the wrinkle; to Wonho, it felt like crashing against hundreds of floppy surfaces over and over again non-stop, aloof to the concept of time, space and even necessity to breathe.

The final collision was harsh against the ground foliage, but Wonho didn’t felt any residual pain except for the short-lived one, caused by the abrupt impact.

As he opened his eyes, he noticed they were no longer in that dark forest, and definitely far away from home.

Hyungwon groaned at full volume next to him, still holding his hand.

“It worked.” Wonho uttered under his breath, swiftly sitting upright to take a good look around him. They lied on a golden wheat field, bathed by the sunlight. “Hyungwon!”

The time traveler slowly opened his eyes, seemingly in pain after that uncoordinated journey.

“Where…” His voice came out rough, so the man cleared his throat. “Oh.”

Hyungwon’s eyes widened hastily, as if he had become aware of everything that happened around them way too fast for him to deal with it.

“Not through space.” Hyungwon’s voice was more orotund, and he frantically looked back and forth between that place and Wonho. “Through dimensions. This is a pocket dimension.”

A loud whimper emerged in the background, leading their attention to the horizon in front of them.

Without breaking the hand bond apart, they carefully got off the ground and followed the sound of the snivel, that grew louder and louder until they could hear a clear weeping.

Just a few meters ahead, squatted down amidst the wheat field, the black-haired boy seemed worn out of so much crying, relenting the willpower to burst into tears at full volume.

At the sight of the child, Hyungwon pulled his hand away and Wonho tried not to think too much of how the time traveler’s warmth lingered on his skin.

“Hello.”

The boy almost jumped out of his skin at the sound of a foreign voice that echoed through that vast field, and ended up falling on his butt.
“Hi, Hyuk.” Hyungwon softly spoke, trying to calm down the kid. “My name is Hyungwon. I’m a friend of your dads. Can I come closer?”

The time traveler tried to take a step in his direction, but the child still seemed terrified and crawled backwards, to put a safe distance between them.

Regardless of his wit that led them there, Wonho wouldn’t have known how to deal with that situation, so he was grateful for the time traveler’s presence and his ability to make a move.

“Okay. Okay. I’m not going to hurt you, I promise. Do you like fireworks, Hyuk?”

Even if shaking in fear, the boy nodded, staring with big eyes at the pink-haired time traveler.

Wonho felt never felt a stronger déjà vu.

His gaze dashed to the man with pink hair.

“If I show you lots of them, will you come with me?”

Slowly, the boy nodded again.

A strong wave of blueish energy gushed through Hyungwon’s body, inherently directing itself to one of his hands to form an inert sphere of light.

Following the same process as he used with Wonho as a child, the time traveler jerked his hand upwards and the ball of light flew above their heads to break into dozens of smaller orbs that popped in the air around them, flickering with low sounds to resemble real fireworks.

*He does this to everyone, doesn’t he? There’s nothing special about it.*

Wonho pushed that stupid thought to the back of his mind, even though he couldn’t suppress that odd irked sensation rising in his chest.

“WOW!” The boy jumped off the ground, trying to reach the spheres before they broke into twinkling pieces fated to vanish.

“Shall we take you home now, Hyuk?” The time traveler stretched out his hand to the boy. “Your parents are worried about you.”

“My dads?” The boy seemed at the verge of crying again, clutching Hyungwon’s hand. “They are mad at me, right?”

“They just miss you.” Wonho broke his silence, earning the attention of both of them. “I’m Wonho.”

“He’s the one who found a way here.” Hyungwon promptly clarified to the child.

“Thank you.” The boy put on his biggest smile. “Can we leave now?”

Oh. Wonho hadn’t realized he had no idea how to use that wrinkle to make the journey back there.

“This way.” Gesturing with his free hand, Hyungwon quickly began to stroll in the direction he pointed to; Wonho trailed behind them. “You can’t see the… wrinkle, but I can. Are you okay, Hyuk? Are you hurt?”

“I’m okay.” The boy sniffled, rubbing his face with the back of his hand. “Who are you, mister?”
The time traveler chuckled, and suddenly looked over his shoulder to peek at Wonho.

“Someone once asked me if I am a wizard. Maybe I am.”

Wonho was left exhausted after that entire trek within a trek — Inception bullshit without the part of being asleep, he established later — and almost dozed off while leaning his shoulder against the entrance of the same building they had entered earlier that day; now, with the solitude of the empty streets and under the dimness of the starless night sky, the entire place seemed more imposing in a very melancholic way.

A vehement tap on his shoulder brought in fully back to the land of the reality.

“Hmm?”

He turned around to see Hakyeon staring at him.

“Wonho-ssi.”

With no moonlight, the illumination casted upon his face came from the faint lamp post a few meters ahead, creating a somber atmosphere around the tanned man, a predator-like vibe.

“Hmm? Yes? Where’s Hyungwon?”

“He is talking to Taekwoon about the… wrinkle. How manage it, since apparently there’s no way for us to get rid of it or, you know, even see it.”

Wonho nodded, looking away quickly from the fierce look of the taller man. Hakyeon himself seemed quite awkward about having that conversation.

“Hyungwon said it was you who found out what it was.” He cleared his throat. “That… anyways. Thank you. For helping bring my son back. And… I’m sorry for my behavior earlier. I shouldn’t have…”

“It’s fine.” Wonho made himself clear. “Hyungwon told me what was it about. Sorry my doppelganger was kind of a prick. He must have been an even bigger asshole to Hyungwon, I can imagine.”

Taking a step forward, Hakyeon shifted a bit closer and lowered his voice. Without any clear reason, the man smirked.

“You like him, don’t you?”

“W-what?” Wonho could feel himself doing the linguistics equivalent to tripping over his own feet. “He is… he is a good man. Pff, probably the best out… there? He’s good. Good. Hmm, is he gonna take, you know, too long? We should… head back… People are waiting for us, to, yeah.”

Hakyeon snorted so badly it echoed through the hall from where he came from.

“Good luck, pal.”

Why did he sound like a Genie from a magic lamp, throwing some enigmatic words at him and simply leaving?

It wasn’t like that.
Wonho didn’t hate the pink-haired time traveler, but still wasn’t sure he liked him either, to be able to call him a friend. Their relationship was no more than okay, and it was no big deal.

No big deal.

“Are you sure this is going to work?”

Kihyun’s question was the same one for the tenth time in a row, and even Hyungwon, a being with everlasting patience, looked up from the piece in his hand that he finished to fix.

“I wouldn’t risk her life if I wasn’t completely sure, Kihyun.”

“Sorry. I just…” His boyfriend suddenly turned around to Shownu, who sat at one of the benches of the main wagon with the girl by his side, napping on Shownu’s shoulder. “Fever?”

The night before had been one of the longest Shownu had ever experienced. Her fever kept having ups and downs during the entire night, and neither Kihyun or him slept more than a few minutes, which felt more like a long blink than even a nap.

“No.” Shownu affirmed, after pressing his hand on her forehead.

It was weird to think of himself as a father, even if his feelings towards that girl conveyed an affection Shownu didn’t know how to explain. And yet, he was somehow glad that she grew up to be such a great person, regardless of which path Kihyun and him took to take her there — in the end, it was worthy.

A ripple of sadness swept through his chest for having to say goodbye so soon, but it wasn’t like there wouldn’t be a reunion ever again. She was a promise, and she was a dream that came true even before their sleep. Above all, she had a place to fill in the hall of greatness of human kind, so like every other parent at some point, Shownu was letting go of her.

*Fly high, kid.*

“All set.” Hyungwon announced, placing his transparent screwdriver on the bench opposite to where Shownu sat with her.

Hearing steps coming from the inside of the train, Shownu turned his head in the direction of the sound only to find his same-age friend strolling towards the main wagon.

“Are we home?” With a groggy voice, his friend inquired.

“Yes.” Hyungwon answered. “You seemed quite tired, so I let you sleep.”

“You went with him?” Shownu asked, truly surprised by that fact. “Willingly?”

“Just the two of you?” Kihyun endorsed his question.

“Yeah?” Wonho blinked a couple of times, looking back and forth between Kihyun and Shownu.

The additional weight on his side stirred, moving sideways.
“Ouch…” The girl brought a hand to her head, clearly not feeling too well. “Not gonna lie… not a big fan of this period.”

“Hyungwon fixed your watch.” Shownu whispered to her, to not worsen her migraine. “Time to go.”

“Oh…” Her excited expression had a few breaches of disappointment, and Shownu never related more to someone. “Oh, hey uncle Wonho.”

“Ugh…” His friend grunted in dislike of that title, making everyone laugh.

“Well, time to bounce.”

As if she wasn’t struck by a high fever the whole night before, the woman jumped off her seat and strolled towards Kihyun and Hyungwon.

“Thanks, uncle Hyungwon.” She bowed 90° to the pink-haired man. “You’re a life saver, always.” Shifting her gaze down, she now focused on Shownu’s boyfriend. “Hey there. Thank you, for everything. Sorry I was a pain in the ass for you, and sorry that I will still be. Thank you for being with me.”

Kihyun wasn’t good with farewells. Even from a couple of meters apart, Shownu could sense the nerve-racking feeling of wanting to keep someone one should let go of, and it would mess with his boyfriend’s feelings for a while.

“Yeah, yeah.” Kihyun looked away, and was surprised when she bent down to hug him. “Go, go!”

Scurrying to Shownu’s side, he once more hid behind him.

“Papa.” The girl gave Shownu a tight hug, and at least one of them wouldn’t have to wait too long to meet again. “Take care. Thank you for never changing.”

Before Shownu could let it show he was about to become emotional about her departure, she sprung backwards towards the time traveler, and beckoned Wonho to come in her direction. Once he was next to Hyungwon, she engulfed them both in a hug at the same time, with eerie final words left behind before parting ways.

To Wonho, the answer to something not even his same-age friend seemed to know what it was.

“You know why.”

To Hyungwon, a charade.

“Green lights to the green light.”

“What?” Both earnestly asked, in unison.

“Bye Monbebe!” She waved her arms upwards to the A.I. “Bye everyone!”

The sound of her laugh echoed through the wagon, displaying a big bright smile one last time.

Twirling around, the most familiar stranger in the world waved a final goodbye at Shownu and Kihyun. With a few maneuvers on her wristwatch, a button on its side was pressed and she promptly vanished into thin air with a quick whooshing sound, just like they were used to see Hyungwon doing.
With a sigh, Wonho broke the silence that ensued her departure.

“God, I need a drink.”

“It’s 9:00 a.m., Wonho.” Kihyun pointed out, moving to stand by Shownu’s side.

“And a bagel.” His same-age friend added.

While Shownu chuckled at their antics, the lights above their heads began to flicker.

“Hyungwon. We have received a new message.”

All their gazes moved towards the time traveler, whom didn’t seem too excited about it.

“Which universe?”

“The Elysium.”

Hyungwon froze on spot, eyes darting to the metallic floor of the train. Almost as if he was afraid to face such reality, the pink-haired slowly raised his head up to face the flickering lights.

However, when Shownu concentrated himself on sensing the vibe that Hyungwon emanated, for the first time in a very long time, Shownu found out he was wrong.

The time traveler wasn’t afraid.

Burning under an iridescent scarlet aura, Shownu was certain that, if inflamed enough, it would be able to burn the world to the ground with so much fury.

Chapter End Notes

YES i love vixx and hakyeon is my bias, lots of more cameos to come also i watched the wrinkle in time movie a day ago so that's the solution of this plot, not really excellent but quite entertaining a bitch cried bc thats what disney does to me, and oprah gets my attention every time

the absence of the fake maknae line has a purpose, so pls understand a bit and they're coming back next chapter so we can have a nice and sweet ot7 adventure while still being chaotic gays and they gain more focus, especially kyun

see ya next week, kids
Interdimensional house of bitches

Chapter Summary

also called "we are in a serious situation, but let's try to find out hyungwon's sexuality"

Chapter Notes

hey there homies how yall doing
thanks for sticking to this story even tho the build up is really long, means a lot to me
im not really happy with this chapter but there's some fluffy shit here that yall might like so there's that
also im already with my board and red threads and a cigarette in hand ready to do a full theory once the mv for are you there? comes out how about yall
thanks for the feedback yall give me here or on twitter, i'd die for every single one of you bitches
enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom.”

*Maya Angelou, “Caged Bird”*

Wonho was fed up.

Not even the safe haven of his academic life was sheltered from the outside influence, albeit it kept good records of achieving it for a while. Especially for the fact that youth prodigy fame forced him to work harder and harder each passing year after Wonho obtained his PhD.
However, at some point, his desire to please others got smaller, fractioning itself into dozens, hundreds, thousands of tiny pieces scattered across his mind. He simply didn’t care enough for what others thought of him, but had to be a good pretender if he wanted to remain on that field.

Which ended up being even more tiring than the actual art of flattering. Wonho wished he didn’t rely on anyone else to be accredited for his achievements, but that was simply not possible, at least not for him.

He still dreamed of Hyungwon, sometimes; whenever such memory came to his mind, Wonho felt jealous. Not of the man himself, but what he had built for himself in his long lifespan, something Wonho didn’t know if he’d be capable of such thing if offered the same opportunity.

Above all things, Wonho envied Hyungwon’s liberty.

Hyungwon didn’t have to report shit to anyone about what he did or refrained himself to do anything; not limited by time, space or reality around him. His unearthly abilities were a fat bonus, capable of aiding him in even return from the dead — sliding across dimensions like no other human could ever do the same, and yet preserving the most human features, the ones our race should’ve kept while tossing aside the greed for power.

But Hyungwon was also gone, and that meant something Wonho didn’t know what it was, and it pissed him off to the core.

Tinkling sounds arose as Wonho fumbled around his desk for his keys and phone, turning off his table lamp to no longer avoid what has been on his mind the entire day.

The drive out of the university towards the underground station wasn’t a very vivid remembrance in Wonho’s mind, but the fact that he had gotten there was enough, and was one of those strong impulses regarding that time traveler that made Wonho feel like he didn’t know himself anymore.

After almost six days, the train was still there in its place, but not its owner.

“Monbebe.” Wonho called out for the A.I. as soon as the door to the main wagon automatically opened. No response, so he tried again. “Monbebe.”

A second later, the lights in the wagon began to flicker.

“Yes, Wonho?”

“Tell me where he is.”

“That I cannot do.”

“Come on…” Wonho sighed deeply, bringing a hand to massage his temples. “It has been almost a week since he vanished out of fucking nowhere, right after receiving message from whoever the hell that was. The kids are worried about him. You gotta give me something.”

“Are you?”

Wonho frowned, squinting up.

“What?”

“Are you worried about Hyungwon, Wonho? That is my question.”

Maybe.
Ever since he crossed paths with the time traveler, never before Wonho had seen the man so disturbed by a single message notification from a so-called “The Elysium”, and it kind of creeped him out to see such reaction; seconds later, Hyungwon quickly tapped on his wristwatch and disappeared in front of them.

It was far-fetched of Wonho to think such thing, but if Hyungwon himself seemed fearful of it, shouldn’t they be fucking terrified? What that place could possibly be?

“Doesn’t matter.” He finally answered. “What matter is—”

“Answer the question and I shall give you information.”

Wonho scoffed.

“Why is that important?”

“Because you are the 302. Regardless of circumstances, Hyungwon always treated the doubles before you with utmost kindness, only to receive hostility in many ways. One could categorize him as an idiot for repeating such useless behavior, which he is. Nevertheless, he is a good human, and humans do not thrive in loneliness. He deserves to be cared about, and he seems to like you regardless of your early actions. However, if you do not have any sympathy towards Hyungwon, leave. He shall come back once he deems necessary to.”

“I do, okay?” Wonho didn’t expect himself to reply so quickly to that. Perhaps because it was the true, and his only witness was a disembodied A.I. “I… am. Worried. Are you happy?”

“That is irrelevant. Hyungwon came back yesterday, a few moments after Changkyun and Jooheon came looking for him, just like you. He is locked up in his personal room and do not respond for my calls.”

Wonho caught himself squinting up at the twinkling lights.

“You said you couldn’t tell me that.”

“Oh, Wonho. I can do whatever I want. Recognize the illusion of control for what it is: a human flaw.”

A small chuckle came out of his mouth unconsciously. Sometimes, dealing with Monbebe was like hanging around a moody teenager, but a smarter-than-everyone-on-Earth one.

His legs moved towards the left side of the train, quickly arriving in the control room. Wonho buried his hands on the pockets of his navy coat, unhurriedly strolling towards the door of Hyungwon’s room. However, as his hand now hovered front of the metallic door before a knock, he reconsidered it all.

Maybe it wasn’t his business, none of that. Hyungwon was a grown up centenary man, aware of consequences of every action of his. What Wonho had to offer anyway, by just sticking his nose in that situation?

Yeah. He is here, so I can just tell one of the kids to come and see him. I don’t need to—

Already with his back turned to the door, planning his way out, every centimeter of Wonho’s body stiffened as he heard a low snivel, coming from inside Hyungwon’s room.

A couple of nervous knocks ensued.
“Hyungwon.” At no response for his knocks, Wonho tried to do it again. “I know you’re in there. Come on. Open the door.”

With the atmosphere becoming uneasily silent, all Wonho could hear was a low sound of shoes being dragged against hardwood floor.

“Hyungwon. Stop running away from this. It won’t disappear, it never does.”

Rapid pace emerged nearing the entrance, making the blond man take a step backwards.

“It does not concern you.” Hyungwon’s muffled voice through the closed door seemed more distant than he possibly was.

“Yes, it fucking does.” Wonho sighed, reminding himself to not lose his temper. “The kids… are worried sick. Because people worry when they give a shit about you, so get over it.” With a sharp inhale, he continued. “Look. I know I’m not your favorite face. I know you certainly preferred if literally any other of the boys were here right now, and I can call som—”

The door suddenly swung open and Wonho took another step backwards out of reflex.

Hyungwon didn’t seem like he was crying, though. Maybe because of his heightened healing, his face didn’t get red for much longer, the only sign he had ever shed tears being the little sniffles he let out by the entrance.

Notwithstanding, the creased tawny suit he wore and his disheveled pink locks told the tale of the days that passed by; alone, somewhere before coming back to the train, Hyungwon struggled for a reason that Wonho still didn’t understand, but at the sight of the time traveler looking so hopeless, he was willing to try.

“So?” The pink-haired asked, with a husky voice.

“W-what?”

“Worry.” Hyungwon’s voice was so low Wonho almost didn’t catch up.

As he quickly looked away and cleared his throat, the sudden remembrance of Shownu’s daughter’s last message weirdly came up in his mind.

“You know why.”

“It’s 9:00 p.m. of a Saturday. I wouldn’t be here if I… didn’t.”

Hyungwon stared at him for a while, with that weird look that gave off the vibe he was studying him under a microscope.

“I’m sorry.” Hyungwon sighed, loosening his grip on the door frame. “This isn’t… easy. For me.”

“Clearly.” Wonho retorted, shifting sideways a bit to avert the bright light from Hyungwon’s room, that hit his face. “Let’s go.”

Beckoning with his head to leave the control room, the blond was met with another question.

“Where are we going?”

“Out.”
Though not particularly harsh, the whimsical weather could be felt even with the windows rolled up — regardless of no other physical reactions to a possible icy atmosphere, Wonho’s hands were freezing over the steering wheel, so he quietly pulled one next to his mouth and felt his breath hot on his hand.

It had distracted him for a while of the flustered figure sitting next to him, and Wonho wished he didn’t have such strong desire to laugh.

Much like the first time in 1996, Hyungwon seemed scared stiff about the idea of being inside a moving car, clutching the seat belt on the passenger seat like his life truly depended on it.

With a sigh, Wonho focused again on the road, but stretched his free arm to turn on the music.

“Relax.” The blond spoke for the first time since they left the restaurant, now with their stomachs full. The playlist Changkyun had made for Wonho began to play, and Instagram by Dean slowly filled the air. “You’re not gonna die.”

Hyungwon exhaled sharply, closing his eyes for a second.

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere.”

In the rearview mirror, Wonho observed Hyungwon raise an eyebrow at him before replying.

“Well, that’s quite obvious. I meant specifications of the route.”

“Don’t you know?” Wonho glanced at him for a second, still focusing on driving. “Can’t you see with your… abilities?”

“I cannot get a glimpse of my own timeline, Wonho-ssi.” The man calmly explained. “I’m not even sure if I want to now…”

The mood inside the car dropped drastically, but Wonho saw that as an opportunity.

“What’s The Elysium?” He wished he could maintain eye contact, but Wonho wasn’t about to crash that car and reinforce Hyungwon’s fear of it.

Even though he thought he was going to be ignored, a few seconds later Hyungwon responded to him.

“It’s…” The blond peeped at him through the rearview mirror again, as the moonlight gently lit up his face features. “It’s the Multiverse’s Council. A neutral universe, with the purpose of supervising the multiverse. Composed by representatives of the oldest universes, particularly the ones who survived my world’s attacks. After my universe was allegedly destroyed, they…” It was not often Wonho got to witness such frail voice of him. “My relationship with them…” Hyungwon let out a dry chuckle. “They pretend I do not exist, and the feeling is reciprocal.”

“But now…”

“They already must know that my world survived. I do not care about it, though.”

Wonho snorted.
“Jesus, that’s the biggest fucking lie I’ve heard in a while. You literally care about everything.”

“May I ask what’s your curiosity about, Wonho-ssi?” Hyungwon’s burning gaze on him was just as real as the iciness Wonho’s fingers. “I appreciate it, I just… do not understand.”

“What’s there to understand, Hyungwon?” The blond clasped the wheel harder. “I’m just being friendly.”

“Friendly?” The time traveler emphasized on Wonho’s last word.

“Yeah.” Wonho’s eyes diverted to the stereo as Dean’s song was replaced by Millic’s Paradise, letting out a sigh. “I’m… I mean, in the way friends do.”

“Friends?”

“Stop repeating what I say.” Wonho quickly shared a look with him. “You sound like a broken record. Yeah, friends. Since, uhm, that thing the girl… Shownu’s kid. She said you’re still there in her time, right?”

“Yes.”

“So… Yeah. I know that…” Wonho’s scrambled brain made him work harder to put his thoughts into words. “I wasn’t the nicest guy at first, I know. I’m just sort of… reluctant. About changes. And you are all about that. I mean, you’re a time traveler…” With the certain feeling his convoluted speech didn’t do much, he tried again. “What I mean is that, either I like it or not, you’re an intriguing person to be around. I see wonders that overshadow all the bad things we’ve been through. So… yeah.”

A weird shift in the meaning of Hyungwon’s stare made Wonho feel as if the man was looking straight through him, no secrets left to be disclosed.

“You could have just said you want to be friends, Wonho-ssi.”

“YAH!” At such disrespect for the moment, Wonho frantically moved his eyes between the pink-haired and the road in front of them. “I was trying to be nice!”

“You are.” Hyungwon chuckled. “It’s an absolutely new experience to me, and I’m grateful. I’ve never been friends with a double of yours before.”

A bit frivolous, but Wonho felt a sense of uniqueness for a brief moment, biting his lower lip to restrain a grin. Maybe all the other versions of himself simply didn’t have spent enough time with the time traveler to overcome their dislike for him.

“So…” Wonho cleared his throat, noticing they were quite close to arrive at their destiny. “Are you afraid of going there? The Council.”

“I am not afraid of them. I am afraid of myself.”

Wonho frowned at that odd response and was about to ask the meaning of it when, in the horizon, the entrance of an imposing building emerged on their line of sight through the windshield.

At the entrance gate of the university, a barely awake guard let them pass as soon as he read Wonho’s name in his ID. More or less five minutes driving in silence through the practically empty campus, Wonho finally spotted his destination and pulled over close to the academic building in front of it.
“Where are we?” Hyungwon questioned, as soon as they got out of the car.

“Kyung Hee University.” The blond answered, pressing the button on his car key to lock the vehicle, with a short beep as a confirmation.

The time had passed fast and they were close to midnight, so Wonho knew he shouldn’t take too long in there.

“Come on.”

Lightly guiding the time traveler by the wrist, Wonho followed down the stone path towards the white dome and couldn’t help but to be swathed by the sensation of calmness that Hyungwon, somehow, exuded. It was not an easy feeling to forget, and a rather addictive one if he was being honest.

The lights of the astronomical structure were still on, and Wonho considered himself lucky. After they climbed the small stone stairs to reach the entry, they noticed no more than two guards standing, respectively, by the door and at the desk on the lobby of the building.

Once more, as soon as Wonho showed them his ID, he given permission to enter with Hyungwon, but with the warning that they should stay for no more than 10 minutes inside because they intended to close soon.

“Here.” The blond let go of Hyungwon, giving up on the man’s warmth.

While the pink-haired man took a good look around, Wonho kept speaking as he sauntered to turn on the lights just enough so they could move at ease in there.

“I came here a lot during my PhD research, so my mom ended up donating a lot of money to the university. Still does. They let me come here sometimes.”

“Oh.” Hyungwon nodded, eyes still wandering around the room.

The huge telescope gave off the impression to bring them closer to the night sky, almost at the reach of the hand. The usual opening in the roof of the observatory was way smaller than Wonho remembered it usually being, but it was still good enough to be an intermediary to the sight of the sky.

“You said you liked stars. Go ahead.” Wonho gestured towards the big optical telescope, two times the size of both of them.

With a bit of hesitation, the time traveler slowly approached the device and leaned his head down to gaze through the lens.

A couple of seconds later, Hyungwon perked up like a puppy after seeing a new toy.

“Oh! I see!” A huge grin appeared on his face, making his eyes turn into a straight line.

His little giggles as he went back to observe the outer space were almost childlike, and Wonho couldn’t hold back a smile.

In such simple moment, Hyungwon had never looked more like one of their kind to him — yet, still one of a kind, a lost jewel throughout the centuries, value passed unnoticed by those who don’t take the time to look a little bit closer.
Leaning against the wall on one shoulder, Wonho observed with attentive eyes the time traveler’s quirks; the man giggled at whatever he was viewing through the telescope, face swathed in complete wonder to the point it actually started glowing, literally glowing with his trademarked blueish light under his skin.

To think of living in a world without stars sounded ludicrous, and yet all he could think how those small things, that everyone took for granted, could mean the world to someone.

Wonho’s eyes never left him even for a second, and he was starting to become too self-aware of his actions, but Hyungwon was faster in catching up to his gaze.

“I see Venus!” He still had his goofy smile on his face, and Wonho was compelled to smile back at him. “Do you want to go there sometime? I know of a universe who does trips across the galaxy!”

“Oh, no.” Wonho chuckled, face palming for a few seconds. “Let’s take it slow.”

His frantic nod made his pink hair jiggle in the air, and Wonho couldn’t stop thinking about how everything he had seen Hyungwon do before, at peak of his power, seemed like a fantasy; mayhaps the time traveler was nothing but a common man, like him, like the others, like the glimpses of his normality in the middle of his interactions with others.

The complexity of that man and its limits was, perhaps, the mystery Wonho wanted to unveil the most.

“You seem calmer now.”

Wonho’s comment brought the time traveler back from his reveries, as Hyungwon comfortable laid against the passenger seat, head thrown a bit backwards without the need to clutch the seat belt.

A while after they got back to the car, Hyungwon asked him to open the window on his side of the vehicle; as soon as Wonho fulfilled his request, the time traveler stuck his arm outside, letting the wind hit him squarely in the face as his arm floated amidst the darkness of the night.

His balletic arm movements alternated up and down like a flying kite, unbothered by the cold air that struck his skin; Wonho had to remind himself to pay attention to the road instead of watching Hyungwon smile to himself with his little enjoyment, much like he had discovered a new wonder about the present, in the vivid and complex moment where they existed just in that vehicle, and nowhere else.


The melancholy in his voice was deep, and Wonho didn’t know what to make of it.

“I just like the feeling of running away.” The blond replied, with a quick chuckle. “Of being in control of myself.” Suddenly, a thought occurred to him. “Hyungwon.”

Eyes still focused on the outside world, the time traveler nodded in acknowledgment of his voice.

“You should go. To The Elysium.”

With a tired mien, Hyungwon pulled his arm back inside the car as his pink hair experienced the
last moments of utter mess and chaotic locks danced over his face, before Wonho pushed the button beside him to close the window.

“You said you’re not afraid of them.” He continued. “Just go over there and tell them to fuck off and leave you alone.”

Surprisingly, the pink-haired snorted.

“You don’t know much about diplomacy, do you?” Hyungwon sighed, shifting a bit in his seat. “I am afraid of myself, Wonho-ssi. Of who I could become in there. These people… bring out the worst in me.”

“Then we go with you.” To be honest, Wonho was surprised at himself for such words coming out of his mouth. “I know you worry that something might happen to us, but, you know, we always survived when we stayed together. This is kind of how friendship works too. We go through good and bad things together, to share the burden.”

Once nothing but a noiseless atmosphere ensued, Wonho considered that maybe he should’ve just kept his mouth fucking shut, and perhaps even maybe not have going through that night at all.

“Alright.” Hyungwon agreed out of nowhere, and Wonho had to contain the urge to slam on the breaks for some reason. Meanwhile, the time traveler pulled his phone out of his coat. “Oh my… many messages and lost calls… It’s easier if I text them all in the group chat.”

“What group chat?” The feeling of betrayal was beginning to arise in Wonho’s chest, and he wasn’t even too much surprised about it. “You guys have one without me?”

Hyungwon slightly shrugged.

“The boys thought you wouldn’t be interested in joining, because I am in it. But we are friends now, so if you wish… It’s called IHOB. I have no idea what that means, though.”

“Who named it?”

“Minhyuk.”

With the nights of Seoul already on the horizon, Wonho let out a loud cackle.

“Knowing Minhyuk, your ignorance is probably a bliss.”

Usually, Minhyuk was prone to feel suffocated by the swarm of emotions that crossed his chest in a daily basis — not even just from himself, but from the involuntary habit of picking up a myriad of sensations from people close to him. However, at that moment, he just felt… hollow.

Such emptiness was a heavy weight on his chest that he couldn’t get rid of; even though he had an idea of the reason for it, Minhyuk just wanted to open a zipper on his back and escape his own body for a while instead of actually facing the problem.

“Minhyuk?” His head moved towards Kihyun’s voice, still distracted by his own musings. His friend seemed to have been calling for him for a while. “Yah, Earth to Minhyuk!”
Flawless cyan sky reigned outside the restaurant they were having lunch, and Minhyuk felt rather guilty for being sad with such beautiful weather.

“Sorry.” The red-haired blinked a couple of times before gazing at the other man. “What did you say?”

“Lots of things.” Kihyun didn’t seem seriously angry, just frustrated. With a sigh, he put down his chopsticks over his finished bowl of jjajangmyeon. “What’s going on with you lately?”

At the brink of spacing out again, his response was so natural that almost didn’t seem worth of surprise.

“I kissed Jooheon.”

Next thing Minhyuk was forced to acknowledge was their table nearly being flipped off by his friend, whom seemingly choked on nothing.

“What?”

Kihyun’s shout attracted weird looks to them, quickly dispersing for lack of continuity.

As absurd as it certainly sounds, Minhyuk felt like something possessed him that night, sole creator of that ruckus that possibly ruined a relationship he cherished a lot. All Minhyuk could remember from Jooheon’s birthday party were flashes that came to a halt, clearly, at the one solid memory of what happened when the red-haired dragged his younger friend towards the backyard.

By that time, only a few already drunk people adventured themselves on the outside, not really giving a shit about what happened around them. Minhyuk had never felt so grateful for alcohol’s existence before that moment.

The thing is that it was Jooheon’s party and Minhyuk’s logical brain side knew that, as the center of attention, the golden-haired couldn’t stay by his side all the time; the emotional side of himself, though — the absolute bitch idiot — was only interested in getting what he wanted, at that exact fucking time.

His mixed emotions and intoxicated brain couldn’t bear to see any other person flirting with his dongsaeng anymore, so his drunk ass thought of no better idea than to haul the boy to the backyard.

Jooheon’s short question about what the hell was going on was shut down as Minhyuk grabbed the younger’s face and hastily kissed him on the mouth.

It felt nothing like he imagined he’d feel, though.

Minhyuk blames the numbing dullness of the event of his mouth against Jooheon’s on the alcohol clouding his mind and his feelings, especially now that he stared at the man’s shocked face; his small eyes widened in surprise, Jooheon’s mouth was slightly agape when the man brushed his fingers over his own lips.

A mistake, Minhyuk’s stupid brain yelled after it was already too late. Of course, he had read all the signs wrong, regardless of the alluring aura he could sense from Jooheon whenever he was close to the man; now, his entire supernatural ability was to be questioned, untrustworthy.

Or so he thought, until the birthday boy pulled Minhyuk closer by the waist and pressed him against the wall, kissing him back. Jooheon’s mouth against his mouth lit tiny sparks on his whole
body, goosebumps sweeping through his skin while his arms naturally moved upwards to settle on Jooheon’s shoulders.

And… that’s that.

Apparently, his brain thought that all information of what happened next was useless, so now they were left to avoid each other at all costs whenever they crossed paths in the last week and a half, which made Minhyuk pretty sure that Jooheon was regretting it all.

Following his explanation, Kihyun still looked at him as if Minhyuk had grown another head.

“So…” Kihyun began his speech, propping his chin in his palm. If anything, he looked perplexed. “You… like him? Jooheonnie?”

“Yes.” Any other response would be a lie. “But I don’t think he likes me.”

“Well, he kissed you. He isn’t really the most straightforward person on Earth, so it must mean something.”

“Are you…” Minhyuk suddenly felt a bit shy. “Aren’t you, like, disappointed on him for getting involved with someone like me? Like… he’s the next Einstein or something… and I’m just me.”

There was no way the red-haired could’ve escaped from the slap from Kihyun that hit his arm.

“You shut your mouth, dumbass! Remember what Hyungwon said? You and Shownu hyung were the first ones, way too unpredictable for the multiverse to assert roles to. Anything you end up doing, it will change the world. Now stop being a coward and just talk to Jooheonnie. At best, you get an answer and can finally start listening to what I’m trying to talk to you about.”

“Fine…” Minhyuk sighed, taking a sip of his beer. “I really didn’t listen. What were you saying?”

“Thanks for the honesty, dipshit.” His same-age friend chuckled. “I was asking you if you can do the sensing thing to find out if Hyungwon is straight or nah.”

“Do you think my Hyungwon-given skill is a gaydar?” Minhyuk genuinely inquired. “My gaydar and my powers are two different things. I never sensed anything romantic-related from him, so I can’t really say.”

“You know…” Kihyun bent his upper body forward a bit, from the other side of the table. “We could use this new trip to find out. Just asking him it’s no fun.”

“God…” Minhyuk cackled, feeling a bit less burdened by his own problems. “You’re so chaotic. I love it. Let’s bring in the others.”

[2:04 p.m.]

Minhyukkie created the new group chat “Is Hyungwon a straight?”

Minhyukkie added Ki, Shownu hyung, Beefy moron, Kkukkung and Jooheonnie
At first, Changkyun was glad they were leaving to another trip on a Monday so he could procrastinate his studies till the point where he just fell asleep on his desk, waking up hours later to grab a snack then get distracted by the internet, falling asleep once more, pretty much.

However, it’s kinda difficult not to feel a bit guilty about it when your sort-of-teacher is confined in the same time machine as you. It was just a matter of time until Hyungwon bring it up, as they all, except Minhyuk, gathered in the kitchen to enjoy fresh kimbaps made by Kihyun.
In front of him, the pink-haired man seemed quite apathetic to everything around him, though, barely speaking as they all chatted among each other.

A moment later, Minhyuk appeared by the kitchen’s door, leaning on the door frame as if he was doing a sexy photoshoot.

“Good night, gays.” His friend declared, earning the attention of everyone but Hyungwon. “And Hyungwon.”

“Good night.” The time traveler replied mechanically, as he stared at his food plate.

“We travel inside a wormhole, Minhyuk.” Wonho, who sat beside Changkyun, pointed out. “Time is irrelevant.”

“Calm down.” The red-haired scoffed at him as he approached the table. “This is why no one likes the kid who asks the teacher to check the homework.”

Bickering ensued as Wonho and Minhyuk tried to talk over each other in that trivial quarrel, as always; at the head of the table, even Shownu cracked up at their nonsense once Kihyun threw his head back laughing, and no more than a second later Jooheon cackled with his mouth full of food, causing the brightest smile to show up in Minhyuk’s face as the latter watched his guffaw.

Oh, to be young and completely aware that all the hyungs underestimate you.

It’s possible that Changkyun knew more about his friends’ affairs than anyone in that group, even themselves — for the simple reason that all of them shared the trait of completely immersing themselves in their own feelings, temporarily oblivious to their vulnerability.

Changkyun never had the best attention span, in none of his lives, and yet managed to read his hyungs like a book. A book called “Be gay, do time travel”. The only difference between them and the maknaes was that Changkyun did the first part outside that train, whilst it was obvious that Shownu and Kihyun had been together for a while and that Minhyuk was head over heels for Jooheon; even Wonho and Hyungwon had gotten incredibly closer lately, to the point where Changkyun couldn’t remember when they had their last fight.

“Excuse me.” Hyungwon’s sotto voce could’ve passed unnoticed, but spurred a silence in the kitchen as the time traveler quickly got up and left.

They all shared concerned looks about the time traveler’s situation, and they had a reason for it. Whenever questioned about The Elysium, the place they were heading to, Hyungwon gave them no more information than he already did, forgetting that what they really wanted to know was why the idea of going there messed him up so badly.

Hyungwon had the right to protect his secrets, just like everybody else. As much as they got along just fine, they were all individuals with different needs and inherent world views dictated by their person experiences. Changkyun couldn’t dream of fully understanding what went through Hyungwon’s head or what he may be feeling, and it hurt him to see his hyung struggling without being able to do something about it.

For someone seemingly capable of changing the world, when it came to the things that Changkyun really treasured, he was just as helpless as anyone else. To be human is to ache, even if your feet walk above the clouds.
The atmosphere in the train wasn’t one of the best, and Jooheon could more or less understand the reason, but it didn’t make things easier. Because that would be a longer journey than usual — Monbebe estimated it would be at least eight hours for them to get to whatever that place was — there were still four hours ahead of them, so maybe a nap wouldn’t be a bad idea for anyone that wasn’t Jooheon.

He tried, though. In the room Hyungwon built for him inside that time machine, Jooheon tossed and turned after voicing for the lights to be shut down, like the pink-haired traveler had taught him to. Like it usually did in the past days, his thoughts ended up going back to the night of his birthday party, which just straight up made Jooheon want to die.

When Minhyuk kissed him, it felt like it was all nothing but a dream, a scene scripted and staged to toy with his stupid feelings. The alcohol in his organism didn’t allow him to remember shot-by-shot how things ended up being like that, but at some point there was the clear conclusion of internally saying “fuck it” and then he kissed Minhyuk, for one time wasn’t enough.

It still wasn’t, but the situation changed into the realm of sober reality, so… yeah, Jooheon was still freaking out about that.

Rationally, like the adult he was, Jooheon knew he should talk to the older man about it, and if it hadn’t been nothing but a misunderstanding, at least Jooheon knew what kissing Minhyuk felt like, and that would never be a regret. The worst outcome of that would be them growing apart, and those were the scenarios that his anxious mind chose to feed on and broadcast to him 24 hours a day.

A couple of knocks on the door made Jooheon flinch, but he quickly slid out of the covers and asked the A.I. to turn on his bedroom’s light.

Like a fool, Jooheon gawked at the red-haired man standing at his door.

“Hey.” Minhyuk’s voice was way lower than the usual, and sending a shiver down his spine. “Can I come in?”

A few seconds passed until Jooheon convinced himself to react, nodding fervently and making way for the older to enter.

When he agreed to join that trip, it had been mostly due to the fact that Hyungwon was going through a hard time, so Jooheon didn’t really think that he wouldn’t be so successful in avoiding Minhyuk, even though the man hadn’t forced any interaction before.

Well, too fucking late. That’s how Jooheon was certain he was gonna have a heart attack.

“I like your room.” Minhyuk commented, taking a good look around. “Feels like you.”

To be honest, Jooheon’s first time seeing that room wasn’t much of an impressive moment, but once he got to hang around more, he kind of understood what drove Hyungwon to think of him like that.

Of an unknown material that looked like plaster, the walls were decorated completely white, with half dozen horizontal shelves scattered in pairs in each side of it, except above his platform bed; countless books and electronic devices Jooheon didn’t have the time to check what they all were displayed on it, with plenty tablets and notebooks as well. White sheets and a dark blue comforter covered his mattress, alongside two of the most comfortable pillows he had ever got.
At first, Jooheon thought of bringing his own computers on board to have something to work on whenever they had nothing else to do, but then he noticed that the time traveler had built one especially for him, he just hadn’t paid attention to it.

A few meters away from the bathroom’s entrance, nearly on the middle of the room, there was a transparent table that seemed made of glass, but its material was far more resistant than it. As soon as his hand landed on the desk, it recognized his fingerprints and lit up, displaying a keyboard on its touch screen surface. Such action ignited the wall in front of it to bring a flat screen out of it, like it was a goddamn drawer or something.

Even though Hyungwon had built this piece to run with a software Jooheon was familiar with, the entire experience was kinda surreal, and he loved it.

“Yeah.” Jooheon didn’t know anymore what he was agreeing with, but it was better than stay silent.

Eyes diverting to anywhere but Minhyuk’s face, he let the older man do the talk.

“Jooheon…”

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry, Jooheon.”

And here it comes, what he feared to hear the most. In Jooheon’s mind, it was settled that his hyung thought of that night as a mistake, but he didn’t need to face confirmation of it.

With too much and nothing to say at the same time, Jooheon simply nodded, leaning his back against the wall.

“I let it get the best of me.” Minhyuk continued, and the younger wished a hole could open beneath his feet and swallow him into the void. “I was drunk, and…”

“Hyung.” Jooheon took a deep breath. “It’s fine. You don’t have to… We can forget about it and —”

“No…” His voice sounded genuine surprised. “I’m just saying I wish I had kissed you in a better situation.”

In his mind, a heartfelt shout emerged.

FUCK!

“W-what?”

Meanwhile, Minhyuk chuckled, seeming a bit more at ease.

“Jooheon. I like you. A lot. Like I’ve never liked anyone before.”

“I never liked anyone before.” Jooheon suddenly spouted, as if something possessed him. “I mean… I don’t know why I like you. Fuck, that’s not it, it’s just…”

The sudden realization of having to approach the topic Jooheon had never spoken about before made his knees go weak, but deep down he knew that he should be honest. With Minhyuk, and most importantly, to himself.
“Just listen to me, okay?” The golden-haired rubbed his face out of anxiety, pacing around in front of the man.

His heart beat so fast that Jooheon knew he would hesitate if he thought too much if that was the right thing to do, so he just spouted it all.

“You know, when you’re a teenager and your friends start dating, and suddenly all they talk about is how horny they are, and you want to fit in, God, you want to fit in and experience the same things to have voice, to have something to tell. To feel normal. That’s why most people start doing, I guess.”

Minhyuk stared at him attentively at his speech, even though Jooheon had to make another pause. He couldn’t face the man and keep talking at the same time, so he brought his gaze to his sweaty hands.

“I lied a lot, you know. To my family, my friends. I lied and faked being attracted to girls, just because I hoped that would make me feel normal. But then… when I finally accepted that I was gay, I thought to myself… ‘maybe this is why I felt so weird all this time’, and I thought things were going to be okay.” A dry chuckle escaped his mouth. “That I would be okay. But… I didn’t. I kept feeling broken, so I never allowed myself to like anyone, because I knew I would have to have this conversation and… I’m afraid. That’s the truth. Always have been.”

Once he glanced up again, Minhyuk was frowning, looking kinda puzzled by where that talk was heading to.

Little did he know that Jooheon was close to faint, really, really close.

*Come on, you can do it. Just say it. He’s a good person, he deserves to know.*

“Because of that fear… Never really… talked about it. Took me a long time to find out… why I feel like this. But it’s still hard for me, so fucking hard… Fuck…”

Jooheon inhaled and exhaled sharply a couple of times, feeling the panic attack building up inside his body, making it as heavy as a rock. He didn’t have much time until all the air escaped his lungs.

“It’s okay if you don’t like me after this. I… I don’t want to…” His voice cracked badly, and Jooheon felt himself on the verge of breaking down. “I… I am… asexual. I…”

Deep down, Jooheon expected a surprised yell. He expected a horrified expression on Minhyuk’s face, he expected the man to look at him differently after hearing those words — words that made Jooheon suffer throughout his entire life while he was in the dark about why he was the way he was, and words that privately gave him a sense of righteousness when discovered.

Because he wasn’t alone. Aware of that fact that he wasn’t the only one to not feel sexual attraction towards people, Jooheon had never felt a bigger relief than when he became sure that there was nothing wrong with him for being that way, regardless of his intrusive thoughts accumulated throughout the years of battle against himself.

The very thought of knowing who he was took him out of a very dark place in his life, and he was glad he had the means — the internet — to learn about it, and not force himself into painful experiences to fix something that wasn’t broken.

Despite of accepting himself the way he was, life still wasn’t easy. Jooheon didn’t feel confident in telling anyone about it, even the ones closest to him; the change of how they would see him would be inevitable, and he was not ready to lose people over that. Things were going just fine like this,
but then… Minhyuk happened.

He fought against that crush by putting some distance between them, by telling himself that his hyung would never like someone like him, that Minhyuk was way out of his league. But it didn’t work, and Minhyuk had to go and kiss him at his birthday party, unleashing a force inside his chest that could not be contained anymore.

Minhyuk gazed at him for what felt like an eternity, but in reality was only a couple of minutes; unpredictably, though, the older man suddenly sauntered in his direction and enveloped him into a hug.

“It’s okay.” Minhyuk buried his face on Jooheon’s shoulder, and the tears began to roll down the younger’s face. “It’s okay.”

There was no patronization in his voice, not even a little bit of pity. It was genuine care, and Jooheon never felt his soul so light like that in… forever, probably. With his never-ending tears, he clung to the man and poured his heart out for a few minutes.

“Hey…” Gently, Minhyuk held his face on his hands and wiped off his tears. “Really. It’s okay. I still like you a lot, in case you’re wondering. Thank you for trusting me with this. You are perfect the way you are, Jooheonnie.”

“But…”

“Shhh. What do you think of… going out with me?”

Well, excuse Jooheon if he was going through a lot in the moment and he actually choked on thin air with that question.

And Minhyuk chuckled.

“Yeah. Like a date. Only if you want to.”

God, what a silly remark.

“Of course I do.”

A peek at his fingers could confirm Hyungwon’s nervousness through his quivering hands, and for the first time in a very long period, he felt profoundly vulnerable. One could say that’s the bedrock of human nature, but the time traveler wished he could postpone such thing after that encounter had passed, so the Constants wouldn’t have to worry about him.

As a matter of fact, Hyungwon debated a lot with himself if he should follow Wonho’s advice and bring them with him to that universe; ultimately, the time traveler wanted to be selfish just for a little and rely on them to be there for him, so he wouldn’t have to go there alone… so he wouldn’t have to revive that alone.

Stepping foot outside the control room, the first thing he saw was the six men gathered in the main wagon, waiting for him.

“Hey.” Minhyuk’s mouth curved into a smile, waving at him with an arm around Changkyun’s
shoulder. “You okay?”

“I’m alright.” Far from the truth. Hyungwon tried to reciprocate the smile, though. “Listen… Now that we are here… I want to express my gratitude for your presence. Regardless of my feelings towards it, this world cannot harm you in any way, so do not worry about them. You are all Constants, after all. However…”

“Oh boy, I knew it.” Changkyun dramatically brought a hand over his chest. “There’s always a ‘but’. Spill, hyung. Who are we gonna throw hands with this time?”

“No one, Changkyun. I meant to say… I apologize if my behavior goes out of hand. Stay together. There’s power in your union.”

“We know.” Kihyun nodded, sitting in one of the benches in front of him. “That’s why we are here.”

Leaving the train behind in an eerie-looking elevated railway, that almost touched the feigned clouds, Hyungwon led the others down a path he, particularly, wasn’t very sure of. He had never been there, and everything about that place made him feel like there was an itch that couldn’t be scratched, prompting the sensation of wanting to give up and never look back.

He wasn’t alone anymore, though; Hyungwon owed an answer to his friends, even if it forced him to deal with an issue he had been delaying for centuries, and no one seemed to care about it either.

The almost menacing lapis lazuli skies above their heads, as they walked down the third flight of glass stairs, formed a silent atmosphere on their way to the ground; in the distance, birds that weren’t birds chirped as the sunlight that wasn’t sunlight poured itself over their bodies, creating the illusion of warmth.

As Hyungwon reached the end of the stairs, he made a stop to let the others pass by him, but noticed an oddity.

“Why did he stop?” The time traveler asked Kihyun, the second to last to get to where he was, as he beckoned towards the middle of the staircase where Wonho seemed to be paralyzed.

The shorter man’s eyes widened in shock.

“Oh, shit! I forgot he’s afraid of heights. I’m—”

Kihyun made a move to go over there, but Hyungwon stopped him.

“I will handle it.” He placed a hand over the man’s shoulder. “Keep going, we will be right behind you.”

“Are you sure?” Kihyun frowned, a bit concerned.

The time traveler nodded, patting the man in the shoulder.

His way back up to retrieve the blond Constant was quicker than his descent, approaching the frightened-looking man with caution.

“Wonho-ssi.”

“Gimme a minute, okay?” With eyes tightly shut and clasping one of the glass banisters, Wonho
began to pant.

The recollection of learning an ability he didn’t know he had prompted Hyungwon to act without thinking twice, reaching forward to grab Wonho’s wrists as softly as he could.

The man’s eyes widened in surprise, blinking profusely.

“Do not fear.” Hyungwon stirred backwards to stay on a lower step, matching their heights. “I will be with you. Come on.”

Wonho’s trembling fingers brushed against his one of his arms, and Hyungwon felt shivers down his spine.

*How strange.*

“Feel better?” The pink-haired asked, as they kept a certain distance from the others on their fifth flight of stairs. One of his hands remained on the blond’s wrist, and Wonho didn’t seem to mind.

“How many?” Wonho gestured with his head towards the ground, not wanting to look all the way down.

“Four more.”

Keeping only one eye open, the blond tried to take a peek at the world beneath their feet, but quickly looked away.

“Why couldn’t we have used your teleporting watch to go down?”

“I didn’t want to bring my technology out of the train.” Hyungwon sighed, keeping an eye on the other boys in front of them. “I don’t feel safe here.”

“Then let’s get this done as soon as possible.”

Truly Hyungwon’s one and most urgent need.

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As they reached the lower levels, the glass staircases turned into stone ones, leading to a large street inhabited with nothing but empty suburban-like houses in pastel colors with a very strange
vibe — as if made of plastic, too fake to ever be considered anything but bizarre to anyone that had ever seen real ones. The entire thing, from the houses to the second batch of clouds that hung extremely close to the ground, was disturbingly fake instead of welcoming.

Letting go of his wrist, Hyungwon took a few steps ahead of them and seemed to be observing the vicinity for any clues where to go next. Faster than Wonho imagined, the man turned around to face them.

“This way.”

The things Hyungwon knew and how he knew such things were an enigma they didn’t bother to unveil anymore, so they just went with it.

A long walk down that street led to another two until they spotted a gargantuan building that resembled the Pantheon, but in a very darker tone; twice bigger than the width of the street they strolled on, the enormous structure displayed thick granite columns on its porch, which was probably the most majestic thing Wonho had ever seen.

“Holy shit.” Jooheon muttered under his breath, beside him.

“Let’s enter.” Hyungwon voiced, not quite excited about anything regarding it.

Inside of it, a gigantic dome gave a suffocating form to the interior, even though the ceiling stood more than 20 meters tall; the dark stone material of the frontage kept its color in there, giving Wonho the sensation he just had plunged deep into the sea.

Hyungwon seemed a bit more oriented now, not vacillating to keep moving forward as they crossed the entrance hall. Without the same hesitancy, the time traveler pushed open a double door that seemed heavy as fuck, leading to a golden chamber.

The ground shifted its material again to solid hardwood, shiny and clean as if no one had ever step foot inside that place.

But it wasn’t true, since they were greeted by dozens of men and women and people whom didn’t even look human, with unnatural skin colors and shape, divided into three rows — one at the center and two on Hyungwon’s right and left side. They all dressed with flamboyant white attires, which Wonho couldn’t tell what it actually was from his spot by the door.

Wonho wondered how long had these people sat there, waiting for them to arrive; however, his brain reminded him that the concept of time those people had was probably different from his, even though that was not Wonho’s first time travel.

If he thought Hyungwon seemed anxious before, now the way the man rubbed his hands on the trousers of his black suit just confirmed that his apprehension had gotten worse.

“Stay.” The time traveler spoke over his shoulder, leaving them at the entrance.

His steps were meticulous calculated, in such way that seemed that, if he moved down the wrong path, the floor would collapse — which Wonho seriously hoped it didn’t, because he was really not in the mood for that fight for survival.

“I am here.” Hyungwon announced, back now turned to Wonho and his friends, soft voice echoing as he stood in the center of the room.

A husky voice arose, speaking in a language that seemed like a mixture of Korean and Japanese,
but with its own particular value that Wonho couldn’t understand a single thing of it. Much to his surprise, Hyungwon replied in this very same language.

The husky voice, whom Wonho now noticed that belonged to a black man of American-like features whom sat in the center row, arose in the room again, but in Korean.

“If you wish the Constants to be aware of what happens, so be it.”

“I want to know why I am here.”

“Since your dawn, you intervene with the course of many timelines. Now, you even sent a direct message through the Multiverse Frequency. Dangerous deeds, CHW-000115.”

At such words from the man, Hyungwon dug his fingernails into his palm.

“My name is Hyungwon.”

The man, or any of those guys, didn’t seem to care about it.

“Is this a direct act with knowledge about the universe 1410’s survival? Your universe of origin.”

“What?” Hyungwon sounded genuinely taken aback. “I don’t have anything to do with them. I only discovered they were still alive after I managed to defeat The Eye.”

“How can we be sure if these words reflect the truth, CHW-000115?”

The time traveler chuckled.

“I don’t care about what you believe or not.” He spat, but keeping his calm tone. Which was scarier than any yell, honestly. “I am the only one who knows what I have been through to make the multiverse a better place. You don’t get to tell me that. Not after I spent 300 years doing my best to lessen The Eye’s trail of destruction, and eventually stop them. Not when all of you did was to hide in your own universes and pretend worlds weren’t burning to the ground.”

A brief pause ensued, only broken by a silvery female voice coming from the left row of the chamber.

“The multiverse faces major threats every single moment.” The owner of the voice, a woman in her 60s with bright blue hair, suddenly got up and Wonho noticed that she actually wore a very long white dress. “Your power does not make you lawless, CHW-000115. You even inserted yourself into a timeline, now.”

“I did not do it on purpose.” The time traveler seemed to be losing his patience. “And you know that. All of you.”

“What we know is that you are a manipulator to your will, CHW-000115.”

“My name…” His jaw tightened as he took a deep breath. “Is Hyungwon.”

“Not only you retrieved the Constants of a doomed universe and inserted them into a brand new one, but you also placed yourself as an essential figure in their lives. You brought all the Constants together in a world where you have full control.”

“That’s not true. I did not save them with this intent.”

“As we mentioned…” The black man now got up, prompting all the others like him to do the
same. “The multiverse cannot be at your mercy, not when you insist of ignoring the rules. We are afraid of what the consequences might be if, one day, you decide to no longer be of any aid to those who seek help, and instead…”

Once again, Hyungwon laughed, retorting something in the language they had heard before.

“Now you care about what I might become.” The time traveler nodded at those people with scorn, as he took a couple of steps forward. “Not before, but now. Not before, when I spent 18 years…” His voice suddenly cracked. He couldn’t see the man’s face, but imagined he was about to tear up. “18 years. Confined. Treated worse than an animal. Where were you?”

What?

Wonho shared a confused look with Kihyun, who stood beside him, almost letting out a squeal as the ground beneath their feet began to shake.

“ANSWER ME!” Hyungwon’s shout made the air vibrate as it echoed through the room, undeniably the cause of that quake. Wonho had goosebumps all over his body. “ANSWER ME WHY I DESERVED THAT!”

In a swift move, the pink-haired lifted his arm towards the right side of the room and a violent blast ejected a part of the Council’s members out of the building, creating a giant hole on its structure.

Wonho’s body flinched, taking a step back out of instinct.

The tremors came to an end, but not the tension in the air.

Wonho was speechless for a moment, listening to his friends’ horrified reactions as his eyes drifted back to Hyungwon, who panted profusely.

Like a glitch on TV, the people who previously stood at the now destroyed right row resurfaced next to left row, not seeming affected at all by Hyungwon’s action.

That’s when Wonho noticed that they weren’t there physically, like the seven of them. They were just holograms.

“Oh my God…” Minhyuk gasped.

“Speak the truth first, then we shall do the same.” The black man affirmed, beckoning the others to stay in their positions. “Speak of the fate of the youngest. Tell them…” His attention shifted directly to Wonho and his friends. “About the Flaming Winter. Or are you afraid they will not remain by your side?”

Wonho’s body froze, feeling only his jaw dropping unconsciously.

Silence. The time traveler glanced to the ground.

“The Multiverse’s Council has come to a verdict.” His orotund voice didn’t give away that that man was nothing but a hologram in front of them; it seemed too real. “Traveler CHW-000115 shall be restricted to the universe in which he infused himself into, for the next 25 years, forbidden to leave this vicinity. In case of transgress of this order, the universe in which you attempt to enter will be the one suffering the consequences. If the situation escalates, the possibility of jailing the traveler CHW-000115 will be considered. This decree shall not be lifted until further discussion among the members of this Council.”
The room fell silent again, and Wonho felt like there wasn’t enough oxygen to breath.

“One day…” Hyungwon clenched his jaw once more, looking up at those people again. “One day… you will come begging for my help. There will be no bargains. I will say no. I will turn a blind eye, like every single one of you did to me when I needed the most. Then you will know… what it is like to feel powerless.”

The black man didn’t waver for a moment.

“You only prove our point, CHW-000115.”

Sheer, unaltered rage like Wonho had never seen the time traveler seem before.

“MY NAME IS HYUNGWON!”

A stomp of feet was enough to bring half of the ceiling down, falling right on top of the holographic figures that now dictated Hyungwon’s destiny. What was apparently unpredictable, or at least miscalculated, was the crack on the ground that traveled fast towards them like a predator on the hunt.

“HYUNG!” Changkyun shouted, focused on the floor’s imminent collapse.

That earned the time traveler’s attention, who turned around to face them with horror in his face; stomping one feet on the stone ground again, Hyungwon quickly waved one hand towards the floor and the crack came to a halt no more than a few centimeters away from them.

Wonho gasped heavily out of fear, looking back and forth between what could’ve been their demise and Hyungwon’s.

For all it’s worth, no many times before Hyungwon was able to detach himself from the concept of timekeeping, as their walk back to the train seemed to last between an eternity and just a couple of minutes — he simply couldn’t tell which was real, and wasn’t really interest in such thing.

His suit was covered in grey dust from the parts of the building wrecked by the wrath he tried to keep tamed, also spreading through his hair and face.

“Monbebe… set course back to their universe.” His voice came out wobbly, but Hyungwon needed to get them home before he could break down.

“It was you, right?” Wonho’s voice made him stop on his way to his personal room.

The time machine began its trip, slightly shaking as it departed from that universe.

“The Flaming Winter.” The blond elucidated, with an already angry tone. Hyungwon gulped nervously, slowly turning around. “They called it like that because it was when the conflicts got worse. The country was literally catching fire.”

“Wonho.” Beside him, Shownu placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“No, no, let him say it.” Wonho moved forward, pulling Shownu’s hand away. “Say that you supported the death of thousands of people in my time. You did, right?”
Shownu tried to meddle in once more.

“Wonho…”

“NO!” Hyungwon winced at that shout, as Wonho pushed his friend’s hand away again. “WE HAD TO GROW UP IN A SHITTY WORLD BECAUSE OF HIM!”

In that moment, explaining himself felt like the most exhaustive thing in the world. Hyungwon wanted to tell, carefully, how things had come to happen in such way, or why he did the things he did.

There was so much Hyungwon wanted to say, things that could save what they had built in their dynamic so far. But it was easier to let Wonho hate him, because Hyungwon always felt drawn to the familiarity of it.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Minhyuk stepped forward, leaving the two youngest behind him, looking confused.

The blond man took a deep breath, rubbing his face with the back of his hand.

“Everyone told stories how the war wouldn’t have escalated to that point if someone hadn’t given a huge advantage to one of the sides during the Flaming Winter.”

That’s not true.

“No one knew how one of the gangs, magically, managed to win the war by bombing their enemies when they least expected. Fucking magically, right, Hyungwon?”

I am sorry it had to be this way.

“It is true.” The time traveler spoke, earning bewildered looks from a few of them. It was inevitable, for them to see this side of him. “You would have never been born if I hadn’t…”

Wonho swiftly tromped in his direction and Hyungwon slowed down his time perception, strangely seizing the last seconds before the hatred was all Wonho knew how to feel about him.

“WONHO!” Kihyun shouted as his friend shoved Hyungwon against the metallic wall behind him, with Hyungwon offering no resistance to it, or desire to fight back.

Kihyun and Shownu quickly ran towards them to pull Wonho away from the time traveler, but the pink-haired didn’t care enough about himself to avoid anything about that attack.

“You DON’T GET TO DECIDE IT!” Wonho raised his voice again, being forced to let go of the time traveler by his friends’ efforts. “I’m fucking SICK of it. Of you. Of you using me, us, as a fucking excuse to the crap you decide to do to our lives. No fucking wonder people wanted to lock you up.”

Who was Hyungwon trying to fool with the idea that they could’ve been friends, anyway? Mainly, himself. He wished that, just for once, a version of Wonho wouldn’t look at him the way Wonho did in that exact moment; flooding with hate and anger, just like Hyungwon had seen more than 300 times before. A naïve expectation, that’s all that was.

No one dared to utter a word, and the pink-haired didn’t venture himself in looking at their faces anymore.
“Monbebe will…” Hyungwon was quite aware of his stammering, slowly shifting to look at the floor. “Let you know. When we arrive.”

As he left the others behind in the main wagon, Hyungwon had never felt so ashamed of existing before.

Wonho was fed up.

Four days had passed since that wretched trip and the discovery that changed it all, and he had barely slept or did anything that wasn’t distracting himself from the thoughts of anything related to Hyungwon.

Sure, he may have let himself get carried away for the heat of the moment, but the fact that the time traveler actively chose not to tell him such thing that he knew how important was to him, to honor the person he used to be, was beyond Wonho’s capability to understand his point.

With a pile of essays to grade through that Friday night and, probably, the whole weekend, Wonho sighed deeply over the mountain of paper when a light knock on his door made him quickly sit upright.

“Come in.”

Standing by the entrance was the embodiment of his headache.

The yellow light from the hall fell on Hyungwon’s face like careless paint over a canvas, and the man looked at him as if he expected something.

“Jesus…” Wonho sighed. “Not now.”

“Can we speak?” His ruff tone echoed through Wonho’s office, still next to the door.

“I’m working, Hyungwon.”

“I would like to speak about what happened in your original world.”

Ah, fuck.

“I’m busy, Hyungwon.” Wonho set his elbows on his desk, pretending he didn’t want to die instead of reading what undergrads had to say about quantum field theory in curved spacetime. “And we have nothing to talk about.”

“It wouldn’t have gotten better.” Hyungwon continued anyway, taking a few steps in his direction. “The war. Two westerner nations were financing the side who lost. With guns, money… But it was simply a deception. Five years after the beginning of the war, the westerners would invade the city. Then, the country. Millions would have perished. Including your parents.”

Most of it were mainly flashes, but Wonho remembered how the feeling of growing up in a broken nation made him into a tougher person, purely because he had to be in order to survive.

“Fucking congratulations, I guess. All of that for my world to be destroyed by some psychos.”
“Wonho-ssi, I’m trying to explain why—”

“And I listened to you, Hyungwon. I’m just fucking tired of this.”

Under the dim lights of Wonho’s office, the pink-haired man scoffed.

“And you think I am not? You forget that your existence is pivotal to the fate of your kind.”

“Everyone’s life matter.” Wonho threw his pencil over his table. “You don’t get to decide that.”

“I do not decide that. The multiverse did. It’s not only about you, but also about your descendants and, ultimately, every single person that may come to live.” The taller man sighed heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose. “If could see… what I have seen… you would understand that, sometimes, there isn’t a righteous choice to be made. War isn’t interested in happy endings.”

Wonho was the first to look away from their unconscious staring contest, clearing his throat.

“I can only do so much, and I am also tired.” Hyungwon continued, with a more orotund tone. “I am tired of explaining myself to you. To every version of you. So I will keep my distance from your life, as you wish.”

I never said that.

“Good bye, Wonho-ssi.”

Leaning his head over the pile of papers over his table, the blond closed his eyes as the ringing sound of his office’s door being slammed shut made him wince for a second.

In his mind, a tiny voice grew louder each passing second.

Go after him.

So Wonho did.

Chapter End Notes

so................. hwh is going (airplane emoji) pinning
this hoe gotta chase after my precious boy a lil we been going through a lot bc of wonho

i will explain in details what happened to hyungwon next chapter, so dw
.............alongside with the other puzzle i just threw in here

see ya next week, kids
If karma doesn’t hit you, Minhyuk will

Chapter Summary

or as i like to call, wonho's pining days begins

Chapter Notes

hello kids, how yall doing
the comeback week has been hectic, but it is all worthy seeing the happy smiles on our boys faces when they win WE'RE DOING SO WELL I'M PROUD OF YALL but yeah, it slows down my writing, which as always ended up bigger than intended so, um, this has almost 15k? yea

also, HAPPY BIRTHDAY MINHYUKKIE I LOVE YOU YOU CHAOTIC PRECIOUS HUMAN BEING <3

stream shoot out and
enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“(…) Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.

Just keep going. No feeling is final.

Don’t let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.

You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.”

Rainer Maria Rilke, “Go to the Limits of Your Longing”

“I tried, I’m trying! I mean, I went after him and… he disappeared. I’m not saying I’m surprised, that’s just what he does after all. And I tried again. I went to the… uh… to where he lives, and he won’t listen to me. He won’t even let me in the… where he lives. He doesn’t respond to my texts, doesn’t answer my calls. Half of my friends are avoiding me right now, and the other half doesn’t want to meddle in. Like, I know I deserve it for being a major douchebag, but what can I do if he doesn’t let me apologize? Like I said, I’m trying but… Maybe I should just drop it, you know.
Maybe we’re better off without each other. But then again… isn’t just cowardice? Running away from conflict, instead of facing it. Like I always do. And I really… really fucked up this time. What’s the solution for this if I can’t decide?”

Slightly pulling her glasses down for it to sit on the bridge of her nose, the woman in front of him in a big black leather chair stared at Wonho as if he had gone insane.

“Wonho, I asked you if you think the therapy is making a positive progress and you proceeded to rant about this Hyungwon person for…” His therapist actually looked down at her wristwatch for evidence. “Almost 11 minutes. Is he a friend?”

“No… not really.”

“Coworker?”

“No.”

“Boyfriend?”

Wonho craned his neck up so fast in surprise that he could’ve broken it.

“No! Not like that! He is… someone important.”

“To you, particularly?”

“I don’t know.” Wonho sighed heavily, sinking on the chair in front of her.

“Wonho, do not get me wrong for saying this. But you are the most emotionally constipated man I’ve ever met in my life as a therapist.”

Not a shock.

“It’s clear this… Hyungwon means a lot to you, so why don’t you admit it? You wronged him, and you feel bad about it. You care.”

Regardless of the amount of proof that could be presented against the next statement, Wonho wasn’t dumb. He had one of the highest IQs in the country, but one could say such intellect wasn’t broad enough to reach the emotional area of his brain — like lots of people from his generation, Wonho was damaged by his childhood traumas, which certainly counted to why he sucked at honestly connecting with people, or why it was easier to hurt than to be wounded.

“I don’t know what to make of it.” Eyes drawn to his hands to avoid her gaze, the blond fidgeted the hem of his shirt.

“Do you have feelings for him?”

His gaze darted to her once more.

“No! Why are you asking that again? He’s just… him. He’s… different.”

“Right.” The look of her face was of someone who hadn’t bought it, but anyways. “What did you do to him, Wonho?”

“I…”

His brain automatically brought back the memories of his assholery acts in the train and in his
office, and Wonho sank in his chair even more.

“I said some stuff because I… forget it, it doesn’t matter the reason. What matters is that he didn’t deserve that.”

“Then keep trying, Wonho. I’m quite sure he’s hurt by whatever you said to him, but putting on the effort already shows you are really repenting. You may find a breach to get to him when you less expect it.”

“But what if… things can’t go back to what it was? Our… Uh… that.”

“Words, Wonho. Use it. Specific words.”

“Our… our… affiliation.”

The woman sighed, pushing her glasses back up.

“Wonho, I’m begging you. It’s for the best if you acknowledge your feelings for this person.”

“What?”

“Come on… Your IQ is 172, you can connect the dots.”

Wonho gawked at her mindlessly.

“For what you’ve told me, you haven’t had a relationship in a while, and a few events brought you closer to this Hyungwon person… way closer than you expected to be. It scares you, Wonho. Fear can bring out the worst on us, especially when we are afraid of such big change of heart. But you know what’s worse than feeling fear, Wonho? To lose someone special, because it was easier to push them away than to admit the reality. Listen… I cannot make the truth more intelligible for you, because I sincerely think that you won’t notice unless someone say it. You like him, Wonho. Romantically.”

Wonho’s body stiffened as he dug his nails into the arm of the chair.

“I… do not? Where-where did you even…”

“Stop. Pushing. Him Away.”

The woman never sounded more serious before, and Wonho felt as if he was being scolded.

“For what I’ve understood from your babbling, he is someone who went through a lot already. Whatever it is that made you say those bad things to him, they can’t be an excuse for you to snap on him whenever you feel like it is right to do so. You see, no matter how selfless we are, there’s always a ‘me’ before a ‘we’. It’s basic self-preservation, and it’s okay. But if don’t think of how your selfishness could affect someone else, it’s harmful. The ‘we’ is, essentially, about sharing. Wonho. The ‘we’ is how us, as a species, connect with each other. When we deeply bond with someone, we understand the other’s needs and what can do them good, or bad. The gist of it, either platonicly or romantically, is not to put their needs ahead of yours, but to work hard to make it work so both of you can share an honest life together.” She made a quick pause, clearing her throat. “The thing is… you need to recognize you’re selfish first, so you can notice this behavior in future your actions and stop it. And you need to start doing it. Now.”

She was right, of course; only the fact that Hyungwon felt the need to explain himself to Wonho, even after how he acted on the train, showed how much more of a broad mind the time traveler had
— and a strange willingness to do his best, regardless of which asshole he was dealing with.

“But what if…” The blond chewed on his lower lip instead of continuing.

“If there’s no remedy to this situation, you learn from it. We can only grow as people by being damaged by life, and facing the consequences of our own actions.”

Greenery around the city faded away like forgotten pictures stashed in drawers, a clear avowal that they were about to be hit by the coldest season of the year. Wonho’s entire drive to his mother’s company was accompanied by the small signs of the first snow, and never before he thought that the weather matched so well with his mood.

Even though he was far from having any right to complain, two weeks passed ever since he last saw Hyungwon, and most of his friends, and that was really ruining Wonho’s humor. His academic life was nothing but a mechanic activity these days, achieved only out of habit since Wonho couldn’t focus well on his studies, but he still tried. One or two things still got his interest, but it was all as if there was something missing.

When Wonho wasn’t feeling like utter shit — when he drank, at the end of his days — he wondered how Hyungwon was doing. Better than him, surely. It’s not like the time traveler didn’t have anything else to do, like saving the world for the hundredth time or being exposed to some weird stuff from their culture, probably by one of their friends.

Which led Wonho to the realization that not a day went by without him thinking about Hyungwon. He’d deal with it later, the blond decided.

After checking with the secretary if his mother was available, Wonho entered her office and found the woman sitting at her desk, doing some CEO stuff by swiftly signing a few papers.

“One moment, son.”

With her gaze fixed on what he was doing, his mother gestured for him to take a seat while she finished her business, and Wonho plopped down in the chair in front of her.

A second later, she squinted at him.

“What’s with this dramatic sitting?” She asked, arching an eyebrow at him.

“Just came back from therapy.” He plastered a smile on his face. “Apparently, I have to face my feelings.”

This apparently sparked interest in her, who propped her chin on the palm of her hand.

“Any feeling in particular?”

Wonho chuckled briefly, rubbing his face.

“I did something bad to someone, and my therapist thinks I want to push him away because I like him.”

“Oh…” His mom suddenly retracted her back, resting it against her chair. “Do I need to scold you or you already apologized to this person?”
As if he had the chance to.

“I’m trying.” Jesus, Wonho wanted to believe he was doing his best, but nothing seemed enough. “It’s complicated.”

“Good. When are you going to introduce him to your mother?”

“Mom…” Wonho rolled his eyes at her. “He’s not my…”

And you already met him before.

He laughed to himself at the very thought of it; technically, in the common linear view of time, his mother had met Hyungwon before him, and yet everything that led to that moment was a ripple effect of Wonho’s actions. He wondered if his mother could recognize the time traveler after so long, if she ever saw him again.

“I bet he’s pretty.” His mom mused, batting her lashes. “You always liked pretty boys.”

Throwing his head back, Wonho let out a groan.

“Mom…”

“Fine… Let’s have lunch. We can discuss about the Halloween ball.”

Sighing loudly, he threw his head back dramatically. So much had happened that Wonho had forgotten he complied with such request.

“Come on, Hoseok. You never attended before, not even once. I would appreciate if you at least made an appearance by my side.”

Don’t get him wrong, he loved his mother and the relationship they were rebuilding little by little, but now he didn’t have an excuse to avoid these things anymore.

“Argh… If any of those dumbass rich kids test my patience, I’m out of there.”

His mom smirked.

“Hoseok, my dear. You are also a dumbass rich kid.”

“Yah!” Wonho pushed himself up on the chair out of sheer indignation. “I entered college when I was 16! I’m the youngest person to teach at my university, ever!”

“You’re still a dumbass at heart. Please, one hour and a couple of pictures with me, and you can leave. Bring your friends to make you company.”

The remembrance of the other men reminded Wonho how things were still weird between them. A while ago, he would’ve gladly invited them all, including Hyungwon. Now…

“Well, Kihyun and Minhyuk won’t talk to me unless it’s to curse at me, Shownu keeps giving me the disappointed parent face, Jooheon ignores all my texts and Changkyun has been responding me with cryptic images I have no idea what the hell do they mean. So… I’ll probably show up alone.”

She arched her eyebrow at him again, with more of a concerned mien.

“Whatever this is, you should fix it. You look miserable without your friends. While you are here, tell Sojung which costume do you want and she’ll get for you.”
“Mother, I’m an adult. I don’t need your secretary to get me something.”

The woman laughed, getting off her chair.

“Every child is forever a baby, but suit yourself. Now let’s go. I’m starving.”

Above all, Hyungwon loved his freedom. It was one of the few things left for him to truly enjoy on his own in the multiverse, so to have that stripped away as a wrong punishment it pained him more than anything.

It pained him more than having to hear Wonho saying those hurtful things about him. More than actually dying, simply because it made Hyungwon feel purposeless.

His friends did try to cheer him up the best they could, and he was grateful for it even though it really didn’t make much influence on him. Whenever he stopped to think about it, all Hyungwon could feel was suffocated.

Which was kind of silly, considering that being stuck in that universe wasn’t that bad. Regardless of what he may feel, in that place Hyungwon had friends and people in need of help; it could’ve always been worse. He was living proof of that, if anything.

Each day dragged itself slower than a snail, and the time traveler concluded that if he stayed in that train doing absolutely nothing, he was going to go insane.

Hyungwon tried to busy himself as much as he could, from reaching out to the Korean government to offer his services to going out there by himself to look for something that needed to be fixed, for people who would benefit from his presence.

The problem was that there was an anger growing inside his chest and Hyungwon didn’t know how to make it stop. Such thing was an obstinate little voice inside his head telling him to succumb to hatred, and it all started since he last spoke to Wonho, two weeks earlier, so one could say that the reason was rather evident.

It was far from what he enjoyed feeling, though. Not even when facing The Eye during all those tough years Hyungwon reached that level of resentment, and he didn’t understand how a single person managed to distress him that badly.

Whenever his mind swerved to the blond Constant, he felt stupid for letting himself believe that, just for once, he wouldn’t have to deal with Wonho’s dislike towards him — even to the extent of friendship. How could Hyungwon still not trust what he had seen and experienced for more than 300 times before? Being friends with Wonho wasn’t possible, ever. No matter how hard he tried, that was something the time traveler was never going to be able to change or comprehend.

With a sigh, Hyungwon pushed the thoughts of that man to the back of his mind, focusing again on the dark energy counter, as the levels on the small flat screen on his hand gradually got higher as he advanced into the corridor.

His newest task was to unveil the cause for the odd glitches in some parts of the city, which led him to that modern castle in the southwest district of town. It wasn’t like the old castles Hyungwon had seen before — obviously — but it was still pretty large to the point that there was a party going
on, and yet not a single soul accompanied him down that poorly lit hallway.

As he reached another corridor, Hyungwon found himself in a dead end, but the counter on his hand beeped eagerly towards the left side of it, so he chose to trust his gadget.

At the end of the path he was now on, to the left side of that hallway, the only thing he could see was a bulky window completely open; the cold wind that breached through it made the drapes dance on its sides, and Hyungwon began to wonder if anyone could’ve entered through that space, certainly up to no good.

His steps were careful towards the windowsill, seizing the better lighting of the outside of the castle to take a peek of something important.

What he didn’t expect to see out there was Wonho sitting at the bottom of the roof, drinking alcohol straight from the bottle.

Hyungwon quickly pulled himself against the wall to hide from his field of sight, even though it didn’t seem like the man had noticed his presence at all since Wonho sat with his back to the window, and was deeply concentrated in staring at the horizon or just intoxicated, Hyungwon couldn’t tell.

Just briefly looking at him made the pink-haired taste the sour flavor of umbrage on his mouth, saturating his chest such thing that he detested to feel.

He knew of the man’s attempts to reach out to him, but Hyungwon’s annoyance got the best of him and to be quite honest, the time traveler didn’t mind much for a while. Never before Hyungwon meant something so much than when he said he was exhausted of explaining himself over and over again to someone whom wasn’t interested in knowing his side of the story, or whatever he had to say in his defense.

Taking a deep breath, the pink-haired decided it was for the best to just leave things how they were, at least for the moment. He had a clue to follow, after all, and that was how he could be useful to that world.

Hyungwon’s journey down the corridor again came to a brusque halt when he heard two voices coming from the adjacent hallway, the very one he had passed to get there.

One of them was too familiar for him to think of a coincidence.

Well, the thing is that Hyungwon’s memory was excellent, especially with sounds. Once he heard something, even just once, it was essentially impossible for him to forget about it — within just seconds, his brain could search and find among his memories the source of it.

That’s why he was sure that one of the voices getting closer to him belonged to Wonho’s mother.

Around him, the place was not very well illuminated, so the chances of him passing unnoticed by the woman were quite high, but also were the chances of Hyungwon ending up being interrogated about his presence there, hence possibly recognized.

A fleeting peek at the timeline displayed a small disturbance around the possibility of them meeting at that moment, so Hyungwon found himself cursing under his breath, dashing down the corridor he had just walked away from.

Quickly sticking one leg out after the other, Hyungwon’s fast collision against the tiles as he slid down the roof created a blaring sound, but it was only after he reached the bottom of the roof,
grunting in pain of such action caused and right next to where Wonho sat, that the blond man squealed out of fright.

“YAH! WHAT THE—”

Nearly swirling in the air, the glass alcohol bottle previous held by Wonho flew off the latter’s hand, filling the air with the shattering sound of it crashing against the ground beneath them.

Hyungwon had his priorities, though.

“Your mother is coming.” Hyungwon pushed himself closer to the man. “Hide me.”

Wonho intensely stared at him for a couple of seconds, as if his brain was trying to process the entire situation, or if Hyungwon was indeed that. Afterwards, the blond was fast in coming up with a strategy.

Hauling his body forward, Wonho jumped over the time traveler and lied on his side, bringing most of his bulky back to hover over Hyungwon’s lean frame; his hand lingered over the time traveler’s chest for a second, but eventually chose to tell Hyungwon to lie down on his back so he could hide the man with his upper body.

The pink-haired blamed on the adrenaline of such act the fact that his face heated up intensely.

“Hoseok?”

At the sound of the woman’s voice, Hyungwon instinctively pushed his legs up against his chest, drawing himself even closer to Wonho for protection — deep down, Hyungwon tried not to think much of how natural that had become for him.

“Yes, mom?” Wonho replied, but didn’t turn away to face her, nor stared at Hyungwon.

The time traveler’s jaw tightened to shut down his panting, letting his eyes travel towards the man next to him.

His fair skin seemed a bit reddish, probably from the alcohol he was ingesting, but it looked incredibly alluring under the bright lights on the outside of the castle — for unknown reasons, Hyungwon hadn’t really payed attention before to the fact that Wonho was very handsome.

There was a strange urge to run his fingers through Wonho’s blond hair and push it back as it usually was, but Hyungwon wouldn’t outlive the awkwardness of such thing not even in a thousand years. Also, his heart strangely began to thump faster, which he didn’t really understand why.

“I was looking for you!” Wonho’s mother sounded quite frustrated, but didn’t raise her voice. “What are you even... oh.”

“5 minutes and I’ll be with you.” The blond declared, looking away. Hyungwon wasn’t sure if he seemed to mind the short space between them or if was flustered by something else. “Can I have some privacy?”

“Sure. Sure. Sorry, son. Uh... come soon, please. We have to take pictures.”

“Fine. I’ll be there.”

Biting his lower lip, Hyungwon’s gaze moved down to Wonho’s shirt; it reeked of alcohol, pretty much his breath, with a significant colorless stain of which the pink-haired assumed to be spilled
“She’s gone.” The man informed, putting some considerable space between and proceeding to slightly hurting himself in the process.

The blond winced a bit, settling himself more cautiously on his back at the bottom of the roof.

“What are you doing here?” Wonho craned his neck in his direction, seeming genuinely curious.

“I could ask you the same thing.”

A snort escaped Wonho’s mouth.

“My mom organized this party. It’s the hotel’s annual tradition on Halloween, it’s always here.”

“Don’t you have to use a costume in Halloween parties?”

“I am.” The other man looked down at himself, noticing the alcohol spilt on his tux. “I’m Bruce Wayne.”

“The Batman?” Hyungwon’s forehead furrowed. “Doesn’t he use a cape?”

“That’s his superhero identity. Bruce Wayne is his actual identity. And I didn’t really want to come, so the effort was not the best.”

Hyungwon nodded, looking away. The starless sky made him a bit sad — it reminded him too much of his original world, the last thing he liked to have in mind.

“I’m working.” The pink-haired gave his answer, in an undertone.

The uncomfortable silence between arose once more, but one that, somehow, Hyungwon discovered he truly… missed it. Things were not becoming coherent that night, that was a conviction.

“Well…” Wonho cleared his throat, making a move to get up. He ended up losing his balance for a moment and Hyungwon’s eyes widened, instantly raising a hand to build a force field around the man, but Wonho didn’t need his intervention. “Good luck with…” The blond gestured vaguely, holding himself still with one hand on the tiles. “And… Hyungwon. I’m sorry. For everything… From the very beginning. Good luck.”

Between the empty sky and watching Wonho head back inside the building, there was a melancholy Hyungwon couldn’t explain, and it made him tremendously confused.

“Hyungwon!”

Kihyun snapped his fingers rapidly in front of his face, trying to cut through Hyungwon’s musings as they shared a meal in his kitchen in the early morning.

“Where is your mind at today?” Minhyuk, who sat beside Kihyun and finished his food, asked.

The time traveler’s eyes wandered down to his almost untouched cup of ramen, slightly toying with the food as he decided on an answer.
“I encountered Wonho yesterday, when I was following a lead.”

“Yah.” Minhyuk’s voice remained at the same tone, but him slamming the table with one hand made the pink-haired wince. “Was he mean to you? Do I need to punch him?”

“I swear to God.” Kihyun seemed already angry, even though Hyungwon hadn’t said offensive. “He’s like a brother to me, but I won’t—”

“Can you two calm down?” Hyungwon looked up briefly. “He helped me… and apologized.”

“He did?!” The red-haired questioned.

“Yes. I don’t know what to feel.”

“You don’t owe him anything, Hyungwon-ah.” Kihyun reached out to pat his hand over the table. “Or any of us, to be honest. Or like, any person that ever lived here.”

“I just don’t want to be the one to break the bond between the six of you, not after everything we went through. Your world needs you to be together.”

“We will.” Minhyuk seemed oddly sure of it. “The seven of us.”

Hyungwon never knew if such thing could ever pass the near the realm of reality, but it was nice to hear the boys including him in their lives.

“How was your date with Jooheon yesterday, by the way?”

His red-haired friend perked up like a puppy at the time traveler’s question.

“It was great. We went to see a movie, but he kept getting scared because it was a suspense movie, so I held his hand the whole time. He’s so cute, but in a doesn’t-want-to-be-cute way. Which is fucking cuter.”

“Language.” Hyungwon chuckled, though.

“It’s just that he tries so hard to not be cute that it backfires. I want to smooch him forever.”

Hyungwon smiled at his friend dazzled face.

“I’m glad for you both, Minhyuk.”

On the other hand, Kihyun made a barfing sound.

“Yah.” Minhyuk glared at his same-age friend, and Hyungwon snorted. “You’re the one who encouraged me to go after him. Shownu hyung isn’t giving you enough attention?”

“You two are just too damn sweet it’s gonna give us diabetes!”

“Not my fault we are the cutest couple around now. Deal with it.”

As Hyungwon was too immersed in his friends’ antics, a new voice in the room came out unexpected.

“Does everyone born in 93 ever shut up?” Shownu inquired, standing at the kitchen’s door.

The time traveler found it endearing how Kihyun’s face lit up at the sight of his boyfriend.
“Minhyuk is being annoying.” Kihyun pouted, reaching out for Shownu’s arm as the man got near the table.

“As if you’re not annoying too.”

“I’m your boyfriend!”

Shownu smiled down at the man, running his fingers through Kihyun’s hair.

“Doesn’t make you less annoying. We need to go, nerd.”

His friend suddenly sat up straight on his chair, looking up at the tanned man with inquiring eyes.

“Had the same feeling?” Minhyuk asked, taking a sip of his water.

“Yeah.” Shownu confirmed, whatever it was that they talked about.

Kihyun drew his brows together, glaring at his same-age friend then at his boyfriend.

“Can you two psychics quit this and tell me what is going on?”

Hyungwon couldn’t tell what exactly what was going on, but he learned to trust the boys’ judgment. After all, they ended up with such abilities because of him, so maybe that’s what Time intended all along.

His tanned friend’s eyes turned way softer as he looked down at Kihyun once again, almost apologetically.

“It’s time, nerd.”

No matter how hard he tried, Wonho was able to get a single minute of sleep the entire night — he even took the goddamn sleeping pill his doctor recommended because his sleeping cycle was a mess, but it didn’t have any effect on him.

Wonho was fucked. Royally fucked. Fucked to the point where he considered that maybe his mental health’s final stop was truly at Crazytown.

As soon as he got pictures taken with his mom, he got the fuck out of that party with a little bit of difficulty, since the alcohol in his bloodstream didn’t allow him to drive and it was ridiculous how he couldn’t get a cab for at 40 minutes. In the meantime, the scene on the roof kept replaying on his mind over and over again, searching for missed details.

Hyungwon’s tranquil touch still lingered on him even almost a whole day after their weird encounter at the roof, and Wonho was too weakened about it to not admit that he missed it.

Things almost seemed back to normal as he aided the man to pass unnoticed by his mother, just like a small adventure that felt too common at that point. Wonho missed that preposterous weird part of his life, only because Hyungwon was in it.
Because, maybe, his therapist was right.

Because, maybe, Wonho liked him. More than he should.

With which was probably was his hundredth groan that morning alone, Wonho stuck his head under the bathroom sink tap, letting the cold water pour over his head until the muffled sound of it was all he could hear, rooting for that thick stream to be able to block the thoughts of Hyungwon in his mind.

Nearly too far away from his reality, a doorbell ring arose in the ambience and Wonho pulled his head out of the water way too fast, causing him to hit his head on the cabinet above it.

Letting out a loud moan of pain, the man massaged the top of his head as he sauntered towards the entrance; tiny drops of water were left behind on the carpet as he passed by, just as much as his black tee was a quite soaked.

With eyes closed as he took in the pain, Wonho opened his door.

He did not expect to see his two best friends there. Not after weeks of barely interacting with them, especially Kihyun.

But he had a bigger matter on his hand, and his heart was grateful that they arrived at the right goddamn moment.

“GUYS!” Wonho let out a grunt, result of hearing his own yell. “Come in! You came in the right fucking time.”

At the doorstep, Shownu and Kihyun shared a look that pretty much could be read as a question about Wonho’s current mental state. Not even the blond himself had an answer to offer.

“Are you…” His same-age friend gave him an inquisitive look as he made his way inside his living room with Kihyun. “Okay?”

“YEAH!” His head hurt from his high-pitched reply, but Wonho kept it cool. “Why?”

“I don’t know what’s going on, but I’m going to assume you did something stupid.” Kihyun raised an eyebrow at him. “Are you shitfaced?”

“NO!” Wonho recognized his weird exhilaration, but only to turn it into profound despair. “I need help.”

His friends now gazed at each other with confusion. Wonho closed the door behind him, heading off to one of the couches.

“Don’t you have a therapist for that?” His shorter friend asked, crossing his arms over his chest. Shownu gave him a reproving look.

“I mean…” Kihyun rolled his eyes, settling himself on the opposite sofa. “We came to see you. You clearly don’t look good. Did you even eat?”

Wonho’s mouth curved into a smile at the realization that his best friend was finally back with his nagging, after weeks of only swearing at him.

“What do you mean you need help?” Shownu, a saint, finally got to what mattered.
“Oh.” Wonho chuckled to himself, mostly out of anxiety. “I’m having a mental breakdown because I found out I like someone.”

His friends’ jaws dropped, eyes widening in genuine disbelief.


“Yeah.” His sleep deprived brain thought it’d be a good idea to sound so calm about it, when in reality he was about to cry. “Yeah.”

“Weren’t you dead on the inside?” His younger friend asked, puckering his forehead.

“Come on…” Wonho threw his back against the couch, sinking on it. “I’m not that bad. I’ve dated before.”

“Yeah, and I wonder how they managed to endure your insufferable ass.”

The blond chuckled a bit maniacally, closing his eyes for a couple of seconds.

“Just ask Shownu.”

“What?”

Kihyun’s shocked tone was the first clue on how Wonho had fucked up so quickly, all because he currently had no control of what his mouth spat whatsoever.

Slowly bringing himself up, Wonho opened his eyes to face his friend.

“It’s nothing, really.”

“You two dated?” The irritability on his voice only grew as he looked back and forth between the older men. When met with silence, it got worse. “SPEAK! SOMEONE!”

Looking at Shownu, Wonho felt like his friend’s gaze was promise to break his neck very soon.

“Yeah.” Wonho truly feared for his life at that point, so he looked away from his tanned friend to face Kihyun. “It was just for a year, when we were teenagers. You know, discovering…”

“No, no!” Kihyun suddenly covered his ears for a split second, wincing when Shownu placed a hand on his forearm. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It didn’t matter…?”

As Shownu swiftly craned his neck towards him, Wonho felt himself get smaller alone on the couch.

“Shut up, Shin Hoseok.”

Without a doubt, Shownu was pissed off at him, enough to call him by his real name.

Still avoiding the tanned man’s gaze, Kihyun’s expression suddenly changed into a forced smile. That entire thing would’ve been creepier if Wonho wasn’t really close to dissociate due lack of sleep.

“I need to go. Gotta finish some work at uni, see you guys later.”
As soon as Kihyun got up, Shownu grabbed his friend’s wrist, with an odd look in his eyes that Wonho couldn’t tell what it meant.

Bit by bit, the shorter man pulled Shownu’s hand off of him and walked away.

“What is he mad about, anyway?” The blond objected, now sitting cross-legged. “We didn’t mention because we knew he was gonna overreact.”

The other man sighed, bringing a hand to his face.

“Forget it. Heard you met Hyungwon, yesterday. And apologized.”

It was almost shameful how his stomach flipped at the sound of the time traveler’s name.

“He told you?”

“He told Kihyun, and Minhyuk.” Shownu clarified. “Kihyun told me. That’s why I convinced him to come here, since he was still mad at you.”

“I know.” With a heavy sigh, Wonho leaned backwards against the couch. “I was a prick. I know. It’s just… Never mind. The thing is… I know Hyungwon is a good person. I just… I still don’t know how to deal, to get over our past life. I can’t really talk about that to my therapist.”

“Talk to me.” His friend gave him a half-smile.

“It’s…” With all the knowledge he had acquired, it sounded a bit silly to feel so stuck on that. “I think about our people, sometimes. Our friends, they went through shit too, but they lived in a peaceful world, not a broken one. It makes me sad, to think that everything that our people fought for, in the end, was for nothing. They all died, as if they never even existed. No one but us will miss them.”

“But that’s not Hyungwon’s fault, Wonho. He did his best.”

“I know…” He sighed once more, rubbing his face. “I shouldn’t have said that. He saved us, after all. He could have left us to die with our world, but… he saved us. Now, unfortunately…” Wonho pursed his lips into a pitiful smile. “I can’t change what I did. But I apologized, you know. And Hyungwon has you guys, so he will be fine.”

“Then why do I sense you quite sad?”

“Oh, come on.” The blond scoffed. “Don’t pull the psychic bullshit on me.” It would’ve worked if Wonho were in his right mind, but a simple unconvinced look from Shownu broke through him. “I fucked up, shouldn’t I feel bad? I feel bad, Shownu. I don’t enjoy being an asshole.”

“Really? I could never guess.”

Well. Guess he deserved that one.

“Yeah. I’m just trying to own my mistakes towards him. Since day one.”

His friend cackled briefly.

“Between this and your little new crush, I don’t know which news about you is intriguing.”

Fascinatingly enough, it all started and ended with the same person.
Shownu hyung:

Kihyun-ah. Please, pick up the phone
Let’s meet and talk, okay?
I’m sorry. You have all the right to be mad

Nerd:

I’m not mad at you. I’m hurt
I’m hurt that I told you everything about my life
Both lives
And yet you really thought it wouldn’t be important to tell me you dated our friend
Seriously, hyung…

Shownu hyung:

I know. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before
I’m sorry I can be a little difficult to open up about my past life
It doesn’t mean I don’t care about you
Because I do. A lot

Nerd:

I believe you do
It’s just sometimes I feel like trust it’s a bit one-sided in our relationship
Even though you don’t do it on purpose…
We didn’t even agree on when tell Wonho about us…
because you keep saying the timing isn’t right
And I trust you, don’t I?
I need to go back to my thesis

Shownu hyung:
Kihyun…
Take a break
Let’s talk
Kihyun?

Shownu sighed heavily, throwing his phone over the restaurant’s table. Not even his lunch seemed that tasty anymore.

The combination of overlapped chats and the sound of tableware colliding against metallic trays invaded Shownu’s sensory system, making him more prone to get the hell out of there any time soon. Jooheon, who sat beside him, seemed to notice his discomfort.

“Is everything okay, hyung?”

Wonho’s eyes diverted to him as soon as the younger man made his question.

“What’s going on?” Wonho sounded honestly concerned, but it was more complicated than that.

Maybe Kihyun was right, about everything. Not on purpose, but Shownu truly received more than he gave it back to his boyfriend when it came to communication, and could pass off to be trust. Those big things seemed so ordinary that Shownu took it for granted.

“Don’t fret, Shownu hyung. It will be fine.” Minhyuk suddenly appeared at the table, lightly kissing the top of Jooheon’s head and proceeding to sit beside the younger. “Hey, angel.”

The tanned man had to laugh at how fast Jooheon blushed at the pet name.

“Hyung…” The golden-haired boy whined.

“What?” Minhyuk chortled, sitting closer to Jooheon than necessary. “Not my fault I have the cutest boyfriend.”

“Excuse me?” Wonho nearly bent over the whole table. “When did this…” He gestured around Minhyuk and Jooheon. “happen?”

“When you were busy being a douchebag.” Minhyuk retorted with a smirk, and Jooheon covered his mouth to muffle his snort. “I got very, very close to kick you in the face.”

Minhyuk had this peculiar look on his face, a bright smirly one that indicated that he didn’t really hold any grudges, but that he’d bite one’s head off if such thing happened again. In all sincerity, it was a bit scary.

“For real.” Jooheon endorsed, after taking a bite of his food. “Had to convince him a few times to
not go to your hotel and roundhouse kick you.”

“I wouldn’t have argued about that.” Wonho grinned sheepishly, eyes wandering to his plate. “I missed you guys.”

This time, what displayed on the red-haired’s face was a harmless grin, in all its bliteness.

“I missed you too—”

Minhyuk’s speech was cut short as the reality around Shownu was fragmented and sucked into a dark tunnel, feeling himself being turbulently pushed back, even though Shownu knew that he hadn’t even left his seat. His skin felt cold for a second, then scorching hot in the next; just like that, one of the eerie visions that Shownu hadn’t had in a while hit him — and probably Minhyuk.

After the darkness, what he expected to be brought into was a peculiar scenery of a different world, of another mysterious adventure they’d have to face.

But Shownu had been there before, in that very empty hallway where he stood.

He had lost count how many times he had to drop by Kihyun’s university to drag his boyfriend out of the classrooms; the man usually got too involved into some math thing that he completely forgot that he was a human, with the need to eat and sleep.

The dread sensation triggered by the awareness that being there meant something was about to happen made Shownu jolt forward, but also made him come to a halt as he heard terrified screams coming from a nearby room.

But in the blink of an eye, he wasn’t in the hallway anymore. Now, he stood in one corner of one of the classrooms he had been the most before, and Kihyun was the one shouting for his life.

His boyfriend crawled backwards on the floor as a figure in a black mask that covered their whole face pointed something at him — looked like a gun, but could be a lot of things from the weird stuff they had seen. Shownu tried to move, desperately wishing to help Kihyun; involuntarily, he held his breath, gasping heavily as the stranger threw a desk across the room.

“KIHYUN!”

Shownu now gasped for air in real life, as if he had been underwater for too long, arm stretched in front of his face in a foolish attempt to get to his boyfriend.

“Calm down.” Wonho’s voice appeared next to him, with a soothing hand on Shownu’s arm.

“We need to go.” Minhyuk’s low voice got his attention, so he craned his neck towards his friend. “It’s Changkyun.”

“Changkyun?” Shownu questioned, puzzled by it.

The majority of their visions were basically the same, so it was a bit unexpected to learn that they hadn’t been to the same place in the strange realm of Time.

“You saw Kihyun?” Minhyuk asked, with a frown of confusion.

“At the university.”

“Kyun is there too.” Jooheon affirmed, already on his feet. “I’m gonna call Hyungwon hyung.”
Hyungwon woke up from his nap on the main wagon’s floor with the train’s system beeping incessantly.

“What?” He lifted his head, bolting upright to talk to his A.I.

“The dark energy counter is so off the charts that my radar can pick it up its blast.”

The time traveler’s eyes glinted with shock, jolting forward to stand up.

“Coordinates and information?”

A 3D holographic map appeared in front of him, with a black dot twinkling quickly on it.

“Estimation: five humans. Unknown origin, since their interdimensional transportation device seems to be made of different parts from many different universes, thus untraceable. Now that I can recognize the pattern of their signal, the vestiges left behind indicate that these humans haven’t been here for too long, but they seem to be on the trail of something specific.”

Eyes shifting back and forth between the map and the flickering lights of Monbebe, Hyungwon finally realized.

“The Constants.” Hyungwon spoke under his breath. “That day, at the party. They were there after Wonho, weren’t they?”

“That I do not know.”

“The location.” His head turned to the projection. “It’s Wonho and Kihyun’s university. They want them.”

How could have he been so blind to the fact that the Constants weren’t completely safe just because he was there full time? Hyungwon let himself be naïve, and people died when he fell into such habit.

“Call the Constants. Their—”

“Already hacked into their phones,” Monbebe admitted. “Changkyun is currently studying at the Physics Library and Kihyun is in the Physics Building, both second floors. According to their cell phones’ GPS, the others are on their way there as we speak.”

“Oh, shit.”

“Goddamnit, Kihyun. Pick your fucking phone!”

His same-age friend cursed at the cellphone on his hand for the tenth time, ultimately deciding it was useless. Wonho parked clumsily in front of the Physics building and Shownu darted out of the car, being followed by Minhyuk and Jooheon.
As soon as the blond locked his vehicle, an abrupt whooshing sound nearby got their attention.

It was indeed Hyungwon, teleporting just a couple of meters away of them. Even Shownu came to a halt for a moment.

“Hyungwon!” His red-haired friend waved his arms at the time traveler, whom already came in their direction.

“Stay out of this.” It was the first thing the time traveler warned as he got close enough. In a chalk striped purple suit, Hyungwon seemed quite distraught. “I don’t know what you saw…”

“With all due respect, Hyungwon…” Shownu firmly stated. “I don’t give a shit. Kihyun needs me.”

“They’re coming after Kyun.” Minhyuk spoke, with a brittle voice. “I can’t lose him again.”

Hyungwon nodded, placing a hand on Minhyuk’s shoulder.

“I will protect him.” The time traveler assured.

“But you can’t be in two places at the same time.” Shownu fairly pointed out. “I need to find him.”

Wonho’s breath got caught on his throat, and the tension in the air almost made him forget to exhale; it came out sharp enough to hurt a little.

Reluctantly, the pink-haired traveler agreed with Shownu.

“Here.” He took a small round piece of metal out of his blazer’s pocket and threw at Wonho’s same-age friend, who grabbed it in midair. “Press it and it will generate a strong bioelectromagnetic pulse. It can shut someone down for a while. All of you, go with Shownu. I will go get Changkyun.”

“But—” Minhyuk tried to argue, moving towards the time traveler.

“There’s only one of them in this area, and four near Changkyun. I can deal with them.” His gaze shifted to Shownu, over Minhyuk’s shoulder. “Be safe.”

The amount of trust those men had in Hyungwon astonished Wonho sometimes, but then he realized he wasn’t too far from them, even though he liked to pretend he was. Apart from emanating an aura of calmness, the time traveler always lived up to his promises, no matter what it cost him.

That’s why, among other things, Wonho decided to follow his instinct.

“What are you doing?” It was Hyungwon’s instant reaction as soon as the blond wrapped his fingers around his wrist, looking back and forth between Wonho’s hand and Wonho’s face.

“Going with you.”

Just a few steps ahead after he started pulling Hyungwon towards the library, the taller man yanked his arm back.

“I told you before.” His gruff voice sounded hostile, like Wonho never heard before. The blond pretended it didn’t sting. “I am not a doll for you to drag around.”

With a single press on a button of his wristwatch, Hyungwon vanished into thin air again.
Shownu was never much of a not-think-before-doing-things type of person, mainly because almost everyone around him had always been like that, so someone had to be the responsible one — in his home, in his group of friends, everywhere.

But he was about to make an exception to that day.

His feet moved mechanically towards the second floor on the stairs, but made an abrupt near the floor entrance as soon as he saw a figure, face covered with a black mask, kicking the door of one of the rooms to make his way in.

“Handle this.” The tanned man murmured, passing to Jooheon the round thing Hyungwon gave him.

Kihyun’s shout was strident, piercing through the walls, and suddenly Shownu couldn’t think anymore.

Because of their small fight, Kihyun decided to go to the university on a fucking Saturday. And because of that, now his life was in danger.

So if something ever happened to him, Shownu would never forgive himself.

“Leave the guy to me.” Minhyuk hurriedly tromped by his side. “Get Kihyun out.”

In any other circumstance, Shownu would’ve debated that they didn’t know what they were dealing it and it was certainly dangerous, but taking his boyfriend out of there was his only goal.

It was straight up selfish, he knew, and yet it was stronger than him.

A loud thud of a desk being throw across the room, just like Shownu had seen before, emerged out of nowhere.

“He’s going to kill Kihyun hyung!” Jooheon tried to keep his voice down, but was way too scared for that.

“Grab that.” Minhyuk pointed to something behind Shownu before they could enter to face the masked guy.

Shownu easily ripped off the green pin board full of flyers off of the wall, holding it in front of his body.

“Joohoonie, stay here.” Minhyuk commanded in an undertone. “When I get this guy on the floor, you come as soon as possible.” His friend then took the pin board from Shownu. “Hyung, get Kihyun.”

The older man nodded, trying to steady his breath.

“Be careful.” Shownu warned his friend.

Minhyuk and Shownu marched inside the room only to see Kihyun being thrown against the back
wall, wincing in pain. Even with some difficulty, the man hauled his body backwards, trying to escape the perpetrator.

“OI! ASSHOLE!”

His friend’s yell snapped Shownu out of that trance of rage that took over his body, taking his chance to get to his boyfriend when Minhyuk knocked the guy on face with the pin board as soon as the stranger noticed their presence and turned around.

A fast kick hit the masked man in the chest, make him stumble backwards to crash against one of the classroom chairs. It didn’t take too long for the person to get back on their feet, though. Minhyuk attacked again, quite literally jumping on the deadly stranger; the muffled sound of fists and kicks against hard clothing echoed across the place, but Shownu ran straight towards his boyfriend on the floor.

Plopping down next to the man, his hands rapidly went towards Kihyun’s face.

“Shit, you okay?” Kihyun felt cold under his hands, and Shownu’s heart thumped intensely in his chest.

Kihyun didn’t utter a single word, just crawled closer to the tanned man, groaning. The way he choked back a sob broke Shownu’s heart.

“JOOHEON!” Minhyuk’s shout grabbed their attention.

Their red-haired friend had successfully brought the person to the floor, holding them on a headlock with both legs wrapped around the perpetrator’s waist to keep them down. The masked individual writhed on the floor to break free, and it wouldn’t take too long for them to achieve it.

Jooheon ran and threw himself on the floor next to Minhyuk, dodging a kick or two from the person they were trying to defeat. Without a second thought, the younger man shoved down the round gadget Hyungwon gave them earlier and gave it a hard push against the person’s chest. Around the frame of the small thing, no bigger than Jooheon’s hand, a thin white line appeared to display its activation.

The effect was immediate; the person behind the mask now viciously quivered on the floor, and Minhyuk pulled away from them with a look of horror on his face. The seizure only grew more violent for a few seconds, but when it came to an end the person trying to harm them was no longer conscious.

“Motherfucker…” Minhyuk gasped in awe, lightly kicking the inert body just to be sure.

A weeping sound right next to Shownu reminded him of what mattered.

“Kihyun-ah…” He kept his voice low, only for him to listen.

His boyfriend’s entire body trembled with fear and pain, and Shownu’s eyes diverted to the small cut on Kihyun’s cheek while holding him.

That only fed the wrath in his chest, but there was nothing it could be done about it.

“Talk to me, Kihyun-ah.”

“I…” His gaze didn’t meet Shownu’s, almost as if he was ashamed of something.
Instead, the younger man broke into tears. And Shownu’s heart shattered once more.

“I’m here.” He murmured, carefully embracing his boyfriend. “I’m here.”

Sighing loudly over the textbooks for hundredth time, Changkyun knew that such thing only attracted more outraged attention from the other students around him, and yet the impulse to keep doing was stronger than him.

In any other circumstance, hell would freeze before Changkyun was caught in a library in a Saturday afternoon, drowning in books. But the college entrance exam was just a week away, and regardless of his confidence on his knowledge and ability for having done that once before, he couldn’t deny that doing nothing would simply make him more nervous.

Maybe a break would do him good, Changkyun decided. However, as soon as he closed his laptop and textbooks, the power in the library went out in the entire second floor. Just a few seconds later, the fire alarm blared across the building, and the ruckus began.

Changkyun froze on spot, mainly out of confusion for what in the damn was happening; since the natural light of the day still reigned over the place, it wasn’t like they were left in the dark, but suddenly everyone grabbed their things and started running, as if their lives depended on it. In less than a minute, he was left alone.

Tilting his head, the black-haired boy frowned as he noticed that he was now alone in the whole room, alarm still blasting unceasingly.

“Oh.” Changkyun eyebrows rose, nodding to himself. “This is when I should react, right?”

The alarm came to an abrupt stop, but only to be replaced by an ear-splitting siren, strong enough to bring Changkyun to his knees as he tried to block the sound with his hands.

Just when he thought he couldn’t handle it anymore, it suddenly stopped.

Changkyun’s brain hurt like it had been stung by a thousand needles, making him grimace as he opened his eyes again.

Two figures dressed in all black, including masks that covered their faces, leisurely walked down the space between the library tables, in his direction.

“No cool, man…” Changkyun pushed himself up, bringing a hand to massage his head. “Or woman. Not being sexist. Just can’t see your face.”

No sound came out of their mouths, whoever they were.

Once on his feet, Changkyun squinted at them to clear the dizziness out of his head; his ears still buzzed quite a lot, though.

“Gonna take a wild guess…” He instinctively took a few steps backwards, as the anxiety rose in his chest. “Trying to kill me, uh? Y’all don’t have another Changkyun to bully in the multiverse?”

One of the people raised their arm towards Changkyun, just a couple of meters away from him, and the air was knocked out of his lungs. Literally.
Changkyun didn’t know if that was going to be the most ridiculous death by some Walmart Darth Vader, or just a really cool one looking in the big picture. Not everyone gets force-choked in real life.

A laugh escaped his mouth at the thought of it, making it even more difficult for him to fight to breath; his hands around his own neck uselessly tried to break him free from that attack, but his laughter only helped with the smothering.

But the worst thing of it all, Changkyun’s mind somehow brought it up, was that he was going to die without meeting G-Dragon, or going to another BigBang concert once they were all out of the military.

The invisible force that choked him disappeared as soon as one of the guys pulled their arm down, tilting their head at Changkyun as if they were examining him from head to toe. That would be the less weird thing he had seen so far, anyway.

Panting heavily, Changkyun fell on his knees again, feeling his vital force getting weaker each passing minute.

The two figures suddenly turned around, and even though his vision was a bit blurry from that near-death experience, Changkyun had no doubt that one of the guys really flew off to crash against the shelves; for the sound of it, the guy knocked down a few of them in that fierce impact.

A hoarse voice blended with pure static could be heard for the first time coming from the stranger in black’s mouth, but he had no idea what language was even that — it sounded like a mixture between Korean and Japanese, and even though Changkyun was fluent in both, it didn’t make sense at all to him.

Out of nowhere, a different figure showed up right in front of him.

“Changkyun.” Never before had it been so nice to hear Hyungwon’s voice. Changkyun swiftly craned his neck up, and his bangs flipped upwards.

His hyung stood tall in front of him, almost looking like a Renaissance sculpture; sparing him just one glance, the time traveler slid his wristwatch into Changkyun’s hands and told him to get out.

“This will take you to the others.” Hyungwon explained, standing between Changkyun and the person trying to kill him.

“Hyung too.” The younger man murmured, brushing his fingers against the pink-haired’s arm.

Hyungwon clearly had other plans, so the pink-haired man took a step forward and Changkyun could only let his hand fall arm onto his lap, clutching the watch with both hands. Within a second after pressing its button, he was gone.

As he heard the tiny whooshing sound of teleportation behind him, Hyungwon cut to the chase.

“Who are you?”

The person in front of them didn’t even stir for a long minute, but suddenly rushed towards
Hyungwon like a hunter ready to attack, except for the fact... they didn’t. Up close, Hyungwon could see that the mask covering their face seemed almost plastic-like, shaping the surface around eyes, mouth and nose as if it was glued to their skin.

And then, the unexpected.

Such language that Hyungwon hadn’t heard in centuries came out of that person’s mouth, and the surprise was clear on his face.

"Killing you wasn’t in the deal."

Hyungwon’s eyes widened at the recognizance of that idiom — the one spoke in his universe of origin.

Any response got caught in his throat for a moment, but he managed to utter something back.

“Who... who...”

His gaze shifted towards the person’s collarbone, and then Hyungwon understood whom he was dealing with.

“You’re a mercenary.” Hyungwon stated, in the native language of his lost world. “A hired assassin.”

A distorted grin could be seen shaped on the person’s plastic mask; such accessory and the serial number on the individual’s collarbone was a mark of people in this field, a syndicate of criminals originated in his home world.

“Just like you.” They replied, voice sounding like pure electronic static.

In a fast move, the assassin wrapped his fingers around Hyungwon’s neck and lifted him above the ground — enough to break his neck if he hadn’t clasped his hands on the person’s wrist and pulled it down with all the strength he had.

Hyungwon stumbled backwards a bit once his feet hit the floor again, but his foe wasn’t impacted by it at all. Their next move was the same as the first two people that the time traveler had taken down on the ground floor — using a high frequency device that disturbed basic human brain function, the masked person hoped it would knock Hyungwon down, like it’d do to anyone else after too long.

But it didn’t. Hyungwon had endured worse situations, and the only achievement of such thing was to piss him off.

“There is no one like me.” The pink-haired spouted, feeling the energy inside his body lighting up through his skin.

A massive sphere of light rotated rapidly over his hand, and Hyungwon was ready to hit his enemy with it when something heavy crashed against his head, bringing him to collapse on the floor.

A loud ringing on his ears was all the time traveler could hear for a few seconds, slowing down the rest of the world to his perspective.

“You don’t even know who you are.” The same voice from before arose as the person from before strolled closer.
Hyungwon groaned, bringing a hand to his head.

“Bring him.”

The second attacker, whom probably recovered from Hyungwon’s blast while they tried to hurt Changkyun before, clutched the lapel of his blazer and started to drag his body towards the entrance.

Whatever it was that he was hit with, it was hard enough to make him almost lose consciousness; despite being aware of what happened to his body, to the shuffling of his garments against the floor to the blood dripping down his neck, Hyungwon was too immersed by the pain to react.

However, his heart almost escaped through his mouth when, as they crossed the threshold, Hyungwon heard a second thud emerge; not against him, but seemingly as strong as the one he took.

And a third, and fourth one until the impact of something metallic against the floor made Hyungwon flinch, and realize that the hold that once was on him had disappeared.

“HYUNGWON!”

The familiar tone sounded too distant at first, but gradually became clearer as the time traveler forced himself to regain control of that situation.

His body was being lifted off the floor, but way gentler than before.

“Oh, fuck.” Wonho’s voice, his brain informed him with certainty. The man brushed his fingers against his nape, where the blood came from. “Fuck…”

Craning his neck up a bit, Hyungwon now stared at the terrified blond feeling an unusual heaviness on his left arm.

“I…”

On his wrist, a grey bracelet that was nothing but a harbinger of bad luck adorned it.

“Get out.” Hyungwon kept staring at the foreign piece, not bothering to look at Wonho again. “GET OUT!”

It was too late, he should’ve realized.

The impact of a sonic blast hurled their bodies forward at full speed, clashing against iron fence that encircled the empty space in the center of the second floor, and actually breaking through it.

Within seconds, Hyungwon felt all the soreness from such blow being put aside as his body rapidly skidded through the breach made by the shock wave, to definitely hit the ground floor.

But the frightened scream about to leave his mouth was cut in the middle as his arm was abruptly yanked upwards.

“LET GO!” Hyungwon shouted, still panting. Part of him felt relieved that Wonho caught him in time, hanging from the edge on one arm.

“NO!”

Not the goddamn time to be stubborn, and yet…
“IT’S BLOCKING ME!” The time traveler lifted his free arm to display the osmium bracelet on it. Every passing second put the enemy closer to a second strike, and Hyungwon didn’t know how he was still breathing, or even speaking.

Wonho squinted at him for a moment.

“DO YOU TRUST ME?”

In any other circumstance, Hyungwon would’ve laughed.

“NO!”

“PULL YOUR ARM UP!” The blond ignored his answer, fervently gesturing with his head towards his hold on Hyungwon’s arm. “DISLOCATE YOUR THUMB AND YOU CAN BREAK FREE!”

“NO!”

“I CAN’T HOLD FOR MUCH LONGER! COME ON! HYUNGWON!”

Wonho’s suddenly gaze shifted above his head and he could sense the man’s struggle, and fear, in the strong clasp he kept on Hyungwon’s arm.

He knew what it meant, and regardless of their conflicts, Hyungwon didn’t want for Wonho to end up seriously hurt because of him. His policy was that was better to embrace it himself than to inflict on someone else.

Gathering all the strength he still had, Hyungwon launched his arm up and grabbed his other hand — Wonho immediately felt the additional weight, and that’s when the time traveler noticed how swollen was his hand, clutching the iron bar from the fence.

What ensued next all seemed to happen in the same fraction of second, an anomaly in the fabric of space-time; with a loud cry, Hyungwon broke his own finger and took the bracelet off as swiftly as he could. As soon as he accomplished it, Wonho went loose, for he couldn’t hold on anymore.

Hyungwon succumbed against the push of gravity, and even though he still didn’t feel himself completely, the time traveler managed to bring a hand down to mitigate his impact, and another all the way up to catch Wonho in a force field before the possibility of any harm come upon him.

That’s when the second blast struck him, and Hyungwon lost control while his back hit the cemented floor, and his energy shield around Wonho was long gone as the man was thrown to the other side of the library.

Hyungwon groaned as his body rolled violently across the floor, making a stop still too far away to see if Wonho was okay.

That man was an idiot, he concluded as he let out a huff amidst his gasps.

All the anger that he felt towards Wonho before was nothing compared to the fury building up inside his chest; his inner energy was still unstable from the interaction with the osmium, and Hyungwon couldn’t bring himself to care enough about the consequences of it. The blue light irradiating through his skin and eyes had its intensity felt in the core of Hyungwon’s being.

While he was still on the floor, on his peripheral vision, the time traveler saw the two masked
figures walking down the east corridor towards the staircase, one of them working on a small box they had in hands — which was probably their mode of transportation.

Without a second of hesitation, the time traveler concentrated a massive amount of energy in his hand and casted towards the structure under them, causing that part of the second floor to collapse into shambles with the two of them on it.

It was hard to recognize the pacifist part of himself, and Hyungwon loathed those moments. He detested to give in to the ugly feeling of wrath that seemed to eat him alive, but Hyungwon was fed up, tired of humans persistently trying to ruin everything.

That world was his world now, and he wouldn’t stand still to the fact that outsiders unceasingly targeted it out of greed or malice. For the time being, those people were his people. And Hyungwon protected what was his.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT?” He demanded, in his native language, marching towards the individuals who grunted amidst the debris. “TELL ME!”

One of them, the one who supposedly hit Hyungwon in the head, spat out blood on the floor, making an attempt to push himself up even though there was a block of cement over his leg.

“Spurious. You are no god.” The distorted voice from before came out rather grating, shifting between static and an actual human tone. “Just an… aberration.”

“WHAT DO YOU WANT!”

Hyungwon’s shout enabled a burst of energy to spread quickly around the room, exploding lamps and other electric circuits around the library.

“Wrong question.” The same person seemingly gave up on trying to move, letting out a dry laugh. Their partner still seemed knocked out next to them. “What they…” They coughed violently for a moment. “What we want is war. It’s what our people feeds on. It all starts… with the end of the Constants.”

It was still surreal to believe that those people were indeed from his universe. Hyungwon let the initial shock pass and focused on feeding his rage.

“I am not… like you.”

The masked person guffawed, bring a hand to their ribcage with a pained face.

“Kill the maker… Embrace the war. You are nothing but that.”

Hyungwon’s throat burned with the fury, and the untamed energy under his skin that begged to run free.

“I am…” His voice cracked, and every hurt. “I am not… a killer.”

The smug grin that shaped over the plastic black mask was nothing but hideous.

“Born monster, always monster.”

“I AM NOT A MONSTER!”

The heat of the moment spurred his hand to stretch forward, striking the masked person with a burst of energy that viciously began to electrocute the mercenary right on spot.
Deep down, he wanted to stop. Hyungwon knew he wasn’t who these people claimed he was — that he wasn’t a mass murderer like those from his original universe. Ever since the incident, the time traveler swore to himself to do his best to help as many people as he could, following Time’s occasional advice and connecting with it as one to lessen the impact of the destruction caused by his people.

But the time traveler felt like he couldn’t back down now, no matter how badly he knew he should. The blueish energy flowing through his hand to hit the agonizing mercenary felt somewhat right, it felt like vindication. Just for that moment, Hyungwon wanted to give himself the freedom of not caring about the consequences.

That didn’t seem to be the multiverse’s plan.

“HYUNGWON!”

He acknowledged Wonho’s voice as soon as he heard it, through a multitude of static of the noisy atmosphere that his energy produced.

“HYUNGWON!” His voice sounded closer, but the only thing growing in Hyungwon’s chest was ire. “HYUNGWON! STOP!”

“GET AWAY FROM ME!” The flicking sparkles in Hyungwon’s eyes held back any possible tears that he wanted to shed, letting himself to be immersed by hate.

“STOP!” Wonho was now behind him, Hyungwon was sure. “YOU’RE KILLING THEM! HYUNGWON!”

The time traveler felt the entire air being sucked out of his lungs once Wonho’s fingers wrapped around the wrist of the arm he used to attack his foes.

It was nothing like Hyungwon had experienced before, and he had no explanation for how that happened whatsoever.

All the energy that ran through his body was partially transferred to Wonho’s, and the time traveler watched in disbelief as the blond’s eyes lit up like his own, skin glowing like Hyungwon was used to see himself being like.

Such brief contact during one of Hyungwon’s biggest untamed breakdowns seemed to last for an eternity, when in reality was nothing more than a few seconds.

Seconds that took him far, far away.

He was no longer Hyungwon.

He was Wonho, running down the streets of a broken Seoul during a protest to escape police brutality, with Shownu by his side. He was Wonho, watching his father bedridden, for the man fell ill after Wonho’s mother death during a bombing in a grocery store. He was Wonho, an orphan, alone and afraid, days without eating a proper meal because he was too stubborn to ask for Shownu’s help. He was Wonho, considering joining the local resistance despite knowing they were nothing but terrorists, because anything was better than living like that — even death.

In such stances, the myriad of feelings that swept through Wonho’s chest throughout his tough life in his original universe hit Hyungwon like a tidal wave, all at once; fear of living, fear of dying. Sorrow for those unfairly lost to the violence, profound hate for those responsible for all that blood in the streets — loneliness, so much loneliness. Much, much more than it should be possible for a
Hyungwon felt like he was going to die, for it was exactly what he felt when he actually died before. That fleeting experience didn’t make justice in the big picture of what it certainly was, but had expressed fairly how awful was to live like that.

The sharp inhale striking his lungs cooled down part the energy raging inside of him, hastily pulling away from Wonho.

But it was too late for the blond not to be affected by his abilities, and Wonho completely passed out on the floor.

The pink-haired held his breath as his eyes widened, body instinctively sprinting towards Wonho on the floor.

“WONHO!” Hyungwon messily plopped down next to him, bringing a hand under his chin to check for a pulse.

He had one, at least.

And yet, Wonho didn’t respond to any of his attempts of bring him back to consciousness, not even with Hyungwon’s uncanny skills.

Hyungwon took deep breaths over Wonho’s inert body, trying to ground himself. His relentless panting made it excruciating to breathe, but the sight of Wonho’s pale skin seeming lifeless was more agonizing than anything.

Fighting his way through an invisible barrier, Wonho drew in a sharp breath as he came back to consciousness, squirming around out of instinct as he sat upright in bed.

The first ounce of pain to hit his body came from his knee, which only grew stronger to the point where he couldn’t move at all. His eyes focused on trying to check if there was something seriously broken, but that wasn’t really his specialty, and it hurt like a motherfucker.

For the first time after waking up, he noticed his surroundings. He was at the med bay of Hyungwon’s time machine, alone.

The lights above his head started to flicker immediately, though.

“You are awake. Yet, remain hecked up. Sprained fingers and minor bruises have been fixed, but your broken kneecap is going to take 20 minutes more.”

Laughing brought only pain to his ribcage, but it was worth it.

“Hey, Monbebe. It has been a while.”

“To be clear, I was against letting you in here. But Hyungwon was out of his mind, so I can’t really argue with him when he is like this.”

How much of a prick someone has to be to piss off even an artificial intelligence? Wonho knew one or two things about it.
“I apologized to him, you know.” The blond didn’t know why he was explaining himself to Monbebe, just felt like he should. “I mean it. You can read my pulse and tell that I’m not lying.”

“You can’t keep saying sorry and continuously still be a douchebag to Hyungwon.”

“I know.” Wonho nodded, propping himself up on the palms of his hands to shift sideways. “He deserves better. He deserves me out of his hair.”

At the already first try of getting up, it was impossible for him to move without the aid of someone.

“Is one of the kids here?” He moved his head upwards again.

“Minhyuk and Jooheon are in the kitchen.”

“Could you call them? I may need to go to the hospital.”

“Why? The technology of your people is obsolete next to mine. Also, Hyungwon made it clear he wanted to speak to you when he comes back from his meeting with the military.”

A sheepishly smile appeared on Wonho’s face.

“I’ll be fine.” It was kind of harrowing, but Wonho wasn’t going to die because of it. So whatever. “But thanks for the concern.”

“As if… Don’t make me laugh.”

Wonho snorted, and his ribs complained again.

“Please don’t laugh. I feel like it will haunt my dreams to witness that.”

“Can I sleep here tonight?”

Kihyun’s fingers paused on buttoning up his blue pajama shirt to turn his gaze to his boyfriend, leaning on his work desk on the opposite side of his bedroom.

“Why are you asking?” Kihyun chuckled, pretending his back didn’t hurt a bit because of it. “You always crash here whenever you want.”

“You were right.”

“I’m right about a lot of things, Shownu. You gotta be specific.”

The dim lights of the room created a penumbra over Shownu’s face, but there was nothing intimidating about it. It felt incredibly… intimate. Familiar. As if Kihyun had always seen this face, thousands of times, as they shared a closeness that couldn’t be described well with words.

“About me…” The older sighed, strolling towards the bed where Kihyun sat. “Not opening up. I’m sorry if I made you feel like I don’t trust you. I said I don’t like misunderstandings, but I ended up creating one. I’m sorry.”
Kihyun was aware of it. Regardless of his frustration and initial annoyance, he knew that Shownu didn’t do it on purpose. It was still good to be able to speak it out, though.

“I know.”

The younger tried to shift closer to his boyfriend in bed, but seeing him struggle a bit, Shownu closed the space between them by encircling Kihyun’s waist with his arm. After that hellish day, it seemed like heaven to be able to smell and feel Shownu’s soft skin.

“Kihyun.”

The younger man hummed, burying his head in Shownu’s neck.

“Kihyun.”

His tone this time was more decisive, compelling Kihyun to move a bit so he could stare at his hyung.

“Yes?”

“Today…” Shownu casted his eyes down, but quickly stared at him again. “What happened…”

Regardless of understanding the worry — God knows he would’ve had a stroke if in Shownu’s place — Kihyun was simply too exhausted to do anything but to hit the hay.

“Hyung.” Gently smiling, the younger brought a hand to his boyfriend’s face. “It’s okay. We—”

Shownu pulled his hand away determinedly, but with tenderness, holding it on his own.

“Kihyun.” The way he said his name in such low tone gave him goosebumps. “When I saw you, there, even before it happened…”

“You saw me? As in you had a… uh… uh… Please, I’m a scientist. Don’t make me say these stuff.”

The older man chuckled, securing a hold on Kihyun’s shoulder.

“Yes. I never had visions of someone specifically so many times, you know. But I’ve had a lot of you, ever since we first kissed. I’ve never had a connection like this with someone. Not even with Minhyuk, who shares these things with me. I…”

Kihyun licked his lips, feeling the tension stiffening his body; the ache wasn’t even the main problem, it was just the sheer expectation of what was about to ensue.

His boyfriend took a deep breath, gently grasping Kihyun’s face with both hands.

“Remember… when we kissed for the first time? I said I couldn’t stop wanting you, even though I didn’t know what was this… that I felt about you?”

“Yes…” Kihyun didn’t even blink, burying his nails in his palm.

“I love you, Kihyun. I am, and have always been in love with you. I have never been more sure of it.”

The younger’s eyes widened in amazement, and partially in relief — what? One could really think they were about to be dumped, and yet it was just the multiverse demonstrating once again that he
had the sweetest boyfriend to ever exist, even though it was kind of hard to admit that when Shownu teased the living shit out of him every single day.

“You don’t have to say anything.” Shownu spoke again after receiving only silence from Kihyun. “Don’t feel pressured. I just had to say it. Today… shit, Kihyun. What I felt when I saw you like that… I should have protected you better. I’m sorry.”

Being the ridiculous idiot he was, Kihyun snorted and his back stung a bit.

“I just confessed to you and you’re laughing?” His boyfriend scoffed, pulling his hands away from him.

“I… I was so afraid, hyung.” The laughter died gradually, and Kihyun’s gaze was nothing but full of sentiment. “But I knew… you would come for me. I don’t know how, or why… I’m a scientist, you know. It’s my job to try to understand things. But I don’t understand anything about you.”

Shownu drew his brows together.

“How come?”

“I’m not sure.” Kihyun briefly snickered again, bringing his hand to hold Shownu’s face. “I don’t think I’m supposed to understand, anyway. You are here, and I… I… love you. I love us. Fuck… I’m happy. You make me happy. I’m not, you know, good with words like you but… please, know that I feel like that. That I feel the same about you.”

The very next second, the brightest smile appeared on Shownu’s face, the ones who made the corner of his eyes crinkle — his favorite one, from his favorite person.

Shownu leaned down smoothly to press a chaste kiss against his lips, brushing a finger over a scratch he had gained from attack earlier.

“I hate it.” His boyfriend’s hot breath poured over his mouth.

“It’s just a scratch. It will heal soon.”

“Still pretty.” The older man caressed his cheeks, fingers then moving to run through his hair. “Such a pretty nerd.”

Of course that at some point, Shownu would make him blush. Thank God for the dim lighting of his bedroom.

“Oh.” Shownu suddenly pulled away and got up, probably on his psychic bullshit. “You are very tired. Let’s sleep.”

Kihyun yelped when his boyfriend quickly picked him up as if he weighted nothing, tucking him under the comforter and sliding down next to him in bed.

“So…” As if he knew where in Kihyun’s body ached the most, his hyung carefully wrapped one of his arms around him, tugging the other under his pillow. “Back then, in the other world, my mom died giving birth to me. My dad was an extremist, and… our relationship, that was never one of the best, only got worse when I joined the government’s recruiting program. For time travel, you know.”

“Baby…” It still sounded a bit weird in Kihyun’s mouth, but he always loved pet names, so that moron was going to have to deal with it. “You don’t have to tell me if you’re not ready.”
“I am.” In the dark, Kihyun watched as the corner of his boyfriend’s mouth quirked up. “I want to tell you everything, from the very beginning.”

“So…” Kihyun crinkled up his nose, shifting even closer to him. “I’m better in bed than Wonho, right?”

The older man sighed.

“You really had to ruin this moment, didn’t you?”

Kihyun laughed a bit too loud, letting the weariness take over his mind.

“I love you too.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake.”

Wonho grunted loud enough for it echo athwart his bedroom and living room, but he didn’t care. An injured man should be allowed to rest, and yet someone knocked on his goddamn door way past 10:00 p.m. of a Saturday.

“GO AWAY!” The blond yelled from his bed, leaning sideways a bit to project his body towards the next room.

Silence ensued, which could only mean that whoever was out there, gave up on trying to bother him.

He preferred not to tell his mother what happened, for the moment, and it couldn’t be one of his friends, anyway. Minhyuk and Jooheon accompanied him to the hospital and dropped him off at the hotel, reminding him to rest even though the doctor said it hadn’t been anything too severe. Shownu took Kihyun home, since his younger friend was pretty scared of what happened that day, and Changkyun, according to Minhyuk, left with Hyungwon to God-knows-where.

So yeah, no one that mattered could be knocking on his door.

Wonho sunk into his bed, surrounded by countless pillows and two comforters, letting the pain settle down when a very familiar whooshing sound came from the living room.

His eyes widened as soon as his brain registered what that meant, but… it couldn’t be happening, right? That was just his sleep deprived brain making things up, plus the morphine he was given at the hospital could sure be contributing to some hallucination.

“Wonho-ssi?”

Oh, man. His entire body turned into jelly at the sound of Hyungwon saying his name in that stupid honorific way that he had grown fonder of.

“Y-yeah…” His tone lowered drastically, and Wonho pulled the covers over his lower body to somehow follow the dumb idea of shielding himself, at least to hide his injury.

His lean figure slowly made its appearance at his bedroom’s door; not a surprise, but Hyungwon had already changed outfits, now dressing up in a dark green suit with brown shoes.
“May I come in or do you wish me to leave?”

“NO!” Wonho became too self-aware he seemed a bit desperate, lowering down his voice. “I mean… you can stay.”

The time traveler nodded, taking a few steps towards him in bed. Wonho held out his breath unconsciously.

“I came to heal you. And… to tell you something.”

“I don’t need it. The healing, I mean.” Wonho dismissed it quickly. “I’ll be fine.”

Then Hyungwon did that thing of tilting his head sideways a bit, as if he was contesting the lengths of Wonho’s intelligence. Meanwhile, the blond man did remember of how Hyungwon had broken his own thumb, but felt useless to ask about it when he knew the pink-haired healed faster than anyone on Earth.

“As you wish.” The time traveler buried his hands in the pockets of his blazer, taking a few steps forward in Wonho’s bed’s direction. “As I said, I need to tell you something.”

“Me too.”

Wonho’s response seemed to have taken him by surprise, as the man frowned at his statement.

“About what?”

“You go first.” Wonho felt the anxiety starting to creep on his chest, so changed the subject.

The time traveler nodded, crossing his arms over his chest; the chewing on his lower lip didn’t stop for a single second while the man pondered on how to start his sentence.

“Earlier, at the library.” Hyungwon sighed, and for the first time Wonho noticed how tired he looked. “You touched me while I was… You could have died, Wonho-ssi.”

“You were out of it. You were going to kill them.”

“You could have died, Wonho-ssi.” The time traveler repeated, giving him a dirty look. “The only reason you’re still alive, as far as I can imagine, is because you have experienced jolts of my energy before. Still…”

“You would have regretted it.” The downcast shift in Hyungwon’s expression confirmed it. “So…”

“When you grabbed my arm…” Hyungwon kept looking away, wrapping his arms around himself. “I… I went through your memories. Of your first life.”

Wonho’s jaw dropped a bit.

“What?”

“I did not mean to!” The pink-haired’s eyes went round, already defending himself. “I… I don’t know why! But… it was all in flashes. I’ve never experienced such connection like this. I figured I should tell you, since I did not have your permission for this.”

“I saw something too. Your memories.”

Hyungwon quickly craned his neck up to gaze at him.
“W-what?”

“I saw you. No, more like… I was you.” The memory of that experience made Wonho’s chest tighten. “I was seeing through your eyes. Feeling what you felt. When you were in… that glass cage.”

Everything happened too fast for Wonho’s ordinary brain to pick up things in detail, but the feeling of dread and anguish that emerged in his heart was unforgettable.

They kept Hyungwon in a cage for 18 years, experimenting and testing on him as if he was a lab rat. Unable to control his abilities and constantly under medication, Hyungwon didn’t know how to fight back, way too young and lost to understand that those people had no interest in helping him.

Nothing hit him harder in life than being Hyungwon for those seconds that seemed to an eternity.

He was Hyungwon, hopeless trying to sleep in a fetal position on the floor of the glass cage, watching the scars of his body disappearing because of his enhanced healing, even though the emotional damage couldn’t be scraped away. He was Hyungwon, being interrogated for hours, bursting into tears because he did not understand what language those people were speaking, what they wanted from him, or what he did to deserve that. He was Hyungwon, underfed and treated like an object, until the day they killed someone because he refused to cooperate. Then he was Hyungwon, unaware of the magnitude of his abilities, crying in an outburst of rage and exploding everything around him.

Out of every single thing Wonho had experienced, those moments in Hyungwon’s shoes changed his life forever.

“I was already sorry for what I said that day but…” The blond spoke again, controlling his tone so it wouldn’t crack. “That… Holy shit, Hyungwon.”

The shocked expression in the time traveler’s face gave off the impression he wanted to run away, but was immobilized but some invisible force.

“It’s…” The man swallowed, bringing a hand to rub his face. “I don’t know… how is this possible… I don’t… know how to respond to this.”

Wonho sighed, a bit relieved of taking that off his chest.

“You don’t have to. I won’t tell anyone.”

“That is not my main concern, Wonho-ssi. What I wonder is why it is always you. I wonder why you happen to me all over again, in so many ways.”

Ignoring the clutter in his stomach after hearing those words and without knowing what to say, Wonho nodded, staring at his hands.

“You don’t…” Awkwardly, he cleared his throat. “I… It’s… Um… I enjoyed, regardless of our differences. The time we had. You don’t have to worry about me, at least.”

“I will always worry about you, Wonho-ssi.” His tone went deeper, and mayhaps Wonho had goosebumps all over his body.

“Why?”

*Say that it’s because I’m your priority.*
“Well… You are a Constant, after all.”

“Um…” Wonho’s head shifted downwards to hide any disappointed emotions he could be displaying. “Can I just ask one last thing?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? About… you know, what happened in the past.”

“I did a lot of things I’m not proud of… And… I thought, that with you… We could have been friends, like you once said. I didn’t want to ruin that.”

_I don’t want to be your friend. I want to…_

“You didn’t ruin it. I did. You don’t have to forgive me or anything.”

The time traveler chuckled a bit.

“I already did, Wonho-ssi. It is liberating to not to feel anger.”

Wonho unconsciously smiled.

“You should do it more, though. Be pissed off. If you hold back for too long, you can’t control. Don’t take shit from people that easily. Especially from me.”

With an amused mien, the man arched an eyebrow at him.

“Next time, should I throw you across the room?”

His tone was so casual that Wonho was left speechless for a moment, unaware of the time traveler turning around to leave his bedroom.

“Next time?” Wonho asked, pushing himself to the edge of the bed.

Hyungwon came to a halt, briefly looking over his shoulder.

“Next time.”

Chapter End Notes

THE PLOT THICKENS........
also when will i stop putting hyungwonho in these dangerous situations....... (i wont)
thanks for bearing with me in this slow burn romance, but i did warn yall that it was a slow burn
we’ve reached the 100k and to be honest idk how long this gonna be, so brace yourselves

AGAIN: I’M PROUD OF US ALL FOR GIVING THE BOYS ALL THOSE WINS, THEY DESERVE IT SO MUCH <3 keep streaming and send minhyuk some love for his bday

see yall next week, kids
Wonho’s demons are chasing him, and they’re doing the Naruto run

Chapter Summary

Local Man Deals With Bullying & Self-Loathing For Having A Crush

Chapter Notes

hello kids
another late chapter finally comes
thank you for all the 3 people still reading this, this story challenges me a lot and even tho i complain a lot on twitter, i love this whole thing

anyways???
just listened to the new exo album and it slaps
STREAM SHOOT OUT ENGLISH VERSION ON SPOTIFY
drink water and remember to eat

enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Anyone who falls in love is searching for the missing pieces of themselves. So anyone who's in love gets sad when they think of their lover. It's like stepping back inside a room you have fond memories of, one you haven't seen in a long time."

Haruki Murakami

Once in a while, Hyungwon believed his life was a bit easier when he was alone.

The centuries of solitude were harsh on him, for sure, especially when he distanced himself from his own kind for too long, but the trenchant pressure created by living in all-human society made Hyungwon want to give up everything and run away, only him and his time machine roaming through uncharted territories where no one knew who, or what Hyungwon was.

But the problem presented was that, to savor what was like to have companionship was to never be able to experience loneliness in the same unbothered way.

The people from his world never taught him anything about friendship or any type of human connection whatsoever. From what Hyungwon remembered in his — mostly — muddied memory, his life was an everlasting cycle of waking up when the Chairman wanted, eating when the Chairman allowed, working to fulfill the Chairman’s orders — and repeat. There was no space for interpersonal relationships, or any concept of it.

Even a while after the incident, it was strange to see how glaringly different other worlds were
about life in society, or how people were raised to deal with such thing. And personally, to get used to be inserted in contexts like these took him great effort, but the time traveler would say he’s doing pretty well.

Except when he felt the weight of having to explain himself to those close to him, because they deserved to know the whole truth; if they wished to stay by his side, good. But Hyungwon wouldn’t blame the boys if the fear got the best of them.

A couple of knocks on the door in front of him were hurriedly answered.

“Hey, hyung.” Jooheon greeted him, and the corners of his mouth turned up, displaying his classic dimples.

“Hello, Jooheon.”

He let the boy hug him, and felt something odd about it — as if Jooheon was holding something back so heavily that it weighted him down.

Hyungwon asked the six Constants to gather at Wonho’s hotel room, since he wished for the blond Constant to be present at that meeting, but the man was still recovering, quite resolute in not having Hyungwon’s or Monbebe’s technology’s aid to heal faster.

“HYUNG!”

On the couch that had its back to the entrance, Changkyun turned half of his body around to wave an arm at the pink-haired traveler.

Sitting in the other sofa in front of the maknae were Shownu and Kihyun, whereas Minhyuk and Jooheon shared the same one with the youngest man.

Almost mechanically, his gaze roamed around the living room to find the last Constant.

A smaller, distinctively emerald couch was pushed against the wall between the two large ones, and there Wonho rested with his feet on the glass coffee table.

“Good night.” Hyungwon greeted them, wandering in between the main sofas.

If he was to be asked of the reason why he chose to sat beside Wonho in the two-seat couch, Hyungwon wouldn’t be able to explain it coherently, because most of what involved his relationship with the blond Constant didn’t fit in his conventional way of pondering.

Wonho’s gaze shifted sideways as Hyungwon settled down next to him, but the time traveler didn’t feel any discomfort in the air, so he took it as a win.

“How’s the knee?”

As if he wasn’t expecting the pink-haired to speak to him at all, Wonho craned his neck upwards with an astounding speed.

“Fine…” The blond nodded, looking away once more.

“He’s lying.” Minhyuk meddled in, shaking his head in disapproval. “He was whining a minute ago that it hurts too much when he walks.”

“YAH!” Wonho’s sudden shout made Hyungwon flinch for a second. It was almost funny how he glared at Minhyuk.
“Shut up, you both.” Kihyun declared, followed by a sigh. “We came here to hear Hyungwon.”

His best efforts to not let the smile on his face fade away at the memory of that fact didn’t live up to its expectations.

“Right.” Hyungwon agreed, nervously rubbing his hands against his navy trousers. “I feel like… I’ve been lacking in honesty with you for a while. However… listen to me, please. Let me clarify first about the incident at the library, four days ago.”

Attentive to his speech, no one uttered a word, and the time traveler took it as an incentive.

“Those people who attacked Kihyun and Changkyun were… from my world. The one I thought it was long gone.”

In the faces of his friends, he could see the eagerness to ask questions, but Hyungwon kept going.

“Yes. They found me. For what it seems, they can’t still travel easily…” Too odd for that situation, but Hyungwon tried to smile. He didn’t really know why. “But that’s not the important part, even if it’s hard to believe. I’ve heard only rumors before… and with so much happening, I didn’t have the time to really look into it but… there has been an insurgency of oppositions against Constants across the multiverse. Specifically, against Changkyun’s doubles.”

“Why?” The maknae drew his brows together, nearly pouting.

Hyungwon couldn’t face the boy at the shameful memory that he had been hiding something from him.

“When we were in that Modeled Universe, meeting up with the Council… they told me to speak the truth of the fate of the youngest. They meant you, Changkyun.”

His frown intensified.

“More or less 300 years ago… a shift in the pattern of your doubles began, slowly. At first, no one saw as a significant incongruity, but… it has kept a stable pace since then. Some say it’s an impact of the actions of my original universe and The Eye’s, but…”

“Oh my God, hyung, say it already!”

Changkyun’s impatience only made Hyungwon feel worse for not mentioning it before, but he didn’t do it with bad intentions. He wondered if such thing mattered, at the end of the day.

“Your doubles, Changkyun… after the development of time travel, your doubles tend to… somehow, wreak havoc in their worlds. Their selves become… corrupted, you could say so. There are movements in the multiverse to… restrain your doubles after they do finish their inventions. And others that… want you dead.”

Everyone’s eyes turned to the youngest boy, but Changkyun didn’t seem too taken aback by it. Nothing pretty new coming from the him.

“So…” Changkyun pursed his lips together, trying to bring up a grin. “This means I’m gonna go evil?”

“No.” Hyungwon was fast in affirming it. “It’s not going to happen to you. I mean it.”

“Well… seems like you can’t do much about it since it’s like… set in stone.”
“Nothing is, Kyun.” The time traveler fought the urge to weep, also for some unidentified reason.
“I will keep protecting you and the others. I didn’t mention before because… I didn’t want you
to… feel like this is inevitable. I didn’t want you to feel hopeless about your future. I… I’m sorry.”

Changkyun nodded, not saying anything else after that.

“You’re not going to go evil.” Minhyuk declared, wrapping an arm around the youngest’s
shoulders. “You know I’d beat your ass if you did.”

On the other side of the maknae, Jooheon sighed as he squinted at his boyfriend.

“Minhyuk…”

But Changkyun actually snorted.

“I know you would.”

“And we are all together, here.” Kihyun pointed out, and in his peripheral vision Hyungwon
watched Wonho slowly bend his upper body forward to grab a plastic water bottle over the coffee
table. “There’s nothing we can’t do if we’re together. Right, Hyungwon-ah?”

I hope so.

“Sure.” The time traveler nodded.

“What happened to those people?” Shownu inquired. “Last thing we saw was the military taking
away the guy who attacked Kihyun.”

“They…” Hyungwon sighed deeply again, feeling his hand tremble a bit. “They are all dead. They
killed themselves in the military facility they were brought to. It’s the method in case they get
captured.”

“How?” Kihyun seemed quite puzzled. “They were under the eyes of the army… and you said you
took away their tech before the officials arrived.”

“Everyone in my world had a… it’s similar to what you may know as a nano-chip. It was implanted
in everyone right after their birth. Here.” Hyungwon brushed his index finger behind his right ear.
“The goal of it was to allow the person to fragment their body across the dimensions, in case any
of us was made prisoner by an enemy. All it is needed is to drop a bit of blood on it. Till this day,
it’s accounted as the most gruesome death known in human history. Ever. Studies showed it’s
possible one would never stop feeling pain as they were scattered across the multiverse.”

“Holy shit.” Jooheon’s wide eyes showed his bewilderment.

“You have it too?” Kihyun also looked quite shocked.

An upsurge of memories Hyungwon wasn’t fond of it at all made him hold his breath for a few
seconds.

“I had. It was removed.”

If the time traveler had any doubt if Wonho knew about that issue, the smoldering gaze of the
blond Constant on him could be felt as clearly as a touch.

“Back in my universe, I worked at a particle accelerator facility where they generated wormholes. I
was, literally, born to accomplish that task. The day my world was attacked, and supposedly
destroyed… It was the first time I remember seeing my people in despair. They all ran out, and… I
was left behind in the particle accelerator. Perhaps I was too slow, I don’t know… I don’t
remember how many wormholes were active at that time, but many fused during the collapse of
my world and… I was dragged into one. I also don’t know… much about how it happened, or why
I survived… I like to believe that Time needed an asset, and I happened to be in the way…”

It was Hyungwon’s first time ever speaking about this incident, and he couldn’t pinpoint which
strong emotion to feel first. There was just a bunch of overpowering feeling swamping his chest.

To continue, he tried to keep his voice as steady as possible.

“At first, it felt as if my skin was being torn apart. I don’t… even know how long I stayed there, in
the wormhole. In the fourth dimension. Mostly, I remember… floating. Like in water. It didn’t hurt
anymore. I think that, maybe, it was because I stopped fighting against it and just accepted…
Time, as a part of me. When I did, I woke up in a different place. A universe nearby of where mine
used to be. For 18 years…”

_Come on, don’t give up now._

“For 18 years…” A puff of breath escaped his mouth, to keep himself going. “Some people…
imprisoned me. I was too weak, and didn’t know how to control my newly gained abilities… I didn’t
even know I had them, honestly. They kept me in a glass cage and tested on me as much as they
could. I didn’t speak their language, nor they spoke mine… It was useless to beseech. One day,
they were trying once more to get something out of me by using someone who knew a bit of my
idiom. The man, around your ages… he looked guilty after speaking to me, at least I think so. Once
this person was out of my glass cage, he started a discussion with the people in charge and… they
killed him. In cold blood. Shot him in the head.”

Next to him, Wonho flinched as if he had revived the memory of it himself, just like the time
traveler. It was still rather strange to realize that the blond had actually seen one of the worst parts
of his life, but somehow it was like he had a company that could truly grasp what he went through.

“I lost it.” Hyungwon continued, afraid he wouldn’t make it if stopped for too long. “I think… my
abilities matured during those years. Stabilized in my body. I couldn’t… handle watching that. It
was my only chance of making them understand I didn’t mean any harm, but I actually…” The
pink-haired slightly winced as he felt a sympathetic hand on his back. Wonho, or no one else, said
nothing about it. “I was angry. Lost. Afraid. And… In an outburst… I killed them. Everyone in that
building, or whatever that was. When I woke up again, I was in the middle of a forest. My clothes
had burned, and I remember feeling so cold … and I fainted again. I was exhausted. Once I
regained conscious, I learned that two women who lived in that vicinity found me, and nursed me
back to health. They were the first humans to ever show me sheer compassion.”

Wonho’s hand left his back and Hyungwon felt strangely uncomfortable, regardless of how much
his touch still lingered on his senses.

“They didn’t understand a thing I said, but they helped me anyway. They hid me, and eventually I
learned their language to be able to communicate, and show my gratitude. We escaped that
universe together, and I helped them settle in my favorite universe as a gesture of appreciation for
everything they did for me. Once I was alone again, I felt worthless. I… settle down for a while,
but the memories of everything I went through were… too much. That’s when I… I tried. To use the…
nano device. I was immediately hauled into the fourth dimension and had it ripped off of me,
which was my first self-aware contact with Time and, by extension, myself. It gave me the only
scar I have, by the way.”
Pulling his hair up, Hyungwon leaned his head down and showed the crooked scar behind his right ear.

“Time saved me, and I understood its purpose, in some way. I learned to accept the abilities that were gifted to me, and to use them to make the multiverse a better place. And… that’s it. That’s my story. That’s what happened to me, so I could become the person you know.”

The end of his words brought up a noiseless atmosphere in the living room, and Hyungwon understood it was certainly something not easy to hear. Daring to look up at the boys again, he was met with weeping faces.

“Hyung…” Jooheon was the first to break the silence, darting in Hyungwon’s direction to envelop him into a hug.

The golden-haired man was warm and fluffy to embrace, and his hugs were one of Hyungwon’s favorites in the whole multiverse.

“It’s okay.” Hyungwon soothed the boy’s tears, patting him in the back. “It’s okay, Jooheonnie.”

“NO!” The boy suddenly pulled away, and it scared him a bit. “I mean… This… is not okay. You didn’t deserve that.”

The pink-haired gratefully smiled at the man.

“I know.”

“No offense, Hyungwon…” Kihyun wiped off the tears that rolled down his face. “But if we ever meet your people, I’m going kick every single one of them in the face.”

“Me too.” Minhyuk fervently nodded.

On the verge of crying too, Hyungwon laughed.

“I don’t enjoy violence, but I wouldn’t do anything to stop you.”

“You are a really brave soul, Hyungwon-ah.” Shownu softly spoke, and he could feel the kindness in his tone. “You could have gone so bad, and yet you became this wonderful person that call us your friends. Thank you for not giving up.”

It was getting harder for the time traveler not to burst into tears, so he tried to change the topic.

“It’s alright. Let’s not be too sad over this, okay? Let’s focus on your future.”

Jooheon moved back to his seat beside Changkyun and Minhyuk, and Kihyun’s voice arose in the room once more.

“I think it’s the perfect moment.” His friend stated, gaze directed to Shownu.

The tanned man seemed to quickly pick up on whatever his boyfriend meant, nodding in acknowledgement.

“So… Wonho…” Shownu’s low voice actually startled the man sitting beside Hyungwon.

Turning his gaze to Wonho, the time traveler observed the man taking a sip of the bottle he held.

“What?” His voice came out a bit funny, for his mouth was full of water.
“Kihyun and I… we are dating. It has been a while now.”

The unexpected happened once again and, instead of spitting out the liquid in his mouth as Hyungwon predicted he would, Wonho actually choked on it — his recover was quite rapid, though.

“YOU WHAT?” The man yelled, regretting pushing his body forward for that made his leg twitch because of his imprudence. Wonho let out small hisses of pain.

“Don’t overreact, okay?” Kihyun started, getting up for some reason. “We like each other. A lot. Shouldn’t you be happy that your friends are happy together?”

“I am…?” Wonho affirmed, as his forehead puckered. “I mean… wow, I’m… surprised? But… if you two are happy, why wouldn’t I be? AH!” The blond playfully pointed a finger at Kihyun. “THAT’S WHY YOU—”

“Don’t.” His shorter friend scowled at him as a warning. “I don’t want to remember that.”

“So…” Hyungwon was a bit taken aback when Wonho looked around, including in his direction. “Everyone knew?”

“Yes.” The other four Constants confirmed, in unison.

“Why didn’t you tell me before?” The blond questioned his friends. “I wouldn’t…”

“You have a tendency to overreact.” Shownu shrugged at him.

Wonho seemed offended by that statement.

“I do not.”

“I’ve seen you cry in a restaurant because they didn’t have more pork belly.” Minhyuk attested to Shownu’s assertion. “You said the universe was conspiring to drown you in misery.”

The man beside him opened his mouth to argue back, but decided to forget about it whatsoever.

“Anyways…” Wonho sighed, pushing his back against the sofa. “Anyone has anything else to say? This is basically an open-up-about-secrets moment.”

“Then tell us who is your crush.”

That spurred another outraged reaction from the blond, who regretted once more moving his injured leg.

“YAH! YOO KIHYUN!”

“WONHO HAS A CRUSH?” Minhyuk shouted, and it certainly ringed on everyone’s ears.

“I really hate you.” Wonho sulked, glowering at Kihyun who only quietly cackled at his friend’s reaction.

Such behavior was still so foreign to Hyungwon, but it amused him quite a bit to see their banter.

“What is a crush?” Hyungwon asked, certain that it was a slang among them.

“Oh…” Jooheon seemed to remember the time traveler wasn’t fully acquainted with that difference
vocabulary. “It’s when you like someone romantically. They are your crush, or you say you have a crush on them. Who is it, hyung?”

“Leave me aloooooooone…” The blond sank in the couch, which made Hyungwon snicker.

“Did you ever had a crush on someone, Hyungwon-ah?”

Minhyuk’s sudden question made him frown out of confusion. He never really had thought about it.

“I…”

“Yah.” Kihyun glared reprehensively at his same-age friend. “Lee Minhyuk.”

“It’s okay.” Hyungwon assured, for it was the truth. “I… never had the time to think about it. I wasn’t educated about how romantic relationships work while growing up, and then… it wasn’t a priority.”

“Don’t fret.” Minhyuk kindly smiled at him. “You have plenty of time. There’s cute guys and girls everywhere. Or no one, if you don’t feel like it.”

“I will think about it.” Hyungwon returned their kindness with a smile, but winced as he heard Wonho choking next to him once again.

“By the way…” Minhyuk propped his chin up on his hand, directing his gaze towards them. “Are you two okay now? I never felt you two so at ease with each other like that before. There’s even some…”

“We are fine.” Wonho cut it short. “I think…”

“We are.” Shifting his gaze towards the blond, Hyungwon sheepishly smiled for a moment. “We have settled our differences.”

“I hope you learned from it.” Kihyun admonished his friend tenderly. “Now back to what matters: your little crush.”

Letting out a loud huff, Wonho sank in the couch again, bringing a hand to cover his face.

“Get out of my hotel.”

“Go home, hyung.”

Wonho looked up from his teaching plans to face his best friend, after spending solid 5 minutes trying to find a position that didn’t make him want to chop half of his leg off.

“I have projects to carry on. And an article to submit to the Asian Journal of Research and Reviews.”

It would take a while for his knee to fully recover at the normal pace in how things usually did, but Wonho was at peace with it. What he couldn’t do was to sit back and do nothing while his worked only amassed, and classes were lost.
“You don’t have to be here to do most of that. Reschedule meetings and work from the hotel.”

“I can’t.” Wonho’s gaze continued on his work material, which remembered him that he needed files that were in his laptop. “I have two classes today.”

“You can’t teach!” His friend’s concern deepened, and he appreciated it… but Wonho wasn’t going to change his mind. “You shouldn’t be even walking around like that! What if your injury gets worse, huh? Do you want to be in more pain? Do you want to not walk properly for more time?”

Of course the nagging was inevitable.

“Kihyun.” The mien he encountered in his friend’s face was a tired one, and Wonho felt a bit guilty. “I’ll be fine. It’s just two classes in the same floor. Finals are coming. I can’t let them without proper instructions, you know that.”

Exasperated, Kihyun brought a hand to his face and sighed into it.

“He will be fine.”

The new voice arose in the room and took Wonho by surprise; not for its owner, but because he didn’t expect such thing to happen that day.

“Hyungwon-ah!” Kihyun tramped towards his pink-haired friend, pulling the man inside Wonho’s office by the wrist and closing the door behind them. “Hyungwon is here. End this silliness and let him heal you if you’re going to continue on being a pain in the ass.”

Even though he didn’t want it, Wonho forced himself to tear his stare away from the time traveler, or else his heart would never calm down.

“Uhm…” Wonho dismissed with a negative head shake, pretending that his papers weren’t more of a scapegoat at that point. “It’s okay. I’m fine.”

“No, you are not!”

“Kihyun.” Hyungwon’s voice was soothing and firm at the same time. It gave Wonho chills. “Don’t worry. I will accompany Wonho-ssi during his work today.”

Wonho craned his neck up towards them so fast his nape stung a bit.

“Excuse me?”

“AWESOME IDEA!” His best friend rejoiced. “Thanks, Hyungwon-ah. I will worry way less like this.”

“You don’t have to!” The blond argued, but the other men didn’t seem to take his opinion as something valuable.

“Take care, moron.” Kihyun waved at him from the entrance, after retrieving his backpack from one of the chairs in front of Wonho’s desk. “See you soon, Hyungwon-ah.”

As expected, the awkward noiseless atmosphere, that was basically their brand at that point, ensued.

“You don’t…” Great, now he was about to begin to stammer. “If you feel like…”
“I feel quite bored.” Hyungwon replied, strolling towards his work desk. “It is something I don’t experience frequently. Also, I brought you something.”

Each movement the time traveler made closer to Wonho made the man feel like he was one step away from having his throat obstructed with anxiety.

“What?”

Swiftly, the pink-haired pulled a five-centimeter metallic ring from the inner pocket of his blazer.

“It’s a stabilizer. It is supposed to make things less painful. You will be able to move better. In theory. I never used, I don’t need to.”

He chuckled for some reason, and missed the part where Hyungwon kneeled down next to him.

Everything about the way his heart thumped violently in his chest was wrong. 

Wonho didn’t stand a chance, and there was nothing he could do about it. Uselessly, the blond tried to pin-point the crucial moment in which that shift of lights happened, but his musings’ only result was to make him fall harder, consumed by a force that seemed stronger than any other thing in the entire existence.

But reality was still harsh, of course. Wonho would never be able to have him, and perhaps that was another way he found to inflict self-punishment — there was no other logical explanation, but then again… nothing he felt towards that time traveler was quite rational, so anything could be it.

Hyungwon turned his life upside down in many ways, and at first, Wonho’s reaction was one of self-preservation, and of many other reasons he didn’t know how to explain, but seemed linked to the common factor he shared with his other doubles: his initial dislike for Hyungwon. But in the end, Wonho could only speak for himself when he was sure he did outcome such petty feelings, and the reasoning was probably quite different in the thousands of universes out there.

Most importantly, Wonho didn’t think he deserve that man at all.

Hyungwon was so many levels above everybody else that it made Wonho feel like he had fallen for a god, a sacrosanct entity that would never even look at him that way, the way that Wonho had never before been so eager to be looked at. After all that time, why would Hyungwon have feelings for him, out of every other — better — human out there?

Unaware of the clutter he created in Wonho’s mind, the time traveler smiled to himself as he unfolded the metallic ring like paper, into a structure twice bigger than its original size.

Wonho’s heart skipped a beat when his big chestnut eyes shifted from the device to him.

“Do I fluster you, Wonho-ssi?”

Fuck, yes.

“No…” Wonho’s voice came out small, incapable of take his fixated gaze away. “Will it work?”

“Oh…” The time traveler laughed quietly, already preparing to settle the device on his leg. “If you’ll believe in me, I’ll believe in you.”

He had heard that sentence before, but it took Wonho a few seconds to remember.

“Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland?”
Swiping his finger over the ring, a thin line of light emerged. Hyungwon seemed pleased it worked.

“Yes.” He replied, without sparing the other man a glance. “I have been reading a lot these days. Books are my third favorite thing in this universe.”

Wonho could feel the carefulness in the pink-haired’s movements over his leg, installing the ring around the bottom of his thing, right above his knee. Even though it sparked a small twinge of pain, the blond bit his lower lip to contain a hiss.

“What’s the second one? First are stars, right?”

“No, I gave a second thought. Stars come in second. My friends are my favorite thing in this universe.”

“Oh. Makes sense.”

In the blink of an eye, Hyungwon got back on his feet.

“Try to stand up now.” The taller man requested, stretching out a hand for Wonho to grab.

With Hyungwon’s help, Wonho put most of his weight on his healthy leg and pushed himself up, gripping the edge of his desk with his free hand.

The lancinating pain he felt earlier as the weight of his body was redistributed over his lower extremities was long gone, eventually showing up in a drastic less amount when he walked around.

“It works.” Wonho declared, eyes still stuck on the metal device on his leg.

“Wonderful! Shall we go, then?”

“Wait.” Wonho’s eyes narrowed down. “Go where?”

“This is a bad idea.”

Hyungwon snickered, still focused on reading the material he prepared for that class while leaned on his desk.

“Why?” Hyungwon looked down at him, in the middle of the noise of mixed chats among the students that entered the class.

“Because…” Wonho looked down and away, picking up puzzled and amused faces from the dozens of seat rows in front of them. “They talk. A lot. I don’t want to make you uncomfortable. They are quite nosy.”

“So are you.”

“Wait, what? I am not.”

The time traveler giggled, laying his textbook down on his desk.

“Oh. They are indeed looking at me rather funny. Is it the hair?”

“I don’t think so. Maybe it’s bec——”
“OI, PROFESSOR!”

With a heavy sigh already knowing what was on the way, Wonho shifted a bit in his swivel chair to pay attention to his student’s call.

“Yes, Moon Bin-ssi?”

“It’s not even spring yet and you already brought in a flower boy?”

The entire class bursted into laughter, and Hyungwon couldn’t look more confused about that boy’s statement.

“Yah, Moon Bin-si.” Wonho directed his gaze to the eye-smiling student. “Show some respect. Hyungwon is here to assist me because I’m injured. Should I just not teach and let you all to fend for yourselves?”

Dozens of voices disagreeing with his question arose in the classroom, and the time traveler seemed to have moved on from his students’ shenanigans to cleaning the whiteboard behind him.

“Enough.” Wonho waved an arm in the crowd’s direction. “This is Hyungwon, a friend. Since I can’t move much, he will be doing the writing for me.”

“Does he even know Physics?” The student who sat beside Moon Bin asked.

“More than you for sure, Park Jinwoo-si. Should I remind you of your last exam?”

The undergrads jeered loudly once more, but Jinwoo only shrugged it off.

“Okay, okay. Finals are coming. What I want you guys to remember is…”

Sometimes, Wonho was prone to believe that his students’ attention span was the same as one from a goldfish — especially when there was something quite distractive standing beside him.

“YAH!” His shout seemed to have snapped the crowd out of it, but it also startled Hyungwon, whom peeked at him inquisitively. “Would you stop staring at him like fools? Are you here to learn or make eyes at someone?”

A few girls in the front row giggled among themselves as Hyungwon turned around to face the class, heedless of his impact on others.

“Should we start?” The pink-haired inquired.

“Yes.” Wonho pushed his chair closer to his laptop, opening the material of what he was about to teach. “Sorry for that, Hyungwon.”

The time traveler looked even more puzzled by his apology.

This is going to be a long class.

He hated to admit, but Kihyun was right. Teaching only two classes in the morning made Wonho extremely worn-out, so of course he rescheduled his meetings with students and a fellow professor with the excuse of his wound — which was partially true.

As soon as they reached his office, the blond plopped down on his chair and found it a bit weird
that his knee didn’t hurt much, but then remembered the ring was still there.

“That was fun.” Hyungwon announced, placing Wonho’s teaching material on his desk. To be fair, Wonho did say he didn’t need to carry it, but the pink-haired was unrelenting. “Humans are fun.”

With his eyes shut as he leaned his back against the leather chair, Wonho snorted.

“Please, don’t say it like that.” The small sound of the door being locked up made him open his eyes. “I told you before it makes you seem like an alien trying to impersonate one of us.”

“Whatever you say.” The time traveler shrugged, leaning on the front of the desk. “I enjoy it.”

“Good.” Wonho couldn’t help but to smile at him. “But I think I’m going to have to fire you as my assistant.”

The taller man frowned.

“What? Why?”

“You laughed when you looked at a few equations I told you to write down on the whiteboard, and asked ‘if I was sure about that’. Twice.” Wonho found it funnier than he was willing to admit, especially with a bunch of undergrads around. “But most importantly, didn’t you see how you affect my students? I have to fight for their attention. You are too handsome for that job.”

Of course, the Regret Train™ ran over him as soon as his last words left his mouth.

“Am I handsome?” Hyungwon’s inquiry was serious.

“Yeah…” It was better to look away before the blushing could start, Wonho decided.

“I have never been fired before.” His cheerful tone made it seem like it was indeed a good thing. “Or had a job. It’s new. I had fun, regardless.”

In the middle of his second stupid smile at the time traveler, Wonho’s gaze shifted to the three boxes behind the man and let out a grunt of frustration.

“I forgot…” Wonho dramatically threw his head back to crash against the leather chair. “I have to organize these books in the new shelf… Ugh…”

“Do it tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow I don’t come here.”

“Do it next week.”

“I can’t. It will bug me the entire time. I have to do it now.”

“I see…” Hyungwon quietly walked away from his desk, with his hands behind his back. “Should I show you a trick of mine, then?”

Oh boy.

“What? I mean… Don’t know how is that related to…”

Hyungwon smoothly strolled back to the door, properly locking it this time. Such thing would’ve made Wonho uncomfortable if it wasn’t that pink-haired man they were talking about.
Faster than Wonho could keep up with, Hyungwon’s eyes became shining spheres of a blueish light, that spread quickly to the visible parts of his skin, turning his veins in thin thunderbolts.

Did Wonho had a major crush on him? Yeah. Would he appreciate having the academic content in his office burned to ashes? Not really.

“Oh, no.”

“Don’t worry.” Said the man glowing in the middle of his office, and half-year earlier that would have not worked on Wonho.

But it did, mainly because he couldn’t have done anything to stop Hyungwon.

In a way Wonho had never seen before, the energy residing inside the time traveler glided around the room in long, endless strings that moved at Hyungwon’s will; small moves, up and down, and the strings swiftly came to embrace the boxes on the floor of Wonho’s office, opening them up to get a hold of the content inside of it.

A heartfelt chuckle escaped Wonho’s mouth as he watched the man maneuvering his books in the air, from a certain distance from the shelf they were supposed to be placed at.

With a childlike small jump, Hyungwon shifted forward and brought his arms up and down at a faster rate; the huge smile on his face as he made the books float around, and then settle on the shelf, was the most contagious one the blond had ever seen. The time traveler looked like he was having so much fun that it would’ve been cruelty to take that away from him.

It didn’t matter that Wonho would possibly rearrange those books later, just because he was a bit of a control freak with organizing things in a very specific manner.

The only important thing was how Hyungwon giggled after he was finished, covering his mouth with a hand while his eyes still burned bright like a supernova — and Wonho fell again, and again, and again. Every time the happiness seemed to radiate from him just like that blueish energy did, but in an invisible, much stronger form, a warm feeling grew in Wonho’s chest and he couldn’t look away from that phenomenon, nor take the dumb grin out of his own face.

Why does it have to be you?

None of his previous relationships worked, typically, because Wonho wasn’t in love with any of them. He tried to a certain extent — maybe — but to be swept off his feet like that wasn’t something he was familiar with.

Why out of every other man on Earth, he had to like one that wasn’t even from there? Someone so agonizingly unattainable, someone whom he had hurt badly already and didn’t want to walk down that same road again.

Why? Well, most likely karma.

Or because Hyungwon was the prettiest man he had ever seen, that works too.

“See?” The pink-haired gestured towards the shelf as the light from his eyes and skin faded away. “I have been practicing this with my own books, but I don’t have any shelves. I would make a few, but I like having my books next to me on the floor when I sleep. Makes me feel safe. Uh… Wonho-ssi?”

“Oh, sorry.” Of course he gaped for too long like the dumbass he was. “I zoned out for a second.
This was… something.” The sudden tilt of Hyungwon’s head made him snort again. “You looked like a fairy from a Disney movie.”

“Because of the… hair?”

“Because you were making things fly, Hyungwon.”

A rapid knock on the door startled them both, but the time traveler promptly sauntered to unlock it.

“Oh! Hello!”

Wonho recognized the voice of his sunbae straight away, but was a bit confounded on why she seemed so enthusiastic of seeing Hyungwon.

“Hello, Ma’am.” Letting go of his hold on the door, Hyungwon did a full 90° bow to the woman.

His senior pushed the door fully open and Wonho could confirm it was her, waving shortly at her from his desk.

“Oh, please. Just call me Noona. Just like Hoseokkie does, right?”

Before he could get into more details, Hyungwon let the woman make her way in, trailing behind her.

“You two know each other?” Wonho questioned.

“Briefly. I attended one of her lectures on astrophysics and was absolutely delighted. We chatted a bit after it ended.”

“I heard you are injured.” The blonde woman strolled to his desk, leaving the time traveler behind.

“Are you okay?”

Lee Jihyun was way shorter than both of them, with a long golden hair falling over her shoulders till her hips and big dark eyes. Out of everyone in that department, she had been one of the few whom had shown sympathy towards Wonho since he began to teach, and he was profoundly grateful for it.

“Yeah, yeah.” Wonho pushed his chair forward a bit to lean his elbows over his desk. “Don’t worry.”

“Okay…” She turned on her heels to face Hyungwon again. “I didn’t know you were friends with this handsome gentleman, Hoseok.”

“I was his assistant today. But he fired me.”

“Hoseok!” She seemed a bit taken aback with his behavior. “How could you fire someone so handsome?”

“Exactly because of that. He distracts my students, noona.”

“Oh, dear.” Jihyun laughed quietly, taking a seat in front of Wonho. “Anyways… I came to ask if I’ll be seeing you in the conference tomorrow night.”

“What conference?”

It’s not like Wonho had forgotten, he just preferred to pretend he did.
“Please…” With an arched eyebrow at him, she saw straight through his bullshit. “I know you don’t like these things, but at least come to the party held after the conference ends? You need to make contacts if you want to publish your works and join a team, dear. That’s how it is.”

Wonho pinched the bridge of his nose to prepare himself for the vexation of the year he was about to agree on, sighing heavily.

“I’m injured, haven’t you heard?”

Ambling from behind his sunbae to the side of his desk, Hyungwon objected to that.

“I don’t think so.”

Hyungwon swiftly squatted next to him and gently pulled the metallic ring out of his leg; Wonho didn’t feel any kind of discomfort at all, but the sudden absence after getting used to it made him feel a bit weird.

But the awkwardness was replaced by the peculiarity of the fact that he didn’t feel any ache whatsoever; one could consider strange after all those days of struggling to fulfill basic tasks, or just by trying to live with that fucked up knee.

“I guess it really works.” Hyungwon said, attracting Wonho’s attention.

“What do you mean?” He frowned at the taller man. “You said it would only lessen the pain. Oh. Damn. You lied.”

That time traveler had the audacity to shrug, blinking innocently.

“Monbebe is very hardworking. She has been complaining ever since you left because does not like unfinished work.”

“So you teamed up with her to trick me?”

Wonho gasped out of sheer disbelief, while the pink-haired chortled.

“You are too stubborn. You don’t need to experience preventable pain. It’s enough.”

Something in the way that Hyungwon’s gaze lingered on him for more than necessary, after his last words, made Wonho feel like there was some hidden meaning to it, but his brain was probably just nonsensically making stuff up.

The sonorous noise of someone clearing their throat broke through their little quarrel.

“You guys are so cute. Are you dating?”

Wonho choked on absolutely fucking nothing, like the colossal idiot he was — not without shifting around too fast in his chair and proceeding to hit his knee against his table, hissing at the brand new pain.

Once more, the time traveler just chuckled it away.

“No, Ma’am. We are friends.”

Had Wonho not committed the dumb mistake of developing a crush on Hyungwon, that statement would’ve resonated better in his heart.
Jihyun seemed convinced by the traveler’s answer, at least.

“You should come too, Hyungwon-ssi.” The woman suggested. “This way Hoseok will have company, and won’t be rolling his eyes at me every five minutes.”

“Oh…” Of course it’d unsettle the man, even though Jihyun didn’t mean it. “I don’t want to bother.”

“You won’t.” Wonho quickly affirmed, looking up at him again. “You can come… if you want.”

“Great!” His sunbae abruptly got up, and her hair flipped in the hair as she made her way out. “See you guys tomorrow night, then.”

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“Can you two stop moving for a fucking minute?”

Another strong breeze hit Minhyuk’s face in that Friday afternoon, whilst the sun began its disappearance in the sky behind Jooheon and him.

His boyfriend had the nerve of escaping his embrace to throw him under the bus.

“It’s Minhyuk hyung’s fault!”

The red-haired threw himself over the younger man even more over the grass, earning some loud whining from Jooheon and, almost certainly, some weird looks from the passersby at the park. Thank God he didn’t care about it at all.

“For Christ’s sake…” Kihyun sighed heavily, putting his camera down on his lap.

“Why do you make it seem like I’m the only clingy one?” Minhyuk laughed mid-sentence, placing a kiss on Jooheon’s neck. “You didn’t even let me get up to pee last night.”

“You didn’t say anything!” The younger protested, pushing Minhyuk sideways to fall next to him on the grass. “And I like cuddling.”

“YAH!”

Kihyun’s yell startled them a bit, bolting upright within a couple of seconds.

“I invited you two to be my models so I can practice photography, not to be disgustingly lovey-dovey in public.”

“Why didn’t you invite your boyfriend, then?” Minhyuk retorted, sticking his tongue out to his same-age friend.

“I already took pictures of him. Privately.”

The red-haired cackled when Jooheon’s face turned into a grimace.

“As Kyun would say, YIKES.”

“By the way…” His friend’s tone suddenly became lower, more serious. “How is he doing?”
A somber feeling in Minhyuk’s chest made him feel like he wasn’t trying hard enough to be there for his baby brother, but Changkyun was still someone he was trying to get to know again.

“He seems just fine.” Minhyuk was aware he sounded quite despondent though, reaching out to pull a tiny leaf off of his boyfriend’s hair. “He acts like he always does, but I don’t know if he will come to me if he really needs me. He has been spending a lot of time with Hyungwon these days, so at least I know there’s someone taking care of him.”

“It’s hard to tell, you know.” Jooheon commented, entwining their fingers together. “Changkyun is a weird kid in many ways. He doesn’t react the same way most of us do, so we can only stay close and hope we can make things easier for him if he has a hard time.”

The short silence that emerged between the three of them, regardless of the incessant chatting and running of kids around the park, was only broken by Kihyun’s phone ringing.

“What is it now?”

Sharing a knowing look, Jooheon and Minhyuk acknowledged it in unison.

“Wonho.”

“No, I can’t go to you right now.” Kihyun replied to their older friend on the phone. “Because I don’t live to satisfy your needs! I have—No, just send pictures to Minhyuk. He will—”

“What is it about?” Minhyuk questioned.

“Wait a sec.” His friend said to Wonho on the phone, gesturing for Jooheon and him to come closer. “You’re on speaker, dumbass.”

“**I’M OLDER THAN YOU! PLEASE, COME HERE!**”

“Stop screaming, we’re at the park.” Minhyuk chuckled, pulling himself even closer. “What’s today’s drama?”

“I have a party tonight! I don’t know if I’m looking nice enough!”

“Aren’t you the one who says you’re always good looking, hyung?” Jooheon inquired, leaning his head on Minhyuk’s shoulder.

“Yeah, but…”

“Ooohhh…” It finally made sense to Minhyuk. “Your little crush is gonna be there, right?”

“**NO! I mean… yeah? But… that’s… not… it? Okay, maybe… a bit…**”

“You are a pathetic man.” Kihyun rolled his eyes towards the phone. “You know that right? Also, didn’t you say Hyungwon is going with you? You can’t look better than Hyungwon in his worst clothes, so maybe just chill.”

“**Jesus Christ, Kihyun. You are a horrible friend. Forget that spot on my will, nasty hamster.**”

“Stop this drama and send me the pictures.” Minhyuk chuckled, pushing his hair up because of the strong wind.

“I’m having trouble with my hair! I can’t decide!”
Letting out a tired sigh, Kihyun finally gave in.

“Your shit better be ready when I get there or I’ll kick you out of the window.”

As they watched their friend distraughtly gather his things and leave, bidding farewell in a hurry, Minhyuk questioned himself about something on the matter.

“Who do you think it is? Wonho’s crush?”

“Hmm…” Jooheon brought his gaze up, as if he was trying to think hard about it. “Dunno. Maybe a colleague, since he’s gonna meet them at the party he’s going? What about you? Do your sensing thing.”

Minhyuk guffawed at full volume.

“It doesn’t work like that, angel. Also, Wonho became a really difficult person to read since he had that fight with Hyungwon-ah. I don’t know… something about him changed.”

“Because of Hyungwon hyung?”

“I don’t know. At least they seem to be well with each other.”

“Do you think Hyungwon knows who his crush is?”

“Eh… doubt it.”

Truth is that Wonho would be dishonest if he said he hadn’t been that nervous before.

His nerves were being tested on an almost-daily basis, particularly after he met Hyungwon — he didn’t regret the choices he made in following the time traveler, but it also didn’t make him less anxious when they faced a life or death situations. So, stating that, one might think he’s being silly by feeling so much apprehension towards a party that he wasn’t quite fond of, but any opportunity to spend some time with Hyungwon was well welcomed.

And the “building connections” thing wasn’t something he could escape forever.

Wonho was progressing as a scientist, but he knew he wasn’t going to be able to do everything on his own, especially when it came to his goal of joining a research team in the near future — but one needs to socialize a bit in that field to do so, even though it made Wonho want to die.

The grand ballroom of his university was already filled with life as he arrived there after 8:00 p.m., strategically dodging the whole conference thing. No one could tell he wasn’t trying, at least. No sign of a specific time traveler appeared, so things weren’t getting any better.

With his phone in hand as he stood at the entrance of the ballroom, Wonho thought about calling Hyungwon, but gave up immediately after chastising himself. The man didn’t even confirm twice his presence in that event; Hyungwon simply told Wonho he “would see him tomorrow” before sauntering out of his office a few minutes after his sunbae, Lee Jihyun, left.

He thought about calling Kihyun for some support, but his younger friend warned Wonho earlier, while fixing his hair for it to stay up, that he was going on a date with Shownu, and if Wonho
wasn’t actually dying, he had no excuse to call — some murder threat was involved, but he couldn’t remember well.

That was not one of the moments he was happy about his best friends dating each other.

“Good evening, Wonho-ssi.”

Wonho’s shriek surely could be heard in the entire two-story building, which happened to startle even Hyungwon himself.

“Oh my fucking God…” Wonho’s voice oscillated up and down fast for a moment as he turned around, both hands clutching his chest.

“Forgive me, Wonho-ssi…” Honest to God, when he saw Hyungwon nearly pouting, the blond almost squealed again. “I didn’t mean…”

“I know, I know.” Wonho let it go, calming his respiration. “It’s okay. You…” Wonho’s eyes then shifted down to the time traveler’s clothes and… damn. “You… look great—good. Good.”

His attire was quite simple, actually; wearing a burgundy turtleneck beneath an indigo blue vest, blazer and trousers, Hyungwon looked like his usual self, but there was more to it to someone who actually paid attention to how he usually dressed — his clothes seemed a bit more modern, more of this world.

“Thank you. Changkyun told me to try more clothing of this universe.” The pink hair in his head remained unbothered as he bowed a bit in gratitude. “I thought I would find you inside already.”

“Oh.” Wonho then remembered that that was the whole point. “Yeah…”

“Were you waiting for me?”

“No!” His dumbass behavior showed up again, making Wonho pull his hands down to cross his arms over his chest. “I mean… I didn’t know… if you were really, you know, coming…”

Hyungwon did his notorious head-tilt.

“I told you yesterday I was.”

“Yeah.” The blond snorted out of nervousness. “But people not always do what they say they’re going to. Eh… nevermind. Let’s go inside before I give up.”

“God, I fucking hate these people.”

Hyungwon adjusted himself on his seat as he stopped midway to grab another salmon canapé, turning his face to the blond Constant.

“Those people just bowed to you as they passed by us here, Wonho-ssi.”

“Yeah.” Wonho scoffed, drinking his third glass of champagne. “But that’s all fake. As soon as they leave, they start talking how pretentious I am just for having the audacity of being successful. Plus, they gave you a dirty look.”
“Is it because of the hair?”

For the first time that night, the other man laughed.

“Gonna be honest with you… probably. Lots of older scientists here, so they’re not quite cool it these things like us.”

“Us?”

“Millennials.”

“I’m not a Millennial.”

“Oh. Right. You are a… I don’t know. Kihyun told me you chose to be an honorary 93 liner, though. So yeah, you’re a Millennial too. Not the point. The point is…”

“The point is that you’re stalling, Wonho-ssi.”

The way Wonho’s eyes widened as he let out a small gasp made Hyungwon chuckle.

“You are stalling.” The time traveler persisted. “People may look down on you, but you still need to try. You are a brilliant scientist, Wonho-ssi. You need to make contacts, as your sunbae said yesterday. You can do so much for your world. Do not let these insignificant things to hinder your path.”

On that serious note, the blond nodded with a sulky expression on his face.

“I’m quite an expert in this matter, Wonho-ssi. Not everyone I had to deal so far was exactly courteous to me, particularly your doubles…”

The pink-haired laughed again at Wonho’s embarrassed mien, as the man covered his face with a hand.

“What I always had in mind is simple. Not everything is for my enjoyment. My presence, and whatever I do in those places is solemnly to improve these worlds, and consequently people’s lives. It’s the same to you. You are a Constant, a person that can, more than anyone else, leave a positive legacy to the next generations, that can lead your world towards a golden age. I can only advise till a certain point, you know that. It’s mostly up to you.”

Every word was sincere, and he hoped not only Wonho, but all the Constants took it seriously. There would never be any betterment as long as humans didn’t swallow their pride in order to build a greater future together, for no one deserved to live in a world smothered by greed and violence.


In a swift move, Hyungwon grabbed Wonho’s arm before the man could reach for the glass on the table.

“You drank enough already.”

His grip wasn’t quite strong, but Wonho twisted his arm and easily escaped his hold, choosing to gently grasp Hyungwon’s wrist.

“I’ll be fine. Will you? On your own…”

With a slight flinch, Hyungwon’s eyes wandered to the Constant’s soft hand on his wrist, as if the
time traveler was going to break if he put too much pressure. Once again, his heart pounded rather intensely in his chest, and Hyungwon didn’t comprehend either why the simple tender gesture of Wonho’s fingers sliding down to brush against his hand made his face warm up.

That wasn’t the first time it happened. Maybe Hyungwon had a subtle problem with Wonho that he didn’t know of — none of his other friends made him feel like that, so something was off.

*Should I pay attention to this?*

“Hyungwon?”

His now free arm fell to his sides as the pink-haired finished spacing out.

“Oh. Sorry. Yes, I will be alright.”

“Oh.” With a loud puff, the blond man abruptly stood up. “Okay! Time to be fucking gracious!”

“Language.”

Wonho laughed while tidied his black suit.

“Alright, alright. Pray that I don’t have a stroke in the middle of this.”

Shaking his head because the silliness, Hyungwon’s mouth curved into a smile.

“Oh.” The sudden remembrance hit Hyungwon at the right time. “Pay attention specifically to that woman.”

A small, sturdy woman with short brown hair and in her late 30s stood next to an empty table, bowing to a few that passed by her, at the opposite side of the room.

“Why?”

“She is an underrated scientist. And a good asset.”

“Oh…” The blond wiggled his eyebrows, for some reason. “Is Mr. Hyungwon giving spoilers? Are you going through a rebellious phase? Should I tell Shownu so he gives you a soothing Dad Talk?”

The last resort was to roll his eyes at Wonho, whilst the latter chuckled.

“Just go already.”

---

Wonho was quite surprised by the fact that it didn’t go as bad as he thought it would.

Sure, his pride must’ve been hurt after the countless scowls and harsh words he had to hear since he began his academic life, but he still needed that communication, that partnership so he could grow and do better as a scientist.

People still treated him with some unnecessary — and unwanted — belittlement; too young for this, too unexperienced for that… but, ultimately, Wonho knew that wasn’t too far from the truth,
no matter how much he had faith in his potential and knew his worth. There was no shame in that, of course. If something drew him to the wonders of science was the unlimited capability of learning, and maybe he did need to be a bit humbler.

In the middle of some of his productive chats, or while was his time to listen to a sunbae, sometimes his eyes instantly searched for Hyungwon around the room; in one of those moments, some older women had joined him in the table and keenly gestured towards his hair, which caused Wonho to snicker instead of paying attention to the man talking.

After almost an entire hour of having a few interesting debates with fellow scholars, Wonho mechanically bowed to people as he looked around for the time traveler, whom seemed to have disappeared from the ballroom.

Wonho was close to give up and conclude that Hyungwon had gotten bored of that whole thing when he caught a glance of pink hair, in the first floor, gently flying with the wind like the drapes dancing up and down around the balcony’s glass door.

“Hey.”

His greeting made the time traveler turn around, bangs falling all over his eyes; Wonho didn’t understand what was the appeal of that place, since the nights’ weather had become harsher every passing day.

“Hello.” His tiny smile made Wonho smile too.

“I’ve been looking for you. What are you doing here?”

“Should I have a surname?”

Wonho furrowed his brows at the sudden question, snorting a second later.

“You’ve been here in the cold thinking about that?”

“My body temperature is a bit higher than yours. But really, should I?”

With a snort, Wonho crossed his arms over his chest and took a step towards the balcony, squirming a bit as the cold night attacked his body.

“I mean, if you want to…”

“It’s just…” The pink-haired sighed, but no icy smoke from his breath appeared in the air, contrary to Wonho. “Earlier, when I was conversing with a few people, they kept asking what was my last name and… I don’t have one. I usually just say it’s just Hyungwon, but… maybe… if I’m going to stay here for a while…”

In all honesty, Wonho felt bad about the whole prohibition from leaving their universe thing, but he didn’t want Hyungwon to leave either, so…

“Well…” The blond made the mistake of drawing in a sharp breath, which hurt his lungs like a motherfucker. “You can… choose. I mean, since you never had one… pick one you like.”

“I don’t have anything in mind.”

“Well…” Wonho shifted a bit to the side to look up at the man. “You can ask the kids for suggestions, but it’s your pick.”
With a slight nod, Hyungwon turned around to lean against the balcony railing.

“How was it?” The time traveler inquired.

“It was okay.” Wonho quickly moved closer to him, even though it didn’t help with the icy breeze. “You were right. As Monbebe would say, humans do not thrive in loneliness.”

“She said that to you?”

“Yeah.”

“Was she talking about me?”

“Yeah.” After a brief pause, Wonho continued. “Get the things you feel like you want, you know. A surname, or anything else. Nothing can stop you. Just get what you want.”

“I wanted to dance.” His tone got lower, as if it was meant to be a whisper.

“What?”

“I wanted to dance.” Hyungwon repeated, a bit louder. “When I saw those couples dancing earlier, I realized I never danced like that before. Seems nice.”

“Oh…” His sudden wishes made Wonho a bit dazzled. “I can ask Jihyun noona to dance with you, if you want to…”

“Oh, no, it’s not necessary. I mean… It’s not that I wouldn’t enjoy it, I just…”

That’s the exact moment where Wonho’s brain stopped working properly.

“Do you want to dance with me?”

Another of his head-tilts made an appearance, but Hyungwon didn’t seem too dazzled by the question per se.

“There is no music.”

Pulling his phone out of the pocket of his blazer, Wonho went through a few songs on his playlist until he found one that fit the atmosphere and pressed play.

Afterwards, he put his phone on the floor at a considerable distance, so he wouldn’t end up stepping on it.

“Come on.” Wonho’s hand was hit by a gelid breeze as he extended it to the time traveler.

But Hyungwon’s hands were even colder than his own, despite the fact that the taller man didn’t seem to feel bothered by the cold night.

There was still a considerable distance between them that made things a bit awkward, though.

“Come closer.” Wonho asked, but instead of waiting for it, he slowly pulled the time traveler in his direction.

*Stars shining bright above you*

*Night breezes seem to whisper “I love you”*
“Like this.” With his free hand, the blond led Hyungwon’s arm to settle around his shoulders. “Now… Can I…”

The response was an unwavering stare, accompanied by a nod.

Wonho hoped it wasn’t quite obvious how badly his hands trembled, but at least he could blame on the weather; his arm around Hyungwon’s waist pulled the man even closer to his own body, and the intimacy of it made Wonho’s legs shudder for a second.

“Do you…” The blond cleared his throat, gathering all his strength to look so up close. “Do you know…”

“Yes.” Hyungwon’s voice came out raucous, sending shivers down Wonho’s spine. “I observed how couples danced earlier. I retained basic knowledge.”

The pink-haired nodded once again, piercing through his soul with his gaze while the wind still made his bangs whirl over his face.

Wonho nearly tripped over his own feet at his first attempt, which earned a snicker from the time traveler, but things went smooth after that.

Hyungwon didn’t offer any resistance on being led, quite the contrary; the man seemed to have adapted fast to Wonho’s slow dance style, even though it surprised him when the blond took his hand away from his waist to take a step backwards, briefly hauling his now free arm behind his back.

What even existed beyond the limits of Hyungwon’s fingers entwined with his?

Nothing that mattered.

With his body once more pressed against Hyungwon’s, whose arm returned to encircle his neck, Wonho spun them both around moving away from the balcony railing, which got a stifled giggle out of the taller man.
“You are a good dancer, Wonho-ssi.”

His voice nearly reverberated on Wonho’s face, and the latter tried not to be too sidetracked by that.

“Mom taught me. She thinks men that can’t dance properly are tools.”

_I'm longing to linger till dawn dear

Just saying this_

“May I ask you something, Wonho-ssi?”

His feet came to a halt, even though the song wasn’t still over.

“Yeah?” Craning his neck up to stare at his round eyes, Wonho never felt more vulnerable.

“Sure…”

“Why does my heart beat so fast whenever I’m close to you?”

_Gotta keep dreaming leave all worries behind you

But in your dreams, whatever they be_

Every single train of thought Wonho had in his head crashed and burned.

How the hell could he ever respond to that?

_I don’t know, Hyungwon. Maybe you feel about me the same way I feel about you?_ Of course Hyungwon didn’t, so why would he ever get his hopes up? There was no use in that, except break his heart even more, and possibly destroy their barely rebuilt relationship.

“Why…”

In a move Wonho could never have seen coming, Hyungwon’s arm on his shoulders retracted backwards until his hand reached the side of his neck, moving up until it was under his chin.

“Do you feel something?” Hyungwon nonchalantly asked, as if he hadn’t weakened the blond to the point where Wonho was close to pass out.

“Hyun… Hyungwon…”

_You gotta make me a promise, promise to me

You'll dream, dream a little of me_

“You are blushing.”

The taller man stated as if it was nothing, already moving his hand to caress Wonho’s cheeks and explore the redness.

_Oh, Jesus Christ. Just end me already._

If everything he had done to redeem himself had conspired to that moment, was the right move for Wonho to confess what he truly felt for the time traveler, regardless of the fact he was going to be rejected? Would he ever have another crucial opportunity like that?
He was asking the wrong questions, of course.

Their relationship had never been in a better state ever since they met, so how would it end up after that new information came between them? The memories of how badly he treated Hyungwon were still quite fresh in his mind, even though the pink-haired man seemed unbothered by it. Was he even worthy of the privilege of being more than friends?

Much to dwell about, especially if it was something that could affect not only them, but their friends too.

After a fleeting moment — that felt like years — of holding his breath, Wonho pulled his hands away from Hyungwon with a bit of reluctance, recognizing again the bad weather around them.

“We should…” The blond cleared his throat, avoiding Hyungwon’s burning gaze. “Go. We should… go.”

His feet quickly made their way to the door, but he remembered his phone, almost left behind.

On his way back, he peered at Hyungwon again, that now displayed a worried mien.

“Did I upset you, Wonho-ssi?”

The genuine concern in Hyungwon’s low tone made him feel like crap.

“No.” Wonho assured, feigning a half-smile. “I’m just really cold. Can we go somewhere warmer?”

Hyungwon immediately nodded, pursing his lips together into a grin.

What for many people was a nuisance, the drop of the temperature in the city made Hyungwon feel a bit more relaxed — it nearly matched how gelid his skin normally was, so one could say he felt less of an outcast during that season.

Not the case of the man strolling beside him, puffing so heavily that an icy smoke came out of his mouth.

“You didn’t have to walk with me.” Hyungwon commented, making a pause on his steps so the blond man could keep up.

“I don’t mind.”

Not what it seemed as Wonho brought his hands close to his mouth and blew air in them to warm himself up.

“You are freezing, Wonho-ssi.”

“It’s okay. We’re close to the station already. But you know…” The blond breathed heavily again, with more smoke emerging and quickly vanishing into the air. “You have a teleporing watch. Did you want me to torture me this badly?”

Hyungwon couldn’t hold back a laugh.
“Did you miss the part where I clearly said you didn’t have to accompany me?” The pink-haired raised an eyebrow at him. “I feel like walking around a lot these days.”

Another chuckle came when Wonho playfully squinted at him.

“Who the fuck wants to walk when they can teleport?”

“Language.” Hyungwon smirked at the shorter man. “And… it makes me feel I have more to explore. That I’m not…” A deep sigh was inevitable. “Trapped.”

“Is that how you feel here? Trapped…?”

“Sometimes.” The way Wonho’s gaze seemed to peek right at his soul made him feel bad about lying. “Quite a lot, lately. But it’s not like it’s a bad world to be. I have our friends, you, thousands of people I could help and thousands of places to see… They might have restricted me, and my freedom could cost a lot to other universes I could attempt to go, but that doesn’t mean I’m hopeless. I’m discovering so many things I never had the chance to before, either because my world never taught me, or for lack of time due my centuries of struggle against The Eye. I feel almost… normal. Dare I say, almost… like I belong.”

Wonho’s lips curved into a smile, and Hyungwon crossed his arms over his chest to embrace himself.

The rest of the walk was silent, only broken by their sloppy steps over the stairs of the subway station. The military had closed the other two entrances for fear of unadvised people entering that space, and Hyungwon was somewhat grateful.

It was only when the time traveler was a few steps from his time machine that he felt icy fingers wrap around his left wrist.

“Hyungwon.”

The blond Constant seemed quite troubled, for some unknown reason.

“Yes?”

“That question… that last question you made earlier.” The man’s stare shifted down and upwards again in a matter of seconds. “I want to tell you. Ah…” Wonho gulped, closing his eyes for a moment. “I—”

“HYUNG!”

Wonho pulled his hand away from him as if it was on fire, snapping his head towards the sound of the shout.

With half of his face squeezed against the glass of the vertical glass of the door, Changkyun frantically waved his arms at him, looking quite distraught.

Without thinking twice, Hyungwon ran towards the boy in the main wagon, hearing the hurried steps of the blond Constant behind him.

“HYUNG!” The boy shouted again, panting as if he had run a bit.

“Calm down, Changkyun.” The time traveler placed a hand over the boy’s shoulder. “What’s wrong?”
“Remember we were working on that interdimensional frequency disruptor to improve the security barrier to this universe?”

“Yes, Kyun. We did it this afternoon. Didn’t I tell you to go home after I left?”

The younger man dismissed his speech with a few hand waves, bouncing up and down like a hyperactive infant.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, but thing is that a weird disturbance in the 4D radar that was mapping the fabric of our reality suddenly kept going, like, bzzzzzzz, then BRRRRBBRRRBRRRBBRR, then beep beep? Kind of a sad beep? I showed Monbebe and she told me it was ‘a human matter’ and that you should deal with it, plus there has been a few small tremors in the warehouse but not like, a quake, just little vibrations, I don’t know what’s that about too, but what if—”

“Calm down, Changkyun.” Wonho composedly requested, now standing beside the Hyungwon. “Breathe while you talk. Let’s check this thing.”

“YES! PLEASE!”

They both snickered at the same time as the maknae darted inside the train again, following him anyway.

“Wow…” Wonho softly spoke, almost in an undertone, as they crossed to the tenth wagon, which was nothing but a modified warehouse where Hyungwon used to test his inventions — and currently, where he worked on improving the shielding of that world.

“Changkyun!” The time traveler raised his voice to be heard by the boy, who was already quite ahead of them in that huge space.

The maknae came to a halt next to the rectangular steel machine, similar to a full-body mirror, that they were working on, bound to the floor by thick wires.

“What’s that?” The blond Constant questioned as they approached his invention.

“People know that I am here, and most importantly, they know that this world has six Constants together. Thus, to prevent intruders, I’m working on strengthening the shield around this universe by disrupting the frequency that this world emits. That way, even with the right coordinates, no machine will be able to lock on this universe’s frequency as long as it is activated. It’s still not fully functional, though.”

“How high is the voltage to create an electromagnetic field like this?”

For some reason, Hyungwon smiled at Wonho’s curiosity.

“Higher than anything you ever seen. My machine can—”

Cutting through his speech, the thunderous sound mentioned earlier by Changkyun blared across the wagon at full volume and the youngest Constant squealed, scurrying towards Wonho and him.

“Monbebe!” Hyungwon shouted, craning his neck up. “What’s the problem?”

The flickering lights didn’t help much.

“A secondary force is pushing against the disruptor. Whatever it is, they know there’s something blocking the frequency.”
“Increase the voltage!” The pink-haired ordered, already walking towards the controls of the device, on the side of it.

“It might fry my system, Hyungwon.”

“It won’t! I boosted it last week, and the capacitors are stronger than ever.”

“Don’t be an idiot. I am the system. I know what I’m talking about. Uh oh.”

Once in a while, Hyungwon wished he that A.I. had a body just so he could smack her for being a brat.

A violent quake ensued and the time traveler’s concern diverted completely to the other men in the place; unsure of what was going on, Hyungwon shifted closer to Wonho and Changkyun and quickly lifted a force field around them all for their protection.

What did he do wrong to cause such thing? The math was 100% right, he was sure, so maybe a flaw in the composition of the device? After all, it was supposed to hold against any interdimensional interference…

Changkyun’s ear-splitting shout pierced through his ear, diverting his attention to check on the boy. He seemed alright, with Wonho keeping him standing with one arm around the boy’s, but Changkyun’s shocked expression told him there was something going on outside that energy shield.

The tremor had come to an end, Hyungwon now noticed, but the absence of that anomaly didn’t mean a return to normalcy. Especially when two new presences crouched down next to his device, that now seemed to have stabilized without the foreign influence.

As the pink-haired pulled the force field down, there were no doubts left that were two humans squatting down in front of them, with their arms wrapped around their heads.

“Please…” A frail voice came from one of the strangers, but he couldn’t tell who. “We… came in peace…”

Hyungwon couldn’t explain right away, but he simply felt that those words were true, so he took steps closer to them.

“Hyungwon! No!”

Wonho’s voice didn’t stir any reaction from him, but he beckoned for the two Constants to stay put.

“It’s alright.” The time traveler swiftly moved to stand right in front of the invaders. “We won’t harm you. Please, get up.”

Such reveal should’ve caused more impact on Hyungwon than it actually did, but at that point, Time seemed to be quite acquainted to his weaknesses, and that included a certain Constant.

Alongside a face Hyungwon had come to know because of Changkyun’s ceaseless determination to introduce him to his favorite boyband.

Bright cherry red fell over his face as one of the man lifted his head to look up at him, eyes so familiar and yet so foreign at the same time — doesn’t matter than he had seen them more than 300 times, it was always a different glint.
Behind him, Wonho expressed quite well the primary emotion regarding that situation, whilst Changkyun screamed once again, after taking a good look on whom had arrived.

“You got to be fucking kidding me.”

Curse word and all, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

this might sound a bit random but minhyuk is going to keep on having red hair until the end of this story just cuz this bitch had the audacity of saying that he hated the Beautiful era hair, one of his best looks ever. fucking fight me, minhyuk

the song hwh danced to is dream a little dream of me - ella fitzgerald & louis armstrong

astro's and qri's cameo may i get a yeehaw

anyways??????? love me some bad timing and angst, also HYUNGWON CALM DOWN

more bullying and more cameos are coming, take care kids

see ya next week, uwu
The Stephen Curry of jealousy

Chapter Summary

Study Reveals: If Those Idiots Don't Kiss Soon, I'm Going To Launch Myself Into The Fucking Sun; Read More

Chapter Notes

it's wednesday, my dudes [high-pitched shriek]
so here comes another chapter, it has been 10 already!!!!!
thank you for the comments and etc, it means a lot to me to know yall enjoying this but anyways!!!
back to what matters, the update

no wait before it, HAPPY BDAY KIHYUN i was gon post on your actual bday but you know, life. love ya, bitch <3

enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The only thing worse than a boy who hates you: a boy that loves you.”

Markus Zusak, “The Book Thief”

Of course that the things impracticable to be said at that moment were the ones eating Wonho alive.

As a scientist, the wonders of Time had always amazed and scared in their adventures so far, generally because he couldn’t fathom most of them, not even the slightest. What he couldn’t deny is how it had affected him as whole; such drastic shift of worldview had a substantial weight, and Wonho couldn’t imagine who he would be without it now.

As a man, Wonho was starting to foolishly believe Time had a personal vendetta against him.

The rubber ball collided against the plaster walls once more after incalculable times, echoing through his bedroom, and Wonho couldn’t help but to throw it even harder once it bounced back to him.

He wasn’t mad that Changkyun interrupted him in the middle of his confession. It wasn’t like the boy did it on purpose, and if something more important than him being rejected on spot was going on, the maknae did the right thing. Plus, in the heat of the moment, that seemed an excellent time to pour his feelings out, but after thinking twice, perhaps Changkyun actually did him a favor.

The problem was with the supposedly personal hate campaign Time had against him, always
sending his goddamn doppelgangers to meet Hyungwon, even when the time traveler hadn’t left their world, for a goddamn change.

“Stupid, asshat Pri—”

The door frame lit up first, leading that blueish bright light to encompass the frames around the whole bedroom, from the floor to the ceiling.

“Come in.”

The A.I. cut to the chase as soon as Wonho allowed her inside the room.

“Stop. Striking. The. Wall.”

It was kinda astounding how the flickering lights above his head managed to seem annoyed.

“Sorry…?” Wonho exhaled sharply, letting his back crash against his platform bed.

“Young human antics are already familiar to me, as much as I’d like to deny. What is disturbing you so much?”

Wonho scoffed at the thought of it.

“That guy.”

“The current male population in this world is 3,912,741,958. But they keeping being born each passing minute, so you will have to be specific.”

“My double, Monbebe. Is he still talking to Hyungwon?”

“Yes.”

“Is he being rude to him? Just tell me and I—”

“Like you were to Hyungwon in the beginning? Not really.”

She didn’t have to drag Wonho through the mud like that.

The blond quickly pushed himself up, with his elbows serving as a balance behind his back.

“I repented, okay? And you know my doubles tend to be dickheads to him.”

“Well… the Prince is being quite decent, so far.”

Prince.

Wonho understood the whole being-a-Constant thing, and how his existence, no matter in which universe, was crucial for humankind or something, but the fact that the stranger that popped up a couple of hours earlier was a fucking prince was a bit too much to handle.

“Prince…” Wonho sneered, falling back on the bed again.

“Universe 1908. The Shin clan has ruled the Kingdom of Korea for over 500 years. Prince Shin Hoseok is the first son of the current king, Shin Howon, whom has been preparing his son to take over the crown soon. Prince Hoseok’s popularity in his nation is quite high, since he’s a renowned aeronautical engineer that led Korea to become a top-tier, pioneer nation of not only time travel,
but in cutting-edge technology.”

“Then why the hell does he need help?”

“I do not know. Hyungwon is conversing with him and his associate in his personal room. I’m not allowed there without permission.”

Who does that with a complete stranger? Take someone who they just met a couple of hours ago to their own damn bedroom? Had they stayed at the control room, there’d be nothing to be said. But Hyungwon trusted too easily, and his unwavering faith in humankind always had the potential to expose him to peril.

“Argh… Whatever. Is Kyun still around?”

“Yes. He’s in the kitchen eating his second cup of ramen and playing a video game in his phone. At the same time.”

The walk towards the kitchen was quiet and rapid, quite the opposite of when the rest of his friends were on board. Wonho wondered if Hyungwon thought the same, at least sometimes; after being alone with his A.I. for so long, did the pink-haired miss the loudness of their tomfooleries when they weren’t there? Will Hyungwon keep the memory of them once they’re all lived through their standard lifespans, and the time traveler would be on his own again?

To hell with the question if they would be truly important for the fate of the civilization. Would Hyungwon remember that they existed, that they were his friends?

Will you remember me? Will you remember that I liked you?

Wonho’s steps came to a halt right next to the kitchen’s entry as he let out a sharp breath, shutting his eyes for brief seconds.

That was the problem with liking someone that will never like you: it’s fucking exhausting. Partially, because of, you know, the issue of wanting something you cannot have, but also because of the deep-rooted fear that comes every damn time you think about confessing — things will never be the same again, no matter how much wishful thinking is put into it. Was Wonho ready for that change, just when they finally got along? And how would affect their relationship with the other boys?

Why does it have to be you?

As mentioned, it’s fucking exhausting.

“Hey, Kyun.”

He waved at the maknae from the door, strolling to sit beside the boy at the table.

That finally took the boy’s attention away from his phone, slurping the last noodles down his throat — which made his speech a bit chaotic.

“Hyun-Hyung!”

“Chew first, talk later.” The blond grinned, patting Changkyun in the head.

“Okay!”

The bowl clinked quite hastily against the table as the maknae discarded it with two light knocks
on one of its edges, which quickly gulped down the round pot as if it was never there.

“Yah, Monbebe.”

Before his head could move upwards, the lights above their heads glimmered in its usual manner.

“You liked it? I’ve been upgrading the kitchen’s furniture so it can rattle Kihyun whenever he’s on his cleaning spree here.”

“That’s… sort of horrifying. What if it had swallowed Changkyun’s hand?”

The man next to him snorted.

“Kinky.”

“It is programmed to not harm anything of human composition.”

“One of these days she’s gonna kill us all, you know.” Wonho spoke to his younger friend again.

“Nah, she ain’t. She knows Hyungwon wouldn’t like it. And for some reason, she actually fears Hyungwon hyung.”

Wonho let out a chortle.

“None of you ever saw what he’s capable of, truly.”

I did. And I still like him, anyway.

Before his train of thought could divert to the time traveler’s memories now stuck inside his head, Wonho was forced to acknowledge the knocks on the kitchen’s door, even though it was wide open already.

Ah, fucking hell.

“May I come in?”

Preferably? No. But that wasn’t his place, and Wonho didn’t exactly have a motive to be a dick. Yet.

Thankfully, Changkyun was more eager than him to have such visit.

“Yes! Please!” The boy beckoned towards the chairs in front of them.

The Prince — fuck, how ridiculous it was to spout such term — and his bodyguard, or whatever that man was, stepped inside the kitchen with their hands behind their backs, perfect posture and all that shit.

His doppelganger wore what seemed to be an oxford blue military uniform cotton-made; on the fully buttoned up long-sleeved jacket, long golden stripes formed a V across his chest till its bottom. Around his waist sit a rope-like feature that was probably just there to show some kind of rank, encircled around him four times. On both extern sides of his blue trousers, a long golden stripe was settled across the garment, forming a full circle just around the hem.

The bodyguard, on the other hand, was dressed quite simply with a white military-ish uniform, also with no insignia on it, just a round red and blue pin attached to his jacket near the left side of his chest.
“Forgive me for not properly introducing ourselves.” The man sounded truly apologetic, as if there was real offense to the fact that he just barged into their world. No biggie. “I am Prince Hoseok, of the Shin family. And this is the Head of the Royal Guard, and my trusted confidant, Kang Daesung.”

At the first yell beside him, Wonho flinched.

“Come on, Kyun…” With a sigh, he turned his head to his friend. “Not again.”

“But!” The excitement on his face was so pure that Wonho felt like a jerk to shut that down. “HYUNG!”

“Ah, I was informed.” At the sound of a similar voice to his own arising in the room again, Wonho turned around. “Hyungwon told me about Daesung’s double being rather popular in this world. It took me by surprise.”

Contrary to what he thought, his younger friend’s enthusiasm didn’t lessen at all.

“Your Highness…” The boy basically threw himself over the table as the prince sat in front of them, with his guard standing right behind him. Changkyun didn’t flinch at all even when the guard’s hand unconsciously moved to whatever gun was on his holster. “Can I take a selfie with him? Pretty please? Uh? Pleaseeease. My VIP selca day is about to be iconic.”

Jesus… Only Changkyun would have the ability to be carefree about the consequences of his acts, especially in those weird situations they got involved in.

“Sorry.” Wonho mumbled, as he pulled the maknae back into his seat. “He’s a fan.”

“It’s alright.” The prince chuckled. “Hyungwon told me about Mr. Im’s… keenness.”

*Oh God, shut up.*

“Where is Hyungwon?” The blond asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

With another stupid smile on his face, the red-haired prince responded.

“He asked if it was okay for him to verify the information I’ve given him, and also his own material in this machine. I complied, of course. It was a good chance to speak to you properly. Especially you, Mr. Shin.”

“We have nothing to talk about.” Wonho was aware he sounded harsher than he intended, but it was already too late. “Were you a jerk to Hyungwon or nah?”

“Hey.” The guard spoke for the first time, lifting his head a bit so he could look down at Wonho. “He is the Crown Prince. Show respect.”

Okay, that was indeed a bit scary, but Wonho tried not let it show.

“Stop.” With one hand lifted, the prince looked over his shoulder to speak to the man in white. “I am no prince here. It’s alright. And, no…” His sudden shift to stare at Wonho was fiercer than the blond imagined. “I wasn’t rude to him. I’m aware of the reputation of our doppelgangers towards him, Mr. Shin. But I left my world to seek help, and I have an immense respect for him and all he did for the multiverse.”

In the middle of their stare competition, Changkyun cleared his throat louder than necessary.
“So, Your Highness…” The boy pulled his feet off the ground, pressing it against his chest. “Who you got there? Of us. I mean, Constants.”

“Oh.” The Prince’s face drastically shifted into a brighter one, as if he was excited to talk about that topic. “We already had a Changkyun and Jooheon, a couple of centuries ago. Now, in my time, there’s—”

The kitchen’s door was abruptly slammed against the wall that it was already too close to, after a violent smack on it.

“BITCH!”

Wonho flinched out of fright, bringing a hand to his chest as Minhyuk and Kihyun barged into the kitchen after Minhyuk’s cry, with a groggy Jooheon trailing behind them.

“WHERE?” Minhyuk shouted again as he trudged in their direction, shifting his attention to Changkyun. “VISITORS?”

“Would you stop screaming?” Wonho admonished him, gaze moving to Kihyun beside him, panting like crazy. “Did you run here? It’s 3 in the goddamn morning.”

“Kkukkung texted.”

His judging stare at the maknae didn’t pass unnoticed.

“What?” The boy inquired, shrugging. “I need emotional support.”

Before the blond could say anything, Minhyuk’s look rapidly went downwards and his eyes widened at the sight of Wonho’s royal double.

“Oh boy!” The man jolted a bit, but the Prince seemed amused by his playfulness. “It’s another Wonho! We have the same hair color! And…” As he recognized the second figure, his voice became even more high-pitched. “DAESUNG?!”

“Oh my God…” Kihyun’s mien seemed pretty similar to his same-age friend. “Min, it’s him!”

“I know, right?” The maknae chuckled, squirming in exhilaration again.

Jooheon came into his line of sight looking way more awake then he did when arrived, slowly moving to the 93 liners’ side with a confounded expression as he stared at the Prince.

“Damn… you guys are really the same.”

The nerve.

“We are not.” Wonho promptly corrected, even though his dongsaeng wasn’t completely wrong.

“Allow me to introduce myself.” His double quickly got back on his feet. “I am Shin Hoseok, Crown Prince of the Korean Empire. It’s an honor to meet you.”

As the guy did a full 90° bow, his friends turned to look at Wonho with a mocking smirk.

“He’s a PRINCE? FOR REAL?” Minhyuk jeered, and Kihyun threw his head back laughing. “You just got owned so hard.”

Who needs enemies and shit, right?
“You resemble him quite a lot.” The Prince declared, with an easy smile. “We have a Minhyuk right now in my universe. He’s my cousin.”

“REALLY?” That brought pure joy to Minhyuk’s face. “What does he do? Does he have a title? Is he cute? That’s silly. Of course he is.”

“He’s a diplomat. And a Duke.”

“Oh…” His friend gawked at him in amazement, aimlessly nodding. “He seems cool. Tell him I said hi.”

“So… Your… Highness.” Kihyun took a seat next to his doppelganger, even though the man was still standing up. “You came all the way here, so I’m going to assume things are not that great.”

The red-haired version of him shook his head in agreement, but as he opened his mouth to speak, he was interrupted again.

“Hoseok, I found…” Hyungwon’s steps came to a halt when he landed eyes on their friends. “Oh. Hello. What are you doing here? It’s late.”

*First name basis already, huh?*

“Kyun snitched.” Jooheon explained, taking a seat at the head of the table. “We got curious, so…”

“Hey, can we switch?” Gesturing between Wonho and the prince, his red-haired friend made his point. “The Prince is nicer.”

As if that dude could handle five minutes into Minhyuk’s hell-bent teasing on a daily basis. Ungrateful dongsaengs.

“Uhm, hey, Hyungwon.” The blond called for the time traveler’s attention, already walking up to him. “Can we talk?”

With his peculiar unreadable expression, Hyungwon nodded.

The chattering emerged again behind them as they left the kitchen, with the time traveler silently walking behind him, as if Hyungwon was letting the blond take the lead on where he preferred to have that chat.

As they reached the familiar setting of the main wagon, Wonho stopped and turned around to face him.

“So…” More or less impulsively, he crossed his arms over his chest again. “What does he want?”

Hyungwon’s forehead furrowed for a moment, certainly surprised with his peevish tone.

“His people can no longer stay in their Earth. They tried to reverse the effects of air pollution on their world made by the older generations, but it is already too late. Much of their galaxy is already colonized, so they’re travelling to another planet already terraformed, and he needs a stronger capacitor for his spacecraft to be functional.”

“And why the hell he came to you, specifically?”

“Because I am the one who designed it.”

Well, that wasn’t what Wonho expected to hear.
“What?”

“Around a century ago, I paid visit to a universe who was in a similar situation. I made the blueprint and taught them everything they needed to, only requesting that they passed the plans ahead across the multiverse for anyone who might need it. But different universes don’t always work the same way, so he needs me to upgrade it to their needs.”

“So…” A moment passes of letting all the info sink in, but he stayed skeptic. “You are just going to give it to him?”

The pink-haired frowned again.

“I don’t understand what you mean.”

“You met him hours ago, Hyungwon. How the hell can you be sure he means what he said?”

The growing tension between them could almost be grasped.

“I’ve checked his references, and of his universe on the multiverse database.” The time traveler spoke slowly, as if he was trying to explain himself to a kid. “Everything seems as he said.”

“Info can be adulterated, everything can be hacked. Come on… you can’t give something this important to someone you barely know.”

“And what do you expect me to do?” His reply was quick as he took a step forward. “Let those people to die in a planet that won’t be habitable for much long? I take leaps of faith, Wonho-ssi. That’s what I do.”

“And I don’t condemn it.” The blond let out a deep sigh. “All I’m saying… maybe give it some more time till—”

“Sometimes, there is no enough time. I just do what I have to do, hoping for the best.”

“Hoping for the best?” A dry chuckle escaped his mouth before Wonho could hold back. “That’s not enough. Don’t you see my point here? You can’t trust people that easily cuz they are very fucking likely to stab you in the back. Don’t you remember the last time we tried to help a double of mine?”

“That was a completely different situation, Wonho-ssi. The timeline changed because of a mistake of mine and I secured the Constants’ safety—”

“Can you do that now?” Wonho could feel his temper starting to get worse, and had to remind himself to keep it cool. “Tell me you can say with absolutely conviction that those guys’ presence here doesn’t put the kids at risk. That it doesn’t put you at risk.”

Letting out a huff, the pink-haired shifted backwards, walking in the opposite direction for a couple of steps.

“All I’ve done…” Hyungwon quietly turned around to face him again, with a stern mien. “Was to protect them. You, included.”

“I asked about you, Hyungwon. You don’t give a shit about what could happen to you, but we do. Do you know how they would feel—”

“Don’t.” His voice became gruff, and Wonho knew he had touched a difficult point. “You don’t
“Yes, I do! I saw it. I was there. I felt what you felt. The instinct to—”

“Do you want to talk about instincts?” With undeniable irritation, his voice got higher, but it wasn’t quite a shout. “My instincts are to ignore and run away every time I encounter a double of yours, including you. But I stay. I stay and I do my best to save all the hating versions of you, and their worlds. So don’t think—”

“I was gonna say the instinct to protect people.” The blond’s voice did its best to not crack, regardless of how Hyungwon’s face fell at his sentence. “You had it. Even before… you knew what you can do.”

There wasn’t awkwardness in the silent mood between them, as it frequently did. What could be almost grasped in that atmosphere, and also cut with a knife, was a crippling dismay.

“Wonho-ssi…”

“I’m not…” He let out another sharp exhale. “I’m not sorry. For caring. But do whatever you want. It’s not like… I could stop you, anyway.”

Probably due the weariness, Wonho’s legs felt rather heavy as he turned on his heels, incapable of gazing at the time traveler and pretend that his heart didn’t ache.

So he walked away, letting that deafening silence engulf into its waves the man he left behind.

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Kihyun very much believed in God, regardless of what people usually say about scientists. His faith stretched so far until the possibility of reincarnation, and perhaps that was the matter that left him wondering about the most.

Because if there were other lives after that one, he’d better be immensely compensated for dealing with morons for a whole lifetime.

“Please, Kihyun-ah?” Wonho asked for the 5th time in a row, with the palm of his hands pressed against it each other.

“No.” The younger didn’t even spare him a glance, duck taping the cardboard box in front of him. “Go there yourself and get your damn phone.”

His friend plopped down on the living room’s couch again as Kihyun finished taking all the books from the last shelf on the opposite wall, carefully placing it inside the box next to his feet.

“Kihyun…”

The older man was about to start whining again, and he wasn’t having it.

“Oh my fucking God.” Kihyun let out a loud huff, holding a book in his hand. “You do remember that you are a goddamn adult, right? That adults work things out instead of just ignoring it, right?”

A snort came from inside the room, announcing the entrance of Shownu coming from Wonho’s bedroom with another box full of their friend’s stuff.
“Nerd, please… It’s Wonho we’re talking about.”

“I’m just… too busy with this moving back into the penthouse.”

The audacity of that man of trying to bullshitting Kihyun, of all the people.

“Shut up, we did most of the work for you. After these books and your possible wish to pack your clothes, it’s done. So no, you don’t have an excuse. It’s not like it’s the first time you two fought. You’re so weird, these days.”

His best friend’s neck suddenly craned up, like a trained puppy.

“Weird? I was trying to help!”

“I meant you both.” With a sigh, Kihyun put down the book in the box and pushed his freshly dyed brown hair. “Before, when you two fought, it was usually because you’re a dumbass.”

His friend scoffed, and Shownu chortled next to him as the latter grabbed the books in higher places of the shelf.

“I mean…” Kihyun continued, peeking at how his boyfriend organized the stuff in the box. “Hyungwon doesn’t want to talk about it either, it’s weird. Like he feels guilty, or something. Kyun told me he’s locked up working non-stop ever since the Prince arrived.”

In a matter of seconds, Wonho’s expression shifted into a frankly worried one.

“What? That’s two days ago. Why?”

“I don’t know, Wonho. Maybe he is… Hey!”

Even though he had just received a half-assed explanation, Wonho was already darting across the room to grab his wallet and keys on his bed. As soon as he had it, his friend quickly put his sneakers on and hurried towards the door.

“YAH!” Kihyun shouted for his attention. “We’re still packing! Where are you going?”

Shifting sideways just so he could shamelessly wink at him, the man shrugged.

“To be an adult.”

There wasn’t enough gold in the multiverse to make it up for Kihyun to have to deal with those idiots.

“Unlock.”

The tiny, mechanic clink made by his bedroom’s door as it was automatically opened caused Wonho to flinch for a moment, for some reason. It wasn’t like he was sneaking into there — even Monbebe greeted him in her peculiar way as he made his entrance, so if anything, it was possible that Hyungwon already knew Wonho was there.

Nonetheless, the blond dashed inside the room to look for his phone as quickly as possible and
bumped his ankle on his bedside table in the process, biting his lower lip to not let out a curse word.

But without searching for long, Wonho finally found his cellphone fallen on the other side of the platform bed, on the floor.

Was that truly the reason why he had gone there? Of course not.

Part of him wanted to drag that stubborn time traveler out of whatever room he was in to take a break, even though Wonho knew he couldn’t be tamed. It didn’t matter how resistant his body was to lack of food and... well, everything humans need to survive — Hyungwon still needed to rest like everyone else.

“Do you want to talk about instincts? My instincts are to ignore and run away every time I encounter a double of yours, including you.”

Yeah. The other part of Wonho still ached a bit after hearing that, even though he probably deserved.

But in the list of things he regretted, showing that he cared about Hyungwon wasn’t one of them, even though what he felt, the way he felt, wasn’t reciprocal.

“Oh, fuck.” Wonho blurted under his breath, eyes focused on the shit ton of unread messages as he opened the door of his room to leave. “What the—”

“Hello again, Mr. Shin.”

_Goddamnit._

Whilst Wonho’s heart almost escaped through his mouth at the unexpected sight of his doppelganger standing at his doorstep, the man in front of him just frowned at the blond’s reaction.

“The fuck?” Wonho’s forehead puckered as he panted for a little.

“Forgive me.” Bowing nearly 90°, the Prince apologized. “I asked the A.I. to inform me once you came back to the train.”

_Great._

Wonho forgot for a second about that man’s presence there, and consequently how to avoid him.

“What do you want?”

At least the other version of him had some sense to notice he didn’t want to be there at all.

“Oh… Uhm… I’ve been told about your discussion with Hyungwon by…”

“The kids.”

Of course those headasses couldn’t keep their mouth shut to outsiders.

“If by that you mean the other Constants, then yes.” With his hands behind his back, the Prince paced back and forth a few times. “Look, I understood you don’t like me...”

“It’s not that I don’t like you.” He spouted, and meant every word. “I just don’t trust you. Is this your first?”
His royal double frowned.

“First what?”

“First time with a doppelganger.”

“Oh.” The man nodded, looking away. “Yes.”

“Well, not mine. Last time I saw one of ours, he nearly killed Hyungwon and I. As you must know, Hyungwon almost died a lot before because of some of them. So yeah, I’m a bit incredulous about a doppelganger that shows up uninvited to ask him for stuff.”

“I comprehend that, Mr. Shin.” His gaze shifted towards Wonho once more. “But I wouldn’t have come if I wasn’t really desperate. I know you have no reason to trust me, but I am—”

A violent burst of electricity exploded above their heads, switching the standard colorless lighting into a dark reddish tone spreading across the wagons.

“MONBEBE!” Wonho shouted, still flinching at the abrupt sparks coming out of random spots around him. “MONBEBE!”

After the longest seconds Wonho had experienced that day, the A.I.’s twinkling lights seemed almost ominous among that red lighting.

“Hyungwon. He’s in the heart of the machine. Hurry.”

Without looking back, Wonho ran down the wagons as fast as he could, ignoring how his lungs begged him to take it easy — it didn’t matter, nothing else in the goddamn universe. His body dashed through the train trusting the memories of his previous visits ingrained in his brain, not minding much what he bumped in the way.

But as soon as he came to a halt when he reached the door of the ninth wagon, his sharp inhale caused a twinge in his chest — irrelevant, just like everything that wasn’t Hyungwon.

“MONBEBE!” His shout caused an even stronger pang on his chest, and Wonho heard nothing but the sound of his own respiration and heartbeat. “OPEN THE DOOR!”

At the first slam of his hand on it, the door automatically retracted sideways, allowing his entrance.

Hyungwon’s cry of pain was a jolt of electricity running down his body, and even before he noticed, Wonho already know where to go.

In the middle of the row of counters where the time traveler kept his equipment, the pink-haired wailed loudly with half of his arm stuck between two thick bars of some device, over the middle counter; his body was swept by the mighty inner energy living inside him, overflowing his unearthly blueish energy across his skin and eyes.

“HYUNGWON!”

Regardless of the pleas of his lungs and legs, Wonho zipped towards him, but was stopped by the man himself, who held a hand up to warn him to not come closer.

“HURTS!” Sparkles flew across his skin, making him glow inside out as it seemed to engulf every part of Hyungwon, like Wonho had seen before when the time traveler tried to rummage through his mind.
Aware he couldn’t touch him in that state, the only alternative was to try to release him from that pain somehow, so he went around the counter only to jump on top of it, and get a better view of that weird machinery.

From that point of view, Wonho could see that Hyungwon’s arm was stuck till the elbow in-between the heavy-looking iron bars that had a round crack on its center, from where some type of reddish energy flowed against the time traveler’s skin, which by the way Hyungwon screamed, was surely agonizing.

The logical part of his brain was forcefully brought on to find a way to shut that down without chopping Hyungwon’s arm off; it didn’t seem like anything he had seen before, but if some sort of electrical energy was involved, it needed generator to function. But what certainty he had about things that were certainly out of his league of knowledge? So Wonho went for the essential as he spotted an electronic circuit on one of the sides of that device, not thinking twice before elbowing with all the strength he had in him.

His first attempt sent shock waves of pain through his whole body and Wonho winced bad, biting his lower lip way too strongly, but kept going two more times until the thing finally shut down with a hissing sound; within seconds, it was already long gone.

Wonho swiftly jumped off the counter and rushed towards Hyungwon, whom gasped at every attempt of drawing oxygen in.

His arm was still stuck, but now with the machine turned off, the blond mustered all as much strength as possible once more to pull the higher bar away from Hyungwon’s arm; his shout in the middle of his effort pushed him one level forward as Wonho hauled it upwards until it finally moved, ignoring how much it burned under his touch.

But the most impressive strength of mind was Hyungwon’s, who still had the willpower to pull his arm away as soon as he physically could, tumbling backwards and falling on the floor; at the same rate that blood now poured out of his wound, his inner energy faded away.

The skin of Wonho’s hands felt like it was ripped apart and thrown salt at, but he found himself not giving a shit about it. There would be a time to let the pain sink in, and that was not it.

“HYUNGWON!” The blond plopped down next to him, hurriedly taking his trench coat off and wrapping it around the injury in Hyungwon’s arm. “TALK TO ME! Please…”

It wasn’t needed. The singular look that he fixated on Wonho, full of agony and helplessness, spoke louder than screams.

“It’s gonna be okay.” Wonho tried his best to delicately wrap Hyungwon’s arm with his coat to stop the bleeding, paying no attention to how badly his hands trembled and hurt. “You will be okay.”

Choking back on tears, the time traveler whimpered, but still tried to voice something.

“Won—”

The crack in his voice was simply a warning of his big eyes flooding with tears that turned into a full loud sob, sliding his head into Wonho’s neck.

It fully broke his fucking heart.

“I’m gonna take you out of here, okay? Come on.”
With all the carefulness he had in him, Wonho slowly moved the pink-haired’s wounded arm to the man’s lap and wrapped his arm around Hyungwon’s waist, wrapping the other around his legs so he could pick Hyungwon up.

The time traveler let out a guttural grunt after being moved, soaking Wonho’s shirt with his tears. The ache in Wonho’s body was nothing compared to how much his heart hurt to see Hyungwon like that, so he kept going.

Once they made it out of there, the lighting system of the train was already back to normal; out of his mind during that entire situation, Wonho had forgotten he was in the presence of the Prince before that mess happened, but soon enough spotted the man waiting for him outside the ninth wagon, now accompanied by his guard in white.

“Is he okay?” The man asked, sounding genuinely worried.

Wonho didn’t have time to explain the accident, the injury or how the whole thing was making Hyungwon bawl his eyes out and wriggle out of pain in his arms, so he ignored the question with his conscience warning him to make it up for the guy later.

The door to the med bay was mechanically opened by the train’s A.I., so Wonho already knew who to seek help.

“MONBEBE!” In the middle of his shout, he shifted the man a bit in his arms, causing Hyungwon to let out a wail. “TELL ME WHAT TO DO!”

“Put him in the hyperbaric chamber. The injury is deep.”

“No.” Hyungwon whispered, turning his head to Wonho. “I don’t—”

“I know.” The blond nodded, already strolling towards the chamber. “But you’re not trapped. Okay? You need treatment. I’ll be here, okay?”

It was tough to have to put Hyungwon in a place like that, but the circumstances asked for urgency. As soon as Monbebe lifted the lid of the hyperbaric chamber, Wonho carefully lowered him down inside of it, still hearing his sobbing.

“Hang in there.” Tears streamed down the sides of Hyungwon’s face as he looked up at Wonho.

It was impossible to not inflict pain as he leisurely unwrapped his black coat so the time traveler could get treated, and if he was going to be honest, it was Wonho’s favorite view to see an actual hole in Hyungwon’s arm, almost piercing through the other end of his skin.

The second he turned around to toss the coat away, cold fingers wrapped around his left wrist.

Glistening with tears, Hyungwon’s eyes never seemed so desperate.

“I’ll stay right here. It will be okay.”

So, with all the willpower he could muster, Wonho pulled the man’s hand away, settling it inside the chamber.

As soon as the lid was closed off, Hyungwon was tied to the chamber’s bed by the wrists and ankles by the chamber’s system — something the pink-haired was clearly not a fan of. From the thin metal bar in the middle of the lid, a robotic arm spread itself till it was fully functional, smoothly gliding around that glass surface to scan Hyungwon’s body, coming to a halt once it
spotted the wound.

“Don’t punch the lid, Hyungwon.” Monbebe advised, as the engine inside the chamber began its work. “I’ll fog the hyperbaric chamber now to apply the anesthesia.”

“No!” Wonho jolted forward, almost tripping over the chamber as if he had the power to do something to protect the man inside of it. “DON’T! He will panic and make things worse. Do it intravenous.”

“He is terrified of needles.”

“Yeah, but that’s better than to feel fucking suffocated! Do it!”

One of the extremities of the arm switched its end into huge ass needle, and the frightened look on Hyungwon’s face as the time traveler began to squirm to break free from those ties told Wonho that he wasn’t taking that well.

“HYUNGWON!” Curving his body over the glass of the chamber, the blond incessantly knocked on the lid until he got the man’s attention. He couldn’t hear a damn thing from the time traveler, so he imagined Hyungwon couldn’t hear him too. “CALM. DOWN. UNDERSTAND?”

Shouting was useless, but gave Wonho a sense of accomplishment.

Amidst his fervent panting, Hyungwon nodded, though.

“LOOK AT ME. STAY CALM.” At the traveler’s second nod, the needle methodically pierced through Hyungwon’s skin and all Wonho could watch was a muffled scream.

Hyungwon arched his back forward with the injection, closing his eyes as he probably let out another cry of pain; a couple of seconds was all it took for the man to be knocked out by the anesthesia, with one last tear rolling down his left cheek.

Within the multitude of things Wonho was interested, medical procedures weren’t one so he didn’t want to look at it, but he did drag a chair fairly close to the hyperbaric chamber to keep his promise of staying by his side.

Now, in the med bay, nothing but the tiny mechanic sounds produced by the chamber could be heard. Wonho let out a breath he didn’t know for how long he was holding, trying not to cry as he buried his face on his hands — without the remembrance, of course, of the burning bruises on them.

The peeled skin made his hands all red and itchy, and something on the elbow the used to hit the machine stung severely, but Wonho didn’t have energy or will to care about it. All in all, he’d be alright after putting some ointment, or whatever.

What got his mind’s attention was the smudges of blood on his hand and on his shirt.

Why didn’t that giant pink-haired idiot care more about his own well-being? How many fucking times had Hyungwon bled like that before, before them, in his lonely centuries? Had he detached himself from self-care so intensely that he couldn’t understand how tough is to others to see him like that?

“Monbebe.”

“Yes?”
“How long this is gonna take?”

“Around 40 minutes.”

Patterns of light overlapped incessantly in Hyungwon’s mind like waves, trying to trick him into believing it was nothing but a dream.

But he didn’t dream. At least not how normal humans claimed they did, with multiple short stories that usually didn’t make sense, fading away at the same pace as the awakening forced them to open their eyes. Past, present and future merged themselves together into messages with too many layers for Hyungwon’s brain to pick up it all and distinguish its origins — eventually, he simply stopped paying attention to it.

The void where he rested didn’t actually exist, but was now quickly decorated by tiny, green sparkling dots that took over the entire inexistent place, pushing Hyungwon towards uncharted territories; all became nothing but a green cloud drenched in a ringing sound that got closer each passing second, smothering the time traveler into letting his survival instincts kick in so he could break free.

His first impulse of getting up as soon as possible was hindered by the fact that his left arm was chained up to the metal surface where he lied down; with a quick look around, Hyungwon confirmed he was in his med bay, in one of the hyperbaric chambers with its cover completely open.

“Monbebe.”

The memories of how badly he had cried and screamed were displayed in how hoarse his voice came out.

“Monbebe.” The time traveler tried again, after clearing his throat. “Release me. How long have I been out?”

Moving at a fast speed, the flickering lights above his head remembered him of his weird experience while unconscious.

The ties around three difference parts of his arms were all removed at the same time, allowing Hyungwon to lift his bandaged arm with carefulness.

“An hour. You got lucky.” His A.I. informed, but the ache on his forearm told another story as he sat upright. “If your arm was drilled a couple of centimeters more, you would have lost half of it. But you’re recovering well. I fixed it in time, thanks to Wonho who brought you here quickly.”

A flood of memories of what had happened took Hyungwon’s breath away, from the excruciating burning sensation of his arm stuck in that device to how much he cried and shouted as he was helplessly locked into that chamber.

“Where—”

The door of the med bay swung open before he could finish it, making Hyungwon jump to his feet, with a hold secure on his injured arm.
Wonho’s steps came to a halt briefly as he spotted the time traveler standing up next to the chamber, carrying a tray with two bowls and a glass of water on it.

“Sit down.” The man continued his stroll in his direction, gesturing towards the common bed a meter away.

Hyungwon did as he was asked, feeling something clouding his chest to the point it felt truly heavy. Without sparing him a glance, the blond Constant handed him the tray and moved towards the chamber’s side to retrieve a metallic chair.

“Monbebe told me.” Wonho mumbled once he settled the chair next to the pink-haired’s bed, still not looking at him. “That you didn’t eat in days. It’s just chicken dumplings and rice, but it’s something.”

Maybe it was the fact that Hyungwon hadn’t eaten in two days, but the smell of the food never seemed more attractive.

“Thank you.” Hyungwon’s voice sounded too feeble, so he tried again. “Thank you, Wonho-ssi. For…”

“Eat, okay?” As his gaze finally moved towards the time traveler, the latter noticed how tired Wonho sounded.

His response was a simple nod, lowering his head to grab a bite of the food. Once his eyes wandered to the other man again, Wonho leisurely rubbed his eyes with one hand, whilst the other massaged his own neck.

“Are you hurt?” Hyungwon’s eyes widened as he saw Wonho’s bandaged hands, letting the chopsticks fall on the tray.

“I’m fine.” With a long sigh, he looked up at him once more.

As his body straightened up on the chair, Hyungwon now noticed the trails of blood on Wonho’s green tee and couldn’t help but to fixate his look on it for a while.

“I’m fine.” Wonho caught his stare, glancing down at himself. “It’s yours.”

“I’m sorry.” Hyungwon said, in an undertone.

He didn’t know what he was apologizing for, but liked to believed it was for all the harsh words said ever since their discussion, a couple of days before.

“It’s fine.”

“No, it isn’t.” Pulling the tray aside, Hyungwon brought his arm to his lap when he shifted sideways, legs dangling off the edge of the bed. “You are mad at me.”

“You could’ve died, Hyungwon.” The reply was quick, but had no anger in it. “You nearly fried Monbebe’s system. What are you trying to accomplish here?”

“It’s not like that.” The regret was a bitter taste in his mouth, regardless of the tastiness of the food. “I just… I just…”

Ever since the night they fought, strange feelings Hyungwon couldn’t quite comprehend insisted in making their way to his chest, and the time traveler couldn’t have that, not when so much was at
risk to people he was supposed to help. But every time he tried to focus on building the gadget for the Prince’s world, flashes of Wonho’s despondent face after Hyungwon told those things to him made him too frustrated; the only way to shut it down was to close himself completely from the outside world until the job was done, but that clearly wasn’t the best idea.

“I’m not gonna nag you anymore.” The abrupt sound of the metallic chair being hauled backwards made Hyungwon wince, with Wonho now standing on his feet. “I called Kihyun to take a look on what you built, cuz these things are more of his area. He’s there with the Prince, so… you can rest. And accept their help.”

Rubbing his face one more time, Wonho began to amble towards the exit.

“Wonho-ssi…”

The Constant’s steps stopped at the sound of his calling; all he did was look over his shoulder, though.

“See ya.”

__________________________

“MR. SHIN! MR. SHIN!”

*Jesus fucking Christ.*

His royal doppelganger caught his attention with his shouts as Wonho was about to leave the train, in need of a few drinks and a nap.

Without much else to do, he sighed and turned around in front of the exit, now watching the Prince jogging in that graceful manner of his.

“What?”

The guy’s hair didn’t even move a centimeter as he moved around. What a prick.

“Hello.” The man panted a bit, as if he was faking it for the sake of cordiality to the peasants. “May we have a word?”

“I just gave you one.” Reading the stubbornness clearly on a face similar to his own, Wonho rolled his eyes. “Go on.”

“I don’t know if we are going to meet again, so I’d like to say that you are a remarkable man, Mr. Shin.”

Wonho didn’t understand the guy’s point, but whatever.

“So?”

“And I’d like to share that I understand, now.”

“Understand what?”

“Your behavior towards me, concerning Hyungwon. You like him, don’t you?”
Oh, God. Was that so fucking explicit? None of his friends had picked it up yet, despite their endless teasing about his so-called crush. And yet…

“What?” Wonho’s voice came out a bit higher than he intended. “I don’t.”

“Please.” His double chuckled, bringing his hands behind his back. “You can’t lie to someone who has the same face as you. Been there, done that.”

The guy had a point, more or less. When met with Wonho’s silence, he kept talking.

“Personally, I’ve never been in love, but I’ve seen that look on people’s face before. When the A.I. simply mentioned Hyungwon, you didn’t hesitate for a second. Without questioning the consequences, you cared about him above everything.”

Was that Time’s way to call Wonho a coward for not confessing? Or was that a brand new way of torture?

“Don’t…” The blond sighed, bringing a hand to his face. “Don’t tell him.”

“Of course.” The Prince slightly bowed his head, as if it was a promise. “Don’t get me wrong, I admire him as a multiverse hero, but I don’t see him in any other way.”

“Told you, Mr. Prince. I just have bad experiences with people like… us. I’m just trying to protect my own.”

Out of nowhere, the red-haired laughed.

“You know that the correct term is Your Highness, right?”

Turning on his heels again, Wonho scoffed in-between a smirk.

“In your dreams, prince boy.”

Kihyun usually didn’t do birthday parties. They were stressful and his apartment ended up a mess of alcohol bottles and scattered food all over the place, which was absolutely not his favorite thing to wake up to.

But the thing is that Kihyun was happy, like he had never been before. Regardless of the insane situations he was put into because of the fact he was friends with a time traveler, never before his life had been in a better state. His doctorate was going considerably well, his friends were all well and healthy and he had a freaking boyfriend. I mean, what more could he ever want?

To said boyfriend to show up at his apartment, since the man has been MIA all day.

“Kihyun-ah.” Minhyuk called for him from where he sat on the couch of Kihyun’s living room, with Jooheon’s head on his lap. “You’re gonna open a hole on your carpet if you keep pacing around like that.”

“Fuck off, Minhyuk.”

“YAH.” Coming from the kitchen, Wonho’s yell would’ve been louder if there wasn’t some indie
music playing in the background. “You get mean when you’re frustrated. Shownu will come soon. He wouldn’t miss your goddamn birthday.”

He wouldn’t, right?

Ever since they celebrated Minhyuk’s birthday, the boys kept talking on how Kihyun should throw a party and, in the end, he gave in; only with those he considered his closest friends and colleagues, just so Kihyun could keep his privacy and still be around those he cared about — to be himself, unapologetically, was the essential shift in his lifestyle, and how he became a happier person.

“By the way…” His same-age spoke again as Kihyun shifted closer to their couch, and Wonho plopped down next to the couple. “Is Hyungwon-ah coming? He said he would.”

“Don’t know.” Kihyun sighed, nearly rubbing his face until he remembered he had make up on. “This is the last day I thought I’d be so stressed.”

“WASSUP, HYUNGS!”

The door suddenly bursted open, and Kihyun’s soul nearly left his body before he broke into laughter at Changkyun standing by the threshold, with a box so big they almost couldn’t see his face.

“It’s your gift!” The boy smiled widely, to the point his dimples showed up. “A surprise. A gift. Big one. Fine, it’s a vacuum cleaner. The best they got.”

Everyone in the apartment giggled at Changkyun’s antics, something that almost distracted Kihyun from the vibration of his phone in the back pocket of his leather pants.

He let Minhyuk dress him that party, with a simple white tank top and an unbuttoned long sleeve black shirt, alongside those not so comfortable pants — it made him look good, though, so who cares just for that night.

<Shownu hyung is calling...>

“WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU?”

“Hey, nerd.” The man had the audacity to reply in the most soothing voice on Earth. “I’m close.”

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN?” Kihyun made a pause, not wanting to lose his cool, and walked away for some privacy. His feet stopped once he had reached the balcony, closing the glass door behind him. “Shownu… are you coming? Tell me the truth.”

His boyfriend chuckled, and he had to take a deep breath again.

“‘Excuse me? This is an awful pick up line.’ That’s the first thing you told me when we first met, remember?”

He didn’t know why, but Kihyun’s heart raced at the sound of that.

“Baby, what’s going on? Please, tell me so I can—”

“I told you I had seen you before.” Shownu’s voice remained unwavering, so he didn’t know what to make of it. “But that was before knowing all the stuff that had happened between you and Jooheon. I don’t want that to be the first time.”

“Hyung…” Kihyun quivered with the harsh night breeze, so he crouched down and hugged his
legs with his free arm. “Please. Come here. Whatever it is…”

“Why did you squat? Are you cold?”

“What?” His entire body jolted forward, and Kihyun unconsciously looked around. “How do you —”

“Look down, sulky shark.”

Kihyun nearly bent half of his body over the railing, finally spotting his boyfriend on the other side of the street, leaning on the wall of another building.

“Is that… you?” He squinted once again in the dark. “The hell?”

“Will you listen to me? Please.”

“Oh God, you’re going to dump me on my fucking birthday. I knew it.”

“Yoo Kihyun.” His low tone reverberated deep into the younger’s skin. “I love every side of you, even this easily rattled one. I’m trying to be romantic here. Will you let me?”

The birthday boy chuckled at himself after he nodded, as if his boyfriend could ever pick that up in such obscure ambience.

“I thought about what I should gift you for a long time. I mean, you don’t really lack anything and all my ideas seemed too impersonal, without showing any effort.”

“I told you that you didn’t—”

“I’m not done. So…” Still in that faraway spot, Shownu now moved a bit into the field of the street lights, allowing Kihyun to see his miniature version better. “A month ago, I had an idea, so I asked Hyungwon for help. But I don’t think it’s enough. So, for the next minute, I’m going to tell you what’s on my head, then your present comes right after. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Yoo Kihyun. Kihyun-ah. My nerd. I think the world of you. You are so smart and kind, even though you get stressed so easily. And I’m me. I love art and exercising, and you can’t distinguish an abstract painting from a kid’s drawing. Not to mention that you’d rather die than jog in the morning.”

The younger’s snort came out too loud, and he could see his breath turning into an icy smoke in the air.

“You’re a scientist, I’m a psychic. You’re more sensitive, while I have some trouble with showing emotions. We are really different, aren’t we? But we work so well. We try to fill where the other lacks the best way we can. I never thought I’d be so glad to have followed a lead that I saw in a dream, because it led me to you, just so I could look at your nerdy face and fall in love.”

His boyfriend went silent for a few seconds, and Kihyun was trying his best to not cry and ruin his make-up.

A gasp escaped his mouth as the area of the building where Shownu previously leaned on lit up like a movie screen, but instead just a single image was projected on the entire concrete surface, from the top to the bottom.
Kihyun didn’t know what was that about at first, but his boyfriend elucidated him quickly.

“That’s the first time I saw you, at the subway station.”

“Oh, shit.”

He now recognized Shownu’s painting style, with dozens of colors concentrated at the center of the artwork, while its surroundings seemed to suck in the light like a black hole. It was Kihyun, from his boyfriend’s point of view at that subway platform, standing sideways with the same puzzled look he gave Shownu when they first met.

But Kihyun shined in the painting; his skin was made of gold and his silvery hair was full of stars, amidst the most common details, like his old glasses, and the stupid shirt he hadn’t change in a day because he was too busy with solving the equation.

He wasn’t done admiring the projection when the giant image suddenly began to move, wandering upwards towards the sky like a ghost.

“What the fuck!” He yelled, forgetting he was still on the phone with his boyfriend.

His painted-self walked around the sky directly above his building the same way he did that fateful day, mouthing words that Kihyun didn’t remember what they were, but were still in Shownu’s memory.

Less than a year ago felt more like an eon, for he had grown so much as a person, all thanks to his boldness of taking that leap, even though he was uncertain of himself.

Gradually, it faded away to give place to its currently starless sky, as snow slowly started to fall over them.

“The actual painting is already in your room, under your bed.” Shownu softly chuckled again. “I love you, Yoo Kihyun. Whatever this universe, multiverse, is made of, I’m glad it all came together to bring you into this world, this one where I am also at. Thank you for being with me. Happy birthday.”

Choking back a sob, the birthday boy had to raise his head a bit to not let tears fall off.

“Shut up and come here right fucking now.”

Once he turned around, he saw the entire party peeking through the windows and the glass doors of the balcony.

He wanted to pour his heart out in the ugliest way possible, but there’d be a time and a place for that, now when he had just been acknowledged by the universe that he had the best boyfriend in the world.

As he turned around to leave the balcony, Kihyun was taken aback by the small crowd gathered at the windows and balcony’s glass door. How the hell would he explain that to people that didn’t know who Hyungwon was and what that man could do? A problem to his future self to solve, not the current self that only wanted to see his boyfriend.

“DID YOU SEE THAT?” Kim Jiyeon, one of his kindest colleagues at PhD program, seemed baffled.

“WOW, SHOWNU HYUUUUUUUUUUUUNG!” Jooheon yelled, with his hands cupped around
his mouth. “THAT’S ROMANCE, BABY!”

With a few chuckles, Kihyun made his way through the people that looked outside for another sign of that spectacle.

Perfect timing had a knock on his door emerge as soon as he typed the code to unlock it.

Shownu stood there with his ridiculously loving smile, brushing snowflakes off of his hair, with Hyungwon standing right behind him.

“I saw you before.” The older said, copying the first sentence he ever said to him.

“That is an awful pick up line.”

His boyfriend cackled, swiftly wrapping his arms around him and lifting him off the ground; out of habit, Kihyun wrapped his legs around Shownu’s torso, hugging him tight.

“Happy birthday, nerd.” Shownu spoke in his usual sotto voce, just for him to hear. “You look so pretty.”

That was just… too much.

A jeer of applauses and whistles blared through the living room as he pulled the older into a kiss, giggling as soon as he felt Shownu smile against his mouth.

All was well. All was happiness.

Out of all weeks he had in that universe, that one surely was at least in the top 3 of the busiest ones Hyungwon had ever had.

If he had to admit something, finishing the capacitor was considerably quicker with Kihyun and Hoseok’s help. Regardless of building most of it during those solitary couple of days, caution and more hands were seriously needed, and the time traveler was grateful for that. He sent off the Prince well with nothing but his best wishes — regardless of Changkyun’s whining even after the boy managed to take pictures with Wonho’s double and his guard — and deep down a small hope that the Prince was another proof that not all of Wonho’s doppelgangers were fated to hate him.

Next, Hyungwon had to practice on how to keep the projection for enough time on the building’s wall, then make it glide in the sky while synchronizing it with the collected memories of the first time Shownu saw his boyfriend, so it could be his perfect birthday gift to Kihyun; that wasn’t quite easy when he was a bit worn-out, but his friends’ happiness was more important than his fatigue.

But what he couldn’t help but to think the most was the day of the accident, when Wonho saved him from nearly having his arm chopped off. There was a sadness in his gaze that made Hyungwon’s eyes water every time he revived that day; how the man let him cry on him, his solid promises of staying by his side, the calming presence that he had become when the time traveler was panicking about being injected with something.

Whether he wanted or not, Wonho understood. There was still no explanation to the phenomenon of their shared memories, but just as much as Hyungwon was Wonho in those long seconds,
Wonho was also him in the same amount of time it lasted for the Constant. Their connection was beyond incomprehensible, but it was there. It was there and they couldn’t deny how intimate that experience was, which was possibly the reason why it scared Hyungwon so much.

Moments after he teleported him and Shownu to Kihyun’s building, his friends dragged him around the apartment as an energetic song played in the background; he was glad for it, though. The boys took him exactly to the kitchen while Hyungwon’s stomach howled from how hungry he was. Minhyuk and Jooheon cackled after hearing the sound it made, feeding the time traveler with all the food they could get their hands on.

After he came back to the living room, now filled with chatter and laughter and the unmistakable scent of alcohol swamping the entire atmosphere, Hyungwon decided to look for Wonho, but the man was nowhere to be seen.

“Hey, Kyun.” The pink-haired approached his youngest friend, whom was sitting in a circle on the floor with other people around his age. “Have you seen Wonho-ssi?”

“Oh, my.” He chuckled at someone’s joke before raising his head to face Hyungwon. “Hey hyung, yeah, yeah, he just left.”

Closing the front door behind him, all he could hear was the cheerful muffled sounds coming from Kihyun’s apartment while trying to decide what was the best route to try to find the blond Constant.

In the poorly illuminated hallway, his eyes swiftly lit up in its usual glow as Hyungwon concentrated on a memory of Wonho to get a glimpse of where the man could be.

Was that cheating? Maybe. But what was the use of it if he couldn’t use it for personal, harmless issues once in a while?

Time seemed to agree with Hyungwon, allowing him to see the blond Constant plodding down a staircase.

It wasn’t hard to find him after that, but what almost caused Hyungwon to shriek was how Wonho nearly fell off the stairs of the fifth floor, saved by the time traveler’s force field in front of him to stop his collapse.

With one arm extended in front of his body to protect the Constant, Hyungwon slowly brought his other hand to his chest, feeling his heart pounding like crazy.

“YAH!” Wonho sloppily hit his arm against the force field. “TAKE IT DOWN!”

He did as the man requested, but quickly maneuvered his wristwatch and teleported himself down the stairs, beside the blond Constant.

“YAH!” The man yelled again, and Hyungwon’s senses immediately were invaded by the scent of alcohol; Wonho reeked of it. “CCTV, you know?”

“Who cares.” Hyungwon shrugged. “What are they going to do? Accuse me of time travel?”

“What do you want?”

The pink-haired blinked a couple of times to pretend he wasn’t hurt by that harsh tone.

“It’s… Why did you drink so much?”
Wonho laughed, placing a hand on the wall for balance as he crouched down to sit on the last step of the stairs.

“Doesn’t matter. I’m okay, you can go.”

“But I came looking for you.” Hyungwon replied, and Wonho’s eyes suddenly shifted to him, glinting in that poor lighting.

“What about your instincts, huh? To run away when you meet me?” A dry chortle let out his mouth, and he hiccupped. “You called me friend… bullshit.”

“It’s not like that.” Hyungwon tried to explain himself, squatting to sit beside him. “I just had so many bad encounters with your doubles before that… it was natural to me. To be apprehensive when dealing with them. Even us… we had our disagreements, but… you always helped me in my hours of need, more than any other person that I’ve met in my lifetime. It is strange.”

“Was?” His voice came out more husky, and Wonho didn’t avoid eye contact. Quite the contrary. “Was natural… to you?”

“I can’t explain our connection.” The pink-haired clarified. “But I am sorry if I said hurtful words when you got under my skin. I thought you were going to talk about that day…”

“No…” Wonho frowned, shaking his head to deny it. “Of course not. I’d never… I know that it hurt you the most. I don’t judge you. Know that. Most people couldn’t even… handle for too long.”

Before Hyungwon’s eyes could see its trajectory, Wonho’s hand moved rapidly towards his head, placing it under his chin.

“Can I…?” The blond’s hand quivered as he made the question.

“Yes.”

A jolt of electricity ran down Hyungwon’s spine as soon as Wonho’s fingers brushed against his scar, behind his ear.

But he was more surprised by the fact that the man advanced on him out of nowhere, engulfing him into a hug.

He wasn’t prepared for that kind of circumstance, for it never had crossed his mind. His shock was clear, with his arms awkwardly hovering on his sides — should wrap his arms around the man? Never before he had been hugged by a double of his, but at that point Hyungwon had to give in to the fact that Wonho was many of his firsts; a singularity among the others that seemed to pull the time traveler into his gravitational field — to fight against had been proven useless, so he completed the embrace.

“You are incredibly soft for a man made of muscles.”

Wonho snorted, throwing his head back to laugh as he pulled away.

“And you feel small for someone so tall.”

Hyungwon nodded at it, sheepishly smiling at him.

“Do you want to leave now?”
Such closeness with the blond Constant made him discern even more how bad was the odor of alcohol, but Hyungwon didn’t care much about it.

“Ugh…” Like a child, Wonho threw his head back again and hit his feet against the floor. “Please.”

That spot was recorded in his wristwatch’s records, as he had been there before to talk about the events in the library, so it didn’t take too long until they were promptly inside Wonho’s hotel room.

The odd thing was that there were cardboard boxes everywhere.

“Are you moving out?” Hyungwon asked, watching the man trudge towards the nearest couch in his living room.

“In. Moving in.” The response came out quite muffled as Wonho was face down on the cushion. “Back to the penthouse. Renovation is done.”

“Oh…” Hyungwon nodded, even though the man couldn’t see him. “Do you want some water, Wonho-ssi?”

“NO!” He suddenly jumped off of it, bumping into some boxes on his way back to where Hyungwon stood, a couple of steps from the couch. “I want you… to stop with that fucking honorific. You even talked casually to THAT guy!”

“Oh. The Prince?”

“Yeah! He spent just DAYS here and you JUST… yeah!”

From the unexpected, a giggle came out of Hyungwon’s mouth.

“I’m sorry.” The time traveler did his best to contain the snort that came after that with his hand over his mouth. “But to be fair, he told me to drop the formalities. You never did.”

“What?”

“Yes.” He laughed again at Wonho’s furrowed brows. “All our friends said it was okay for me to speak casually. You didn’t say anything since I started using Korean honorifics from this world.”

“Well, fuck it.” The blond shrugged quickly, pulling Hyungwon by the wrist to join him in the couch. “Call me by my name.”

So he complied.

“Shin Hoseok.”

“YAH.”

Hyungwon didn’t bother trying to suppress his laughter, letting his head fall back on the couch. As the laughter died down, he leisurely moved his head sideways, only to find the flustered Constant looking away.

“Wonho.” His voice came out lower than he planned, so he wasn’t sure if the man heard and tried again. “Wonho.”
Even in the dimness of that room, Hyungwon could observe the way Wonho gulped while his gaze wandered back to the time traveler.

“Hyungwon.” The sudden call of his name in such harmless tone made him shiver. “Can I ask something stupid? I am really…” He slowly blinked, and Hyungwon’s heart raced in the odd way it did lately. “Really drunk. So I don’t care now.”

“What is it?”

“Hmm… can you lie down with me? I’m so sleepy.”

That time, Hyungwon was sure that his heart skipped a beat.

Motive for it, was still fully unclear to him. Perhaps was the effects of that strange connection they shared, mixing up what he felt around Wonho.

“Sure…”

The couch was quite big, but they were both large in their own ways, so there wasn’t much space left between them while they lied on their sides.

It was surprisingly comfortable, though.

“Ah…” The blond sighed loudly, sounding quite pleased. His breath was hot on Hyungwon’s face.

“Stop exhaling so much.” Hyungwon chuckled, stretching his legs till it hit one of the couch’s arms. “Your breath is pure alcohol.”

Wonho’s guffaw echoed through the living room, making the time traveler’s stomach do some odd sounds.

“My bad.” His eyes were as pretty as they were dark, Hyungwon took note. “You know…” Wonho hummed while looking straight into his eyes, out of nowhere. “This will be a nice memory.”

“Of what?” Hyungwon murmured, as if to not disturb something.

“Of you.”

_Oh._

He didn’t know how to reply properly.

“Don’t worry.” Wonho guaranteed, curving his lips into a smile. “I won’t ruin it, for now.”

Amidst the confusion of feelings in Hyungwon’s chest, the blond lived up to his promise and fell asleep quickly; his respiration pattern drew in the time traveler’s attention, who simply couldn’t look away from his chest, from his peaceful face, from his arms carefully wrapped around himself to give Hyungwon some sense of privacy.

But that only made the time traveler push himself closer, once more lacking in motivation to his actions. It felt safe to be near him, so who was Hyungwon to deny himself a piece of that?

_What’s wrong with me?_

Just let it go briefly, Hyungwon told himself as he forgot about the multitude of universes out there, just watching Wonho sleep profoundly; his little ticks, small shifts in his position and how
he wrinkled his nose multiple times made Hyungwon feel as if he had seen that scene, from that exact same angle, a hundred times before.

He knew it wasn’t really possible, but the gratuitous familiarity with that kind of proximity didn’t demand much, and Hyungwon learned to take what he was offered.

The seconds in which he briefly closed his eyes turned into hours between the fall of dark skies and the ascension of the sun, casting its light upon a world that wasn’t the same that Hyungwon faced before that night.

Because for the first time in 322 years, Hyungwon slept on a surface that wasn’t the floor.

His eyes widened at the shock of such event, not knowing that there was more to it.

It took him a few seconds to recognize his surroundings; the pink-haired suddenly bolted upright and finally noticed an arm wrapped around his waist, belonging to a still very asleep Wonho.

He was so very soft that it was a shame to drag himself away from that man.

But with utmost caution, Hyungwon freed himself from Wonho’s embrace and got on his feet, dashing away from there with a face so red it felt hot on his hand, hoping the blond Constant wouldn’t notice what had happened.

“**You know… This will be a nice memory.**”

“Of what?”

“Of you.”

It was useless to try to count how many times he squealed that day after he woke up with the memory of Hyungwon as the last thing he saw before falling asleep, and only a slight hangover much to his surprise. He’d like to attribute to the time traveler’s fleeting presence the fact that he hadn’t sleep that well in months, so be it, regardless of what was real.

His whole day had been a mess of flashbacks of that night, so he was glad it was a Sunday and no responsibilities waited immediately for him — which meant more time to rewind his eidetic memory for any single frame of their time together. The hug, the laughs, the fucking way he said his name without the honorific that almost made Wonho choke on thin air. How goddamn beautiful Hyungwon was, even more from up close. In some other life, it could’ve been the two of them lying side by side like that every day, and things would never have to be too complicated.

But in the reality, the one where Wonho lived, they were. His feelings for that man only grew with each passing day, in the absence and in the presence of him, under the sun or during the rain. If Wonho and his friends were the Constants of the universe, Hyungwon was the only constant of his heart, unchangeable to every side of his personality, to any circumstance they were put in, to life, to death.

Raining on his sentimental parade, somewhere in his bedroom his phone began to rang, forcing Wonho to fumble around until he found it under his bathroom’s sink, somehow.
The bright green screen nearly made him scream.

“Oh, hey.”


He was forced to cover the phone screen with one hand so he could happily punch his bed’s pillows.

“It’s okay.” Wonho hummed, smiling to himself. “What’s up?”

“Are you busy?”

“Just lazing around. Why?”

“I’d like to show you something. Hmm, actually… I need your assistance.”

His body was already off the bed before he could even reply.

“I’m on my way.”

“Good night, Monbebe. How you doing?”

As usually, the twinkling lights of the machine promptly responded.

“Everlasting, contrary to you humans.”

All the grumpiness that the cold night weather brought up on Wonho dissipated as he chuckled at the A.I.’s antics.

“Awesome. Can you tell me where Hyungwon is?”

“In theory… It’s a joke. Changkyun’s sense of humor is rubbing off on my software. By the way, I would like to say I appreciate what you have done for Hyungwon.”

Maybe there was a lot to think about how his life had become so weird that the approval of an A.I. meant a lot to him.

“No problem. Are we having a moment here, Monbebe?”

“Please. I don’t care for humans that much.”

“Aw. You need to update your lying skills, they’re really bad.”

“Hey.” Hyungwon’s unexpected voice made him wince a bit, quickly turning around to see the time traveler leaning on the control room’s doorframe. “Stop pestering Monbebe and come here.”

Wonho felt a bit stupid for being so giddy after hearing the time traveler use such casual speech with him; it wasn’t like he hadn’t heard him speak to his friends like that before, nothing much new — but if looking like a fool was the price he had to pay, so be it.

Proof of it was how he simply couldn’t help but to grin a bit all the way to meet Hyungwon.

The pink-haired had his back towards him once he entered the room, already moving his hands over the touchscreens of the three panels.
“Well…” The blond cleared his throat, crossing his arms over his chest. “What’s up?”

“So…” Hyungwon swiftly twirled around, with a silver cube in his hand. “The Prince gifted me this.”

At first sight, it didn’t seem something out of ordinary, but Wonho learned to not underestimate anything around Hyungwon.

“And…?”

A gasp escaped his mouth when the time traveler threw it upwards out of nowhere, chuckling at Wonho’s frightened reaction.

The cube hovered in the air for a couple of seconds before dismantling itself completely, now giving place to a giant holographic projection of weird shapes amidst swift waves, aimlessly moving at an increasing speed.

“So…” Hyungwon’s voice suddenly appearing beside him made him flinch again, now looking up at the man calmly explaining. “Do you see that?”

“See what?” He did his best to squint at the spot the time traveler pointed out with his finger, but it was just more of the same.

“Oh.” The man gawked at him for a while. “You can’t see 4D. I forgot.” Faster than his eyes could keep up with, Hyungwon stuck his hands into the hologram and moved them up and down a couple of times, fully opening his arms in the end. The clutter of light fields now formed a clean shape. “See now?”

A large 3D static image now floated in the air in front of them, bending itself like folded paper over and over again, repeating the same arrangement while moved in slow waves that distorted its shape.

“Before leaving, the Prince gave me this. He told me that his colleagues observed this anomaly somewhere in the 3rd quadrant after picking up continuous odd frequencies. According to the rumors in the multiverse, the Prince believed it originated from my people.”

“Wait.” Shaking his head a bit, Wonho made a rewind gesture with his hand. “The hell am I looking at?”

“Don’t you know? You told me what was it before.”

It took a couple of seconds of staring at the holographic projection for him to get it.

“Oh… Like… a wrinkle, of some sort?”

“Seems like it. You see?” Hyungwon pointed at the thing again. “The pattern of folding itself is just like the one we encountered back then, but I had never seen one before in a membrane of the multiverse.”

Wonho nodded, taking a step closer.

“Can we, uh, get a better look? Like, a zoom?”

In a heartbeat, the pink-haired stuck his hands into the projection again and slid his fingers over the image to its sides, zooming it closer till the point that the hologram was a way bigger than both of
The blond Constant did his best to recoil in perfect details his experience outside and inside the wrinkle to analyze it, but something wasn’t quite the same.

“You see that?” Wonho moved his hand up and down around the central area of it. “The wavelength seems a bit weird, but it could be because of a different medium. It almost… too perfect. As if it’s controlled. Doesn’t look like the one we saw before.”

Behind him, he could hear Hyungwon sigh.

“The medium is vacuum. Anything from zero to infinity is possible.”

“Then what would be the purpose of it?” Wonho turned around to face him. “If the info is that a) it’s supposedly a wrinkle, b) your people has something to do with it, and c) we know it’s a means of interdimensional transportation… it could be man-made, Hyungwon.”

“Wait…” The time traveler seemed a bit befuddled, looking down and back at the hologram. “Are you saying… that my people made this?”

“Maybe.” He shrugged. “I mean, they used to build traversable wormholes. I don’t think it’s a far-fetched idea. We don’t know their exact situation, but we do know that they managed to send people here.”

“Monbebe.” Hyungwon’s eyes never left the image in front of them as he called for his A.I. “Why didn’t we know about this before?”

“It was a confidential file between a few universes. You told me to stop hacking into other A.I.s’ systems, so I did.”

“Hyungwon.” Wonho’s fingers wrapped around his wrists, craving for his attention. “Don’t do anything yet. Let’s study this to be sure, then…”

“Then what?”

“Then…” Even though he had a lot to say, nothing sounded too suitable. “Eh… I don’t know. We’ll wing it.”

He didn’t see it coming how loud Hyungwon’s guffaw was.

“You laugh, but that’s actually our motto.” Wonho didn’t suppress the huge smile on his face, watching the time traveler leave the control room. “Last minute plans are the bedrock upon which the multiverse was founded.”

Already from the main wagon, he heard the man cackle even louder, not really caring about the mess of supposedly butterflies it turned Wonho’s stomach into.

“Whatever you say, Wonho.”

Chapter End Notes

as i said i couldnt post on kihyun's actual birthday date, so i gave him a lil sum to
celebrate it later uwu
can wonho PLEASE confess? CAN WONHO PLEASE-

anyways, THESE SOFTIES GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER pls hyungwon this
is just gay imma have to ask u to admit this shit, chief

take care, kids
see ya next week
Pride and Prejudice and Christmas

Chapter Summary

this is a slow burn you know i had to do it to em

Chapter Notes

howdy fellas
here it comes another update and...... thats it?
thank you for the comments and kudos and etc and if you're still here i hope you're
enjoying this long ass story
enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"(…) It was a union that must have been to the advantage of both: by her ease and liveliness, his
mind might have been softened, his manners improved; and from his judgement, information, and
knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance."

Jane Austen, “Pride and Prejudice”

DECEMBER 1ST, SATURDAY

Changkyun walked down the long broken escalator with the sudden thought if that thing just didn’t
work because, to the outside world, that subway station was abandoned. Not that it mattered, after
all, but sometimes those random thoughts got stuck inside his head for days, either he wanted it or
not. Anything ranging from pure bullshit to epiphanies, honestly.

Before that day started, going there wasn’t his first choice, but Changkyun was bored to death now
that the college entrance exam was done and he didn’t have much to do besides waiting for the
results; these slow, dreary days made him miss the hacker part of his life the most.

Not actually the hacking part, but just the thrilling sensation of doing something that had impact in
real people’s lives made him giddy, at least in the beginning — a long time ago. After a while,
everything became an undying routine with monetary intents, and Changkyun could almost taste
the boredom just by thinking of it.

The year came to a conclusion and it felt like it had lasted three times more than it actually did; so
much had happened, too goddamn much. But, in the end, he had gained more than he lost — more
hyungs, more time spent really fixing his relationship with his parents, more missing parts of the
puzzle that was himself were now back inside his mind, so Changkyun couldn’t really complain.

“‘Sup, Monbebe.” As the wagon’s door closed behind him, he lifted a hand up in the air, shaking
his small banana milk box. “Want some?”

“No, thank you. It has been a while.”

“Aw, you missed me?”

“As if. I’ve had enough entertainment here to not think much of your absence.”

“The Oblivious Duo out here still running around circles?”

“You could say so. There are moments where I want to just tell them already, but then my
amusement would end. By the way, they are in the control room.”

“Doing what?”

“They fell asleep. Hyungwon, on the floor, and Wonho, over one of the panels. They spent all night
studying the wrinkle.”

“Awww… Domestic. Also, losers. Who spends their Friday nights being nerds? Monbebe, this is
gothing for too long. I want my hyungs to be happy, and most importantly I’d like for this sexual
tension to end.”

“Well… I might have a suggestion.”

“A plan, you mean.”

“How good are you at acting?”

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DECEMBER 3RD, SUNDAY

Jooheon was greeted by nothing but bells over the front door chiming and the slight dust from the
inside, that now swirled with the wind as it hit the floor, letting some residual snow come in.

The feeling of being there was foreign, although that was possibly one of the places he knew the
best in the world; his father had practically built the place from scratch when they moved from
Daegu to Seoul, 20 years ago, after buying the space from a family friend, so Jooheon grew up
running around that space, or just until his innocence was shattered by the cold and hard reality.

It was a bit weird to think how broken his relationship with his family had become, to the point that
it had been years since he had last saw his father and brother — after his mother’s death when
Jooheon was only 12 years old, everything began to crumble. Such thing forced him to be more of
an adult than the adults around him, and things like that leave a mark too profound to be erased.

His father’s bookshop was the pride of his life, even more than his own kids. It wasn’t something
Jooheon resented, since he was painfully aware he hadn’t done much with his life, and he was
already in his mid-20s — to be honest, Jooheon wasn’t even sure if he would’ve done different if
he could go back, with the knowledge he currently had.

From the outside, the shop seemed smaller than it actually was; it didn’t seem suffocating, but
didn’t compare to a top tier shop in fancier neighborhoods; the first hallway led to the interior of
the place that had a small room, encircled by books where his father would sit while the customers
were left free to roam around. Almost glued to it was a bigger space, divided by shelves that in the
dark almost seemed endless — even though it was still daytime, the light that came through the
giant glass display in the front only reached the first room.

All the feeling of emptiness in his chest was replaced by fright as he spotted the figure sitting on
the desk that belonged to his dad, reading a book.

“Holy shit.” Jooheon jumped backwards, letting his backpack fall on the floor. “Shit, hyung…”

Hyungwon looked like one of those cats that, sometimes, hung around libraries, dangling his legs
off the edge of the desk and unbothered by his loud reaction.

“Hello.” The man grinned, putting the book down. In the cover, the title *Pride and Prejudice*.
“Sorry for scaring you.”

Now a bit calmer, Jooheon took off his trench coat and strolled in his direction.

“It’s okay, it’s okay. What are you… doing here?”

The time traveler didn’t reply, and instead kept staring at him.

Normally, Jooheon would’ve started feeling a bit uncomfortable, but there was something in his
gaze that was incredibly… loud. Loud, and clear.

“Since when?”

Hyungwon now kindly smiled at him, tapping on the spot beside him on the desk for Jooheon to
come over.

So he did, letting out a small sigh as he sat beside the pink-haired.

“After our gathering at Wonho’s hotel, when I told you about my past.” The time traveler clarified,
taking a hold of his hand. “I felt something was a bit off, so I glimpsed at the timeline. I’m sorry,
Jooheon.”

That was exactly the day Jooheon had gotten the news. His brother, older, was the one to call him
and tell that their father had died, telling all about how out of the blue it was — a heart attack,
nothing really surprising since his old man wasn’t the type to take care of his health, like, *at all*. Joohoon still remembered his mother saying that if his dad didn’t swallow his stupid pride and
went to do regular health check-ups, he’d die before turning 70.

Quite prophetic.

“It’s fine.” The man looked at him with certain doubt. “Seriously, hyung. It’s just… life.”

“Then why didn’t you tell the others?” Hyungwon asked, in such low sad that almost made him
feel guilty.

Jooheon feared pity above everything else, even more than the possibility that he’d never live up to
the expectations put over him.

It was okay for him to endure that alone, even if it took him a whole week to finally cry over his
father’s death — he’d usually cry on spot, which led Changkyun to create some sort of weird
system to find the better moment to give him bad news that Jooheon didn’t understand much, but it
had avoided him ugly crying in public a lot of times. Furthermore, in the end his fear stopped being
pity, and now was being the extra weight on someone’s shoulder.

He knew he was loved. By his friends, by Minhyuk… but the way both of his lives overlapped made him struggle to know how to properly act in those emotional moments.

“I don’t know.” Jooheon finally replied, after a brief silence.

“Do you think it could’ve been prevented?” The taller inquired, in a small voice.

“Could have been?”

His hyung shrugged.

“I don’t know.” The corners of Hyungwon’s mouth quirked up. “I don’t really know everything, just what Time deems necessary. And every day, things that doesn’t seem to have an explanation happen in the multiverse, but that just means more work for us. Nothing is meaningless. We are the ones who lack wisdom to understand the purposes. The important is to keep doing our best.”

Jooheon didn’t know what to say after that, so he snuggled closer to the time traveler and rested his head on his shoulder.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, until Hyungwon suddenly pulled away and kissed the top of Jooheon’s head.

“I’ll bring it back once I finished it later.” The man announced, jiggling the book he previously read on his hand.

“Nah.” Jooheon smiled at the man, settling his grip on the table with both hands at each side of his body. “Keep it. It’s an early Christmas gift.”

Hyungwon nodded happily and bid him farewell, and disappearing within seconds with no need to use the front door.

And so Jooheon was brought again into the solitude, letting out a heavy sigh.

Earlier, his feet dragged him to that place almost unconsciously as he woke up from a dream about his childhood; Jooheon forgot about its content right after waking up, but the sensation it felt on him yearned for a trip down the memory lane. Now, the deep smell of old books and coffee stained over his deceased father’s desk were a reminder.

About letting go.

“Hey!” Minhyuk sounded full of enthusiasm on the phone, even though his voice was a bit raucous due waking up early. “Good morning, angel.”

“Hey…”

“What’s with your voice? Are you ready to tell me?”

His boyfriend was a whole psychic, so of course Minhyuk noticed the shift in his mood in the past weeks. However, the older dismissed the need for an explanation, saying that he felt Jooheon wasn’t ready to tell him yet, and it was okay to wait until the younger was… ready. Not quite the sentiment in the moment, but it was easier like that.

“Yeah. I am now.”
“Yah, Im Changkyun!”

Wonho knew he had enough after his fifth knock on Changkyun’s door, still receiving no response from the boy he knew was in there.

Behind him, Wonho could hear his dongsaeng’s hurried steps in his direction after letting Wonho inside the apartment he shared with the maknae.

“Hyung, hyung!” Jooheon lightly tapped on his shoulder. “Go easy on him. It has been, like, 2 days since he left his room.”

A line appeared between Wonho’s eyebrows.

“Why?”

“Dunno, man. When he gets like this, I just give him some space and he usually gets better in the same day, but now he’s like this and I don’t know… I called you because you’re his third favorite hyung…”

“Wait. Third?”

“Kihyun first, because he feeds him, and Hyungwon second because… eh, he is Hyungwon.”

Fair enough.

“Am I above Minhyuk?”

Jooheon shot him a glare that screamed are you serious right now.

“Minhyuk is like, a real brother or something. Listen, don’t ask me about this kid’s antics. Just… try to talk to him and find out why he’s like this, okay?”

His mind went back to what Hyungwon mentioned in their last reunion at his hotel, about how some people in the multiverse were willing to capture or kill Changkyun’s doubles because they usually… well, went evil or something not really specified.

But again, the time traveler stated it only happens after the Changkyuns invented time travel, somehow, so it couldn’t be really it. Right?

Wonho now tried to twist the doorknob without knocking, and the door opened.

“Kkukkung?”

At first, as soon as the turned the lights on, Wonho thought the boy wasn’t in the room at all, for all he could see was a bunch of comforters bundled up all around his king size bed, partially falling off the edges of it.

A sudden shuffle under the covers changed his opinion.
“Ah.” Changkyun mumbled, sloppily pulling his head out of the comforter, hair sticking out of every side of his head. The boy squinted at him before Wonho closed the door. “Hi.”

He looked like the personification of the mess his bed was, and Wonho was starting to get really worried.

“Hey…” The older strolled towards his bed with carefulness, and now the boy pushed himself up to sit down, wrapped up in the comforters like a burrito. “What’s going on, Kkukkung? Is there anything wrong?”

God. Wonho felt like an awkward dad trying to make small talk with their kid as a form of showing that they cared, but didn’t know the right approach. Not what he imagined feeling before reaching his 30s.

But Changkyun looked sad, for real, and he had never seen him like that before.

“It’s cool, hyung.” His voice came out too shrill, so the boy cleared his throat. “I’m just a bit nghhhhh, but it’s cool.”

Sighing, Wonho took a seat beside him on mattress.

“And why is that? Jooheon is worried about you. I know I’m not the best choice when it comes to feelings, but the guys are busy so if you want…”

“No, no, it’s okay. Thank you…” Changkyun jolted forward a bit, looking down and away.

“Thanks for coming… To be honest… I’m more bummed out that my parents won’t be able to come home for Christmas than I thought I’d be. Don’t know, man…”

“Oh…” Wonho’s mouth turned into an O, comprehending him a bit more. “You could… go there? To America?”

“Nah…” The maknae clicked his tongue, squeezing his cheeks with the covers. “They’re gonna be busy with the research they’re doing right now… I’m just gonna be a hindrance. I wish we could have one of those big Christmas reunions, you know? Like it was when I was a kid…”

“Hey…” The blond shifted closer, putting an arm over the covers, on what was supposed to be Changkyun’s back. “You’re not gonna be alone, okay? We… can do something. Invite the others and…”

The boy suddenly perked up, and a wave of relief swept Wonho’s body.

“Really?”

DECEMBER 23RD, SUNDAY

“Kihyun, you’re stressing me out.”

His friend stopped pacing back and forth in front of the van only to throw a murderous scowl at Wonho.

“You don’t know what could’ve happened. He can be dead. Maybe kidnapped. Maybe he needs our help and can’t—”

The squeaking sound of the car window being rolled down caught their attention.
“OI!” Minhyuk peered at them, sticking his head out of the window. “Quit being dramatic. The man is just late. Which is funny if you think about the fact he’s a TIME traveler…”

A loud whooshing sound emerged before Kihyun could talk back to his same-age friend, which startled Wonho a bit.

“Hello!” Hyungwon’s voice drew them to their left side, where the man came running in their direction, a bit disheveled.

They were in front of Minhyuk and Shownu’s apartment building, trying not to freeze to death even with their padded coats on in that Sunday morning. Sometimes Wonho wondered how the hell Hyungwon wasn’t caught in teleportation action and exposed all over the internet, but maybe the government protection was really that great.

As soon as his eyes landed on the taller man, Wonho bursted into laughter.

“Yah.” The blond tried to stop laughing, but it was quite hard.

“I’m sorry.” The taller panted a bit. “Did you wait too long?”

The streets were practically empty except for their presence, so one could find a little odd to see a man over 1.80 cm racing against the wind while wearing a blue and white hanbok and a gat, the traditional hat worn by men in the Joseon period.

“Are you okay?” Kihyun, on the other hand, seemed as worried as ever.

“Yes.” Hyungwon replied, putting a hand on Kihyun’s shoulder. “I would’ve texted you, but there was no signal. Did you bring the bag I left with you?”

“Yeah.” His shorter friend nodded, pointing at the car.

Once more, Minhyuk stuck his head out and shouted to the sky.

“LET’S GOOOOO!”

Not without sighing at Minhyuk’s loudness, Kihyun opened the sliding door and moved to the sit in the middle of the van, where Shownu was almost dozing off with his head against the window.

Hyungwon didn’t waste any time in opening the door to the passenger seat, but was having some trouble in fitting the whole hanbok inside of it.

Letting out another chuckle, Wonho went to help him.

“Sit down.” He patted the man in the back, whom quickly complied.

It was hard not to cackle when the time traveler accidentally hit his large hat on roof of the car as he tried to get in sideways, so Wonho concentrated in putting all the bottom part of that garment inside of the van. It didn’t seem like the ones people usually wore during special occasions — it was heavier, and way more detailed, as if an old artist of those times had made it themselves. Which was probably right.

Once they were all settled in and ready to go, Hyungwon greeted the others.

“Is everyone alright?” Everyone muttered ‘yeah’ or ‘uhum’, except for Changkyun, whom lied down on the backseat while scrolled through his phone, with his head on Minhyuk’s lap and his legs over Jooheon’s. “Changkyun-ah. Are you excited?”
The boy slightly raised his head and nodded, diverting his attention back to the device on his hand.

They had debated about the maknae weeks before, and Hyungwon didn’t seem quite worried about the “going evil” thing, but more about Changkyun’s mental state — everyone has their limits, the time traveler said. Would that be a preview of how bad things were when they weren’t looking? Since they met, Changkyun had always been a strange and gleeful kid, but no one could be like that all the time. Jesus, it’d be weirder to never see a sorrowful side of him, but it didn’t fail to worry Changkyun’s hyungs anyway.

Beside him, on the passenger seat, Hyungwon groaned as he got the relief of taking his hat off.

“Rough day in Joseon?” Wonho asked, turning on the car’s engine.

“The worst.” Hyungwon huffed, pulling the headband under it and running his fingers through his pink strands. “I do not like kings. He thought I was a sorcerer just because of my hair color.”

Wonho let out a snort.

“I don’t know what you expected.”

“I went to avoid a plague!” The pink-haired’s voice sounded so whiny it was ridiculously cute. “It’s not their fault they had never seen pink hair before, though. Should I dye it black?”

In front of him, the traffic light turned into red, so he made a stop.

“No, no. I like it that way.” It took him a second to realize how weird that must’ve sounded. “I mean, if you want to…”

“You like it?” There was a tiny smile on his face that made his cheeks go bigger, and Wonho would’ve probably hit the brakes if he was driving.

“Yeah.” The blond turned his face away to avoid on stammering.

On his peripheral vision, Wonho peered at Hyungwon’s mouth curving into a broad grin.

“Then I will keep it.”

The light was now green, so he kept going.

Changkyun was the one who suggested the trip, to which Wonho couldn’t really deny after seeing those sad puppy eyes of his. The place they were heading to was in the outskirts of Seoul, where the maknae’s uncle had a lake house it wasn’t used in a while. Everyone was concerned about him, of course, but most of them were also relieved to be able to be together during Christmas — gay kids only have each other, as Minhyuk said.

It wasn’t like Wonho’s mom didn’t want to spend that holiday with him, though. Annually, she’d go to this fancy party where people from the same field as her gathered to drink expensive champagne and discuss how to make more money, and that was absolutely not Wonho’s scene. So she understood his trip, promising they’d meet on the 25th after he came back home.

The others… were a bit more complicated. Shownu’s parents were quite receptive of him, even knowing he dated a guy, but that couldn’t be said from the rest of his family; his same-age friend didn’t want to bring Kihyun to an environment his boyfriend wouldn’t be able to be himself. Kihyun, by the way, continued to have a horrible relationship with his dad, so that was an easy decision for him.
Minhyuk’s mom and brother went on a trip, Jooheon’s brother was serving in the military and Changkyun… well, he didn’t seem too happy about not being able to have a proper family holiday, but Wonho hoped that they could make up for him somehow, even though they weren’t his real family. It just broke his heart to see his youngest so gloomy.

With the all the snow that fell the night before, it took about an hour to get there; Kihyun started complaining about his driving (apparently, the food he made would be ruined if Wonho drove too fast). Minhyuk jumped to the front row to stick his flash drive in the car stereo and the Sistar discography played for at least 20 minutes, until Kihyun decided he had enough and pulled the thing out — noisy bickering ensued, then Changkyun finally made a move and plugged his own flash drive, what which Wonho was grateful for, because everybody finally shut the fuck up over some chill rap songs.

Hyungwon slept through all that loudness, though — what was quite remarkable when Wonho remembered the times he was in a car with the time traveler and the man didn’t feel quite comfortable in it. But less than half hour in the road and Hyungwon quietly leaned his head against the window, arms wrapped around himself. The tiredness in his face was quite obvious, so Wonho let him be.

Once they arrived at the lake house, the blond rounded the car to wake him up.

“Hyungwon.” He tapped the man’s arm lightly, while Kihyun and Jooheon yelled something about cleaning as they took their stuff out of the van. “Hyungwon.”

It felt a bit creepy, but Wonho couldn’t help but to stare a while; half of his body was turned to the window’s side, with a slight pouty lips.

He is so cute.

Much for his dismay, the time traveler stirred in his sleep and Wonho took an instinctive step back, but still observing him slowly opening his eyes.

Hyungwon let out a cute groan, scrunching up his cute face, especially his cute nose—

Jesus Christ, Wonho, get a grip.

“Hi…” He muttered in a hoarse voice. “Did we arrive?”

“Yeah.” Wonho replied, pursing his lips into a smile. “Hungry?”

The time traveler frantically nodded, and Wonho’s heart was getting weak again.

“Let’s go before Ki—”

Woosh.

Before Wonho could react, the residual from that attack dripped off his coat, falling a bit over a surprised Hyungwon whom gazed at him with curiosity.

As soon as he turned around, five expectant faces now stared at the blond.

“Who the he—”

Another snowball now hit him squarely in the face, which made his friends burst into laughter, including Hyungwon.
“YAH!”

One day Wonho would be treated like the hyung he was. Not that day, though.

The snowball fight broke down and suddenly all Wonho could hear was his friends guffawing while they tried to hit each other as much as they could; even Hyungwon looked as eager to throw the balls at the kids, although the time traveler got hit more times than he actually hit someone. However, what made them laugh the most was the moment when Hyungwon accidentally used his abilities to lift the snowballs into the air and ended up making them melt — Changkyun and Kihyun stayed on the ground dying of laughter until the others helped them get up.

Shenanigans apart, their bodies were thankful that the house was warm, which already probably counted a lot in Wonho’s unconscious to make him like the place. In all its wooden graciousness, Changkyun’s uncle’s lake house was a two floor residence, with short steps in the front before its porch that led straight to the living room.

On the inside, the space was decorated all in white and beige and other neutral colors, with a big couch sitting against the farthest wall while a bunch of armchairs scattered around it, with a coffee table sitting in the middle of the living room.

Changkyun stood next to the opposite wall checking on the electric fireplace when Shownu’s voice cut off through the chattering about the house.

“Hey, Kyun.” His same-age friend was already on the middle of the staircase. “We’re gonna check the rooms, okay?”

The maknaes nodded, pressing his lips together.

Suddenly, it was of everyone’s interest to check the floor above, but knowing those brats, it was certainly to get the best room out of the ones in there.

Kihyun would’ve been squeezed to death by his same-age friend if he didn’t climb the stairs ahead of his boyfriend, since Minhyuk hopped on Shownu’s back like a koala while Jooheon rolled his eyes at the red-haired, carrying both of their backpacks.

As usual, Hyungwon strolled behind Wonho so quietly that he could’ve forgotten the man was there at all if Hyungwon’s presence didn’t linger on him permanently.

According to his youngest friend, there were 3 rooms and 2 bathrooms in that house; Shownu and Kihyun took the first one, which had an en-suite, after the latter bickered with Minhyuk for a solid minute that he had seen it first, to which Minhyuk only gave up when a sighing Changkyun passed by them, heading to the room at the end of the corridor.

“Hyungwon hyung, Wonho hyung.” The maknae called, with a hand on the doorknob. “Coming?”

Oh, Jesus.

Maybe it was the unhealthy diet Wonho had during that week — his professional tasks were hurried over the preparations for the Christmas trip — so it was possible that Wonho’s brain didn’t realize what was happening before it essentially did, and anything he could’ve possibly said about such matter would sound too suspicious, and that was the last thing he wanted.

Luckily, Minhyuk intervened.

“We can room together, Kkukkung.” His red-haired friend approached the boy, tugging Jooheon
Changkyun’s face broke down into a quick snort, and everyone seemed amused to see the maknae laugh so much that day.

“Hyung, no offense. But I don’t wanna be a third wheel.” The boy craned his neck to the side so he could stare at Hyungwon and Wonho. “With the hyungs is fine. Unless they’re a couple and we don’t know about it.”

Changkyun’s first murder attempt.

The blond choked on his own saliva, while Hyungwon didn’t seem too daunted about the way how every single one of their dumb friends laughed about such possibility.

“Changkyun-ah, that was a good one.” Kihyun cackled once more, sending a finger heart to the maknae. “Wonho’s sorry ass wouldn’t—”

“I’m literally standing a meter away from you.” Wonho spouted, scowling at his best friend.

“Yeah, nerd, don’t be mean.” Shownu put one of the duffel bags he carried on the floor, only to flicker his boyfriend’s forehead. “After all, he’s loyal to his crush.”

“As if…” Minhyuk was the next to make fun of him, shortling mid-sentence. “As if Hyungwon would even—”

“YAH, ARE YOU DONE?” The blond blurted out, distraughtly passing by them to meet the maknae at the last room’s doorstep. He shot the boy a clownish glare, to which Changkyun laughed again.

“Here, Hyungwon-ah.”

At the sound of Shownu’s voice talking to the pink-haired, Wonho turned around.

“Oh.” Hyungwon swiftly bowed, grabbing the duffel bag Wonho’s same-age friend had in hand before. “Thanks for taking care of it. I would’ve ended up forgetting in the train.”

“I put a hoodie and sweatpants in there. In case you want to wear something more comfortable.” Kihyun announced, pointing at the bag. “Plus, one of Shownu’s padded coats cuz you didn’t pack any, and mine wouldn’t fit you.”

The time traveler nodded, walking in their direction and Wonho suddenly remembered what his previous panic was about.

Sharing a room with Hyungwon — and Changkyun — wasn’t quite the problem, but the growing desire to confess his feelings that was building up inside his chest during the past months made it hard to endure such closeness for two days and not ruin everything. But if that’s what the universe — multiverse — wanted, who was he to fight against?

Right. Someone who didn’t want to lose Hyungwon.

So yeah, Wonho was going to have to force his brain to constantly remind him what they were there for — Changkyun, Christmas celebration… Hyungwon’s first Christmas Eve.

As expected, there was only one goddamn bed and for a second, Wonho’s legs turned into jelly at the remembrance of the time traveler standing so close to him when he was drunk and made a
stupidly nice move.

“You two can take the bed.” Hyungwon coolly declared, already heading to sit on the floor beside it.

“No, hyung, no.” Beside Wonho, the other man pushed his lower lip forward, with a whiny voice. “You’re my guest. You can take the bed… with Wonho hyung.”

“Oh.” The time traveler’s gaze lingered on the boy for a moment, then shifted to the blond. “I can’t sleep on beds. It’s alright.”

“But it’s cold, really cold in here! You can’t sleep on the floor. I can sleep on the couch downstairs, I’ve done it before.”

“No need, Kyun. Really.” Hyungwon shot him a kind smile. “I don’t feel cold easily.”

“But hyung—”

“Let him be, Changkyun.” Wonho interceded, giving the boy a pat on the shoulder before heading towards the bed to drop his bag on it.

His dongsaeng whined again, but muttered a fine before jumping on the mattress at full speed. From the floor, Hyungwon chuckled, which twisted Wonho’s stomach in the silly lovesick way it was used to around that pink-haired man.

Wonho felt a wave of relief for not being alone with Hyungwon in that room, because God knows he would’ve made that ten times more awkward than it needed to be — simply because he was too much of a coward to tell that time traveler he liked him. So, perhaps, Time wasn’t so ruthless after all.

Commonly, when you have nothing to do, the day drags itself at the pace the, but the Sunday already lost its natural light as Wonho sat by the largest window of the living room, a few hours after lunch, reading a book one of his peers had written and asked for his opinion about.

Out of habit, Wonho quickly closed the book for a second to pull his turtleneck all the way till his mouth was covered, enjoying the relative peace now that his friends went for a nap before dinner.

“Hey.”

His neck craned upwards fast as soon as he heard the time traveler’s voice.

The book fell on his lap to hastily hit the floor the second Wonho landed eyes on the man and noticed he was wearing a pink sweatshirt with his linen trousers — a combination Wonho never thought it’d be so lethal.

And so cute.

“Did I scare you?” Hyungwon questioned, picking his book up for him.

“No, no… Eh…” Jesus, why did that man fluster him so easily? “It’s fine. I thought you were… out.”

“I was.” The taller replied, taking a seat on the floor in front of Wonho’s armchair. “I checked the perimeter to see if everything is alright.

Wonho threw a heartfelt glance at him.
“You don’t have to worry all the time, you know. We will be fine, relax.”

Hyungwon shrugged, pulling a book out of the pocket of his hoodie.

“Doesn’t hurt to be sure.”

The title in his hand read *Pride and Prejudice*.

“You like Jane Austen?” Wonho tried to make small talk, because he was desperate for some sort of connection.

“I enjoy her style.” The pink-haired responded, flipping the page after his eyes roamed over it for a few seconds. Wonho still didn’t understand how he could read so fast, but that was just one of Hyungwon’s idiosyncrasies. “She writes women very well. Better than most classical writers of this world. The main character is also an avid reader, I like her.”

“Which part are you in?”

“Oh.” He suddenly pulled his gaze from the book to Wonho. “Mr. Darcy is confessing his love.”

Goddamnit.

“Uh… that’s—"

“*In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.*”

Fucking hell, Jane Austen.

“This was bold!” Hyungwon excitedly commented, flipping another page. “Oh, no. She… rejected him.”

*Just like you will…*

“That’s… they are fighting? I thought they were supposed to be together…”

Wonho abruptly got off his seat, now watching confusion unfold on the pink-haired’s face.

“Where are you going?”

“Uh… A nap? See you soon.”

So what? It was sheer panic now flooding the blond’s chest, so he did what he had to do.

Without looking back, Wonho left the living room, trying not to think of the failure his love life because he was a fucking coward.

——

“CHANGKYUN-AH, COME DOWN!”

Hyungwon was thrilled to be a part of that holiday. The ongoing study of the wrinkle and the small errands he had to run through time took over most of this schedule during the past weeks, so he didn’t have much time to make a thorough research on Christmas traditions; Hyungwon concluded
he knew enough, though, and if it’d make please his friends, the effort was worthy.

Kihyun and Minhyuk dashed from the kitchen to the living room after his shout, while the others emerged from the first floor, strolling down the stairs.

As soon as Hyungwon spotted Changkyun leaning over the banisters at the top of the staircase, he pressed his finger against the tips of power plug in his hand and all the lights wrapped around his clothes, from his shoulders to his ankles, lit up.

The youngest among them stared at him with wide, baffled eyes for a brief moment, only before bursting into a loud laughter, which quickly spread to all his other friends in the room.

“Like a Christmas tree!” Hyungwon chuckled, not being able to move around much with all those light strands on his body.

The boys were too busy laughing and taking pictures with their phones to utter a reply, but the time traveler didn’t mind as long as they could make them happy.

“Yah.” Stifling a snort, Kihyun approached him. “Take this off and come to the table. Time to eat. YAH!” The man now directed his voice to the men on the stairs, still chortling over the sight of Hyungwon wrapped with Christmas lights. “COME ON! DINNER!”

Changkyun was the first to enthusiastically approach him, asking the time traveler to pull his finger away from the plug then put it on again to see if it really ignited the lights, just until Jooheon dragged him to the kitchen regardless of his protests.

As he untangled himself from the lights, Wonho approached him.

“You sure are into the holiday spirit.” The Constant commented playfully.

The time traveler let out a chuckle, pulling the last light strand enveloping his waist.

“I thought it’d cheer Changkyun up.”

“It did.” With a giggle, Wonho ruffled his hair. “You did well.”

Once again, the way Hyungwon’s heart pounded faster at those irrelevant interactions with Wonho, oddly yearning for more; he wasn’t ignoring it, simply postponing. It was clear, by now, that something wasn’t quite right, but everything could wait till the end of the Christmas event.

In all honesty, Hyungwon didn’t really know how to feel about… all of that. It was only natural to find it peculiar, since he had never been one to explore the multitude of humans’ traditions, and he was grateful that his friends kindly introduced him to the things they enjoyed, but those familiarities made the time traveler feel like a kid again, learning little by little what was required to know and do to be considered one of them.

And Hyungwon wanted to have at least the illusion of it so much it was embarrassing.

So he complied, trying to capture all the topics of conversation during dinner that went from their childhood stories to how someone tried to cut Minhyuk in line, last week. Hyungwon didn’t mind that he didn’t have any similar story to tell, but his friends noticed his prolonged silence and clearly didn’t want to make him feel uncomfortable — even though he wasn’t — so the men eagerly asked him to tell some of his stories too.

After a rapid reflection, the time traveler told them about one of his off-world travels to a nearby
galaxy a couple of centuries ago, and how he accidentally met Nikola Tesla a week earlier when he was trying to guide another historical figure into the right path for the future of mankind, which lead to them asking a bunch of questions (“Do other civilizations like kittens?” “Sure, Jooheon.” “Wait, Tesla did receive a message from the aliens?” “Don’t be a loser, Kihyun.” “Shut up, Minhyuk, I need to know if he was crazy or not.”), so Hyungwon was quite satisfied with the results.

All in all, everyone seemed a bit worn-out from trip and its implications, so the boys all returned to their rooms as soon as they finished chatting in the living room after dinner; the time traveler tried to settle down on the couch to not interrupt Wonho and Changkyun’s with his restlessness, but the maknae vehemently insisted that Hyungwon wouldn’t bother them by staying in the room, and he had been having a difficult time saying no to Changkyun — so he stayed.

It was almost past midnight when Hyungwon heard low grunts coming from where Wonho and Changkyun slept on.

The blond Constant jolted forward out of the blue and got up, letting out a loud sigh.

In the dimness of the bedroom, Wonho’s silhouette was delineated against the feeble light coming from the bedside lamp across the room, and Hyungwon held his breath for a solid second.

“Jesus…” The man muttered, in a sort of annoyed tone.

Now Hyungwon’s gaze turned to the other boy in bed, and Changkyun arms and legs were stretched out over the entire mattress, especially where the blond Constant rested before.

A guilty chuckle escaped his mouth at the sight of Wonho’s exasperated face, looking down at the maknae.

At that, Wonho now seemed to acknowledge the pink-haired’s presence.

“Don’t laugh, I was almost falling asleep.”

Hyungwon sat on the floor right under the window with one of his tablets in hands, watching Wonho amble in his direction.

“Sorry.” He mumbled, avoiding looking at the blond’s face or another cackle would come out.

“Seriously…” The man spoke in a murmur, plopping down in front of him, wearing just sweatpants. Hyungwon’s focus was utterly compromised. “I love Kyun, but I pity the person who’s gonna sleep with him for the rest of their lives. He just threw his whole body on top of me, how did he expect me to keep breathing?”

“Once he fell asleep during one of our studying sessions and started rapping in the middle of his sleep.”

Wonho had to cover his mouth to suppress his snort, then his eyes shifted to the device in Hyungwon’s hand.

“Yah, didn’t Kihyun said no work during Christmas?”

“Well…” The time traveler shrugged, placing the tablet on his lap. “Technically, it’s not Christmas yet…”

With a sigh, the blond dejectedly extended his hand to Hyungwon.
“Lemme see.”

He didn’t hesitate in passing the device to the blond, only to see it being tossed away to the other side of the room.

“Wonho! Why would you—”

The other man only raised an eyebrow at him.

“Go to sleep, Hyungwon.”

“But…” The pink-haired knew he was sulking over nothing, and yet… “What if the tablet broke with your strength?”

“Please…” He scoffed. “Your tech could survive a nuclear attack.”

“True.”

The Constant let out a last giggle before fully lying down on the spot in front of him.

“Wonho?”

“Hmm?”

“What are you doing?”

Hyungwon’s eyes followed the shadow he casted on the floor as he lied on his side, tucking one arm under his head, and the blond leisurely blinked before looking up at him.

“Trying to sleep.” He replied, letting out a weary sigh. “Don’t argue about me being on the floor, please.”

“But…” Hyungwon’s gaze wandered across his chest again, and he had to force himself to not dawdle over it. “You’re shirtless.”

“I always sleep shirtless. Don’t worry.”

Any attempt of discussing the issue would only prolong the inevitable — Wonho would drag the debate for hours if necessary, winning over Hyungwon just by being way too persistent.

But whether he liked it or not, that moment brought back memories that Hyungwon determinedly repressed over the past weeks.

How could he explain the sleeping incident without making it sound awkward?

Something he was about to found out.

“Here.” Hyungwon caught his attention, offering him the pillow that Changkyun insisted that the time traveler should have.

The expected disagreement didn’t come, but Wonho shot him a knowing look that could be heard all over Hyungwon’s mind: you really don’t change, uh.

“Wonho.” He called, getting closer as he kept his tone low to not wake Changkyun up.

“Hmm…”
"I have to tell you something."

His figure shifted abruptly, and now Wonho stared at him with wide eyes.

"Remember that night…" Alright, that seemed a bit harder than he imagined. The time traveler intuitively brought his legs against his chest. "That you were drunk and I took you home? We talked for a while…"

"I remember." Wonho firmly replied, which gave him slight goosebumps.

"You asked me to lie down with you… and I did… and I closed my eyes just for a few seconds, but… when I woke up, it was already morning."

"Wait." The blond gawked at him, looking away as the engines of his brain seemed to be at full speed. "You don’t… sleep on…"

"Yes. I know." Hyungwon’s hand trembled for some reason, so he encircled his legs. "It was the first time in 322 years. I don’t know what to make of it, but I had this feeling it was… wrong to not tell you. Sorry."

"For what?" Wonho bolted upright. "Listen…" He suddenly chuckled, and Hyungwon’s forehead puckered. "I… It’s fine. Don’t apologize. There’s nothing wrong… with it? It’s fine. It’s fine."

An invisible weight on Hyungwon’s back was instantaneously lifted off.

"Thank you." The time traveler said, in an undertone, with a tiny smile. "You are a very odd occurrence, Wonho."

The blond snorted, glancing over his shoulder to check on Changkyun.

"Says the centenarian time traveler." Wonho curved his lips into a smile, and something dropped to Hyungwon’s stomach again. It got worse when the man gently tugged him by the sweatshirt’s sleeve. "Come here."

Any word that could’ve been spoken died down at the sensation of warmth that radiated from Wonho’s skin, so inviting and foolish that it was a little discomfiting.

The Constant pushed his head to one of the edges of the pillow, giving plenty space for Hyungwon to settle his own head on it — so he did.

"You don’t reek of alcohol this time." The time traveler mentioned, in a tiny voice.

"Yeah." A grin appeared on his face as the blond crossed his arms over his chest. The smile faded abruptly, though. "Hyungwon."

Wonho’s voice reverberated through the time traveler’s skin, and his body automatically shifted closer.

"Yes?"

"Did you… finish that book?"

The pink-haired nodded over the pillow.

"Do you think that two people so different… really different… can really end up together?"
The painstaking tone to the question made Hyungwon shiver.

“I think so… Why? Is this about…” Hyungwon felt himself lose interest in that conversation. “Your… crush?”

Say no.

“Yeah.”

“Oh…” The time traveler looked away, quite… disappointed?

“I’m afraid, you know.” Wonho kept going, but he didn’t want to hear about it. “I don’t think he likes me back. He never dated anyone before, so I don’t even know if he’s into guys or…”

“Well, ask him.” More brusquely than he intended, Hyungwon let his back fall against the carpet.

“Are you into guys?”

Hyungwon frowned, turning his head to his side to face an expectant Wonho.

“Yes.”

“Seriously?”

“I am human too, Wonho. And very old, in case you forgot. Of course I noticed I’m prone to find men more attractive than women. What does it have to do with you and your crush?”

A short gasp escaped his mouth at the end of the sentence, and the time traveler suddenly realized he sounded way too harsh without a reason.

“Jesus Christ…” The blond rubbed his face leisurely. “Forget it.”

“Fine.” Hyungwon turned around, giving his back to him. “It’s not like—”

Out of instinct, the time traveler nearly yelped when Wonho’s arm wrapped around his waist and pulled him closer to his chest, with no more space left between them.

Hyungwon’s heart felt like it was going to jump all the way up his throat and escape through his mouth.

“What…”

“Shut up.” Wonho’s breath against the back of his neck made him stiffen up. “Good night.”

Unsure what to do, the time traveler let himself get carried away by the feeling of safety that slowly swept through his body; his shoulders fell back into place, bringing his hand over Wonho’s.

“Good night.”

DECEMBER 24TH, MONDAY

“Good morning, my friends. Merry Christmas. What a lovely day, isn’t it?”
Without batting their eyelashes for solid half minute, his friends stared at him from the kitchen’s table as if he had said some absurdity.

“The fuck is wrong with you?” Kihyun asked, pointing at him with his chopsticks.

“Good news?” His same-age friend questioned, in a politer tone.

“Jeez…” Minhyuk blew air through his nose, leaning his head on Jooheon’s shoulder. “Y’all blind or what. He’s glowing with love.”

Shownu chuckled, putting his coffee mug down.

“I was trying to be subtle, Minhyuk.”

“Yah, hyung.” Jooheon slightly pulled away from his boyfriend to get closer to Kihyun, whom sat opposite to him. “Isn’t really annoying to date psychics sometimes?”

“Absolutely.” Kihyun nodded. “They have these weird insights they think you should magically know about.”

“Not magically.” Shownu retorted, poking his boyfriend on the stomach, to which Kihyun flinched. “Naturally.”

“God, all of you are so annoying.” Wonho declared, grabbing a piece of bread on a basket over the table. “Where’s Kkukkung?”

“Outside.” Minhyuk replied, filling his mouth with more food.

“He went for a stroll around the frozen lake with Hyungwon.” Kihyun added, leaning his back on his chair.

The blond’s stomach twisted at the mention of the time traveler. Whatever had gotten into him the night before that spurred Wonho to be so bold to the point of embracing Hyungwon while they slept, he was grateful for it. Bodies against each other trying to be the last piece of the puzzle of what was perfection in that world, not fighting against the sensation of finally being exactly where they were always supposed to be, with whom they waited their entire lives to meet.

In his dream, they were one; in reality, not really.

As expected, Wonho woke up alone on the floor, but he’d never forget the feeling of having Hyungwon so perfectly molded into his arms; no regrets plagued his mind, neither there was sorrow over the fact that such moment was the most he’d ever have from the time traveler. More important than his own feelings was continuing to be in Hyungwon’s life.

Even if his stomach begged for more food, Wonho put his padded coat on and left the house, following the only path the maknae and the time traveler could’ve taken.

No much longer, he found a bundle of pink hair flying against the wind as Hyungwon held a screwdriver in one hand and his wristwatch on the other; the man used only one of his usual black suits and nothing that could do a better job protecting him from the cold.

“Yah.” The breeze came a bit harsher than usual, making Wonho squint as he jogged in his direction. “What are you doing here?”

Hyungwon didn’t even spare him a glance, focused on his task.
“It’s not working. It’s not possible.”

“The watch?”

“It must be one of the components.” Hyungwon continued, but he wasn’t exactly talking to Wonho. “The battery seems and the circuits—”

“HEY, NERDS!”

Minhyuk waved at them, strolling in their direction with his arm linked with Joohoén’s.

That’s when it hit him.

“Wait, where’s Changkyun?”

“Hey, where’s Changkyun?”

“He is—”

Before Hyungwon could finish, a thunderous sound of something cracking in the distance made them all come to a halt, rooted in their spots for a moment before they sprung towards the lake’s direction.

Please, please, please—

Wonho’s heart dropped to his stomach at the sight of the thick crack slashing through half of the lake, and even more when he saw a quivering Changkyun standing around it.

That was the first time Wonho had ever seen Changkyun genuinely frightened for life, and that only made it harder for him to breathe.

But he was forced to act when he saw Hyungwon dropping everything he had in hands and nearly running into the frozen lake.

“HEY, HEY!” He held the time traveler back in his arms, even though he was pushed away effortlessly. “You can’t go! The ice might—”

“KKUKKUNG!” Minhyuk’s voice arose in a shout, and both of them turned to see the red-haired already at the entrance of the lake, talking to the scared maknae. “LISTEN TO ME, OKAY? HYUNG IS HERE. NOTHING IS GONNA HAPPEN.”

“HYUNG!” His brittle voice made Wonho want to cry too. “I…”

“Changkyun!” Minhyuk called again, testing the surface of the ice. It seemed good enough for him to stand on, so he did. “Listen to me, okay? Stay calm. Look at me. Look at hyung. Do as I say, okay?”

The boy nodded, trying not to keep the rest of his body still.

“Changkyun-ah, you gotta lay down and roll away from the crack REAL quick, okay?”

“IT’S SCARY! WHAT IF—”

“Listen, LISTEN.” Minhyuk took another couple of steps into the lake’s surface, but still quite distant from his friend. “I’m gonna go to you, all you gotta do is crawl to me. I’m here for you, hear me?”

Changkyun seemed paralyzed by the fear for a minute, but tucked his phone on the back pocket of
his jeans and slowly started to move downwards; the ice didn’t break anymore, and Wonho let out a
gasp of momentary relief.

Beside him, the time traveler watched that scene unfold with a strange mien, somehow clutching
again the wristwatch he had thrown away before Wonho stopped him to go any further. It was hard
to tell the exact emotion displayed on his face, and made Wonho’s heart ache even more.

“You’re doing great.” Minhyuk broke the agonizing silence in there, prudently shifting even closer
to where came from. “Just a bit more. Keep going, the pace is great. Hyung is here to catch you.”

Now over a steadier ice, the maknae hurried his pace until he noticed it could make the ice break
and pull him into the frosty water, so he pressed himself against the lake’s frozen surface with
more caution; panting heavily, the boy used his elbows and whole forearm to haul him forward.

It got to the point where Minhyuk was just a couple of steps away from Changkyun, squatted down
over the ice, so the red-haired jolted forward as carefully as he could and got a hold of the boy
between his legs, pulling Changkyun back with him by the maknae’s torso.

Wonho could hear Hyungwon let out a heavy panting, possibly after holding out his breath for too
long.

The blond was spurred to action when Jooheon jumped in their direction to drag Minhyuk and
Changkyun back to the land, so Wonho did the same.

“Oh God…” Jooheon muttered when they were away from the ice, and Minhyuk collapsed on the
ground with the youngest’s back pressed against his chest. “Holy shit. Are you okay? Baby? Kyun?”

“Yeah.” Minhyuk blew some air through his noise, and it all came out as an icy smoke.
“Changkyun-ah?”

“I thought…” Changkyun let out a cough, and Wonho noticed how damp the boy’s clothes were,
so he took his coat off and enveloped it around him. “I thought I was the ‘baby’ one…”

Jooheon unwillingly let out a chuckle.

“Meh. He’s just fine.”

Amidst the relief of nobody getting hurt, Wonho was late in noticing that Hyungwon was long
gone, but he had a feeling about exactly where the man was heading to.

A few minutes after they went all back to the house and Changkyun was being warmed up by the
others, his attention diverted to the one missing in action.

Before Wonho could reach the end of the hallway, the blast of the bedroom’s door being slammed
made him flinch, but the blond continued down that path anyway.

With caution, Wonho pushed the handle and walked inside to see a raging Hyungwon smashing his
teleporting watch against the wall, opening a small hole on it in the process.

“Hyungwon…”

“Not now. Go away.”
His toneless voice sent shivers down Wonho’s spine. He had never seen the man like that.

“Hyungwon. He’s fine, it’s not—”

“I should’ve been watching him.” The pink-haired suddenly turned around, and his watering eyes tore Wonho’s heart apart. “If I…”

“It’s not your fault.” Wonho stated, with an unflinching step closer. “Changkyun suddenly got a call and wandered into the lake without noticing while looking for better reception. It’s not your fault, Hyungwon. He’s okay. He’s okay, Hyungwon.”

It was seemingly the last straw, to which the time traveler fell to his knees as a wave of sobbing took over his body.

“Hey…” Wonho approached him as sensibly as he could, taking notes to realize Hyungwon didn’t really want him to be there at all. “It’s okay. We all got scared.”

The blond sat on the floor next to the weeping man, slowly pushing him sideways by the waist until the man collapsed on his chest.

Hyungwon’s hands clutched the fabric of Wonho’s turtleneck with a strength that could’ve ripped it off, but it had a gentleness at the same time — as expected of that man, since being a paradox was his specialty.

Wonho held him until his tears came to an end, and the blond carefully pushed the time traveler to lean against the bed frame, still on the floor.

“I’m afraid…” The pink-haired man sniveled, rubbing his face with both hands. “There are things… I won’t be able to protect him from. Protect… all of you from. And you will die, because I’m—”

“Yah, stop it.” Hyungwon’s doe eyes stared at Wonho intensely as the latter wiped the tears off of his face. “We have been taking care of ourselves way before you got here. We survived, and… now that we are together, we protect each other. The seven of us against the world, always. We will protect you.”

With a feeble voice, the man whimpered.

“You too?”

“Of course.” Wonho answered in a heartbeat. “Everything is okay now.”

“Yeah?”

With a soft smile, the blond patted Hyungwon’s head, and the man let out a sigh of relief.

“Yeah.”

Inevitably, Hyungwon was crestfallen for most of the day, or just until Changkyun, Minhyuk and Jooheon came to the bedroom he occupied and cuddled with him, saying that he had nothing to worry about; just because Changkyun is dumb enough to walk into a frozen lake, Minhyuk said, it
wasn’t his fault at all. They were all back to the house and unharmed, so that’s what mattered.

Not losing the thin snow that insisted in consistently falling, the grey sunlight was swallowed by the shadow being casted upon the skies and Hyungwon decided it was time for him to get ready for the Christmas dinner, or mostly because Kihyun knocked on his door telling him to get dressed and come downstairs soon.

Out of all the clothes he picked from that trip, the most comfortable and yet somehow formal one was a black turtleneck under a black blazer and trousers of the same color, so he chose to stick with it for the occasion.

It wasn’t a trait of his to feel so nervous about those prosaic matters, but the time traveler couldn’t help but to rub his sweating hands over his trousers as he took a deep breath, preparing himself to face the rest of the occasion.

Silly, if one considers the fact that Hyungwon didn’t waver for a single second when he walked into a battlefield to defeat an 8-meter-tall genetically modified human in one of Jupiter’s moons, but now his hands quivered with anxiety because of a Christmas dinner.

A lot of expressive whistles emerged while he walked down the stairs.

“The visual of this group!” Jooheon announced from the couch, cupping both hands around his mouth.

Minhyuk, sitting beside his boyfriend, eagerly screeched as Hyungwon walked down the last steps.

“Damn, you look good.” Kihyun announced, standing at the section between the kitchen and the living room, sounding a bit bittersweet. “And you don’t even have make up on.”

“You are pretty too, nerd.” Shownu soothed it a bit, mouth curved into a smile as he looked at his boyfriend from one of the armchairs.

“KIHYUN-AH!” Minhyuk shouted, with a pouty face. “When is the food coming?”

“Maybe faster if you’d help me.” Kihyun threw a glare at him, to which his same-age friend sent a finger heart. His friend now turned to face the pink-haired again. “Don’t worry, I’m just finishing the cake. These morons can tell you more about Christmas and stuff, if you want to know.”

A glance around the living room revealed that only Changkyun and Wonho weren’t in there.

“Relax.” Minhyuk affirmed, as if he had read his mind, clicking his tongue. “They went to the convenience store nearby cuz Kyun wanted some chips. Now sit down…” He pointed at the armchair exactly in front of the couch. “I have some knowledge to pass on.”

Knowledge, as referred by his friend, was a bunch of stories about their Christmas experiences during childhood, especially one how one Jooheon got stuck inside a car in the middle of a snowstorm and almost died, which Hyungwon didn’t understand how it was a nice tale to tell, but the boy laughed so much while talking about it that it didn’t feel such a bag thing.

Hyungwon took some time to imagine how it would’ve been to have grown up like them, playing around their houses, going to school, eating delicious foods during holidays… What would be like to have parents? A whole family, bonded by blood?

It was a concept Hyungwon couldn’t grasp by empiricism, in any case, so no good would come from dwelling about it.
Changkyun and Wonho arrived a moment later, right on time for the dinner. There was a warmth to that shared meal that the time traveler couldn’t truly explain, but he felt like he understood human relationships with a bit more of judgement through experience, which was something he didn’t have the opportunity, or the spare time, before.

At some point, they all started a chat over until which age they thought Santa was real (Shownu, Wonho and Kihyun, around 5 to 6; Jooheon and Minhyuk, until 7 or 8, and Changkyun firmly declared that his parents always said Santa was just a fictional character), and Hyungwon had some trouble grasping the concept of telling your children that a stranger comes down from the chimney every Christmas morning to gift the well-behaved kids. To be sincere, it sounded a bit terrifying, which earned a laugh from the boys as they observed his face while one of them told him how it things were.

Right after the delightful dinner, as it expected of Kihyun’s cooking, Minhyuk started blasting Christmas songs in the living room, to which Changkyun tried to sing along and failed miserably, but still made all the others tear up from so much laughter at the boy’s attempts to belt high notes.

Kihyun was the one who shut them down with the announcement it was time to share gifts, much to Hyungwon’s concealed panic. With so much happening in his life in the past weeks, he completely forgot about getting the boys anything and his wristwatch wasn’t of any use now that it was completely destroyed, so he simply sunk into the couch as some of them bounced upstairs to get their presents.

“Hey there.” Shownu nudged him lightly, sitting next to him. “Are you okay?”

“I didn’t…”

“We don’t care about it.” He curved his mouth into a smile, then handed him a box wrapped in a floral paper. “Merry Christmas, Hyungwon-ah.”

The momentary serenity was disrupted by the chaotic shouts as the others came downstairs again, so Hyungwon simply mouthed a thank you to Shownu.

It was a very elating moment for the Constants. For over an hour, they chatted about what they had gifted each other and what were they worst things they had gotten from relatives, to which Hyungwon stayed silent as he didn’t have much to tell. He still got more presents, though.

Jooheon got him a pair of white sneakers, saying it was way more comfortable to run around on; Minhyuk gave him a purple cotton bracelet he made all by himself, with a tiny number 7 in the middle of it.

Kihyun chose to be more practical and bought him a facial skincare kit; he claimed Hyungwon might not really need it, but it was always good to take care of himself. Shownu’s gift was a white linen handkerchief, with CHW embroidered at the bottom of it, for the man claimed it was always nice to wear one with a suit.

Last but not least, Changkyun gifted him with… a Roomba.

“I thought Monbebe could get lonely or something.” The boy explained, shrugging.

“Yah.” Minhyuk pointed a finger at Wonho, whom sat in one of the armchairs next to the east window. “You gave all of us money as a gift, where’s Hyungwon’s?”

The blond Constant calmly swallowed the wine in his glass before looking up.
“It’s gonna arrive in a few days.” He clarified. “Postal service sucks during the holidays.”

“You ACTUALLY bought him something, and just gave the rest of us money?” Kihyun scoffed, throwing a cushion at the man.

Wonho chortled, and Hyungwon found himself laughing too.

“You can give it back if you don’t want it.” The blond chuckled again at Kihyun’s annoyed huff. “Anyways… this is nice, guys. This year brought us together, so I guess it wasn’t that bad.”

“Yeah.” Minhyuk agreed, with a big gummy smile. “We met each other because of Hyungwon-ah, helped saved the multiverse, went to other worlds!”

“We literally jumped into a moving train.” Jooheon reminisced, with a snort. “We are totally crazy. We could have been dead by now. Guess this universe really needs us, huh?”

“To Hyungwon-ah.” Shownu spoke out of the blue, raising his beer glass. “For always taking care of us, and the world we live in. You may not have a family of your own, but you will always have us.”

The rest of the boys did the same with their glasses, and suddenly the time traveler felt a bit shy for feeling so happy to be with them.

“TO HYUNGWON-AH!”

Minutes of laughter and chattering over Christmas movies on the TV turned into hours, and soon the night came to an end as the men, especially the couples, went in separated ways to spend the rest of Christmas evening; the giant clock over the fireplace struck midnight as Hyungwon passed by the now deserted living room, letting his mind and body absorb calmly absorb everything that had happened not only that day, but since he became friends with those Constants.

The warm feeling in his chest couldn’t be compared to any otherworldly experience Hyungwon had ever have before; extraterrestrials, strange behemoths and hundreds of universes with peculiar races and their individual marvels that any human couldn’t even dream of seeing was nothing compared to how loved his friends were capable to make him feel, and maybe now Hyungwon understood a bit more about the emotional pattern of raging wars and doing the impossible over platonic and romantic love that seemed to follow humanity no matter what universe they were in.

In the comfortable loneliness of that porch, he pondered if wishing that such moments could last forever was a selfishness that every human was familiar with; Hyungwon knew all about eternity, though. Eternity tasted like expired food that still seemed quite decent to be eaten, it felt like a curse and a blessing at the same time. Absurdities of time and space seemed so… insignificant at that point. Hyungwon would trade all the wonders in the universe for their companionship, and never look back.

“Hi.”

The unexpected husky voice emerged a bit far away from the time traveler, but it was way too familiar to prompt any fear.

“Hello.” Hyungwon instantly beamed as Wonho’s frame stepped out of the shadows, moving towards him in the swing he sat.

“How was it? Your first Christmas.”
The man sounded genuinely curious about it, which only made Hyungwon smile even wider. As Wonho pulled down the hood of his padded jacket and sat down next to him, the time traveler suddenly had the wish to run his fingers through those messy strands.

“It was a delight. I don’t know, exactly, what a homey environment is like, but I guess it’s pretty close to this.” The pink-haired directed to his chest, as if it was visible. “I never thought I’d feel so welcomed somewhere, as if I truly belonged.”

“You do.” Wonho’s voice turned into an icy smoke as he spoke. “You belong with us. I don’t care about your universe, or anything else. You are one of us. This is your world.”

Hyungwon displayed an even bigger grin at such words.

“Hyungwon.” The blond continued, without waiting for his reply. “I’d like to show you something.” An expectant pause. “You can go through my memories, right?”

The remembrance of what happened the last time the pink-haired traveler attempted to do that gave him goosebumps.

“Yes… But I don’t think…”

“Please. It’s important to me.” His voice seemed it was about to crack, and Hyungwon’s defenses were weak. “If I concentrate in… one specific memory… can you see it?”

“Yes.”

“Please? Please.”

Hyungwon pondered, examining the Constant’s face as if he’d find a clue to the right decision in there. In the end, he trusted the faith he had in Wonho.

After being hit by a harsh breeze, the time traveler’s hands slowly moved up towards his face, getting a hold on each side of it; Wonho shuddered, but closed his eyes immediately.

“Okay.” Hyungwon kept his tone low, moving the rest of his body to him. “Focus on it for as long as you can.”

The blond’s head nodded, and Hyungwon took that as a lead to plunge into the uncharted territories of someone else’s head.

What was only murkiness turned into a bright atmosphere, and suddenly Hyungwon found himself in an exquisite office, where a woman sat in a leather chair directly speaking to someone, whom sat in one of the chairs in front of her desk.

The time traveler was free to roam around, so he shifted closer to the table.

“He asked if you felt something? Why didn’t you say—”

“Because I do.” Wonho’s voice, undoubtedly. “And it’s hard. It’s...”

Hyungwon frowned. Was that scenario about Wonho’s crush? Why would he bring the time traveler there?

“He said his heart beats faster whenever he’s close to you, didn’t he?” The woman, to which he
guessed it was a consultant of some sort, asked and it finally clicked in. “What if he—”

“He doesn’t.” Wonho’s voice was wobbly, and Hyungwon’s heart dropped to his stomach. “So much could be the cause of his pounding heart, but I’m sure the reason behind mine. It’s because I was stupid enough to fall in love with him.”

It couldn’t be… that. It couldn’t be him. Hyungwon couldn’t be the one...

With the abrupt shift in the time traveler’s emotions, the dreamlike reality around him started to glitch, so Hyungwon took a deep breath.

Wonho suddenly chuckled.

“It’s so fucking stupid.”

The blond Constant suddenly got up and walked right past him, frustrated, running a hand through his hair; it was just a memory, of course, and the man couldn’t see him, but it didn’t stop Hyungwon’s heart from feeling a twinge of pain.

He now stood up in front of her desk, and the woman’s sympathetic eyes never left him.

“This.” The blond pointed to his chest — to his heart. “Is so stupid that I’m considering taking another IQ test, because I must be the dumbest person alive.”

“You can’t lose hope so easily like that, Wonho.”

“But it’s Hyungwon!” The man threw his hands in the air out of frustration.

Oh.

“It’s… he’s like, a God, and I’m just… me. He never even liked someone before, so why would he like me? A guy that treated him badly for most of the time we’ve known each other? I know that karma is real because I fucking fell in love with him.”

The walls of that memory began to glitch harder, but Hyungwon simply couldn’t tear his gaze away from the Constant.

“He’s… so good.” Wonho had a softness in his voice that made the time traveler want to cry. “He is too goddamn good for any of us, for this fucking world. Is this what I get for falling in love with a god? This feeling of powerlessness over what I feel, of what I wish he felt about me? I don’t want to ruin what we have, but I can’t stand this anymore.”

“Then tell him. At least you won’t regret keeping this in your chest forever. Tell him.”

Wonho made a long pause, and all Hyungwon could hear was his heartbeat as he stared at him with a bewilderment he didn’t know it was possible to feel.

But then the man suddenly looked away from her, shifting his head to the left, then to the right. With a last sigh, he stared the woman dead in the eye, but Hyungwon had the feeling he wasn’t talking to her.

“I am.”

With a loud gasp, Hyungwon pulled his hands away from Wonho’s face more abruptly than he’d
usually do, but there were no words in his vocabulary to explain what he felt after witnessing that; maybe now he understood what Minhyuk meant when he said his feelings were all over the place, unable to be picked apart and discerned from one another.

“Hyungwon.”

The blond Constant’s voice pulled him back from his hurried musings, and the small window between veracity and fantasy seemed to lessen even more.

“I…” Hyungwon’s voice came out too strained, so he diverted his eyes to the floor again. He could hear his heart beat so clearly it was almost like it was inside his head.

“I meant it. I mean it.” Wonho’s voice sounded too frail, and Hyungwon felt guilty about his inability to do something about it.

“You…” The time traveler inhaled sharply, gazing at the blond man again. “Love me?”

“Yes.”

“But…” He gulped, trying not to linger on Wonho’s face. “You never… You didn’t… like me until…”

“I don’t know…” Wonho seemed conflicted, scratching the back of his neck. “I denied for a long time. Maybe even before I realized it. But… it has been a while.”

The most awkward silence in the history of their awkward silences ensued, and Hyungwon’s brain seemed to be shutting off too fast, so he tried to put his first thoughts into words the best he could.

“I… Wonho…” He stared at the Constant filled with perplexity, watching the way the man gulped while waiting for an answer. “I… I don’t think I can… return your feelings.”

His limbs went numb as he watched Wonho’s face fall into a somber mien, and Hyungwon felt as if his heart was being crushed by an invisible force.

“Yeah.” The man let out a dry chuckle, staring at his own hands. “I sort of… expected. It’s fine, it’s fine, I saw that coming.” Even in a visibly painful moment for him, Wonho gave him a lopsided grin. “Sorry if I made things weird. Shit, can we forget this happened and…”

“Wonho…”

“I’m… gonna go, okay?” He quickly got up, and something in Hyungwon’s instincts begged him to make him stay. “My feelings are my… responsibility. So don’t worry. I’ll get over it. I just… needed you to know, or else I’d explode.”

Once on his feet, Wonho’s movements became slow, but quite sharp. An outside look could conclude it was as if he was restraining too much inside of him, and any miscalculated move would rip it to shreds.

In the distance, the wind howled threateningly as if it was a late omen, one that Hyungwon should have, somehow, noticed before it happened; if not from Wonho, from himself and all the unusual variations in how the blond Constant made him feel. By what means, though, could Hyungwon have made sense of it if he didn’t know what to make of so much that was still new to him?

In the light of the openness of Wonho’s heart, maybe the significant truth of what was disregarded by his raw perception was now right in front of his face, merged into the words that Wonho voiced
and made him feel so conflicted to the point of wanting to run away, but only down a path that led to Wonho in the end.

Romance books told tales of epic love stories and countless heartbreaks that came with, for to love too strongly, to burn too brightly was pure human nature. If so, most of what he read about how horrible it felt to break someone’s heart was true, but it couldn’t be avoided that it felt like the right thing to do at that moment.

Maybe what was missing in the equation had been there all along, Hyungwon just hadn’t been clever enough to understand what was about Wonho that tore down all the walls he had built around his heart, or that the lack of romance throughout his life had built for him.

A tear rolled down his cheek as he watched Wonho walking down the short steps off to the outskirts of the lake house, swiftly disappearing into a fog that emerged only to make Hyungwon feel that he was losing something he didn’t know he had up until that moment.

To be human was, and always had been, a devastating experience.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for scaring yall with kyun? JDGHHDJHDJFKDF just a lil bit of angst so i wont lose the habit in here. he remains iconic and the number 1 hwh supporter alongside mbb in this story

also WAY TO GO WONHO i mean u got rejected but at least u told him (showed him?) right buddy
dw man i got you just wait a bit more

about the scene in the frozen lake, dont take my advice as something 100% accurate because i did only a small research on what to do in these cases but jkdfhdfh who knows what if u need it one day, do ya thing and survive

bruh..... still cant believe mx performed on madison square garden....... legendary

anyways, take care, kids
see ya next week
“(...) Alone,
in the crown of the tree,
I went to China,
I went to Prague;
I died, and was born in the spring;
I found you, and loved you, again.”

Mary Oliver, “Hummingbirds”

“So, since Hakyeon sent us the data he collected so far exploring his wrinkle, I ran a comparison…”

Wonho’s mouth moved at its usual speed, but Hyungwon’s brain didn’t seem to be so keen of keep up with it. It was of utmost disrespect, he was aware, but the time traveler’s attention deviated on its own, out of his control to wander among the memories of what happened between them.

It had been two days since Christmas Eve, and the time traveler could tell how hard Wonho was working on bringing things back to normal, even if it was evident that the blond Constant felt uncomfortable. Hyungwon didn’t know what could possibly be helpful in that situation, so he let the matter on Wonho’s hands.
So far, no one had noticed this small crack in their relationship; if they did, nothing was mentioned, much to Hyungwon’s appreciation.

“Hyungwon?”

The pink-haired flinched after being called out of his musings, even though he was staring at Wonho the entire time.

“Hmm?” Hyungwon unnecessarily cleared his throat, shifting sideways on the panel he leaned on so his entire back could touch it.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes, yes. The… Uh… Hakyeon’s wrinkle wavers way more in contrast with the one we have, whilst ours follows a different pattern.”

“Yeah.” Wonho nodded, adjusting his round specs on his nose as he brought his head down to face the tablet on his hand, and suddenly Hyungwon was barely listening again.

That wasn’t the first time he had seen the Constant with glasses on; a week before, Hyungwon stormed inside the man’s office with the partial conclusion of their study to find Wonho picking up a book from one of his office’s shelves, and Hyungwon’s legs oddly shudder for a second when the man turned around to face him, specs nearly falling off his face.

Wonho didn’t like them much, as explained by the blond himself, but he used once in a while when his retinas begged for a break from contact lenses.

“Hey.”

“Uh?” Hyungwon’s eyes went round, as if he got caught doing something wrong.

“Is there… something wrong?”

Maybe, but Hyungwon didn’t know how to put it into words, so he plastered a smile on his face.

“No.”

“Uh… okay. Uhm, I…” Moving swiftly, Wonho placed the tablet he held over one of the panels of the control room. “Since we can be sure it’s man-made, we have to find a way to shut it down. But… I’ll be going now.”

“Where?”

“I, uh, have lunch a friend.”

“Friend?”

Of course Hyungwon was aware of the silliness of his questions, but he couldn’t help himself. Not when their friendship was already so frail; it only made the fear of losing Wonho grow at a remarkable rate.

Was he even going out with a real friend, or was Wonho already moving on from the feelings he claimed to have for Hyungwon? It suddenly popped up in his mind a mention to what blind dates were, made by Minhyuk, and the time traveler uselessly pondered if that was the case.

If so, that was good, right? Wonho was young and handsome, why shouldn’t he be enjoying his life
with someone from his own world?

In theory, the thought of it should make Hyungwon hopeful for that awkwardness between them to be over, but it wasn’t that simple — not when a part of him was surprisingly not quite comfortable with this idea.

“Yes…” Wonho’s hand moved up to stroke the back of his neck, gathering his backpack on the floor next to the exit. “So… see you soon.”

Hyungwon knew he didn’t mean it.

In the past month, they had gotten closer than ever with the amount of time that Wonho spent on his time machine while they worked on the wrinkle case all by themselves; evidence to support it was in how, most of the days, Wonho either slept on his room inside the train or somewhere in the control room.

Without noticing, he got used to have Wonho around all the time.

“When?” The pink-haired took a step forward. “Do you want to go over my devices with me to see if there’s something we can use? Tonight?”

“I can’t.” His gaze dropped to the floor. “I have… stuff to do.”

“With your friend?”

Hyungwon’s tone sounded more defensive than he intended, and he didn’t know where that came from.

“No.” The shorter man shook his head, and Hyungwon buried his nails on his hand at the way Wonho’s eyelashes moved gracefully when he blinked. “Just… stuff.”

“Is this an excuse?”

It took the blond by surprise.

“No. I mean, not exactly…” Briefly shutting his eyes, the other man sighed. “Look… We haven’t… talked about that and I’m trying my best to… be like we were before… that. But it’s hard. I can’t be here all the time and expect my feelings to go away. I just need some time.”

“How much… is that?”

“I don’t know.” His mouth twitched, and a weight was added to Hyungwon’s chest. “I’ll still come around to check the progress…”

The time traveler didn’t bother to hide the disappointment in his voice.

“Just for that?”

“I’m sorry. Really. I’ll… go now.”

Hyungwon’s silent response blended with the noiseless ambience of his control room now that Wonho was gone, and the heaviness of what engulfed his chest did nothing but to bring him to crouch down, burying his face between his legs.

Little did he know that it was just the beginning of Wonho’s casual avoidance.
It started with the blond Constant brazenly making excuses to hang out with their group of friends whenever he knew Hyungwon would be around; the time traveler did his best to comprehend what Wonho had told him about needing time alone to deal with his feelings, but it was difficult to get used to his absence. It felt wrong. Hyungwon felt wrong. The world felt wrong.

Notwithstanding, Wonho still came around once in a while, like he said he would. Their moments together were cut short to technical interactions, regardless of the time traveler’s attempts to make small talk (“Did you send that article you were working on?” “Not yet. Revising.” “Are you getting a New Year’s break? The others—” “I don’t take breaks. I’m just gonna work.”) which wasn’t much, but at least Hyungwon tried. Trying being the key word, which led Hyungwon to believe he didn’t know too much about dealing with humans as he thought he did.

Things became more evident once when Kihyun dragged him to the mall, in the second to last day of the year, and his eyes spotted Wonho entering the movie theater with someone, in the same day the blond texted him he was “too tired” to watch a movie with him in the train.

Hyungwon may or may not have caused a black out in the entire building on his way out, with a distressed Kihyun beseeching for an explanation that the pink-haired didn’t offer.

Maybe he was overreacting, Hyungwon thought to himself later. Life wasn’t black and white and things just… happened. And yet an ugly, burning feeling in his chest made him want to yell and get angry for being put aside, even though he didn’t have any concrete reason that didn’t sound simply petty.

When it came to seek for someone else’s help, Hyungwon decided to appeal to his life-long partner.

“So…” The time traveler leisurely sat down on the floor of the control room, cross-legged, after asking his A.I. for her opinion on what was happening to him. “What do you think?”

“Well…” Monbebe’s lights flickered faster for a second, quickly returning to its usual pace. “According to every online quiz I’ve crossed references with, you are 99% jealous. My personal opinion counts as the other 1%, so there’s a 100% chance you are just very jealous.”

“What? I am not. I mean, maybe. In a friendly way. He’s just… too distant. Making up excuses to not see me…”

“He came by two days ago.”

“Yes, but…” The time traveler sighed heavily. “He just comes by, checks on our study and, sometimes, hang out with one of the Constants, but don’t last 10 minutes in the same room as me.”

“Africa of the internet, it is not easy to forget someone you have strong feelings for. Maybe he’s trying to find a way to see you as just a friend again. That’s what you want, right?”

“Of course?” Hyungwon scoffed, fidgeting on his spot.

“Then everything should go back to normal as soon as he falls for someone else. He’s a pretty decent looking human, so it shouldn’t take too long.”

“You think so? He said he… loved me.”

“Again: that’s what you want, right?”

A line appeared between his eyebrows.
“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Monbebe’s lights faded away for a brief moment, as if the A.I. was sighing.

“Have you even considered that you have feelings for Wonho? That you might fancy him?”


“You know what? Sometimes I am ashamed that you are my creator. Your folly is unfathomable.”

He could tell his A.I. darted away from the room as the ambience lighting returned to its standard mode, and Hyungwon let his back collapse against the floor.

Such plunging into his own thoughts only lasted a couple of minutes, or just until he heard his friends’ voices coming from the main wagon.

Jooheon had an arm around Kihyun’s shoulder as they sat in the first bench in front of the control room.

“So, what are we doing tomorrow?” Jooheon questioned, while Kihyun typed on his phone. “Please say there’s gonna be booze.”

“Fuck, me too.” Kihyun snorted, bringing his attention to his younger friend before detecting the time traveler’s presence. “Oh. Hey, Hyungwon-ah. Tomorrow is New Year’s Eve. Got plans?”

“Do we have to celebrate?”

“It’s good, hyung.” The golden-haired boy smiled briefly. “This year had so many ups and downs, but it was pretty good. I mean, we are alive after all that, I’d say that’s reason enough to celebrate.”

The pink-haired hummed, crossing his arms over his chest. Then an idea popped up out of nowhere.

“What about a trip? It has been a while since I took you all somewhere nice.”

“I thought you couldn’t leave.” Kihyun commented.

“I can’t leave the universe. I still can move backwards and forward in time. Even though I need to be careful with the future, since I am inserted in this timeline, hence there’s a future me out there.”

“Nice!” Jooheon exclaimed. “Take us somewhere with lots of booze.”

“Yah.” Kihyun lightly smacked his friend, chuckling. “Let’s wait till Shownu and Wonho are done with their fight thing and we can decide.”

“Fight thing?” Hyungwon inquired.

“Oh.” The expression on Kihyun’s face made it seem like he had forgotten something. “They’re in that room inside Shownu’s room that’s also a kendo gym.”

“They are here?” His voice came out way too eager. “In the train?”

“Yeah.”

Hyungwon didn’t bother in making up an explanation to his sudden departure towards the further
wagons, with a renewed hope that a trip would be of great help to heal his fissured friendship with Wonho.

The man was nowhere to be found in Shownu’s room, though, or as informed by the owner of that space himself, Wonho had left not much long ago to shower in his own room.

A couple of knocks were enough to have the door unlocked.

“Come in.” Wonho’s voice arose before Hyungwon’s eyes could find him.

With his back turned to the entrance, the blond had a black shirt in his hands, maneuvering it so he could put it on.

In the air, Hyungwon could smell the balsamic odor of left by deodorant spread across the entire space, but his gaze was hooked on his friend’s back.

There was something peculiar about the way Wonho seemed to stand under a different light to him; the time traveler wished he could explain it easily, but the way his eyes traced the muscles of Wonho’s back as the blond put his shirt on was almost invasive — that wasn’t even the first time he had seen Wonho shirtless, so what was that hotness in his face about?

Just one of the myriad of unanswered questions about Hyungwon’s odd behavior.

Shaking his head to send those thoughts away, Hyungwon cleared his throat to announce his presence.

“Oh, uh, hi.” The shorter man forced a smile as he turned around. “You…”

“Tomorrow is New Year’s Eve.”

Wonho nodded at his assertion, fetching his black leather jacket from the bed.

“We are planning a trip. To the past, or future.”

“Sounds nice.” His toneless voice somehow made Hyungwon way sadder. “I can’t go.”

“Why?”

“I have to review some projects and—”

“But…” The frustration in his voice was clear as day. “It’s New Year’s Eve. We are supposed to celebrate.”

For a moment, the Constant’s stare lingered on him for more than necessary, and Hyungwon swore the man was going to grin and agree with his wishes the way he used to.

Before Christmas, before the love confession. Before whatever was in Hyungwon’s chest that seemed heavier than a supermassive black hole.

“I… don’t do that.” The man turned his shoulder to him, to grab his backpack on his bed. “Sorry, I’ll come next time.”

“Stop lying.” Hyungwon blurted out, surprising the both of them. “Do you hate me?”

The kindest smile he had ever seen on Wonho’s face made an appearance.
“No. You know I don’t. Try to understand me.”

“I’m trying, Wonho. Isn’t there another way? Every time I see you these days, I feel like your mind is elsewhere. We were getting along so well. I miss that.”

Silently, Hyungwon choked back a sob, but Wonho strolled in his direction and took him in his arms. He smelled even better up close, with his damp hair dripping a couple of water on the floor.

The time traveler managed to push back those tears, even though the sensation of being held by Wonho seemed to make the world seem bearable again.

“I’m sorry.” Hyungwon quivered a bit as Wonho’s voice reverberated through his skin in the middle of their hug. “I’ll fix this, okay?” Yet, the blond was the first to pull away. The time traveler wanted to whine about it, but Wonho brushed his fingers against his hand. “I promise I’ll fix this. Enjoy this trip with the kids. I will… try to make things as they were before. I’m sorry if I made you feel bad. That’s… everything I didn’t want.”

Of course it wasn’t the first time that his eyes acknowledged Wonho’s beauty, but Hyungwon couldn’t help but to let his gaze hang on his friend’s face for a bit longer; ages seemed to have passed since he saw, actually saw, Wonho like that.

The blond studied his face with such cautiousness that it seemed it was the last time he was going to see Hyungwon. Something in Hyungwon’s chest dropped to his stomach, and he wanted to hug him again.

But he didn’t.

“I need to go now.” Wonho announced, rubbing the back of his own neck. “I’m having lunch with my mom.”

“Alright.” With a light nod, the time traveler stepped out of his room so the blond could lock it.

For a moment, Wonho’s habits during the past days crossed the taller’s mind at the thought he was about to leave with a dry farewell.

“Then, uh…” His friend stuttered a bit, throwing the backpack on one shoulder. “See you soon. Happy New Year, Hyungwon-ah.”

Hyungwon-ah.

Wonho didn’t wait for an answer, but had an easy grin on his lips.

In the darkness above his head, fireworks blared all across the city as the clock hit midnight, and Wonho stood in his balcony embracing the melancholy growing in his chest; maybe if he paid enough attention to the cheers of celebration all around the world that came from the TV inside his living room, he’d feel more resigned to what he needed to do.

While the cold of that night was subdued by his heartache, Wonho was caught in the sort of trance caused by those explosions in the sky, which reminded him of something his mother used to say when he was a kid — if he wished upon a star with enough faith, things would come true.
“Please…” Wonho gulped, blinking fast as hot tears rolled down his cheeks. “Please, universe. If it’s… the right thing to do… take these feelings away. If it’s right… let me see him as just a friend.”

A violent sob engulfed his being, forcing Wonho to crouch down as he poured his heart out, feeling like he didn’t belong in that world that was so eager to celebrate the arrival of a new year, a new era; all he wanted was to feel the keenness for the unknown too, but things didn’t seem to matter that much once the realization of his one-sided love emerged.

Perhaps, that’s why all his other doubles hated Hyungwon — it was easier when Wonho thought he disliked him, like the others, because at least he didn’t have to deal with the mess caused by his own feelings. Maybe, hate at first sight was a painless way out of the mess that Wonho was dumb enough to get himself into.

Crying over spilled milk wasn’t of much use, though. No one forced him to fall in love with Hyungwon, and his stupid method of attempting to get rid of his feelings for him was hurting the person he claimed to love, so clearly it was not the best way.

Just for once, Wonho wanted to be given the answer to a problem and not think twice before making use of it to make the world right.

The Constants were two, maybe three meters away from him, but he could perfectly hear them laughing around the table filled up with food and drinks right in front of the largest window in the place, with the best view all the way down; their skepticism didn’t believe Hyungwon at first when the time traveler said he’d take them on a ride around the planet in a Chinese railway build in outer space, but completely lost their minds when they got up there. The time traveler didn’t remember his first time out of the planet, but thought that their reactions to it were adorable.

Two hours had passed since their arrival, and Hyungwon still couldn’t take his mind off of Wonho.

He’d love that view, the time traveler concluded as the transportation crossed the Pacific. It would take Wonho a while to stop pretending to not be too dazed from that experience, but once he did the questions would come in waves, and Hyungwon would laugh at his face every time he responded the blond’s inquiries with something that was virtually impossible to him, just to dive into the undying curiosity that was part of his friend’s being, and one of the things Hyungwon liked the most about him.

An unconscious smile appeared on the pink-haired’s face, but it was abruptly interrupted by someone bumping on him.

“Oh, shit, sorry!” The girl mumbled in Korean, using the windowsill as support. “Sorry, sir, I didn’t mean…”

She had a small face, with big, brown eyes that fitted well with her long grey hair, seeming more distraught than apologetic.

“It’s alright.” Hyungwon’s mouth curved into a smile as he replied in the same idiom. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah…” She replied, tidying her cherry red dress. “Didn’t see you there, my bad.”
“It’s okay. I don’t mind. Are you here alone?”

“Oh, no.” The girl snickered. “I came with a… friend. I’m Lee Jinsuk, by the way.”

She extended her hand to him.

“Nice to meet you.” He grinned, shaking her hand. “I am Hyungwon.”

“Pft, I know.”

Hyungwon was a bit taken aback until he remembered that, regardless of being three thousand years in the future, he was still inserted into the timeline. That explained why he earned a few funny looks on their way there.

“Oh.” His eyes widened for a moment. “I…”

“Don’t worry, man.” She sighed, leaning forward on the windowsill to gaze at her home planet. “Meeting the Hyungwon is nice, but is the least of my problems now.”

“Oh.” He repeated himself, feeling a little silly. “May I help you?”

Her head suddenly turned to him again.

“Are you good with the ‘having feelings for someone’ thing?”

“Oh.” Hyungwon shook his head, also leaning on the windowsill on an honest hour. The Earth gleamed with its natural beauty. “I wish I was.”

A muffled snort came from the girl.

“Damn, I thought the hero from my childhood’s tales had more game.” Then, a deep sigh. “Man, this sucks. Remember I told you I’m here with my friend? So, uh, I really like her. It has been a while now, and I don’t know how this will affect our friendship. Am I being selfish for wanting more than what she possibly can offer?”

“Do you…” Hyungwon cleared his throat. “Do you think she… likes you?”

“Man, I don’t know. I suck at reading people, but I really, really like her. I worked for months just to save up for this trip and finally confess to her. But now I’m chickening out. What do I do, hero of my childhood’s tales?”

Did Wonho feel like this too during our Christmas trip? Full of… fear?

“Are you sure?” Hyungwon lightly shook his head to shoo Wonho away from his mind. “That you like her?”

“Yeah.”

“How?”

“What do you mean how?” Jinsuk chortled again, as if it was an absurd question. “I look at her and my stomach gets full of butterflies.”

“Butterflies?”

“My chest feels so freaking warm whenever she smiles.” That prompted the girl to smile too,
ignoring Hyungwon’s question. “And being next to her is when I feel the happiest and the safest. I want to hold her and kiss her, and take her in cute dates and, fuck, just thinking of her with someone else makes me mad.”

Oh.

“But… what if she rejects you?”

“Uh…” Jinsuk seemed a bit uncomfortable, and Hyungwon regretted the question. “What I am gonna do? I want her happiness above everything, even though I wish I was the one making her happy. If our friendship isn’t completely ruined by it, I’ll find a way to get rid of these feelings. It will be hard, though. I really, really like her. No, I love her. Yeah. I do.”

*Why do I feel so… guilty?*

“Won’t you… suffer?”

“Yeah, probably.” She shrugged. “But, you know, it’s a risk. Of course I won’t let it show to her, but if she doesn’t really like me like that, what can I do? She’s my best friend, and it’s entire on me that I fell in love with her.”

“And she fell for you too, dumbass.”

The foreign voice speaking Korean made Jinsuk almost jump out of her skin, bringing a hand to her chest as she turned around to stare at the other girl with wide eyes.

“You…” Jinsuk kept staring at her, as if the girl was just an illusion. “Like me…? For real?”

The other girl, a brunette slightly shorter than Jinsuk, nodded with the brightest smile on her face.

“I can’t believe you told a historical figure about it and not me.” The girl cackled, getting closer to her. “By the way…” She turned to face the time traveler. “Nice to meet you.”

“Uh…” Her face flushed, and Hyungwon had the urge to laugh, but didn’t want to ruin their moment. “I was… going to? You disappeared a few minutes ago then I was wandering here and…”

“You two seem to have a lot to talk about.” Hyungwon commented, ready to make his way out. “I’ll leave first.”

They barely noticed that Hyungwon was gone, too caught up in their own world; they kissed at some point, and something stung in Hyungwon’s chest — guilt, as he thought, perhaps. Now Wonho glided across his mind again, and it only made him realized how he didn’t think about how gravely the blond’s feelings could’ve been affected since Christmas.

Because romantic love wasn’t a topic that had crossed his musings many times before; his personal life didn’t seem to matter much in the grand scheme of things, not when the multiverse was at an unceasing risk during the past 300 years. How could he comprehend easily something he never even felt before? It didn’t stop Hyungwon from only thinking about himself regarding the effects of the distance between them.

Was Wonho in too much pain while trying not to be in love with him? If it was the other way around, how it would feel like? Was guilt the only reason why the time traveler’s chest seemed to ache to the point it was a bit hard to breathe?

*I’m sorry, Wonho.*
Wonho read the same sentence over twenty times in the past hour as the sun drowned behind him and the moon rose in its place; the university was virtually empty during the winter break period, and the blond found solace in the silence of his office, with no students of colleagues to pester him.

Only if he didn’t have another brat to pester him in that office already.

“Jesus, get a job, Jeonghan.” Wonho cut his friend’s whining monologue as the man sat in one of the chairs in front of his desk. “I’m working, can’t you go bother one of your friends?”

“It’s the second fucking day of the year.” He pointed out, as if that mattered. “I can’t believe you grew up into such a loser.”

Only God knew for how long they knew each other; their mothers were friends, so Wonho was naturally pushed to play with Jeonghan when they were kids, but their growth was immensely distinct — while Wonho was drawn to his studies, his friend grew up more inclined to living the chaebol life, but he was probably the only one the blond man didn’t hate out of his family’s social circle.

“You mean someone with an actual job, other than being an heir?”

“Being an heir is everybody’s dream, hyung.”

“Well, not mine. Go away.”

“But I’m leaving next week! Stop being mean to me or I’ll tell your mom.”

Peeking at the raven-haired through his eyelashes, Wonho scoffed.

“What do you even want from me? Don’t you always say that I’m your ‘uncool hyung’?”

The younger grinned, getting on his feet and sauntering towards Wonho’s side of the desk. He also took the pen out of Wonho’s hand and threw over his papers, closing his laptop.

“But you are my friend!” Jeonghan laughed, leaning half of his body over Wonho while engulfing him into a hug. “I love you, hyung, let’s go out! Aren’t you starving? Damn, you need me in your life.”

Wonho snorted, tapping on his arm for the man to get off of him. Not that Jeonghan complied, anyway.

“God, you are so annoying. Fine, what do you want to do?”

“YAY!” His friend threw his arms in the air in celebration like a kid. “Let’s go out to eat. I’ll be your date tonight.”

As Jeonghan finally pulled away, he could clearly see the disgusted face Wonho made at his proposal. Once more, he laughed it off.

“I swear I’ll tell your mom you’re being mean.”

“Shut up.” Wonho gave in, reaching out for his phone over the table and the backpack inside one
his drawers. “Let’s go before I regret this.”

“What about Chang?”

Minhyuk crinkled his nose after thoughtful consideration.

“Nah…” The red-haired clicked his tongue. “Doesn’t sound right.”

“Well…” A peek through his eyelashes showed Kihyun concentrated on his phone. “Choi?”

“Too common.” Minhyuk replied.

“Cha?”


“Yeah, I think so. What do you think, Hyungwon? It’s your call.”

He was grateful for all the effort and determination his friends always put in making him feel more like one of them, but the memories of his early visit to Wonho’s office made him want to scream of frustration, somehow.

“God, you are so annoying. Fine, what do you want to do?”

“YAY! Let’s go out to eat. I’ll be your date tonight.”

Hyungwon went there to say he was sorry for his lack of consideration for Wonho’s feelings since Christmas Eve, but before he could set a foot inside Wonho’s office, that dialogue emerged and the pink-haired simply froze on spot, leaning beside the entrance.

Maybe that was Wonho’s way of keeping his promise of fixing whatever was broken between them.

So why on Earth was Hyungwon vexed about it?

“You guys can pick one.” He mumbled, with his head over his arms on the kitchen’s table. “It’s fine…”

“Yah.” Kihyun speedily knocked on the table to get his attention. “That’s your surname we’re talking about. We can’t choose for you.”

At least a feigned smile at his friends Hyungwon was able to show.

“I like it. Chae Hyungwon, I like it. Really.”

“Hyungwon-ah.” Minhyuk’s voice was softer, and the time traveler was afraid it could ignite his tears. “What’s going on? Ever since we came back… scratch that, even during the trip, you seemed so goddamn sad. Did something happen?”

Well, it didn’t hurt to question people with actual experience.
“What does love feel like?”

“What?” Kihyun squinted at him, dropping his phone on the kitchen’s table. “What do you mean? Like, romance?”

“Yes.” The time traveler nodded, just because. “How can you be sure you like someone?”

Minhyuk and Kihyun exchanged a look that seemed to cautiously question where did that come from.

“Well, Hyungwon-ah…” Minhyuk cleared his throat. “It’s different to everyone. But I guess romance is… a bit complicated, but it’s worthy.”

“Complicated how?”

“You gotta let yourself be vulnerable.” Kihyun responded, pursing his lips together. “Opening up to someone is always a risk. If the person likes you back, awesome. If they don’t… awful.”

Okay, that part Hyungwon got it.

“What… if the person likes you back?”

“Then you date.” His red-haired friend cackled. “I mean, romance comes in many ways. Hmm… I guess I didn’t mention it to you before, but I’m asexual.”

“Oh.” Hyungwon tilted his head. “Like Jooheon?”

“Yeah. Guess we’re not so rare after all.” Minhyuk chuckled again, running his hands through his hair. “Before I got my memories back, I struggled a lot with it, but now I’m fine. We are.”

“I’m glad.” Hyungwon brushed his fingers on Minhyuk’s hand, and the man smiled so sincerely it made his chest ache a little less.

“So…” The man lightly tapped on the table. “There’s Jooheon and I, our kind of love that doesn’t really care about sex. There’s also Shownu hyung and Kihyunnie, who do like it. There’s also people who date multiple people at the same time, there’s people who don’t want to date anyone, etc. That’s why it’s different to everyone.”

“But it’s good.” Kihyun sheepishly smiled. “I mean, it’s a lot of effort, but it pays off with the right person.”

“The basics, Kihyunnie.” His same-age friend brought forth. “Love feels like the worst and the best thing in the world. Worst because of the fear of not being reciprocated, and best because the other person can make your day better just by being next to you. You feel excited and anxious to be next to them, and you spend most of the time thinking about them, even when you don’t notice… also, butterflies in the stomach whenever you see or talk to them.”

“Butterflies…?”

Kihyun snorted at full volume.

“It’s this weird feeling in your stomach that makes it seem like there’s butterflies flying inside of it.”

“Oh…” Maybe Hyungwon had felt it before, he simply… didn’t know how to describe. A sudden question appeared on his mind. “Do you think… If you weren’t taught about romance, do you
think you’d still have fallen in love?”

Kihyun and Minhyuk both looked down and away, pondering on his question.

“It’s so…” His shorter friend was the first to answer. “I had never thought about it… like this.”

“Maybe.” Minhyuk had a stronger opinion. “Love comes in many forms. Even if you don’t know how to name it, it’s there. There’s love in friendship, love in caring about the wellbeing of others, love for animals, love for art, etc. If there’s love, deep down you know it’s love.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Kihyun nodded in agreement. “But it’s hard to put myself into a scenario like this. Uh… Hyungwon, is this about… the way you grew up?”

The pink-haired licked his lips, looking away.

“I just… don’t know if I will ever…” Hyungwon felt the drop on the mood as soon as the words came out. “So I thought it’d be nice to at least know a bit more.”

Now that he faced his friends again, the men looked at him with a devastated mien.

“Hyungwon-ah…” Kihyun seemed to want to reach out for him, but was too hesitant to do it.

“I’m alright, Kihyun.” Hyungwon lied with a tiny smile.

“It’s okay if you don’t want to fall in love.” Minhyuk reassured him. “But, Hyungwon-ah… if, one day, you ever find the right person, hold them tight.”

A conundrum ensued.

“How do I—how would one know… that? How to know if someone is the right one?”

Kihyun laughed quietly, and Minhyuk threw a sympathetic gaze at him.

“I have no idea, my dude.” His red-haired friend affirmed. “Sometimes it strikes you when they go out of their way to do something nice for you, or when they’re holding you tight while you cry, or sometimes you know when you kiss them. You just don’t know until… you do.”

Without noticing, Hyungwon scoffed, which made both of them burst into laughter.

Love was an intricate matter, and yet most of the human affairs fell into its spectrum — had Hyungwon ever escaped it, too? Of course not. If he still fought for the multiverse, was because he believed in the goodness in people’s hearts, and the inherent love that came with it. Then it was settled, before all things: humanity was Hyungwon’s first love, and the only one he needed to keep doing what was right.

Then why was he so worked up about it now, after witnessing that girl speak so fondly of the one that she loved, and seeing her beloved reciprocate her feelings?

Guilt, of course, or at least that’s what he tried to convinced himself of — it was a simpler, better way. Hyungwon couldn’t live with the fear of losing what was already precious to him; the few friends he made there, Wonho included. If the latter’s feelings were impossible to escape from, what would happen to them?

No, Wonho assured it would be alright. He promised that things would be back to what they were. How long till that, though? Minhyuk said that love was different from person to person, so it could be anything from a week to years…
Considering the possibility of being away from the blond Constant for so long made feel a twinge hit his heart.

*Wonho will find someone else and forget his feelings for me. Maybe that man… maybe he already did.*

And there it came again. Instinctively, the pink-haired frowned and a stingy feeling cut across his chest.

Would the love he claimed to feel for the time traveler really disappear, as if it had never existed? It was what Hyungwon asked for, in one way or another, right?

So why did it make him feel so… sorrowful?

*Oh.*

*Am I…*

Hours passed, and Hyungwon tried to imagine all his other friends with loving and caring partners; he didn’t feel something acrid drop in his stomach whenever he saw Jooheon and Minhyuk being affectionate with each other, nor felt slightly annoyed by Shownu and Kihyun’s skinship in front of him — not to mention Changkyun, whom he wished nothing but happiness if he decided to settle with someone, one day.

When all was said and done, Wonho wasn’t even supposed to like him. None of his previous versions did, so why that one would to go great lengths, such as falling for him?

“Hyungwon.”

Hyungwon’s eyes went round as Wonho’s voice came right beside him, both sitting on the last bench of the main wagon.

The time traveler blew air through his nose, feeling a quietude in his chest at the sight of him.

“Wonho. I—”

“I’m not him.” The achromatic light of the train haloed his blond hair, and the man gave him a half-smile. “I’m just your imagination.”

With a deep sigh, Hyungwon brought his legs up to press them against his chest.

“I know.”

“You are not dumb, Hyungwon.” The imaginary Wonho got closer, wrapping his fingers around his wrist only to bring Hyungwon’s hand to his chest. “Being afraid is okay. Pretending to be dumb out of fear is not.”

“I…” He kept his mouth open for a moment, gazing into the eyes of someone who wasn’t really there. “Why now? Why him?”

“Does it matter?” Wonho intertwined their fingers together, and the time traveler wanted to cry about how badly he wished he could feel his warmth. “I know you think you don’t deserve something like this. But it isn’t true. Haven’t you walked on enough thorns, Hyungwon? Hasn’t your skin bled enough for the sake of your kind? Haven’t you given more than enough years to pay for sins that aren’t even yours?”
Rapid, hot tears rolled down Hyungwon’s face, and his body yearned for Wonho’s presence next to him — the real one.

“I’m so confused.” He whimpered, and Wonho’s imaginary hold on him got tighter. “It was so much easier when you hated me, like the others. Now I’m a walking contradiction.”

Wonho chuckled quickly.

“You realize you are talking to a projection of your subconscious, right?”

“But you have his face.”

The other man slowly tilted his head.

“And why is that?”

With silence as a response, Hyungwon decided to take a nap instead of dealing with his feelings.

So he harshly pulled his hand away on his way to get up.

“I’m tired.” Hyungwon lied for the second time that day. “Goodbye.”

His attempts to sleep were in vain, though. He tossed around the floor in his room and tried every single sleeping position possible, but restlessness didn’t leave his mind and soul for a single second.

Finally giving up, the time traveler decided on a final and decisive attempt to make sense of it all.

“Monbebe.”

Her flickering lights circled the frame of his door, quickly making its way to the ceiling.

“Yes, Hyungwon?”

“Run a behavioral analysis on me in the past months. Is it possible for me to have developed feelings for Wonho?”

“Yes.” Monbebe replied, way too fast. “Your dopamine levels and heartbeat increase significantly whenever you are around him. My final report is that you are an idiot. Why are you still being an idiot?”

“Excuse me?”

“You were devastated after your two last fights. You kept making excuses to be around him, to the point of using my technology as an excuse to follow him around when he was injured and I reiterate, I did not force you to go there. You even shared the same pillow with him as you both slept on the floor.”

“Hey, how do you know that?”

“I hacked into Changkyun’s phone camera and saw it. It’s boring when none of you are here.”

“That…” Just the remembrance of that night made Hyungwon want to seek Wonho and don’t ever look back. “Friends do that.”

A holographic screen popped out in the air in front of him, above his head level just so Monbebe
could display a short footage from a sort of distorted angle; it still encapsulated Wonho and Hyungwon’s sleeping figures, though, in the bottom of the frame, and Hyungwon’s stomach twisted in a very odd way at the sight of his body moving in his sleep only to wrap his arms around Wonho’s torso and bury his face on it.

His face never flushed so fast before.

“Friends.” The A.I. repeated his statement, in a very mocking tone if you ask.

“You can’t—You shouldn’t invade my privacy, how many times have I told you that?”

“That’s not the point. The point is that you are lying to yourself. That’s ridiculous and purposeless.”

Hyungwon scoffed, getting on his feet to argue with her.

“And what do you know about it?”

“I am a perfect machine, and you are a foolish human in denial. I admit that I did not like Wonho at first because of how he mistreated you, but your relationship with him evolved. I’ve watched his selflessness only grow in your time together, and how much he started to care about you. He is a good human, and so are you. So I question again: why are you being an idiot? Humans need—”

“Enough, Monbebe.” His tone was severe, but Hyungwon didn’t regret it. “I don’t need this right now.”

Sleeping wasn’t going to happen soon, not with so much of Wonho to dwell about, and sharing that space with his bratty A.I. wasn’t the best option, so Hyungwon put on his shoes and left his time machine behind.

“Hyung, pleeeeeeaaase.”

“No.”

“Hyuuuuuuuneggg…”

Letting out a huff, Wonho tossed his pen over the desk harsher than he intended.

“Don’t you have someone else to bother?” He retorted, crossing his arms over his chest. “Seriously, I’m trying to work.”

“It’s Friday, of the first fucking week of the year.” Jeonghan arched an eyebrow at him. “I’ll literally pay you to stop being a loser.”

“I have work to finish.”

“There’s literally no one in this building but you and the security guard, hyung. Look at how sad your life is.”

“So what?” Wonho leaned his elbows on his desk.
“I’m leaving soon, so why don’t you spend some time with your dear childhood friend? I promise you I won’t take you to those pubs where those spoiled rich kids hang out. Please, come with me? It will be nice for you to leave this place.”

Truth to be told, Wonho hadn’t eaten since noon, and that was simply a sandwich that he bought on the grocery store near his hotel. So maybe going out with Jeonghan had its perks.

“I’m not getting wasted with you.” Wonho pointed a cautionary finger at him. “If you get shitfaced, I’m dropping your ass in a cab and that’s it.”

“Jeez…” Jeonghan grimaced. “I’m just inviting you for dinner. We need to catch up as much as we can!”

“Do we?”

The younger man groaned, and Wonho didn’t fight back the urge to laugh.

“Fine, fine.” He rolled his eyes at Jeonghan, whom seemed way too excited about winning over him.

“YAY!” The man jolted from his seat, already ambling towards the door. “I’m giving you 5 minutes to pack your shit and meet me in front of the building.”

Maybe some time outside would really do him good, but there was always the ghost of his last encounter with Hyungwon hovering on his mind and Wonho simply couldn’t bring himself to meet the time traveler without being able to keep the promise that he made — that things would be just as they were before.

A small vibration spread over the table as his phone received a notification.

[07:36 p.m.]

**Kkukkung:**

sup hyung, you good?

[07:37 p.m.]

**Wonho (The Shin):**

I’m fine. Are you okay?

**Kkukkung:**

YEP

haven’t seen u yet this year :/

stop being so busy and hang out w/ us

hyungwon is here watching some random drama on tv

he’s been here for 2 days actually
not that i mind #loveuhyungwonhyung
but u should come over!

Wonho (The Shin):
Actually, I have plans with a friend, sorry :/

Kkukkung:
WHAT FRIEND
WHY

[07:40 p.m.]

Wonho (The Shin):
What do you mean WHY
By the way, the package got there by now?
I ordered it a day before Christmas so…
You gave it to him already?

Kkukkung:
...
OOF

Wonho (The Shin):
Changkyun?
[07:42 p.m.]
What does that mean
CHANGKYUN
IM CHANGKYUN!

To say that Hyungwon didn’t understand most of the things Changkyun did was an understatement; it either lacked apparent meaning or simply didn’t any. So when the boy suddenly jumped off the couch they shared, Hyungwon’s hand froze inside the bag of shrimp flavored chips he ate to watch his friend chuck his phone over the coffee table and dash out of the room as if his life depended on it.

A couple of minutes later, the boy returned to the living room struggling to carry a large cardboard
box, so Hyungwon went to help him.

“What’s this?” The time traveler questioned, taking it from Changkyun’s hand and easily settling it on the floor behind the couch.

“Oh, it’s Wonho hyung’s Christmas gift to you.” Panting, the boy plopped down next to the box. “You don’t have an actual address, so he sent it here cuz it’s the closest to the station. It got here a day before New Year’s Eve, but I forgot. Sorry.”

His shoulders hunched at the mention of the blond Constant, but the curiosity took the best of him.

Hyungwon’s eyes shifted down to the huge box as he felt his heard pound faster, as it normally did these days at the thought of Wonho; a mixture of sadness and elation all at once came to make the world seem more complicated than it had ever been in the past centuries.

“It’s…” He bit his lower lip, crouching down. “It’s fine.”

His friend gestured frantically towards the object.

“Open it!”

Without struggle, Hyungwon opened the cardboard box and found a small envelope on top of what was supposedly the real gift, engulfed in bubble wrap.

“Hyungwon-ah. I know that you can build something better, but accept this as a token of my hope for you to see as many stars as you want to. Thank you for everything. Merry Christmas. From your friend, Wonho.”

“WOW, IT’S A TELESCOPE!” Changkyun shouted, pulling the wrap in a noisy manner. “WOW, A PROFESSIONAL ONE!”

His eyes shifted between the card and the telescope in the box while his nails buried hard against the palm of his free hand; Wonho’s penmanship was one Hyungwon wasn’t acquainted with, but he could almost feel the wavering way his hand touched that card before attaching it to the gift, one that brought back the memories of their chat back in 1996 as the sun rose in the sky and how happy Hyungwon was the night Wonho took him to the observatory, giving him some hope when he was at his lowest.

A buzz in his ears made Changkyun’s voice seem way too distant as his heart submerged into a numbness he didn’t expect to be so heavy.

Ghostly fingers enclosed his wrist and Hyungwon immediately lessened the pressure of his nails against his skin, drawing his attention to someone who wasn’t there.

“It’s alright.” The imagined version of Wonho smiled at him, and all of Hyungwon’s willpower was needed to not cry. “To be human and to feel everything so strongly is so burdensome, right?”

Way beyond that. It burned and teared him apart from the inside out, but Hyungwon had never felt more alike to those of his own race before. Was that what everyone else was fated to experience at some point of their lives?

If so, they had never been so much worth saving. At least Hyungwon now could attest to that way more.
“They say love is in the small things.” Wonho chuckled, letting go of his wrist. The small cuts made by his own nails before began to heal, but stung a bit. “Watching movies together, feeding the other, remembering what the other likes…”

“Hyung?”

His friend’s voice rang loud and clear in Hyungwon’s ears, prompting him to swiftly turn his head to the boy on the floor.

The living room colors suddenly became too bright and everything was so, so loud that the only thing in his mind was running away; Hyungwon just needed to escape to a place no one could make breathing so difficult, to where he could manage all those emotions in a better way — or not at all, if that was a possibility.

“Hyung?” Changkyun called for him again, now noticeably worried.

“I…” The time traveler inhaled harshly, slipping the card in the front pocket of his trousers. “Can you… keep it here? I… I need to go.”

He didn’t wait for a reaction, already making his way towards the door.

“Wait, hyung!” Changkyun’s voice left behind echoed through the room. “Are you okay?”

_I don’t know. I don’t know._

The silence of a trip alone to a random year in the future ended up being louder than having all the six Constants in the train with him; his thoughts were inescapable, always trailing back towards what he wanted to avoid the most. Not even looking up at the stars he adored so much was of much comfort anymore.

Two months and a half passed by in a populous Canadian city Hyungwon didn’t bother learn its name, or anything else that didn’t serve the purpose of distracting him from what he didn’t want to feel. Instead of wearing suits, the time traveler bought a few jeans, long-sleeved shirts and a couple of hoodies to blend in better, one of which Hyungwon currently used as he strolled down a small street towards the coffee shop he got used to frequent every morning.

As expected, the queue for the best iced coffee in town grew bigger each passing minute, but it was a rather familiar blond locks in the crowd that got his attention.

_It can’t be him._

And yet, Hyungwon’s steps rushed towards the man in the queue with his back turned to him, only to come to a halt in the middle of the street when the stranger suddenly turned around and showed his westerner features, to which Hyungwon quickly darted away from.

Without knowing where to go as his face reddened a bit due his silliness, the time traveler resigned himself to take a seat on a wooden bench, across the street.

The summer breeze hit him straight in the face as soon as he pulled his hood down, letting it wash over his pink strands.

“It’s because you miss him.”
Gasping loudly, Hyungwon almost jumped off the bench at the sudden voice speaking Korean, which earned him a passerby’s puzzled glance.

“Go away.” The pink-haired replied in an undertone, in Wonho’s mother tongue.

The laugh that ricocheted through his memories emerged right beside him, and Hyungwon looked up only to throw a glare at the hallucination on his left.

“I’m not really here.” The illusion of Wonho smiled widely, and his eyes turned into crescents. Hyungwon was taken by the so-called butterflies faster than expected. “You traveled, you helped a few people, you rested… and you still feel like crap. Stop pretending.”

“It’s not love.” He chided, looking away from the illusory Constant.

“Are you sure?”

“You know I don’t.”

“What I know is that you want him to touch you, like this…” Wonho’s arms slid around his waist and secured a hold on it, and it almost felt real. The air got caught on his throat as the man now placed a hand under his chin. “You want him to kiss you, and you want this to be real.”

Hyungwon’s startled gaze shifted down to the hand on his face then back to Wonho’s face, shamelessly lingering on his lips.

“This…” He gulped, but didn’t try to break free from what his imagination built. “Can be many things.”

The blond’s fierce gaze turned into an innocent one, and something inside Hyungwon melted at how well his mind seemed to remind Wonho in many different states.

“How will you find out hiding here?” Wonho pulled away, much for his dismay. “You may have an indefinite time to figure out things, but he doesn’t. Life isn’t like the romantic movies you watched lately. Humans fall out of love just as quickly as they fall for someone.”

For most of the time since the confession at Christmas Eve happened, Hyungwon thought that that was what he wanted — for Wonho’s feelings to shift back into the platonic territory, ending this distress that forced the blond to put a distance between them. And it would be so much easier if, just this time, things happened exactly how Hyungwon wanted.

Or what Hyungwon thought he wanted, or what he didn’t notice he stopped wanting — one would have a field day trying to understand the mechanics of his brain, a task that didn’t seem too attractive to the traveler himself.

The rigid dichotomy between the reason why his heart embraced his feelings for humanity and fought against the ones that bloomed for Wonho was unmistakable; as much as the first had been something natural for Hyungwon ever since his incident, the second scared him to death because he didn’t know what to do about, and not knowing always felt unsafe.

What could he possibly have to offer Wonho, anyway? Their lives diverged in so many ways, and yet none of them stopped the time traveler from — literally — run back to his time machine, parked at an abandoned underground facility.

“Monbebe!”
The lights twinkled all across the wagons, sign of an old friend he hadn’t been in contact with for weeks.

“What do you want? I’m in the middle of a Venezuelan telenovela marathon.”

“Take me back to 2018. Now.”

Monbebe’s flicker got more intensely than usual.

“Finally. The Constants did notice you were gone, but I have told them you had a job to do. I recommend you return in January 9th.”

“Why that specific date?”

“You need to hurry.”

“Did you get everything?”

It was the third time Wonho asked Jeonghan about it, and it was the third time the younger man tried to tell him that, yes, he got everything.

“Jeez, hyung.” The man eyed him with a tad of annoyance as they walked down the airport runway. “Not even mom nagged me like this. Oh, hey!”

The wheels of his luggage clashed against the concrete floor with more force as Jeonghan sprung forward, right after spotting three of his friends waving at him, already in front of the private jet.

Wonho liked to believe that he was a good person, because only a really good one would face a horrible traffic jam in that cold morning to accompany his friend to the airport; even with his thickest trench coat on, the icy wind still managed to be a bother to his sight, especially near the aircraft, so Wonho looked away for a few seconds.

Nothing about the weather was what made his blood run cold as his eyes landed on Jeonghan again, though — just the fact that his friend seemed to be frozen in time, with one foot suspended midair as a result of his run.

To panic or not panic? Wonho tried to remind himself that he had seen stranger deeds, but his natural instinct was winning over his self-control. The world drowned into a deafening silence, and for a moment Wonho thought that, maybe he couldn’t move too, so maybe it was panicking time.

“Wonho.”

A known sotto voce cut through the noiseless atmosphere, resonating across the runway like the howling sound of the wind did before.

Wonho considered the delirium possibility, but the fact that, yes, he still could move while the rest of the world remained stationary sort of put that possibility in the past.

The blond turned around in a heartbeat, embracing his own torso out of unease.

A sigh of relief escaped his mouth as soon as he recognized Hyungwon ambling in his direction,
clasping his own wrist that powerfully shined as if the time traveler was holding onto a lamp that gleamed through his skin.

“Hyun…” Wonho’s gaze then shifted to what the man wore, coal black jeans and hoodie of the same color; an involuntary grin appeared on his face. “What…”

The man let out a hiss of pain on his way to him, bringing his fist down as if it was too heavy for him to carry around. Wonho felt his blood run cold once more, staring at him with wide eyes and an anxious feeling on his chest.

His first instinct was to worry, of course, but after a few seconds, there was his body emanated something that felt like relief, yearning; God, how it was possible to miss someone you haven’t seen in less than a week so goddamn much?

“How go.” His voice was now orotund as always, but his mien was rather appalling. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry I lacked consideration… Ah…” A spark of light flowed all the way up his arm. “Do you still like me?”

Although the answer was obvious, Wonho got too caught up in the nonsense of that situation — and one would think he’d be used to it by now.

“What?”

“Ah…” The pink-haired hissed again at his glowing hand, and Wonho’s concern was now the main emotion again. “Do you still like me?”

“Of course.”

“Then don’t go to someone else…” His big eyes watered; the blond couldn’t tell if it was because of the pain on his hand or something else. “Please. I… I know what I said and… I can’t explain, but… I want to be selfish. I’m not sure of anything, but I want to keep you with me. Please, just let me be selfish for once.”

Wonho’s heart pounded so violently in his chest that it reverberated through his ears.

“Wait, wait…” The shorter man took a step further, minding the weird way Hyungwon’s blueish energy burned on his hand. “What do you mean? Go to someone else?”

Though the man looked down and away, Hyungwon eventually glanced over Wonho’s shoulder; the latter turned around to the sight of his childhood friend still frozen in time like everything else, and suddenly he realized what the pink-haired meant.

Wonho let out a chortle that didn’t please the pink-haired.

“You think I am…” Wonho pointed behind his back with his thumb, and cackled. “Hyungwon, Jeonghan is just an old friend. Nothing more.”

“But…” The man pouted. “I saw you two at the movies… and I heard him say he’d be your date… Aren’t you leaving with him?”

“No. He lives in Japan and came to visit.” There was a dumb, goofy smile on Wonho’s face, but he couldn’t care less. “He gets too nervous about flying to drive, so I brought him.”

“Ah…” His voice was small, and his hand dropped from his wrist, even though his fist still blazed viciously. “I see…”
“Are you…” Wonho took a sharp inhale. “Jealous?”

“Yes. I guess. Yes.”

_Oh. Jesus. FUCK._

“But you said…” The blond swallowed. “You said you couldn’t return my feelings.”

“Because I didn’t know what I feel for you.” Hyungwon’s eyes bored into him, and excuse Wonho if he held his breath. “I still don’t know well, honestly. But it’s not just friendship. I don’t feel like this towards our friends, just you. I’m tired, Wonho. All these months, I couldn’t take my mind off of you…”

“Months? It’s—”

“I traveled, far away.” He summed up. “And I kept seeing you even when you weren’t there. I missed you so much it hurts.”

Cool, cool, cool.

It wasn’t like Wonho was _very_ close to pass out on spot, because then he wouldn’t know how that situation unfolded, and he’d rather die than miss that opportunity.

However, the blond still had to acknowledge the odd feeling of seeing the world like that.

“What… Hyungwon? Before we can, uh, continue, uh… Are you, like, freezing time right now or should I worry?”

“Yes.” The taller chuckled, peering at his hand. “It _really_ hurts.”

“Then…”

“The movies said everything seems to stop when you see someone you like. I was trying to be… romantic.”

Hyungwon was the first to burst into laughter, so Wonho followed him, shifting closer to the time traveler.

“So… your plan was to stop me from leaving with someone else by _literally_ stopping time?”

Nothing in the world was more precious than the way Hyungwon blushed out of embarrassment of his own actions, and Wonho’s chest was about to explode of how cute he was.

“Yes…”

“Hyungwon…” Wonho’s chuckle now was more anxious than anything else. “I’m not going anywhere. My life is here. Everything I love is here.”

_Including you._

“You didn’t come around anymore ever since I came back, though…”

“I was a bit ashamed.” The blond confessed. “I promised you I would fix things, but I hadn’t found a way to do it. I’m sorry.”

Another hiss escaped Hyungwon’s mouth as he gawked at his shining hand again.
“Should I stop this now?”

“Please.”

The warning wasn’t enough to not have Wonho yelping once the harsh, icy breeze hit his face again, and every noise in the world returned at full speed once Hyungwon crushed whatever was in his hand and his inner energy faded away.

“Oh, fuck.” The blond lifted an arm to block the wind, but Hyungwon was faster in standing in front of him to block it and entwine their fingers together.

“YAH!”

The sudden shout outside their little bubble reminded Wonho they were still in public, and that he was fucking freezing.

Hyungwon’s strands flew against the wind as they turned around to pay attention to his childhood friend.

“You still… wait, who are you?” His eyes squinted at Hyungwon, then back at the blond. “Bring him, I don’t care. You still came come with me to the Hawaii.”

“I’ll pass, Jeonghan.” He wasn’t exactly smiling at his friend, but more of how good it felt to hold Hyungwon’s hand. “Call me when you get back, brat.” A quick, loving glance at Hyungwon was necessary. “Let’s go.”

But the man came to a halt before Wonho could walk towards the exit.

“Wait, do you want me to open a portal so we can cross the city faster? That’s how I got here. It’s hard, but I still have some dark energy in me.”

“No!” Wonho’s eyes went round, but he chuckled at how Hyungwon adorably frowned. “Stop tearing holes in the fabric of reality, I have a car. And a phone. You could’ve just called me, you know.”

“I think I made myself clear when I said I was attempting to be romantic. A grand gesture was the goal.”

“Okay.” Wonho nodded, because he would’ve agreed to anything at that time.

This time, the taller didn’t resist at Wonho’s attempts to lead him out of there by the hand, and the cold wasn’t that bad anymore if he got to keep Hyungwon close to him.

In retrospect, he regretted a bit not taking that offer, because the traffic jam on their way back wasn’t better than when he went to drop Jeonghan off. However, the drive back turned into one more opportunity for Wonho to embarrassedly brush his fingers against Hyungwon’s hand, whom took Wonho’s hand into his own every time; the blond’s mind was still processing on how to deal with all of that, but it was a nice surprise that the kind of silence that fell between them was between contented and apprehensive, gladly possible.

It was only on the next turn that Wonho decided to take him to his home, since Hyungwon mentioned how he hadn’t eaten yet and, boy, did he underestimate how hungry that man was? Absolutely, but after devouring a 10-person meal all by himself, the time traveler seemed satisfied;
a lazy yawn escaped his mouth as the man lounged on the brown three-seater on his living room while Wonho dumped the dirty dishes on the sink.

“So…” Jesus, the nervousness was palpable in his hesitant voice. Hyungwon bolted upright in the couch as soon as he heard him. “We should talk, right?”

The pink-haired nodded, tapping the seat next to him on the couch for Wonho to come over. Hyungwon sat cross-legged, tidying his sweatshirt.

“Did I… sound too silly earlier?” Hyungwon stared at his hands, and Wonho didn’t fight the urge to grab one of them into his own.

“No, no, that’s not it. I meant… uh… like… what happens now? Should I expect anything?”

“Oh…” He seemed to have understood his point. “Hmm… I think I need more time to figure out things.”

Wonho tried not to make the despondency too evident, so he leaned his head down and nodded, staring at their tangled fingers; he was used to the frostiness of Hyungwon’s hands by now.

“This is brand new to me, so… I don’t know what to do about it. I don’t know how to act… And I really don’t like not knowing things. But I am here…”


“I also don’t know that.” The time traveler chuckled, and brought Wonho’s hand to his lap. “But like I told you, I know it isn’t merely friendship. I never felt like this before. Can you… be patient? With me?”

Craning his neck upwards, his gaze shifted to the pink-haired again, and Hyungwon seemed so damn lovely and soft in those clothes that it was impossible to deny him anything.

“Of course I can. Should we not see each other or…”

“No!” Hyungwon jumped a bit on the sofa, and Wonho’s heart missed a beat at his adorableness. “Please, no. I meant… can you be patient while I’m still learning? I know I’m not offering much, but… please, don’t go away.”

“Okay.” The corners of Wonho’s mouth quirked up. “Baby steps, then.”

“Can we… keep this between us for now?” The pink-haired asked, and his heart pounded faster, because that was truly happening. He had a fucking chance. “It’s just… I’m dealing with a lot in my mind…”

“I get it. Don’t worry.”

“Wonho… I know this isn’t much…”

“I don’t mind.” Wonho gave him a half-smile. “I’d rather have whatever you can give me than anything else. You have no idea how much I like you.”

“Thank you.” His eyes glistened with a childlike delight, just before shutting down as Hyungwon yawned again. “I’m tired. Freezing time is quite complicated, but even more exhausting. Can I sleep here?”
His hold on Hyungwon’s hand got tighter as Wonho mentally screamed of happiness, but if the man noticed, he didn’t mention.

At his nod, Hyungwon proceeded to spread his limbs over the couch.

“Lie down with me.”

Oh, man.

How the hell would Wonho survive while hearing those things from him? He had no idea, but was willing to find out if there was a chance.

That was not the same couch they had slept before, when Wonho was drunk and making some questionable choices that ended up pretty well; all the furniture in the penthouse was handpicked by his mother, whom had a better taste for these things than Wonho. It wasn’t as big as the previous one, but Hyungwon saw no problem in nestling into the blond’s chest as soon as Wonho settled next to him.

“Oh…” Hyungwon probably noticed the subtle stiffness in his body, pulling his head back to stare at him. “Do you mind when I do that?”

“Absolutely fucking not.” Wonho chuckled, carefully wrapping an arm around the time traveler’s waist. “Can I… do that?”

“Yeah.” Lethally, the pink-haired grinned at him. “You are so warm. Wonho… thank you for still liking me.”

“You know…” He shivered as Hyungwon’s breath was hot on his neck. “I, uh, I asked the, universe or something, for my feelings for you to go away if that was the right thing…”

“What?” Hyungwon sounded genuinely taken aback.

“I thought I never stood a chance, okay?” He looked at the man through his eyelashes, settling a hand on Hyungwon’s hair. “I guess there’s more to it, then…”

“I think so.” Hyungwon smiled, closing his eyes as another yawn surfaced. “I don’t know if I’m going to be able to sleep on a couch again, honestly. Maybe that day… was just an exception.”

“It’s okay.” Wonho sighed, feeling his body as light as a leaf. “Just close your eyes. Hmm… Do you want me to tell you a story? To help you sleep?”

The time traveler laughed, and Wonho could feel every move his body made; a sigh, a hum under his breath, Hyungwon’s hands moving up and down on his back.

“What kind of story?”

Of love, the blond wanted to say. He wanted to tell the most powerful tales that human kind had written down, just so Hyungwon could have an idea what that kind of love was talking about when Wonho spoke of his feelings for him. He wanted to tell that time traveler that he’d be willing to follow Hyungwon to the ends of the earth and amble through hell for the illusion of him, but it was simply too much at the moment. Patience had been promised, and so it’d be delivered.

“It’s a story about a boy who missed another boy just as much as this other boy missed him. Wanna hear it?”
“Everything.” Hyungwon snuggled closer, burying his head in the crook of his neck. “Tell me everything.”

Chapter End Notes

(eyes emoji)
lmao i gtg

(to the tune of NSYNC’s It’s Gonna Be Me) it's gonna be GAY

see ya next week, kids
“What’s just a coincidence for you that you still find me in your way, is a long wait for me to get found by you.”

_Yusha Rizvi_

Way before his feet could touch the ground of where he teleported to, Hyungwon felt the nausea building up inside his stomach. Maybe the fact that he hadn’t done it in a while was the one to blame, or possibly because Hyungwon built that watch in a hurry the night before after Wonho fell asleep.

The time traveler took a deep breath and his senses were overwhelmed by the sounds and smells of his surroundings; the briny and strong wind hit him squarely in the face, while the roaring sound of waves crashing against the shore made Hyungwon gulp hard.

With a light head shake, Hyungwon shooed away his sea-hating thoughts and began his tough walk on sand to meet his friends.

This time, that trip was a small reward for Changkyun’s efforts in the college entrance exam after the boy received the results and successfully got in — the maknae’s initial request was to travel back to the Cretaceous Period so he could pet a tiny dinosaur, much to Kihyun’s distress who vehemently forbid Hyungwon to even think of complying, so Changkyun settled down for a two-day trip to the beach in Southern California, early days of the summer of 2014.

It would’ve been a wonderful time if Hyungwon didn’t detest hot weather. Especially at that
moment, that he wore a three-piece grey tweed suit under a sun that seemed to want to roast him alive.

“COME BACK HERE!”

Kihyun seemed defeated by Changkyun and Minhyuk running around the seashore, panting heavily as he plodded back to where Shownu lied down on a white lounger, under the shadow of a big umbrella. Hyungwon was the one who suggested that his friends settled down in that area, since it was almost desert and they’d have more privacy while he was briefly absent.

“Tough crowd?” Hyungwon asked, taking off his blazer to lessen his discomfort.

His shorter friend squinted at him for the sun was on his face, gasping due the physical exertion. “It’s like dog sitting two puppies.” He blurted out, jogging a little to collapse next to Shownu, that barely made any move that wasn’t to sip on his beer. “They can perish without sunscreen, I give up.”

“Yah.” Jooheon’s voice came from beside him, and the time traveler had forgotten that there was a bit of distance between the three loungers and beach umbrellas settled by his friends. “They go into full toddler mode when at the beach. Doesn’t last long, so relax.”

“If they get sunburned, they don’t get to come crying to me!” Kihyun declared.

Speaking of the obnoxious yellow orb in the sky, Hyungwon felt the dizziness come back as his feet, now shoeless, acknowledged the sizzling sand beneath them; still way too many layers of clothes made him feel like there wasn’t enough oxygen to inhale, but his priority was to find the nearest shadow.

The time traveler opted for dashing towards the free lounger a few steps away from Jooheon’s, and never before he felt so grateful for an umbrella existing at that exact spot and time.

“Hey, Jooheonnie.” He called for his friend, a couple of minutes later when his skin didn’t feel like it was on fire. “Where is Wonho?”

Instead of replying, Jooheon simply pointed to the sea.

Hyungwon’s fingers stopped working on taking his vest off as soon as an… interesting sight was put before his eyes.

Wearing nothing but swimming trunks, Wonho came out of the ocean with all his broad-shouldered appeal and fair beauty, drenched from head to toe, and Hyungwon had to remind himself to stop holding his breath.

The man spotted him easily and opened a big, gummy smile, jogging in his direction — which didn’t make anything easier, since Hyungwon couldn’t stop gawking at him like an idiot.

It wasn’t his fault that Wonho was way too gorgeous, and his newly discovered attraction for him only made Hyungwon question how on Earth he hadn’t noticed all of that before.

“Hey.” The corners of his mouth quirked up as he bent to retrieve a towel, placed at the bottom of the lounger. “How was it?”

“W-What?” He was stammering, it didn’t look good. Yet, the view was too enticing.
Wonho chuckled, drying his chest with a white towel, and Hyungwon gulped.

“Your meeting.” The man clarified, sitting on the other half of the lounger since Hyungwon was now cross-legged. “Didn’t you leave earlier for it?”

“Oh. Oh. Yes.” Feeling his face getting hot out of shyness, Hyungwon casted his gaze to his hands. “It was… alright. I…”

A sudden wave of lightheadedness hit Hyungwon harder this time, and the world around him seemed to spin way too fast, blurring his sight for a few seconds.

“Hyungwon?”

Wonho’s voice seemed louder than usual as it reached his ears, and maybe it was time for him to admit the truth.

“I am just… a bit dizzy.” Hyungwon confessed, feeling his hands tremble as he brought them to rub his face.

As expected, a worried mien waited for him as he looked up again.


Before Wonho could get up again, Hyungwon got a hold of his wrist.

“No.” Hyungwon pleaded, shutting his eyes for a second. “It’s not that bad. It’s just… the time travel by teleportation, I guess.”

The blond Constant felt cold under his hand, and Hyungwon wanted to hug him to enjoy his coolness. But they were in public, with their friends just a few meters away, and Hyungwon was the one who asked for secrecy.

“You said the watch was functioning perfectly! Why…”

“I built it last night, maybe I missed something or I’m just… a bit rusty from travelling like that.”

“Then you should’ve waited. You should’ve taken the train, or we could have delayed the trip so you could—”

“I got their call last afternoon, you were there.” Hyungwon’s mouth curved into a tiny smile. “Don’t worry. It’s also the weather. I’m not really fond of high temperatures.”

A line appeared between Wonho’s eyebrow at his unamused mien, and Hyungwon let out a small huff as he smirked at him; Wonho stood on his feet again once the time traveler reached for the inner pocket of his blazer to retrieve a screwdriver.

“Here.” The blond Constant’s voice now hovered above his head, and Hyungwon looked up to see a water bottle being offered to him. “Drink it.”

A tender smile erupted on his face.

“Thank you.” Hyungwon expressed his gratitude, and Wonho seemed a bit more at ease, sitting down in front of him again with one leg on each side of the lounger. “My meeting was…” At the remembrance of it, he sighed. “Disappointing. The Koreans are being pressed by the westerners to convince me to give them advantage against other nations. I’ll have to talk to a few presidents soon.”
A low hum came from the blond’s mouth as the thundering sound of waves was noticed in the background again; to escape the slight discomfort, Hyungwon took off his wristwatch and began working on it.

“Isn’t it…” When he glanced at Wonho again, his face hinted apprehension. “Dangerous?”

“To whom? You?”

Wonho shook his head negatively, pursing his lips.

“To you, Hyungwon. What if… they take you away?” Kihyun yelled at Minhyuk and Changkyun again in the background, but there was an odd intimacy to that talk. “They could do that. What if…”

“I am not going anywhere.” He reassured, voice a bit higher. “My conditions to cooperate with them were clear regarding my freedom and the safety of all of you. If anything happens to me, Monbebe knows what to do.”

A frown appeared on his face, and Hyungwon would’ve said he was cute if their talk wasn’t so tense.

“What to do…?”

“The governments may not know who all of you are, or what you will do for your world, but I know I can’t cast aside any bad scenario. You are my priority.”

“And you are mine.”

Before Hyungwon could avoid, the screwdriver twisted against the surface of the watch to brutally hit him at the bottom of his index finger.

“Ouch!”

“Shit, you okay?” Wonho jolted forward, getting a hold of his wrist to inspect his wound. “You’re bleeding. Shit.”

During those last days, Hyungwon seldom could tell the difference between the way his heart pounded at an alarming speed whenever next to Wonho and a common nervousness.

Somehow, it still felt… nice.

“I’m alright.” Gently, Hyungwon pulled his hand away to put pressure on his bleeding finger.

“YAH!”

At the sound of the shout, the men turned their heads towards its owner.

“Are you okay?” Kihyun inquired, now sitting on Shownu’s lap. Suddenly, his head turned to Wonho. “Yah, what did you do to him?”

“Why do you assume I did something?” The blond retorted, mildly annoyed. Hyungwon chuckled.

“It was my fault.” The time traveler clarified. “I was careless. It’s just a scratch. It will heal soon.”

“So you want me to—”
“He’s not dying, nerd.” Shownu interjected, tugging him with a hand while he held a beer on the other. “Calm down.”

“Yah, can you two leave this PDA to your room?” Wonho playfully asked, grimacing.

Kihyun’s only reply was a middle finger thrown at his best friend’s direction right before the man grabbed Shownu’s face and kissed him, much to Wonho’s dismay of witnessing that sight.

A snort escaped his mouth as he observed Wonho’s repulsed mien blooming in his face.

“Yah.” Wonho’s tone was serious, but he meant no harm with those worried eyes. “Forget the watch. Oh, wait.”

Hyungwon opened his mouth to say something, but was obstructed by the blond Constant’s body moving forward and he felt himself stiffening for a second, just before he realized Wonho was reaching out for his backpack, settled beside the lounger on the sand.

A tiny sound of zipper being opened and closed passed quickly, and suddenly Hyungwon wished they were alone so he could run his fingers across his arm, from the very tip of his fingers until the beginning of his shoulder blade.

Not that they couldn’t share any type of skinship; they were close, everyone knew it, but the status of their relationship to their friends seemed a peculiar one, that maybe didn’t include openly burying his head on Wonho’s neck in a public space. Hyungwon liked the way they were dealing with whatever that was, even if it meant keeping it as an undisclosed matter.

“Give me your hand.”

But Wonho didn’t wait for him, and smoothly brought the time traveler’s hand closer to him.

Barely any blood poured of his finger anymore, and yet Wonho had such caution as he wrapped an adhesive colored with pink and white cupcakes around the scratch that it made Hyungwon’s chest a bit warm, as if the sun above their heads, millions of light years away, had now made home of his heart.

“What is this?”

“A Band-Aid, silly.” A tiny smile appeared on his face as Wonho watched his job finished.

“No. I meant… what is that for?”

His forehead puckered with confusion.

“It’s a bandage. You never saw one before? Don’t they have in other universes?”

“They probably do.” Hyungwon rapidly mused. “I just never used one before. It’s weird.”

Wonho’s head unexpectedly moved to their right side, where their friends where, and the time traveler’s gaze followed; Jooheon was too immersed with whatever he was listening with his headphones, Kihyun took some pictures of Minhyuk and Changkyun fooling around the beach and Shownu still rested on the lounger, now with his eyes closed.

In a split second, Hyungwon felt a peck being pressed against the bandage on his finger.

“Better?”
Expectant eyes now stared back at him; Wonho’s tiny smile didn’t lessen as he let go of his hand, even though Hyungwon wished he seemed a bit bummed about it.

“Better… what?”

The pink-haired didn’t blink for long seconds, regardless of the harsh beach wind, afraid he’d lose something in the translation of Wonho’s mien.

“It’s just…” Scratching the back of his neck, the blond continued. “A thing that we say. That we do. A peck helps make it heal faster.”

“Very scientific, Dr. Shin.”

Hyungwon chuckled after getting an eye roll.

“Shut up.”

“So…” His thoughts were a bit bold, but he didn’t care. “Will you give me a peck whenever I get hurt? Is there a correlation between the severity of the injury and the amount of pecks? I think some of them will require a lot of pecks.”

At the sudden silence as Wonho now stared at him more pallid than usual, Hyungwon let out a loud laugh.

“Yah…” The blond cleared his throat, tearing his gaze away briefly. “How—how can you… don’t say these things so lightly. Don’t laugh.”

“Thank you, Wonho.” He glanced at his own finger again, still smiling. “It’s cute.”

“Ki buys a bunch of these once in a while and dumps in by bag.” Wonho said, randomly brushing his finger against the hem of Hyungwon’s pants. “Pretty sure you will find some if you look around the train.”

Under the new brand of contented silence that emerged between them these days, Hyungwon blissfully admired the Constant’s facial features; swift blinks caused by the stingy sea wind, a tiny smudge of pink tinging his cheeks, his damp blond locks now falling over his forehead, his lower lip quivering for some reason — it took all the willpower in Hyungwon to not reach out to touch it.

He didn’t flinch for a second when Wonho’s glance landed on him.

“Why are you looking at me this?”

“You are gorgeous.”

In the wake of his words, the blond’s entire face flushed.

“I’m enjoying now that I can openly stare at you.” The time traveler continued, ignoring the nervousness growing inside his chest.

“Argh…” Sighing, Wonho leaned down a bit to cover his face with his hand. “Your honesty kills me.”

Hyungwon’s urge to laugh again was cut short by the thud of a body hitting the sand just a couple of steps away from them.

Before an observation could be made, a dolphin-like screech came out of Minhyuk’s mouth that
caused Changkyun, whom rested beside him with his arms open, to simply roll his eyes at his friend’s antics; the maknae was fast in starting his own, though.

“I AM THE SAND GUARDIAN!” He yelled in English, throwing sand over his chest and legs. “GUARDIAN OF THE SAND!”

Minhyuk picked up quickly, eagerly throwing more sand over his younger friend before whacking Changkyun in the chest.

“POSEIDON QUIVERS BEFORE HIM!” His red-haired friend dramatically shouted.

The youngest now slightly raised his head, peering at the sea.

“FUCK OFF!”

All his friends broke into laughter at Minhyuk and Changkyun’s bit, but the time traveler remained unfazed; it seemed rather funny, but Hyungwon didn’t understand the context of it all.

Wonho seemed to notice his confusion, still giggling at the scene.

“‘You don’t know that? It’s from a Vine.’

“What is a Vine?”

A loud gasp of horror arose next to them, and Hyungwon now glanced at Changkyun’s aghast expression.

“Oh my God.” Mouth agape, the youngest bolted upright. “I didn’t show him Vines. I can’t believe I’m the dumb bitch of the year already.”

“Oh, no, no.” Wonho interpolated, pointing a finger at Changkyun. “Don’t do that. It’s for the best.”

Much to Wonho’s surprise, Hyungwon already had his phone in hand to search online for whatever it was that Changkyun meant.

“Yah, don’t watch it!”

“Oops.” He replied, in a deadpan tone.

“No, gimme that!”

In a split second, Wonho jerked forward to attempt to steal Hyungwon’s phone from his hand, but the time traveler was already dashing away from the lounger right after clicking on the first video he saw about the mentioned topic.

“TOO LATE!” Hyungwon spiritedly shouted while being chased down the beach.

“YAH!”

The background was engulfed by his friends and Hyungwon’s own laughter, feeling his feet scorched by the heat as a desire struck his chest; it couldn’t have been a better moment to slow down his perception of time.

Leisurely, Hyungwon glanced over his shoulder to watch Wonho smiling widely as his body moved smoothly against the air, whilst the rest of the Constants guffawed at their friskiness; the
incandescent sun in his chest was ablaze after a hundred-year sleep, guiding him towards a certainty of a long forgotten concept.

*This is what happiness feels like.*

Mere two days were spent there, but Wonho could really get used to that warm weather all the time, even though it wasn’t realistic since they had to go back to Korea in the morning. The ice cream in his hands didn’t seem too pleased with that night’s heat, though.

Wonho’s struggle to open their room’s door while holding two cups was nothing next to the wave of dread than ran down his spine once the first thing he heard inside the hotel room was a loud sob.

Nearly tripping on his own feet, he placed the cups over the wooden table next to the entrance and darted inside the hotel room.

“Hyungwon?”

His eyes scanned the bedroom’s floor and quickly spotted the time traveler sitting cross-legged against the bedframe, on the side between the farthest window and the bathroom.

“Hyungwon?” Swiftly, Wonho crouched down to place a hand on his back. “What’s wrong? What happened?”

But Hyungwon didn’t seem close to stop bawling his eyes out, even though he acknowledged the blond’s presence.

“It was… so sad.” A hiccup got in the way of his speech. “Wonho…”

“What?” Wonho didn’t understand, but shifted closer. “Please, tell me.”

His puffy eyes now implied that his weeps were coming to an end, but the pink-haired still whimpered as he turned to gaze at Wonho.

“The movie… he died, Wonho. And she was left alone.”

It was only after Hyungwon’s remark that Wonho noticed his laptop sitting on the floor in front of the time traveler, now displaying the credits of whatever Hyungwon was immersed in watching.

He would’ve smacked the shit out of that man if he wasn’t in love with him.

“Jesus fucking Christ…” Wonho let out a sigh, bringing a hand to his chest to bid calmness to his heart, and nerves. “Don’t do that. I thought something bad had happened, holy shit.”

That pink-haired buffoon posed as offended.

“It was horrible!” He snapped his head towards him, as if he wasn’t the one who almost gave Wonho a heart attack. “How could they not end up together?”

“I don’t know! It’s just a story, idiot! You got me worried to death for nothing. Jesus…”

Hyungwon’s expression slowly changed into an embarrassed one, raising his hands to his face to
wipe off the tears and his runny nose.

“Sorry…” His voice was tiny and vulnerable, and Wonho almost regretted scolding him.

“Come here.”

His arm easily wrapped around Hyungwon’s waist, bringing him close to his chest while the time traveler threw his legs over Wonho’s thighs on his own.

Nice wasn’t the adequate word to describe the feeling swarming Wonho’s chest every time he held Hyungwon in his arms; he dwelled on it for a while, but concluded it wouldn’t lead to anything concrete simply because it wasn’t needed — words failed where feelings triumphed, and Hyungwon knew how much he meant to him, so it was alright.

Four days had passed since their talk about Hyungwon’s possible feelings for him, but Wonho liked to believe they were already making some progress — the shift in their relationship had only deepened it, so one can only guess that Wonho had been on cloud nine ever since.

“It’s okay, uh?” His tone turned mellow as he ran his fingers through Hyungwon’s hair. “Just… don’t cry. I don’t like seeing you cry. You know what? You’re banned from watching these sad movies. Only movies with happy ending from now on, okay?”

Sniffling a little, Hyungwon nodded, as he rested his head on Wonho’s shoulder.

“Sorry to scare you.” The pink-haired muttered, sniffling back some tears.

“It’s okay.” Wonho’s hand wiped off the traces of his tears. “Sorry too. For yelling. I just…”

“I know.” He slightly raised his head to lock eyes with the blond. “Do you think the others… suspect something? Since we’re sharing a room…”

“Not really.” Changkyun was keen to share a room with Minhyuk and Jooheon this time, and Shownu and Kihyun paired up together as usual, so… “If these goons ever thought there was… you know, we’d be being interrogated right now. I don’t think they consider us even an… possibility.”

Hyungwon raised a brow.

“Why? Don’t we have potential as a couple?”

His initial reaction was a snort.

“No, it’s mostly because… you know, we used to fight a lot in the beginning and weren’t each other’s biggest fans…”

“Oh, you mean when you used to be rude to me for no reason whatsoever?”

“Yah.” Wonho shot him a scowl, but it all crumbled down at the sight of Hyungwon’s eye smile. “I’ll make it up to you.”

A shiver went down Wonho’s spine once he noticed the time traveler’s gaze moving down to his mouth.

It could’ve been easy to kiss him at that moment; Wonho’s hand was still on his face, Hyungwon’s unmoving legs over his thighs, their closeness… if Wonho hadn’t changed one bit from the person he was before meeting that time traveler, he wouldn’t have hesitated.
But the subject of importance was Hyungwon — different from everybody else in too many ways to be completely listed, but most importantly, he was the man Wonho loved, which was something quite new to the latter.

His natural appeal and a few drinks had always been enough to grant him a few nights of pleasure, or sheer bare minimum effort when it came of dating. None of it could be compared to what he was building with Hyungwon, which made those explored territories rather uncharted to him as much as it must’ve been to the time traveler.

“I will wait.” Hyungwon’s smile was wider, and something in Wonho’s stomach twisted and pulled it. “For the compensation.”

Thankfully, he was saved by a couple of knocks on their door.

“I’ll get it.” The taller informed, promptly standing up.

Wonho’s heart thumped way too fast for it to be slightly healthy.

Exhaling sharply, the blond let his back hit the floor as he brought a hand to his chest, telling himself to calm the fuck down. Aside from his heavy breathing, only the sound of the front door being open reached Wonho’s ears.

“Hey.” Hyungwon’s voice.

“Just checking if you’re okay.” Minhyuk’s voice was orotund. “You ate so little at dinner, then Kihyunnie said you cut your finger earlier… I can’t read you, it’s just… pure static, so I’m asking.”

“I was just a bit… tired. Don’t worry. Enjoy your night.”

“Call me if you need something, alright, Mr. Chae? I’m just next door.”

A brief chuckle.

“Alright, Mr. Lee.”

After a tiny clink that assured the door was closed, Hyungwon’s gracious steps towards him arose in the background, so Wonho moved to sit up again.

“Mr. Chae?” Wonho grinned, looking at him over his shoulder.

It was a very near-death experience to have that pink-haired replying to him directly on his ear.

“Do you like it?”

Obviously, Wonho almost jumped out of his skin.

“Jesus…” The blond brought a hand to his chest again, now way too aware of the way Hyungwon settled on the floor behind him.

As if it was the most natural thing in the world, the pink-haired wrapped an arm around his torso and pulled Wonho closer to him, so that now he’d be sitting between Hyungwon’s legs — the issue of forgetting how to breathe ensued, but Wonho tried not to make a fool out of himself for a change.

“W-what are…”
“Do you mind?” His voice was low and hoarse, and goosebumps swept across Wonho’s skin. “I saw this in a movie and wanted to give it a try.”

Gently, Hyungwon’s hands leisurely ran down his arms and that’s when Wonho knew God was testing his strength and patience to not throw that man on bed and…

“You are soft.” The man established, resting his hand on Wonho’s and tangling their fingers together. “And also very stiff. Am I making you uncomfortable?”

“No, no, no.” He thought of turning around a bit to face him, but his fully red face wasn’t the best sight. “I like it. It’s just… it’s new to me too.”

Any stupid thought that could become material to overthink was pushed aside and Wonho relaxed under his touch, leaning his back against the time traveler’s chest.

The usual wave of serenity struck him quickly, and the blond closed his eyes a bit to bask on the feeling of Hyungwon’s arms on his arms, legs pressed against his legs, head caressing the top of Wonho’s head with tender movements.

“Minhyuk and Kihyun helped me.” Hyungwon commented after a brief silence, completely wrapping his arms around Wonho’s chest. “With the surname. Do you like it?”

“Do you?”

“Yes.” Even without eye contact, he could tell the pink-haired was smiling. “When I checked in here in and gave my full name, it was so strange… and yet sort of exciting. I like it.”

“I like everything you like.” Wonho stated, turning his face a bit and feeling his skin brushing against the fabric of the shirt Hyungwon wore.

The time traveler had no choice but to wear one of Wonho’s shirts for the night, since all he brought along was a bunch of suits that were way too thick to be worn at that hot night; a pair of shorts that looked twice bigger than him was paired with it.

“I like your arms. And body.”

His tone was so casual that should’ve been illegal.

“So… this…” He squeezed the fingers still intertwined with Hyungwon’s. “was just an excuse for you to touch me. As if you’re not touchy enough when we’re cuddling.”

“Is it a crime?” Hyungwon snickered. “I appreciate everything I can.” A tiny movement from the man’s body could be felt, but Wonho still winced once Hyungwon’s lips almost touched his skin; his tone got even lower. Like a fool, Wonho leaned even closer. “Can I? Appreciate you?”

What the fuck was he going to do? Say no?

“Y-yes… fuck, Hyungwon-ah… I… thought you wanted to go… slow.”

“I do.” His breathy voice against his neck was nearly fatal. “But to you… it was just a few days away from me, when to me…” Hyungwon quietly sighed, brushing his nose against his ear. “Months away from you. Then three days later, or last night, they request me back in 2018 Korea by this morning… four busy days, Wonho.”

Shifting a bit in Hyungwon’s embrace, he now peered at the time traveler over his shoulder.
“What’s the hurry, Hyungwon?”

“Hyungwon-ah. Call me that.”

“Okay.” Wonho chuckled sheepishly. “What’s the hurry, Hyungwon-ah? I will wait, as long as you’re comfortable.”

“I am comfortable.” He reassured. “But I also want the experiences. I want to get rid of this stupid restriction from the Council and show you everything in the multiverse. I want to kidnap you and wander across the splendid worlds out there, to let you see the wonders I’ve witnessed on my own. I could take you right now and travel for, I don’t know, 100 years before coming back.”

There was a time that such sentences would puzzle him more than it’d provide some amusement.

“You know I’d get old, right?”

“I could get you through a biological time dilation process. You’d age way slower. Not quite like me, but still…”

“Hyungwon-ah…” Slowly, Wonho turned his upper body sideways to get a hold of his face. “Let’s not think about that right now, okay? We can enjoy what we have here. Take your time. Whatever that can mean to you, anyway.”

The time traveler’s mouth twitched for a moment, almost into a smile.

“So much has happened to us, Wonho. What if something gets in the way and…”

“Shhh.” A quick gulp almost passed unnoticed as Wonho slowly brought their foreheads together. “I protect you, you protect me. Also… do you want to go out with me when we get back? Like a, uh, date.”

Hyungwon beamed to the point his eyes wrinkled up, and the blond had to take a deep breath to shut his mind from the persistent chants of kiss him, kiss him.

“I would love to.” With his reply, Wonho finally could breathe again.

“Great.” He let out a relieved gasp as he pulled his hands down, to which Hyungwon chuckled. “Cool. Uhm, I totally forgot, but I had brought us ice cream… must have melted by now.”

“I don’t care about that. I care about you.”

Then there was it — the piercing gaze that bore holes in Wonho’s skin in the last few days that they spent together, ever since Hyungwon confessed he might feel something for him. As an academic, it was truly vexing not to be able to decipher what in fresh hell that exactly meant, just because deep down Wonho wanted to not have to interpret things anymore — to have it said, word by word, whether it was what he wanted to hear it or not.

“Me too.” The blond muttered, taking in the stunning sight that it was Hyungwon. “Me too.”

After centuries of facing improbable, terrifying scenarios across the multiverse, to have witnessed
the rise and the downfall of entire worlds, one could think it was a bit puerile of him to be nervous about what he was going to wear on his first date ever.

If the love stories taught him well, it was just Wonho and him in some carefully picked place, spending the night together, so why would he need to feel nervous about it? Why did it matter what he wore or not?

He wished it was easy to convince his romantic comedy-filled brain that he was being a fool, but Hyungwon chose to ask for help instead.

“So…” Hyungwon announced, holding two coat hangers, each in one hand. “The grey suit of square patterns with a vest over a charcoal turtleneck…” He pointed to his left side. “Or a black turtleneck with tweed grey trousers?”

Minhyuk and Jooheon stared at him with an inquiring mien, alternating between the garments in his hands and directly at his face; obviously, Hyungwon didn’t tell them he was preparing for a date with Wonho later, but the time traveler needed an opinion more than he needed questions.

“What did you say this is for?” From the entrance of his personal room, Minhyuk arched an eyebrow at him. “You talked so much I forgot already.”

“A very important meeting.” It wasn’t a complete lie, Hyungwon concluded. “I need to… uh… make a good impression.”

“Impression on who?” Jooheon asked, crossing his arms over his chest. “You sound so nervous that if I didn’t know you, hyung, I’d think you’re going on a date or something.”

Oh no.

Not that Hyungwon was bad in lying at all, but the mention of the actual truth made him feel a bit guilty; licking his lips, the time traveler blurted the first excuse that he could come up with.

“I have to impress world leaders, that’s all.” If his avid reply was somehow unnatural, the men didn’t think so.

In the pocket of his current brown trousers, his phone vibrated.

[4:16 p.m.]

Wonho

Hyungwon-ah, I think I have to postpone our date

I have to fly to Shanghai tonight, work related

I’m sorry :( I’ll make it up to you

“Oh.”

The word came out of his mouth before Hyungwon realized it, just as much as his face must’ve looked dejected enough to worry his friends.
“Is everything okay?” Minhyuk took a step forward.

*I don’t know.*

“Yes.” The time traveler plastered a smile on his face. “Just a change of plans.”

[4:19 p.m.]

Hyungwon

Don’t worry. I understand.

Can I see you before you board? I could take you to Shanghai with my watch, this way we’d still spend some time together.

Wonho

I have too much stuff to do before boarding, I didn’t even pack yet

I’ll see you tomorrow when I get back, okay?

[4:21 p.m.]

Hyungwon

Is everything really okay? Why can’t I see you?

Wonho

Yes, it’s okay

I’m just really busy, this thing showed up out of nowhere

I’ll call you tonight, okay?

Hyungwon

Alright. Travel safely.

Wonho

<3

“Oi, Hyungwon-ah!”

With a bittersweet taste on his mouth, Hyungwon swallowed his frustration as Minhyuk called out his name; its free fall to the bottom of his stomach felt like he had just guzzled acid.

“Yes?” Hyungwon diverted his attention to his friends, slipping his phone in his trousers’ pocket. The clothes, now hanging on his right forearm, felt way heavier than they actually were. “Sorry to bother you. I won’t be needing your assistance with this, so… excuse me.”
His natural manners found him to be quite rude towards the men, but the deep desperation to be left alone at the moment spoke louder, so Hyungwon hurried out of his personal room, dumping the clothes over the first bench of the main wagon before making his way to the heart of the machine. Now he only felt like an idiot, getting excited over nothing.

Hyungwon fell asleep waiting for a call of the blond Constant — he would’ve called first, but he didn’t know which kind of issue Wonho was dealing with and simply didn’t want to make it seem like he was being petulant.

Which he kind of was, but Wonho didn’t need to handle that while facing work matters.

As he stretched his limbs on the floor of his personal room, Monbebe informed him it was 7:31 a.m., and a small ping came from the phone on his hand.

On screen, a new message.

[7:31 a.m.]

Wonho

I’m so so so sorry :( There was so much to do
I didn’t have time to even eat yet
I’ll have to stay a little longer, though. I’ll call as soon as I get back
So I’ll see you tonight, okay?
I’m sorry :(

Hyungwon sighed heavily, throwing his phone next to him on the floor. What was it about that trip that required so much attention? More importantly, why was Wonho putting an unnecessary distance between them? He could’ve been the one to take him there and pick him up rather easily.

Was it something that Hyungwon did or said? The time traveler tried to think of something that could hint a shift in Wonho’s behavior ever since they came back from California, also known as the day their date was supposed to happen. He seemed fine when they parted ways at the platform, so what was going on?

Could Wonho be regretting the confession of his feelings and just—

Oh, crap. He was overthinking. That always took some years of his life, quite literally, so he decided to just reply instead.

[7:38 a.m.]

Hyungwon
Don’t worry. Finish your business and call me when you’re done.

Regardless of the hazardous situations he had been put in throughout his lifetime, Hyungwon liked to believe he was doing pretty well; the worlds he failed to save never left his memory, but what he had built for himself in that little universe floating in a much bigger sea of worlds was more than he ever dreamed of having.

Every single day, he reminded himself of how lucky he was to have his friends and Wonho around, but no one in the multiverse could make him sulk less that day.

Everyone seemed too busy with their own lives to spend a goddamn minute with him, though; Wonho was still in China, Shownu and Kihyun were way too deep into their academic lives, Minhyuk had taken an extra shift at the Café whilst Joohoen was preparing to reopen his father’s bookshop, and Changkyun flew to the USA a day after they came back from California, to spend some time with his parents.

His initial plan was to travel quickly to somewhere in the future, just until the timeline was stable enough for him to jump a few hours ahead till night time, but Monbebe not so kindly informed him it was impracticable at that moment because she was updating her system, which required at least half a day to be thoroughly done.

Hyungwon could’ve contacted the government to check if there was something for him to deal with, but he wasn’t in the mood for dealing with authorities, nor for watching the movies that had been a great tool to make him relax.

The books piling on his floor had been completely read a day before their trip to California, no abnormalities in the timeline were found, the devices he had been building to deal with the wrinkle needed Wonho’s approval too since it was a team effort of them both…

“Oh, fuck it.” Hyungwon muttered to himself, chucking his phone over a random bench of the main wagon he had been sitting for the past hour.

If the world decided it was well enough without his presence, he’d do the same and take the day off to sleep.

Blending with the dimness of his room, the moving shapes above Hyungwon’s body would’ve startled him if his brain hadn’t picked up, in seconds, the similarity with the ones in his memories.

Out of laziness, he remembered letting the door of his personal room open, but didn’t expect anyone to come over since they were too caught up with their own things.

“Lights at 70%.” The time traveler ordered, watching the room lighting rise once again.

Minhyuk crouched down next him, while Kihyun and Shownu stood by the entrance with a concerned look in their eyes.

“Hyungwon-ah, did you sleep all this time?” Minhyuk’s voice buzzed on his ear, as if it was way too distant even though he was right next to Hyungwon. “Hey. Are you okay? Why was your phone in the main wagon? We’ve been calling you all night.”

“I was… uh…” To readjust his thoughts, the time traveler rubbed his face with both hands. “Is
“No.” Kihyun was the one to announce with a stern tone, tightly holding onto Shownu’s hand. “You need to come with us.”

“What?” The panic started kicked in, and Hyungwon fumbled around the floor to get on his feet. “Wait. Where is Jooheon?”

“Outside.” Shownu told him, toneless. “He’s waiting in the car.”

“Changkyun?”

“He’s okay in Cambridge.” Kihyun avowed. “We talked to him earlier.”

The sudden realization that Wonho was the only one missing in that equation made his heart drop to his stomach as his eyes went round.

“Wonho. Where is—”

“He’s fine.” Shownu’s voice was soothing and trusting. “He’s on his way.”

“Then what’s going on?”

“Hyungwon-ah.” The weight of Minhyuk’s hand on his shoulder made him shiver. “It’s better if you see it.”

Without a second look in the mirror to check on his (probably not so good) state, Hyungwon grabbed his burgundy blazer and dashed out of the room with his friends.

It didn’t matter to his heart that they assured that everyone was safe and sound, Hyungwon’s mind couldn’t calm down for a second during that ride downtown; he could feel his inner energy bouncing up and down as Minhyuk ran his fingers through his hair, possibly to help him relax. It didn’t work at all, but he appreciated the effort.

In the passenger seat was Shownu, but Hyungwon wished it was Wonho.

The blond Constant would look over his shoulder and give him a tiny smile that would get the butterflies in his stomach in a twist; it didn’t matter which challenge waited for him outside the borders of that vehicle, because everything was simply a delay on his path back to Wonho.

Little by little, in the space between the seconds as Hyungwon stared through the window, the realization struck him like a bolt of lightning.

“I like him.” His voice quavered, very quietly.

The car made a final turn, and Kihyun questioned what he just said.

“What?”

“Nothing.” The time traveler brushed it off, closing a button of his blazer.

Jooheon pulled over half-minute later, on a whimsical well-lit street; lots of shops and restaurants were still open, it was hardly after 8:00 p.m. of that Tuesday, so Hyungwon began to wonder what kind of problem could have emerged in that rather fancy neighborhood.

“Can someone tell me what’s going on?” He beseeched as soon as he stepped out of the car.
But Kihyun thought it was more important to tidy up the white shirt under the time traveler’s blazer, checking on his looks as if he was a kid.

“Hyung…” Jooheon’s hunched shoulders made his heart race out of anxiety. “We did something…”

“What?” He turned to Kihyun and stopped him by taking his wrist. “What did you do?”

His friend looked down and away, with a line appearing between his eyebrows.

“Come on.” Kihyun tugged him by the hem of his blazer, looking rather crestfallen like the rest of them.

No overthinking, Hyungwon retold himself. To come up with any possible bad set-up that could’ve happened would do no good, especially when they were already on site of the possible disaster. He’d see it for himself and solve it, like always. They’d be alright. Wonho was waiting for him.

In their fast pacing, they passed by three buildings filled with life that Hyungwon thought it to be bars of some sort, since the scent of alcohol and grilled food toured all the way down the sidewalk, but he didn’t pay much attention to it. Trouble lingered around the corner, and as always, everyone’s well-being depended on him.

Shownu and Kihyun, the ones leading the way, came to a halt as soon as they reached a space that read *Da On Intercontinental* on its front, but with its lights entirely out both in and out of the building.

Something unpleasant contorted in his stomach.

“It’s closed.” Hyungwon calmly affirmed.

“I got a way in.” Minhyuk was fast in jiggle the keychain on his hand.

Well, it was a very Minhyuk thing to happen, so Hyungwon didn’t question any further.

As soon as Minhyuk twisted the doorknobs of the double door, his friend requested that he entered first, for all his questions would be answered.

The faster he got there, the faster Hyungwon could put an end to that insufferable day.

A few tiny lights among the murkiness were swarmed by the sudden lucent orange glow that spread all over the place as the lights of the place were turned on, followed by the strident sound of something popping in the air.

Muddled by the empty place in front of him, Hyungwon turned around to find his friends wearing tiny cone-shaped hats and blowing on small pieces of plastic.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HYUNGWON-AH!”

Kihyun was the first to yell, jumping up and down as he was followed by the others with an odd chant that said something along the lines of *happy birthday dear Hyungwon*, which ended with even more incoherent shouting and deafening popping noises.

His lousy reaction to whatever was going on in there relied on the fact that Hyungwon didn’t know what to do. With wide eyes, the time traveler didn’t move a single muscle until the song and the cheering was done; what was going on? Time to use his brilliant brain and slow down his...
perception of time — his friends looked quite happy, so nothing dreadful could’ve been truly happening, a birthday was mentioned, the place — a restaurant, apparently — was completely decorated with colorful balloons, flowers and a banner that said *Happy Birthday, Hyungwon…*

But why was *his* birthday? Hyungwon didn’t know when he was born so why were they doing that? Why right at *that* moment?

“Hyungwon?”

Shownu’s mellow voice snapped him out of his reveries and Hyungwon suddenly flinched, as if he was caught doing something wrong.

“Uh… can someone…” He looked ridiculous, standing there in the middle of the empty restaurant staring at his friends, whom still stood by the entrance. “Explain?”

“It’s your birthday party!” Minhyuk bellowed, leaping in his direction to put one of those cone-shaped hats on the time traveler’s head. “Happy birthday, Hyungwon-ah!”

“My… what?”


Awakening at the combination of those words, Hyungwon’s mind was directed to the early days of their friendship, when they shared their first meal in his time machine’s kitchen and the boys were trying to come up with a birthday date for him — Minhyuk’s idea was the final deal.

*Your code… serial… thing… I don’t know, but it’s CHW-000115, right? If we follow the Korean date format, 01 means the month of January, and 15 is the day of that month. That’s your birthday, January 15th. BOOM!*

“Oh.” An acute exhale escaped his mouth. “It is… my… birthday?”

“Of course, dumbass.” Kihyun laughed at him again, and the others followed. “To be honest, we just remembered cuz we were talking about Changkyun’s birthday next week, so we literally pulled all of this in a day and a half.”

“Bro, Wonho hyung literally rented this place *just* for your party.” Jooheon boasted, wrapping an arm around Minhyuk’s waist. “He ain’t playing games.”

The unconscious smile on Hyungwon’s face faded away at the mention of the blond Constant.

“Where is he?”

“He took a flight to China this morning.” Kihyun told him. “He said he’d be back in time, so he must be—”

“Wait, this morning?” Hyungwon frowned.

“Yeah.” His shorter friend confirmed. “All of us spent all night doing the decoration then he did something on his laptop this morning and left saying he had something important to do in Shanghai. He should—”

Maybe Wonho wanted to cover up for the surprise party, but why would he lie that he had gone to China just to *actually* go over there without giving an explanation to his friends? What was going on that, even with everything revealed, Hyungwon still felt he was being kept in the dark?
“Excuse me, sir.” A foreign voice behind him made him wince, and Kihyun ducked his head sideways to make eye contact with whoever that was. “Should we ask the chef to start preparing the dishes?”

“Yes, please.” The corners of Kihyun’s mouth quirked up, as it usually did when he was being polite to a stranger.

“Come on.” His friend tugged on the hem of his blazer again, dragging him to a bigger table settled in front of the large window, with view to the street.

Many mixed emotions enveloped Hyungwon’s chest at the moment, so maybe it was okay for him to feel a little numb while trying to pull himself together.

*Kihyun is talking,* he informed himself. *Pay attention.*

“I didn’t know if they could actually make the seaweed soup here, cuz it’s fancy and shit, so I came in earlier and dropped the one I made.”

“That’s nice.” Hyungwon forced a smile, because they were all too nice and didn’t deserve to know he felt a bit disappointed. “Thank you. Really.” His eyes wandered to every single one of his friends, now gathered around the table. “I’m sorry I didn’t remember…”

“Nah, it’s fine.” Minhyuk dismissed it, sitting between Jooheon and Kihyun in front of him, while Shownu sat at one of the heads of the table. “We just wanted your first birthday to be memorable. Do you like it?”

“Of course.” Hyungwon grinned, this time more genuinely. “Even though you didn’t have to scare me like that.”

“Oh, hyung.” Jooheon chuckled. “You gotta feel a little thrill to be unforgettable!”

On their left side, the stomp of heavy shoes hitting the floor as the front door was swung open grabbed their attention.

“AH, HE LIVES!” Kihyun jeered, clapping like a seal at the man standing by the entrance, whom seemed to be freezing.

An irregular force in his chest yanked his heart in every possible direction at the sight of Wonho smiling at him (them) while he took the beanie off of his head, hauling a small suitcase against the floorboards of the restaurant.

This is it, he thought. Any frustration or annoyance Hyungwon could’ve been feeling since the past day because of their failed date and their miscommunication would dissolve into thin air as soon as he could have Wonho simply sitting next to him, touching his hand under the table or just—

“Hold this for me for a minute.” Sparing a quick glance at Hyungwon, Wonho now directed his speech to Kihyun as he shoved his suitcase in his friend’s direction.

“Yah, Wonho!”

He paid no attention to Kihyun’s shout, though, darting inside the restaurant again, and Hyungwon was left standing there with a feigned smile on his face.

It was his party, after all. One that his friends had put a lot of energy into, and it’d be discourteous of him not to appreciate it entirely just because his harsh displeasure at Wonho. There would be a
time and place to deal with that, but not at that moment, not when he was so lucky to have so many good people in his life. Why should he waste a good night over such petty feelings? It was alright if Wonho didn’t think of his first birthday ever as a priority, that’s just life happening for everyone in that world, right? Right. Absolutely right.

To avoid the intruding thoughts feeding on his vexation, the time traveler let himself be engulfed by the laughter and loud voices of his friends chatting about their first impressions of Hyungwon; regardless of being certain of the pink-haired’s goodwill, Minhyuk thought it wasn’t fair for him to be that tall and that handsome, while Jooheon found him “unbelievably dope” when he saw Hyungwon’s eyes and skin lit up for the first time — like a Christmas tree, his friend repeated. Shownu’s only mention, in-between his attempts of consuming as much food as possible, was that as soon as he saw Hyungwon, he knew he was a good man with good intentions, which was proved to be true to him; Kihyun jabbered for a good 5 minutes about their similarities as scientists (which Hyungwon never thought of himself to be, but you get it) and in polite personalities, confessing that he was a bit intimidated by the time traveler at first, but those were times long forgotten.

Half an hour into his dinner party and Jooheon’s phone blared a hip-hop song in his friend’s jeans’ pocket, only for them to find out it was a call from Changkyun, all the way from the United States.

“HYUNG!” The youngest screamed during the FaceTime call, jiggling his free hand at him. He seemed to be sitting somewhere outside, since the clarity of the sun was visible. “HAPPY BIRTHDAY HYUNG!”

“Thank you, Kyun.” Hyungwon chortled while the others plodded behind him to appear in the call, feeling himself a little lighter by hearing his friend’s voice. He missed him. “Are you and your family alright? How is it going there?”

“Ah, it’s nice.” He clicked his tongue, stabilizing his phone on his hand. “They got a little vacation from work now because of the winter break, so we’re hanging out a lot. Actually…” Changkyun moved the camera to show his surroundings; a greenery scenery filled with large and tall buildings encompassed almost everything. “I’m at Harvard, baby! Dad took me on a tour here, this shit is GIGANTIC!”

“Language, boy.” Hyungwon’s grin got brighter at the sound of Changkyun’s laugh. “I’m glad you’re having fun. You took the ring I gave you, right? If something happens and—”

“If I’m in danger, I just gotta press the inside part of the ring for a few seconds. I got it, dad. Don’t worry. Sorry I missed your birthday.” He made a sad face, but Hyungwon ended up snickering. “I’ll bring you a little thing from here.”

“BRING ME SOMETHING TOO!” Jooheon shouted, leaning on the time traveler’s shoulder to appear on the screen.

“BRO!” Changkyun yelled back. “OF COURSE! Can’t forget a single hyung!”

“Take care, Changkyun-ah.” In his most soothing voice, Shownu waved at the boy 10,000 kilometers away.

“GET YOUR ASS BACK HERE SOON OR I’LL KILL YOU!” Minhyuk announced.

“Eat a lot and wear thicker clothes!” Leaning on his other shoulder, Kihyun was the last to greet him. “Tell your parents we take care of you well or they won’t let you come back!”

The maknae cackled at full volume until his eyes were all wrinkled, nodding at his friends’
requests before saying his final goodbyes.

“Is that Changkyun-ah?”

The five of them turned their heads to the left to find Wonho standing a couple of steps away from their table; now under a better lighting, Hyungwon noticed how disheveled the blond’s long-sleeved white shirt was, as if he had slept with it. His jeans weren’t in a better state either.

“Was.” Hyungwon replied, craning his neck to the other side to hand Jooheon’s phone back to its owner. “Was Changkyun.”

“Where the hell were you?” Kihyun was the one to question him, and Hyungwon busied himself with the food in front of him.

The same shoes that bursted through the front door a bit more than half-hour earlier now moved in the time traveler’s direction, and Hyungwon didn’t need to look over his shoulder to know it was Wonho ambling towards him; a unique kind of energy, one that Hyungwon was way too acquainted with, radiated from Wonho’s body — he could find him by mere sensory impulse in the darkness, and in the fall of the silence in the multiverse, by sheer intuition.

To be so sure of that should’ve been scary, and incredibly foolish. What was about human affection that made everything so soul-consuming, as if it was the beginning and the end of all things at the exact same time?

Irksome, at best.

“Happy birthday.” Wonho’s husky voice pierced through his skin as the man took a seat beside him.

“Thank you.” Much to his distress, Hyungwon’s voice came out too strained and high-pitched, which made him clear his throat and divert his attention to his friends.

“Why didn’t you—”

Hyungwon wasn’t interested in Wonho’s questions at the moment, not after that myriad of ambiguous events — he just wanted to enjoy his damn party and deal with it later.

“Jooheon, how is the bookshop going?”

The blond’s retreat to his own space in his chair implied that Wonho got the hint, and the time traveler let out a deep breath before actually paying attention to what his friend was saying.

During the rest of the night, they didn’t exchange any words whatsoever, which wasn’t quite their style these days, but Wonho dismissed the Constants’ worries about his quiet behavior by saying he was tired from his trip, which he actually seemed to be. As everything related to Wonho, Hyungwon pushed his musings about it to the back of his mind.

A couple of hours later, with their stomachs full of the delicious food prepared by the restaurant’s staff, his friends’ messy body language betrayed their effort of trying to not seem as drunk as they were. The only one who remained sober was Jooheon, and just because he was the one driving.

“Are you sure you don’t need help?” Hyungwon questioned his friend for the third time, while Jooheon tried to fasten the seatbelt on a very clingy Minhyuk on the passenger’s seat. Kihyun was already dozing off with his head on Shownu’s lap on the backseat.
“Nah, it’s cool. Min, min.” He had to forcefully pull away from his boyfriend, whom let out a whine. “Everyone’s crashing at my place tonight, so it’s okay. Take Wonho hyung home for me, please?”

Peering over his shoulder, Hyungwon got a glance of the blond standing by the entrance, talking to some of the restaurant’s staff.

“Will do.”

After sending the boys off safely, the moment that Hyungwon avoided the most had come, so he might as well handle it quickly.

“Let’s go.”

Wonho shuddered at the sound of his voice and moved away from the doorframe which he leaned on, and the time traveler gulped hard to ignore the things his wide-eyed face, gleaming with the lowlight of the ambience, did to him.

“Hyungwon…”

“Not here.” The time traveler replied in an undertone, grabbing Wonho’s suitcase that stood right next to him. “Let’s go.”

“A shiver went down his spine as soon as Wonho’s fingers wrapped around his wrist.

“Are you mad about the date—”

What was Hyungwon mad about, exactly? Could the root of his annoyance be pinpointed, when an entire galaxy of famished feelings clashed against each other for the main role?

Much to talk, but not in a public space like that.

“Walk.” Hyungwon’s voice was dull, gently pulling away from the blond.

Without an ounce of doubt, the time traveler trudged down the sidewalk and rounded the corner of a short alley two buildings ahead; the heavy stomps of Wonho’s shoes against the concrete floor announced the man was trailing behind.

By the time he set things in motion on his wristwatch, Wonho jogged towards him.

“Hold my arm.”

And Wonho did, which prompted the taller to immediately take them out of there.

One could tell it wasn’t the first time Hyungwon had teleported into Wonho’s penthouse by the way he left the blond behind in the living room, tromping towards the kitchen for a glass of water.

“Hyungwon.” Wonho gently clasped his wrist again, as the taller gulped down the remaining liquid on the glass. “What’s going on?”

Under the white light of the kitchen’s environment, Wonho’s blond hair looked like an exhausted kind of mess, and for a second he almost gave up everything just to run his fingers through it.

“I should be the one asking that, Wonho.”
He put down the glass on the large rectangular table way too starkly; both of them could tell it cracked a bit.

Hyungwon’s heart pounded so fast he could hear it as clear as day.

An expected reaction was some tantrum, or an angry remark — anything that conveyed irritation, because nothing in Wonho’s face told such tale, regardless of the circumstances.

Instead, the blond Constant pulled a chair and turned it around, so that its back was against the wooden table.

“Sit down.” Wonho required, eyeing the chair.

“I don’t want to.”

“Sit down, Hyungwon.” His voice dropped a tone, which Hyungwon wouldn’t admit it gave him goosebumps.

So he did, but not without a loud scoff.

“Now, talk. Are you sulking because I didn’t call you last night?”

Crossing his arms over his chest defensively, Hyungwon scoffed once more.

"Please, Wonho.” He responded, looking away. “I am an interdimensional diplomat. I don’t sulk over a call.”

“Then—”

“Why did you asked me on a date if it was to cancel it just hours before it? Do you know how much I was anticipating that?” Hyungwon spouted in one go, and apparently that was a dam breaking on its entirety. “Why did you go to China this morning without telling our friends why you went? Why did you spend half hour of my fucking birthday party talking to whoever was in there? Why couldn’t you make a fucking call to tell me you were alright? Why do you have to make me so angry when you know I hate being angry?”

Once more, Hyungwon anticipated a cutting retort, or anything that hinted Wonho’s displeasure. Yet, the man in front of him simply grinned at him.

“Chae Hyungwon.” His collected, smoky voice possibly made Hyungwon’s legs tremble, but you didn’t hear it from the time traveler himself. “First of all, I canceled out date because, at that moment, I was busy organizing your surprise party with the others, and I didn’t have time to do what I had in mind for our first date. I had to convince my friend, the owner of that restaurant, of closing it down just for us, and convince his staff to work that night because I’d pay them if they did. The kids and I fell asleep while working on the decorations, so I forgot to call you. But I apologized, didn’t I?”

Alright, that conversation didn’t take the turn Hyungwon was expecting it to.

“To be honest…” Wonho let out a sigh, and Hyungwon’s eyes darted to the floorboards. “I didn’t know it was your birthday until Kihyun remembered in the car, on our way back home from California. I didn’t know you even had chosen a birthday already. So everything was too fast and I wanted our first date to be special, not hurried up. I had to make a choice. Regarding whom I was talking to in the restaurant… I went to greet the staff, and one of them started talking and talking, and I couldn’t leave without sounding rude. It wasn’t premeditated.”
“You didn’t even hold my hand…” The time traveler mumbled.

“You cut me off as soon as I started talking.” Wonho promptly made a comeback. “Regarding my time in Shanghai…”

In the brand new noiseless atmosphere, Wonho’s mouth continued open as if he was going to keep talking, but seemingly gave up.

“Wait here a minute.”

Hyungwon groaned out of embarrassment as soon as he was left alone, covering his face with both hands as the realization he just had made a fool out of himself in front of the man he liked; why did he have to go and make a storm in a teacup before letting Wonho explain himself? Why was he such a stupid human when it came to personal relationships?

Exactly one minute later, because he was calculating the length of his humiliation, Wonho returned to the kitchen with a black velvet box on his hand.

“Open it.”

After gaping between the box and Wonho, he assented and did as asked.

What waited for him was beyond what he could’ve had imagined during that process of internally screaming, or mainly because Hyungwon didn’t know what to expect.

His fingers brushed against the velvet surface before it reached the cold silver necklace, moving down towards its round pendant, the leading actor of that show.

Relatively small, the pendant had constellation of Capricornus engraved on its center front and it seemed so fragile, so carefully made that Hyungwon was afraid of touching it any further.

The expectation emanating from Wonho, right next to him, forced him to, though.

Once in his hand, Hyungwon noticed that the pendant was actually a locket.

And there was a picture of the seven of them inside.

The memory of that day in California was fresh on the time traveler’s mind; Wonho’s efforts of chasing him around came to an end as the man plopped down on the sand panting, and Kihyun thought it was the perfect moment for a group picture, so he settled his camera over a cardboard box a bit afar of where Wonho sat, and called for the others.

Right after Hyungwon sat next to Wonho, Minhyuk hopped on the blond’s back and they nearly fell on their side on the sand, being followed by his boyfriend behind him, while Shownu did a peace sign and settled next to Wonho, with Kihyun standing on his knees behind him; Changkyun, full of panache, lied down on his side in front of his older friends, propping his chin up on the palm of his hand.

His insides melted when he noticed that, in the exact moment the picture was taken, Wonho was gazing at him with a huge smile on his face.

“I love it.” Hyungwon thought aloud, before his throat got too tangled up.

It wasn’t over yet, apparently.

“Look on the back.”
So he did, only to find his full name, Chae Hyungwon, carved in Hangul in the middle a myriad of numbers that encircled the round locket’s frame; it took him a few seconds, but Hyungwon knew that too well to let it be disregarded.

“Monbebe… told you?” Hyungwon finally glanced up, pushing back the water gathering in his eyes. “The coordinates of your universe.”

“Yeah.” Wonho blew air through his nose as he chuckled, scratching the back of his neck. He looked a bit nervous for the first time that night. “The jeweler who worked for my mom moved to Shanghai, so I sent him the specifications last night and flew over there this morning to fetch it. It took it longer than I calculated to become like this, though. That’s why…”

“You…” His voice cracked quickly, but Hyungwon continued. “You did all of this… for me? Why?”

“Because I love you, Hyungwon.” The corners of his mouth turned up, and Hyungwon’s chest was struck by a twinge of pain. “Unconditionally. This necklace… is a reminder that you have a home to come back to. I’ll be always waiting for you.”

If he didn’t feel like crying before, now was the crucial moment for his silly tears roll down his face.

As soon as he choked back a sob, Wonho lightly tapped on his arm.

“Come here.”

“I’m sorry…” Hyungwon scrunched up his face to fight back the tears, letting himself relax in Wonho’s arms. “I’m sorry, Wonho…”

“It’s okay, don’t cry.” Much for the time traveler’s consternation, Wonho pulled away, but kept an arm around Hyungwon’s waist while he wiped the tears off of his face. “Shh, kitty, it’s okay, it’s okay.”

“But I was rude to you.” A whimper made his voice sound even more childlike, making his pout even more foolish.

“I like it.” Wonho smiled smugly, and Hyungwon frowned. “This bratty side of you is adorable.”

“It-it’s not…” He freed himself from the blond’s embrace quite easily, turning around to feel his cheeks burning.

But before he could regain his composure, Wonho twirled him around and got a hold of his hand.

“Yes, it is.” His lowered tone was even more lethal when combined with skinship. “Come with me. I still have one more thing to you.”

“What is it?”

“You will see.”

Wonho directed the way inside his place, and they quickly arrived at the doorstep of a room Hyungwon had never been brought to before; it wasn’t Wonho’s bedroom, so he imagined it could be a guest room, like the one Changkyun had in his apartment.

“Go on.” The shorter man gestured towards the doorknob.
As soon as Hyungwon swung it open, countless shadows of tiny lights spread across the floor and the ceiling as its source were mainly submerged by a bunch of blankets and pillows, with a large entry in the middle.

“I put just a comforter on the floor.” Wonho suddenly appeared beside him, taking his hand into his own. “It’s a blanket fort. It’s permanent, so now I don’t have to stow the blankets when you leave. Whenever you feel like crashing here, we can sleep here. Or just you, if you, uh…”

“Wonho.” He could feel his eyes watering again, but tears could wait, so he squeezed the shorter’s hand. “This is lovely. I’m sorry I still can’t sleep on beds and you had to do this…”

“Hey.” With his free hand, Wonho kindly gripped his waist, bringing Hyungwon closer to him. “I don’t mind. I just want you to feel more comfortable. I could sleep anywhere with you.”

His pale skin was stained with a bit of pink as he blushed, and Hyungwon snorted.

It was unbelievable that he was ready to throw a tantrum 10 minutes earlier, and now he was softening in Wonho’s arms again. The power that that man had over him was worrisome.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, just feeling each other’s breathing patterns and tiny body movements; every time Hyungwon felt like Wonho was going to make the move he wanted him to, something held the blond back, and the taller was getting fed up.

When it came to happy endings in the movies he watched and the books he read, it commonly ended with a kiss, so why couldn’t he have it? Now that he experienced a romance of his own, Hyungwon wanted all the good clichés to happen when they were supposed to, and he was so sure that moment was the right one that he’d put his hand in the fire for it.

His body already felt like it was in flames, anyway. That room seemed to be emulating a sauna, so at least it should be the good kind of one.

“Wonho.” His sotto voce broke the silence, and he felt Wonho getting a bit startled.

“Hmm?”

“Kiss me.”

The blond’s expression transformed into a terrified one, and if Hyungwon wasn’t so sure of what he said, he would’ve start wondering if his words were somehow scandalous.

“Hyungwon…”

“Wonho… Are we just going to keep saying each other’s names?”

“No, it’s, uh, I’m just…”

In order to calm him down, Hyungwon softly brought his hands to his face, hoping that his supposedly calming-nerve effect would work again.

The taller almost thought it didn’t when Wonho looked down and away, but it was only for a couple of seconds until the man got a hold of his hands.

“I’m gonna ask you something. Are you forcing yourself to do this because you think this is what I want?”

“No.”
“Because I can wait, Hyungwon.”

“But I can’t.” He shot him a tiny smile, and Wonho’s troubled expression now turned into a dazed one. “I waited for you to kiss me that day we came back from the airport and slept on the couch, also when we watched a movie in your bedroom, and also during the two nights we slept together in California. But you never did. I’m a time traveler. I detest waiting for too long.”

A fleeting pause, to which Wonho looked like he was reevaluating all his life decisions.

“Are you sure?” He nervously asked.

“Wonho.” He took his hands to the blond’s face again, gently brushing his thumb against his cheeks. “If you don’t kiss me in the next minute…”

“Okay, Jesus, calm down, let me, uh…” Wonho started fumbling around, and Hyungwon had to bite his lower lip to not cackle. “Okay, uh, I got it. I got it. Jesus, I’m nervous. Are you nervous?”

“You have no idea.” Hyungwon confessed. He didn’t even know how he managed to spout all those words. “I almost got a full body transplant with an Empress in one of Jupiter’s moons once and didn’t worry for a single second, but now my legs are quivering.”

“You what?”

“Doesn’t matter. What I mean is… Wonho, I’ve come a long way. I’ve seen too many things. But you’re the only person that ever lived that makes me feel like this. So much can still happen to us… I want to enjoy every minute I have. With you.”

“Alright.”

“Alright?”

“Yeah.” Wonho chuckled, intertwining their fingers together once more.

Slowly, as if he was afraid of stepping on a wrong spot, he led Hyungwon towards the blanket fort and sat down, pulling the time traveler to sit beside him.

“Okay. It’s okay. I’m… Yeah.”

Hyungwon had the urge to laugh again, because the Constant seemed to be talking more to himself than to him.

“I’m the one who’s supposed to be more nervous, Wonho. You did this before.”

“But, it’s, you know, different.” He started fidgeting, and Hyungwon found it so adorable his heart skipped a beat. “You are different.”

“Because I am at least 294 years older than you?”

“No, because I’m in love with you. I don’t think I…” Wonho let out a deep sigh. “I don’t think I ever… loved anyone I ever been intimate with. I think… I was waiting for you. Waiting for you to find this version of me.”

“My favorite version.” Hyungwon shot him a fond smile. “I might have been waiting exactly for you too.”

Surrounded by the yellow lights that shined all around them in the fort, Wonho’s pale face
reddened as fast as a blink, and Hyungwon just couldn’t stop staring at that beautiful phenomena.

A couple of minutes in that warm atmosphere of loving gazes passed, and the time traveler could feel the impatience rising in his chest again.

“Wonho.”

“Hmm?”

“If you don’t kiss me now, I’m going to start telling you things about your universe that you still don’t know. I swear.”

“Can you… uh, I’m trying to set a good mood, okay?”

“I’m going to start on how this multiverse started.” His eyes widened at Hyungwon’s affirmation, and that was way more amusing that Hyungwon would let it show. “So, after the period of—”

“Don’t you dare.” He pointed a cautionary finger at him.

“You think you know how entropy works. Let me tell you—”

“Hyungwon, I swear to God.” Vexed, Wonho turned to his side. “I’m not kidding.”

“As soon as you develop the right technology, you will be able to see that—”

“No!” He jolted forward, and Hyungwon pushed himself backwards inside the blanket fort to shelter himself. “You promised you’d never tell me anything!”

“There’s an imprint of another—”

“NO, STOP!”

“What dark matter and dark energy actually are—”

“YAH! CHAE HYUNGWON!”

The time traveler snorted once Wonho nearly jumped on top of him to cover Hyungwon’s mouth with his hand, and yet he kept talking under his breath until Wonho decided that the best way to shut him up was to tickle his belly.

“Ah, stop, stop! Wonho!”

Hyungwon laughed so loud that his throat was starting to get sore, so he gave up.

“Okay, I won’t say anything, I promise!” He beseeched, lightly slapping Wonho’s biceps.

“God…” Wonho panted badly, and Hyungwon trembled at the way he could feel the blond’s muscles rise and fall above him. “Why would you…”

“Wonho.”

Recognition of their rather odd positions seemed to have dawned on the man; at that point, Hyungwon was certain he’d freak out and get off of him as soon as possible, but as the time traveler had learned ever since he crossed paths with that version of him, Wonho could be an unpredictable figure when it’s less expected of him.
Instead, the blond settled the palm of his hands right next to each side of Hyungwon’s head, propping himself up over him.

Then he smiled. Not an ordinary one, though — there was a gut feeling that such grin wasn’t seen by everyone, or every day — it had a profound sense of affection, perhaps untranslatable in any idiom that ever existed, perhaps passed unnoticed by Hyungwon so far because no one in the multiverse ever made him feel so loved, so safe.

What could not be grasped by the human body grasped itself against his skin; Hyungwon could feel in every bit of his chest the veracity of Wonho’s feelings as the man murmured again that he loved him and leaned forward without unnecessary hurry, just as he thought Wonho would do when that time came. The way he touched him was never the same ever since Hyungwon accepted his feelings, which made the time traveler wonder if it was possible for humanity’s way of love to be told in a simple motion of fingers running through his hair.

Wonho was closer than he had never been before, and Hyungwon didn’t know what to do with himself anymore; he thought he was doing great by inciting the kiss with conviction, but now that it was about to happen, all the knowledge he gathered in that big brain of his seemed to have vanished into thin air.

“All your confidence was gone and Hyungwon turned into a panting mess; he couldn’t tear his gaze away from Wonho slowly parting his lips as he closed the distance between them. He was supposed to close his eyes, he knows, but Wonho was closer than ever, filling his entire being with such intense warmth that made Hyungwon a little dizzy — the good kind. He wanted to remember it all, for whatever could happen in the tomorrow would never be able to take that night from him.

Wonho’s damp lips were gentle and voracious at the same time and Hyungwon’s heart was about to explode; mouths molded against each other, there wasn’t any other movement than Wonho’s occasional body jerks, up and down, as if he was trying to restrain himself from overdoing it. But the pink-haired’s mind went blank once he felt Wonho’s firm hand settling on his waist, because he was so painfully aware of everything that was happening that his emotions seemed about to collapse.

So there was it. Hyungwon was being kissed by the only one he wanted to kiss, and it felt like almost everything the love stories promised him: warm and magical and incredibly life-changing, because Time was his witness that as soon as that man kissed him, the tip of his soul brushed against the tip of Wonho’s, now so homogeneous that it was impossible to know where Hyungwon ended and Wonho started.

It was way too brief, though. A simple kiss of the start of a simple relationship, and yet the time traveler was already craving for more.

Wonho pulled back with a dazed mien, unable to open his eyes for a few moments after they broke apart.

He was lovely, and Hyungwon liked him. Nothing else mattered.

“Wow…” Wonho mumbled under his breath, gradually opening his eyes. Once his gaze landed on him again, he seemed surprised. “Uh, Hyungwon…”
“Hmm?”

“Do you… You… Uh… Glowing?”

The time traveler immediately raised his arm and saw his hand gleaming a little, which surprised him too.

“Oh. Oh.” Hyungwon didn’t know his inner energy could emerge without his knowledge, so he focused on making it fade away. “I’m sorry, I didn’t…”

“Hey.” Wonho’s hand now was under his chin, and this time he could feel his interior energy building up to make his skin shine. “I don’t mind. It’s cute that you literally glow when I kiss you.”

“Oh, no.” He brought a hand to his face out of embarrassment. “Why am I like this?”

“Lovable? Cute? Handsome?”

“No…”

Wonho laughed until this eyes crinkled up.

“You are.”

“Kiss me again.” Hyungwon asked like his life depended on it, because nothing could’ve changed how badly he wanted to feel as close to Wonho as possible. “Please.”

Their second kiss was more open-mouthed, losing the initial awkwardness of the first time. Hyungwon didn’t know how to explain in words how much he wanted more and more of him, so what could slightly grasp the concept of it was the way he shifted under Wonho to wrap his legs around the blond’s waist; a genius idea, he concluded right after, because now Wonho was completely on top of him, quickening the pace of how he impulsively rocked his hips against Hyungwon’s, and suddenly the time traveler was burning from inside out. There was no better way to explain it.

He was in such haze that it took him a few seconds to notice Wonho licking his bottom lip, so the pink-haired immediately parted his lips even more, letting out a guttural groan when he felt Wonho’s tongue brushing against his own before licking his mouth.

A new found confidence dawned on Hyungwon when he found a use to his hands by bringing them up to embrace Wonho’s torso, which prompted the blond’s hand to advance up towards his face, not without first haphazardly drag his fingers against Hyungwon’s ribcage and making him want to shriek if such thing was possible without interrupting the moment.

It was a shame that it took him so long to know pleasure like that.

So, being no authority in that matter, Hyungwon let Wonho lead the direction where that was going; Wonho found no difficulty in keeping a languid yet fervent pattern, fingers now burying gently on the time traveler’s hair as he slightly moved Hyungwon’s head to the side to deep their kiss — Hyungwon was a fast learner anyway, and carefully moved one of his hands to get a hold of Wonho’s hair, which got the most beautiful groan out of the blond, reverberating right into Hyungwon’s mouth and awakening things in him that made him vehemently gasp for air.

“Fuck…” He panted against Wonho’s mouth, feeling their chests rose and fall rapidly, hand still holding the blond’s face next to him.
“I love when you curse.” Wonho laughed with his entire being, and the pink-haired loved how he could feel it as if it was his own body. “It’s hot.”

There was so much joy inside of him that Hyungwon couldn’t pretend not to smile.

“Shut up.” He said instead, uselessly trying to pacify his heart so that his skin would stop gleaming.

“With pleasure.” Wonho smirked, leaning forward again.

The night was long, and so were their kisses.

A quick peep through his eyelashes confirmed to Wonho that it was already morning, but he didn’t want to acknowledge it and have to move away from the cozy spot he was lying on; Hyungwon’s breath against the crook of his neck kept a steady pace for a while, until it suddenly began to hurry at an alarming speed.

Wonho was still in that weird midpoint where he wasn’t completely awake nor prone to fall asleep again so he just ran his fingers through Hyungwon’s hair, unable to have predicted the sudden jolt of the time traveler’s body violently bolting upright.

Half-awake and half-asleep, Hyungwon choked on thin air as if he had just run a marathon, yet still managing to mumble incoherent sentences in a language Wonho had no idea where it came from, but didn’t seem like it was the first time he had heard it.

“Hyungwon-ah.” The blond was now 100% awake and startled, watching the way the pink-haired’s arms trembled as he panted.

It was like Hyungwon hadn’t noticed his presence before, even though he slept the entire night in Wonho’s arms inside that blanket fort.

Wide-eyed, Hyungwon turned around with a frightened look that, somehow, was a bit familiar; Wonho caught a glimpse of it when Hyungwon almost drowned in that glass tank, because he was smarter than anyone the blond had ever met, but he also was a moron for always sacrificing himself so easily.

The man opened his mouth and spoke something in what sounded like the same language that Wonho couldn’t understand a single word before, and he realized that maybe the time traveler was still in the sort of trance between a dreamlike world and the reality.

“Hyungwon, I can’t understand you.” He softly spoke, extending his hand for Hyungwon to take it if he wanted.

“I’m sorry.” Hyungwon gulped, looking in every possible direction except for Wonho’s face. “I—”

An infinite amount of apologies was about to come out of his mouth. Wonho shushed him and simply opened his arms.

“Come here.”

So Hyungwon did, rapidly sinking into the blond’s chest with a heavy and fatigued sigh; in any
other moment, Wonho would be the first to break the silence to question what was wrong because he couldn’t stand not being able to do anything for the people he loved, but in that moment, he oddly made the choice to just be there for him.

Once his breath was stable again, Hyungwon broke free from his embrace to melancholic stare at him.

“Wonho,” His gruff tone kept Wonho worried; a ray of gray sunlight cut across the time traveler’s chest. “I have something to tell you.”

“Hmm…” The blond nodded, even though it created a knot in his heart. “Is it bad stuff?”

“No.”

“Is it about the, uh, language you were speaking? While…”

“No.”

“Then why you looked so scared, kitty? You looked like someone just tried to kill you.”

“I…” He exhaled a bit too harshly, and Wonho sort of regretted asking. “I don’t know. Can we talk about this… later?”

“Of course.” Wonho smiled from ear to ear without showing his teeth before leaning to press a kiss against his forehead. “What do you wanna eat? I’m going to order in.”

“Anything is fine.” Hyungwon smiled back, and he could tell the time traveler was putting effort into that.

“Alright, Mr. Chae.” It came out in an excited tone as Wonho jolted to stand up, but before he could take one step forward, the pink-haired grasped his hand. “What?”

“Where are you going?”

He looked down at Hyungwon sitting on the floor, wearing the blue striped pajamas borrowed from Wonho that the blond had no intention of asking for it back; he had never used, anyway, simply buying it because he was accompanying Kihyun during his shopping sprees and grabbed the first thing he saw in front of him to make his best friend shut the fuck up about him not getting anything.

Those clothes already made Hyungwon disgustingly cute, but the cherry on top of the cake was the big pout on his mouth as the time traveler gazed at him; honest to God, Wonho nearly forgot about this stupid necessity to eat to just keep kissing him till the end of times.

“I left my phone in the kitchen.”

“Oh.” He endearingly nodded twice, then let go of Wonho. “Alright.”

It was way too early for his heart to be almost imploding inside his chest.

His phone was long forgotten over the counter the night before, when Hyungwon got angry at him for a few misunderstandings, and Wonho laughed quietly to himself that this was his life now. Kissing Hyungwon, sleeping with Hyungwon, holding hands with Hyungwon… that was actually his fucking life, and if that was nothing but a summer dream, he hoped to never wake up from it.

Wonho was mindlessly humming to himself while scrolling through the dozens of notifications
from friends and work when he heard the sound of the front door’s electronic lock and his body froze.

Eyes darting back to his phone, Wonho checked the time. 8:12 a.m.

Who the hell was entering the penthouse at such ungodly hour? More importantly, why they were hell-bent on unknowingly ruining his time with Hyungwon? Whose body did he have to hide when he killed this intruder?

Only two people besides him new the code to unlock the front door: his mother and Kihyun, because his friend often came over to stuff his freezer with leftovers. But it couldn’t be Kihyun, because Wonho knew damn well that Kihyun spent half of the day sleeping whenever he got hammered, so you might understand now why sheer panic ran through his veins, making Wonho sprung towards the living room.

At the sight of his mother ambling towards him with a few shopping bags, Wonho gulped.

 Fuck, fuck, fuck.

“Oh, hello, son.” His mother calmly greeted him. “Put on a shirt, Hoseok. You’ll get sick.”

Suddenly, Wonho was hyperaware of his entire self, and what had happened since he came back from China; his suitcase was still abandoned on the living room, which caught his mom’s gaze, but she didn’t say anything about it, minding more the startled state of her son.

“Uhm, mom, uh… why are you here?”

She frowned as she settled down on the two-seater, placing the bags beside her.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

Okay, he needed to calm down.

There wasn’t exactly a chance that Hyungwon wouldn’t notice that someone else was in the house, especially when he had gone through questionable means to avoid meeting his mother again, as experienced by Wonho in the Halloween ball. Using whatever his abilities were, Hyungwon certainly was already hiding until his mother—

“Wonho…” The time traveler’s drowsy voice echoed through the hallway that led to the kitchen, and eventually to the living room; Wonho’s blood ran cold. “Do you have another toothbrush…”

Hyungwon legitimately squealed as he quickly spotted Wonho’s mom sitting in the living room, quitting rubbing his face with both hands to wrap his arms around his torso, as if he hadn’t his entire body covered by the pajamas.

“Oh, dear.” His mother now seemed a bit flustered, and Wonho let out the breath he was holding for way too long. “I didn’t know you had… someone over…”

Okay, he really needed to calm down, and be rational. 23 years passed by to his mother since she first encountered Hyungwon on that dreadful night, it was nearly impossible for her to recognize him like that.

“Wait…” Her voice dropped to a lower tone, and Wonho’s eyes widened as she started walking towards the alarmed time traveler. “Do I know you?”
Why wasn’t Hyungwon running away if he looked like he had just fucked up really bad? Wonho could make up some excuse that he was shy and they hadn’t been together for too long to such meet-the-parent thing, but the taller man simply didn’t bat an eyelash while staring at Wonho’s mother, as if he was waiting for something bad to happen.

_I should do something. Should I? What the fuck? What if—_

“Your hair…” She stretched the hand up towards his head, and since she was way shorter than Hyungwon, the latter leaned down. “Reminds me of…”

“Mom.” Whatever clogged Wonho’s throat now gave him some breach to speak out. “Could you not?”

Instead of a reply from her, whom still intently gazed at the time traveler, Hyungwon shot him a tiny smile.

“I think it’s okay. I don’t feel any disturbance.”

Wonho wanted to laugh at how a phrase like that surely seemed weird to anyone who didn’t know who Hyungwon was.

Gently, Hyungwon grasped the hand Wonho’s mother had on his hair and held it between his own, curving his mouth into a smile.

“Nice to see you again, Ma’am. My name is Hyungwon. Chae Hyungwon.”

The fear of some paradox destroying the fabric of their reality was now gone from Wonho’s chest, yet he still sighed heavily, bringing a hand to cover his face at the realization that his plans for a cuddly morning were gone for good.

Chapter End Notes

_MAY I GET A YEEHAW_

anyways, happy birthday hyungwonnie my baby! my son! i wont come back here before you birthday so that’s that, mama loves u

_LET’S GET IT HWH_

and yes changkyun will come back next chapter *finger guns*

take care kids, see ya soon
Things go well (NOT A CLICKBAIT!)

Chapter Summary

seriously. aint a clickbait soft hours are OPEN

Chapter Notes

howdy lads
sorry about this 1 month delay i'm just a dumbass that wrote other fics and that postponed the update of this fic. but we good now and the new chapters are coming regularly!
anyways, mx is coming back and i'm not prepared

as always, thanks for still sticking to this story and i hope you have a good time here
ALSO thanks to @youtubewholock003 for beta reading this <3

enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“To intertwine your happiness with someone else’s is so dangerously brave, so inherently idiotic, and so incomprehensibly, undeniably human.”

K. Towne Jr.

Any thought attempting to enter Hyungwon’s mind during that silent car ride was blocked by the anxiety that was turning his brain into a sea of self-doubt; Why did he feel so nervous if the timeline remained stable after his encounter with Wonho’s mother? Was it because she was Wonho’s mother, after all, and they were…together? Were they together? Hyungwon didn’t know, and worse: he didn’t know what to do about it. Where they stood wasn’t clearly stated, since what people from this time considered a relationship varied depending on the culture, so the uncertainty was still there, growing roots inside his heart.

He was the one to blame for suggesting that a trip to his time machine was needed, though. Humans were prone to believe it only if they saw it, so nothing more could be done to prove his claims to Wonho’s mother than to actually take her there.

What happened the night Wonho’s father died played with his emotions and his memory. Under the grey skies of that Wednesday morning, Wonho’s mother didn’t seem to have aged much from the last time he saw her, regardless of how weary prolonged suffering could be. Her hair was now of a much darker tone of brown, reaching till the end of the of her neck, contrasting well with the white blouse and beige pants she wore.

It wasn’t like she didn’t actually believe Hyungwon when he said he was the one she met during
that dreadful night decades ago, but the time traveler felt like he owed her something he didn’t
know exactly what it was—once again, the realization that she was the mother of the man he liked
ticked something under his skin. Hyungwon just wanted to be liked, to be accepted, and the
possibility of that not happening left a bitter taste in his mouth.

“What are we doing here?” Hyungwon heard Wonho’s mother ask, behind him.

“Hyungwon lives here.”

“Underground?” Her tone was full of shock, and the pink-haired focused on leading the way
instead of laughing. “I thought this place was abandoned.”

“Officially it is.” Wonho clarified as they approached the door of the main wagon. “The
government makes sure no one but us come here.”

“The government?”

Drawing his hands behind his back, Hyungwon turned around and bowed quickly.

“Welcome, ma’am.”

As soon as the doors automatically opened, the time traveler entered first. The woman took a good
look on her surroundings, holding tightly onto Wonho’s arm, as if she thought her eyes could be
playing tricks on her. The blond Constant shot him an inquisitive look, and the raised eyebrow
made Hyungwon chuckle.

Once Wonho’s mother finally stepped inside, her eyes tried to keep up with the amount of new
information being displayed in front of her. The woman’s head moved up and down so quickly that
Hyungwon wondered if it could cause a headache later.

“What…”

“New human?”

Monbebe’s flickering lights reminded Hyungwon that he hadn’t told her he’d spend the night out
for his birthday. She usually didn’t mind, being who she was, but it had become a habit of his.

“What’s that?” The woman’s gaze flew to the ceiling. “What was that?”

“Ah, you are Wonho’s mother. Greetings.”

“That’s Monbebe.” Hyungwon interrupted, fearing she would truly start panicking. “She’s an
artificial intelligence that runs the train.”

Wonho’s mother still frowned in confusion.

“Like… a robot?”

“I am not a robot.” His A.I. disclaimed.

The woman flinched at the sound of Monbebe’s voice and the time traveler was starting to believe
that, maybe, bringing her there so soon was not one of his smartest moves.

“She’s like the Siri on your phone, mom.” Wonho tried to explain. “But a sentient, more powerful
version that occasionally throws sarcastic comments at you.”
The lights above their heads twinkled in a wavy pattern, and Hyungwon snickered, feeling a bit more relaxed.

“Shall we talk in the kitchen?”

If anything, Wonho’s mother seemed quite overwhelmed with his account on who he was and what he had been doing for most of his life, which was rather understandable from the point of view of an ordinary person. Hyungwon tried his best to enlighten her on what happened that night in 1996, or more specifically why he was there, but she still struggled.

“Wait, so that happened last year to you?” She questioned, sitting across Hyungwon at the kitchen’s table. “23 years ago happened last year? I don’t get it.”

“It’s because you perceive time to be a linear.” Hyungwon tried again, drawing a line in the air. “Year happening after year. To me, what happens tomorrow could’ve already happened before this moment.”

“You’re not helping.” Wonho snorted, sitting beside his mom. “Listen, mom, time travel is weird and hard to fathom. Only those who have experienced it can understand it better.”

“Have you?” She turned her head to her son. “Have you… time traveled?”

“A few times.”

“That’s how you discovered…? About your father?”

It was subtle, but Hyungwon picked up a sudden tension in the air. So the pink-haired man decided to interfere based on what he had heard from Wonho about it how that day impacted them.

“I had to tell him.” He broke the brief silence, and both turned their heads to him. “It’s an even more complicated matter, but it was necessary.”

“I see…” The woman sighed, rubbing her son’s arm with one hand while caressing her cheek with the other. “I tried to look for you, you know? For a while… I wondered for so long why a stranger with pink hair helped me when I needed the most…”

“I know what is like to feel helpless.” The time traveler quietly said, with a tiny smile. “I try to help whenever I can. Furthermore, you are Wonho’s mother. Wonho is a very important person, hence so are you.”

“He is?” She turned to her son again, curiously.

Instead of returning her gaze, Wonho now stared at him.

“Are you gonna tell her?”

“Why not?” The time traveler shrugged. There was no uproar in the timeline so far, so he guessed it was alright. “Would you like some tea, ma’am?”

Hyungwon guessed she complied out of sheer courtesy, but he got up to prepare it anyway.

At the table, Wonho attempted to give details about the concept of Constants and how their universe wasn’t the only one to exist. Unconsciously, Hyungwon smiled to himself while listening to the blond clarifying—more than once—that no, Hyungwon wasn’t an alien, he was simply from a different universe.
“So, where is that?” She was still focused on talking to her son when Hyungwon returned to the table, with two cups of tea. Wonho wasn’t a huge fan of it.

“My world is lost.” Hyungwon answered, sipping on his jasmine tea. “It’s a complex topic.”

“But you are human…”

“Yes.” He chuckled. “Born and raised on Earth. I’m just a little different than you. For example, I age slower, and have a few abilities.”

“How old can you be?” She added, tasting the offered tea. “You look younger than Hoseok…”

“I am a few centuries old, ma’am.”

“Centuries?!?” Her eyes went round. “I’m sorry, it’s a bit…”

“Hard to believe?” Hyungwon completed, with a soothing grin. “I get it. I’ve had this conversation many times before with a lot of people.”

“Doesn’t matter.” She suddenly said. “I…Hyungwon-ssi…”

“Please, speak casually.”

“Okay. Hyungwon…” The woman sighed deeply and reached out to rest her hand over Hyungwon’s. “Thank you. There was so much…I wanted to say during all those years. I wouldn’t be able to still be here now if it weren’t for your help that night. Everything was so bleak and…Because you gave me hope, I was able to raise Hoseok properly and build a new life for myself. How can I ever repay you for what you have done for me? For my child? I’m forever indebted to you.”

That’s what he liked the most humans—their willingness to repay one’s good deeds, even when they thought the worth of the deed was difficult to ever pay back.

The time traveler’s eyes glided to her hand over his own and he smiled softly, raising his head to look at her.

“You owe me nothing. That’s not how it works with me. I don’t do things expecting a reward in return.”

“Still…” She rubbed her thumb over Hyungwon’s hand, and something in his chest glowed with warmth. “There must be something I can do for you. Anything.”

“Live a long and healthy life, ma’am. That’s enough for me.”

“God…” She sighed, turning to her child, who immediately giggled.

“He can be frustrating, right?” Wonho chortled. “He’s annoyingly way too good.”

“Didn’t you say I was being ‘bratty’ yesterday?” The pink-haired smirked. “I remember clearly.”

“You were.” He replied with a fond smile, and Hyungwon nearly forgot about the rest of the world. “But you’re entitled to.”

Had it not been for the not so subtle throat clearing of the third person in the room, they would’ve kept staring at each other like fools for much longer.
“Are you…” Wonho’s mother coyly pointed from Hyungwon to her son. “Are you two… Are you two?”

“Are we what?” The time traveler sincerely asked.

“She’s subtly asking if there’s something between us.”

That earned Wonho a slap on the arm from his mother, even though Hyungwon didn’t understand why.

“Yah.” The woman lightly scowled at her son. “How can you…”

“There is.” The blond made it known, shifting his gaze between Hyungwon and his mother. “I’m in love with him, mother.”

Slowly, but firmly, she turned her head to shoot a flabbergasted stare at Hyungwon and the latter was reminded of the alarmed thoughts floating around his mind earlier. Would she be okay with her only son being with someone like Hyungwon? What if she thought he wasn’t good enough to date Wonho? What if she ended up being like the mothers from the dramas Hyungwon watched, the throwing-a-glass-of-water-at-his-face type?

“I’m not going to pretend I completely understand all of this.” She stated, with a serious mien. “Or how things between you two work…but Hoseok changed a lot in the past year, and I can see now that it is because of your influence. A good influence, for a good change. I’m grateful I get to rebuild my relationship with my son and to see him become a better man. Never before has he spoken so easily about his feelings, so you must be really special, Hyungwon.”

“I’m not, ma’am. I’m just—”

“Shut up.” Wonho cut him off, though with no malice. “You are.”

“Can I finish?” Hyungwon chortled, brushing his finger around the borders of his tea cup. “I don’t think I’m special, I’m just doing my best. I think that’s nobler than being special. And I treasure your son a lot.”

A smile from ear-to-ear grew on the woman’s face, and she eagerly turned to clutch Wonho’s arm with both hands.

“You better not lose him.” She advised, squinting rather friskily at the Constant. “He’s really way too good.”

“What does that mean?” Hyungwon inquired, watching both mother and son turn their heads towards him.

“She likes you.” Wonho chuckled, nodding at him.

Hyungwon’s mouth turned to an “O” shape at that insight, musing once again how peculiar human family relationships tended to be in every universe he had been to. A couple of memories from old encounters came up before he was brought back to reality by the twinkling lights above their heads, quickly making Monbebe’s presence known.

“As Hyungwon’s only kin, I guess it’s my duty to vouch for him.” Monbebe declared, and the time traveler snappishly brought a hand to his hand to avoid eye contact with the Shins. “You won’t find a better male suitor in the multiverse. He’s decent, kind, has good genes and has saved hundreds of worlds from—”
“YAH!” The pink-haired shouted at the ceiling, hearing Wonho cackling at his A.I.’s antics. “Get out.”

For once in her existence, Monbebe did as she was told to, and the kitchen lighting returned to its standard pattern.

“Forgive me.” Hyungwon directed his apology at Wonho’s mother. “I tried to teach her manners, but failed.”

Her face broke into giggles and Hyungwon was immediately hit by a strong sense of déjà vu; one didn’t need to ponder the cause of it, though. Beside her, an almost identical expression was now displayed on Wonho’s face as he continued to laugh at Monbebe’s act, and that was the first time Hyungwon noticed how much the blond looked like his mother.

The time traveler never imagined what it would be like to have someone who looked like him, but he liked the way mother and son’s eyes crinkled into crescents, mouth agape to reverberate the melodious sound of their laughter across the kitchen. It was alright, he thought, whatever that meant.


Jesus Christ.

“What?” The blond blurted, moving his laptop aside to give attention to the persistent soul in front of him.

“Will you stop that and pay attention to what your mother is saying?”

By that, she meant his actual work.

Wonho didn’t know what it was about his university office that stimulated people to believe it was okay to invade it and keep him from advancing with his research and unrelated works. It felt like everyone was in a secret society hell-bent on disrupting his peace lately.

Including Hyungwon, but he didn’t mind that one as much.

The pink-haired time traveler almost always showed up unannounced in the middle of his office with something new to share with him, or simply popping up because he was bored and everyone else was busy—so was Wonho, but he didn’t dare to say anything that would keep Hyungwon away from him, even if it hindered what he was doing at work.

During these times, while Hyungwon read all the books on his shelves for the second time, Wonho could almost hear the faint voices of Shownu and Kihyun, in the back of his mind, jesting about how smitten he was with that man.

“Fine, fine.” The blond gave up on finishing anything with his mom pestering him and closed his laptop. “What is it?”

“I asked about Hyungwon.” She said, leaning forward to rest her elbows over his desk, tangling her fingers together. “Tell me more about him.”
“What do you want to know?”

“I don’t know, Hoseok, anything. What kind of family did he have?”

“He didn’t…have one.” The taste of such words in his mouth were bittersweet. “He was raised in a sort of industrial facility.”

“Oh…” His mother’s back hit the chair she was sitting on. “That sounds awful. I’m glad I didn’t mention anything to him…”

“He wouldn’t be mad about it. I think we get more upset about it than he ever did.”

“We?”

“Kihyun, Minhyuk…”

“They know him too?” His mother frowned.

“They’re also, uh… Constants. Remember, what I told you…”

“You said there were six of them, and the only universe where all of you are alive at the same time.”

“Yeah. Kihyun, Shownu, Minhyuk, Jooheon, Changkyun and I.”

“Alright…” His mother swiftly adjusted herself in her chair. “Now, about Hyungwon…”

Wonho chuckled at his mother’s keenness to know more about the time traveler, contemplating the fact that each day he discovered a new fascinating thing about Hyungwon.

“I know what you’re doing.” He stated, playfully squinting at her. “You’re trying to impress him.”

“Of course.” She shamelessly admitted, raising an eyebrow at Wonho. “I didn’t give up on trying to do something for him.”

“Of course you didn’t.”

“Yah.” Wonho snorted at his mother’s glare. “Is it a crime? Plus, he’s going to be my son-in-law soon. I need to get to know him.”

“He won’t be impressed by whatever money can buy.” Wonho stated right away. “He’s not that kind of person.”

“So…” She leaned forward again, propping her chin up on her hand. “What kind of person he is?”

“I don’t know if I can explain it well but…Hyungwon is a feelings-over-materialism type of person. What he values is the kindness in people’s hearts, not what they have to offer. He’s too selfless, even though he went through a lot of hardships in life because of it. He got used to hide his pain from others, so he needs to feel comfortable around you to show you this side of him. He’s just…brilliant, in every aspect. At first, I thought that would intimidate me because, you know how competitive I am, but he’s just…extraordinary. And he doesn’t make a big fuss about it, which I used to think it was a bit infuriating. But that’s just who he is. He’s so, so humble. He treats everyone the same way regardless of class or status, and he pays attention to what you’re saying with such consideration that makes you feel special, but it’s because he really cares. He cares so damn much. And I’m glad he does. Because we wouldn’t be here if he didn’t. I wouldn’t get to meet him if he didn’t. Honestly… I can’t imagine my life without him anymore. I’d like to
think he feels the same about me, at least a little bit. Wouldn’t mind if he didn’t, though. I’m okay with it.”

“Oh, dear…”

Her mien suddenly shifted into a stern one, making Wonho mind the foolishly endeared look on his face.

“What?”

“You really love him, don’t you?”

Not a question. Despite being phrased as one, Wonho could tell his mother didn’t need a confirmation from him with the way she flashed him a knowing smiled, and the blond grinned in return.

“Alright, alright.” She suddenly stood up, grabbing her bag from the chair next to her. “I’ll think about it and inform you later.”

“Hey, mom. Just take it easy, okay?”

“Of course, baby.”

It wasn’t like Wonho didn’t trust his mother’s words, but she was a businesswoman accustomed to getting what she wanted—Wonho’s instincts were just too wary of anything that could hamper his relationship with Hyungwon. Still, he knew his mother understood how much that meant to him, how much Hyungwon meant to him. So in the end, he chose to trust that she would keep her word. Any more dwelling on that would be just suffocating.

Two days had passed since that peculiar encounter with his mother the morning after Hyungwon’s birthday and he hadn’t seen the man since. Which was good because Wonho still had some things to catch up on at work before the beginning of a new academic semester, but also bad because he missed the time traveler like a silly teenager in love for the first time.

They met again that Saturday afternoon, a few hours before they agreed to meet the others at Shownu and Minhyuk’s apartment for a group dinner, mostly because Kihyun was cooking and it had been ages since Wonho ate any fresh food his friend made.

“Your mother called me.” Hyungwon announced after taking a sip of his iced coffee.

Sitting opposite to him at the table of the small Café, Wonho looked up from his phone to stare at him which, for some reason, made him aware of the pop song playing in the background.

“What? Why? Also, how did she even—”

“I gave her my number.” The pink-haired clarified, staring through the rectangular window next to them. “She asked me to inform her when we are free to have lunch with her. I said I’d ask you first. Since you have an actual job and don’t almost rip a hole in the fabric of reality in your bathroom.”

“What the…” Instead of continuing his train of thought, Wonho decided to eat one of the macarons in front of him.

“I had this really good idea for a stronger signal blocking for this universe while I was in the bathtub so I started building a prototype in there. Guess I miscalculated how much of my energy I needed to put into it for a brief test.”
“You’re worse than a toddler.” Wonho shook his head mouth agape. “Because you’re like a toddler with super-powers. Why do you even have tools in your bathroom? Are you crazy? Stop doing that.”

“It’s fine.” Hyungwon shrugged, slowly smiling. “I mean, once I accidentally destroyed half of the train while teleporting a device to our moon. That was really damaging. Monbebe was angry at me for nearly 10 years because of that.”

Wonho simply laughed, because he had to. He was dating an eccentric interdimensional time traveler with too much of a vivid imagination and too much energy to put into work in the most random moments of his daily life.

“Stop doing these things in the bathroom. It’s dangerous. You’re prohibited from building things in the bathroom.”

“But it is my bathroom.”

“And?”

Alright, whatever you say. But to be fair, I always fix the cracks I make.”

The blond snorted after gulping his Americano.

“You’re unbelievable. Now, back to the actual topic. You know you don’t have to appease my mother if you don’t want to, right? I won’t force you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable.”

“I like her.” He declared, flashing a broad smile while leisurely batting his eyelashes. “Also, if we are going to keep doing this…”

“Dating?”

“Are we dating?” Hyungwon asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Aren’t we? I mean, we don’t have to label things if you don’t want to…”

“No, I’m implying that dating usually requires a date. From what I remember, it was postponed. Is this…” He gestured around the Café. “A date?”

“No. This is, like, a pre-date. A thing before the official one.”

“Is this a real thing?”

“Now it is.” Wonho smirked at him, and the time traveler snickered. “Wednesday. 7:00 p.m. I’ll come to get you.”

“Are you sure I won’t get stood up?”

“Come on.” He pursed his lips while making a cute face at Hyungwon. “That was one time and it was for a nice cause. I have everything planned this time.”

“What if I already had something planned for Wednesday?”

“Reschedule it. Your night is mine.”

“Alright, Dr. Shin.” The pink-haired chuckled till his eyes turned into crescents. “Where are we
going? Do I need a special attire or…?”

“Just dress as you always do. You look handsome in anything. Also, it’s a surprise.”

“The surprise is that you actually show up this time.”

“Yah, don’t be like that.” He tried his best to scold him, but Hyungwon was giggling way too hard and Wonho was way too weak for him. “You hang out with Minhyuk and Kihyun way too much. Their wittiness is getting under your skin.”

“Your universe demands too much.” Hyungwon slowly blinked, and the cold grey light from the outside made his skin look paler than it indeed was. “There’s someone staring at us behind me.”

Without thinking twice, Wonho tilted his head up over Hyungwon’s shoulders and caught two school girls staring at them from the farthest corner of the shop. They quickly turned away after being caught, mumbling something inaudible to each other.

“Just kids.” A corner of Wonho’s mouth lifted as he turned back to the time traveler. “They might think you’re an idol because of your hair color.”

“We should get going.” The time traveler suggested, but was on his feet in the very next second. “I think I solved the problem with the prototype. Do you have any tools in your car?”

“No!” His puckered forehead made Hyungwon laugh. “No building anything today!”

Smoothly, Hyungwon bent half of his body forward until he was just a few centimeters away from Wonho’s face, whom felt his cheeks heating up immediately.

“Alright, Dr. Shin.” The taller murmured, and for a moment, Wonho thought he was going to kiss him.

And he wanted Hyungwon to kiss him, because it had been days since they last kissed. The blond felt like he was tiptoeing around the subject of kissing the man he was, by all accounts, dating. It was almost like he was an inexperienced school boy with a head full of doubts about the “do’s and don’ts” in a relationship.

But to be honest, anything with Hyungwon was a brand new adventure, as if he had experienced romance in the wrong way before meeting that time traveler, so Wonho guessed it was only right for him to feel like that.

Hyungwon didn’t kiss him, though. Because a) they were in public, b) people still snuck glances at them and c) Wonho knew the pink-haired was just teasing because he always crinkled his nose when doing so.

Before any possible reaction from the blond, Hyungwon moved his torso back up and got a hold of the coffee he was drinking, before sauntering towards the exit.

To kill some time before the dinner, Wonho drove around for a while and let the time traveler choose the playlist, which was definitely the best decision he had made in a while. Among the vast appreciation Hyungwon had for the music of their world, recently the man discovered his fondness of bubblegum pop, so he blasted a couple of girl groups’ songs for half an hour and sang along to it because apparently that was a thing that Hyungwon actually did.

It was only when they stopped at a red light that Wonho grabbed his phone and started recording him, while the time traveler mindlessly kept singing at the top of his lungs.
“You’re a baritone, kitty.” Wonho giggled as the song came to an end and he paused the filming. “You can’t hit those high notes.”

“That’s mean.” He cutely frowned, jutting out his bottom lip. “By the way, why do you keep calling me ‘kitty’?”

As the traffic light turned green again, Wonho kept driving before answering him. They were heading in the direction of Shownu and Minhyuk’s neighborhood, so Wonho decided to just take them there already.

“You’re like a cat.”

“What?” Hyungwon’s modulated voice got a bit higher.

“Well…” The blond let out a contented sigh as he made a right turn. “You like attention, but don’t like to show that you want it. You sit on places that wasn’t made to be sat on, and also drop things out of place just because you feel like it, sometimes.”

“Where do I sit that I’m not meant to?”

Eyes focused on the road, Wonho let himself freely to reply since they were in a relatively calmer lane.

“The counters in the machinery room of the train, sinks, tables, kitchen counters, my office’s desk, the top of the bookshelves in my home library, etc.”

“That’s just a matter of perception.”

“Not that I mind it.” Wonho continued. “Just saying you’re a bit of a cat, so I call you kitty.”

Out of the blue, Hyungwon tittered. “Never thought you’d be fond of pet names.”

“Not really.” The blond shot a quick smile at him before fixing his sight on the road again. “Just for you, kitty.”

In his peripheral vision, Wonho watched him bring his hands to cover his face out of embarrassment.

“Shut up.” Hyungwon spouted and Wonho cackled, pressing play on his pop playlist that immersed the car with bass boosted sound waves.

Almost 15 minutes later, Hyungwon was the first to get out of the car as soon as Wonho parked it in front of Shownu and Minhyuk’s building, on the other side of the street.

For a moment, he thought the time traveler was going to get a hold of his hand and not let go until one of their friends were on sight, but Hyungwon didn’t.

They walked side by side towards their friends’ apartment; Hyungwon hummed the tune of one of the songs he sang in the car while Wonho pondered whether it was necessary to talk about certain boundaries in those daily moments they shared. Not that he didn’t have enough courage to make the first move, but Wonho hadn’t felt the shift from friendship to an actual romantic bond, so of course it was a bit weird for him. Maybe it was the same for Hyungwon too, but the latter didn’t let it show as much as he did.
An elderly couple came out of the elevator right before they could enter, feeling the cold wind of January coming back to bite him in the ass for leaving the house with just a leather jacket and jeans. At least the heating inside of his friends’ apartment was pretty good, and Wonho yearned for it at that point.

“Are you cold?” It’s the first thing that came out of Hyungwon’s mouth as soon as the elevator doors closed in front of them.

“Yeah, sort of.”

Wonho sniffled out of reflex in that dry ambience, unable to have noticed what was coming for him because the next thing the blond knew, he was being pushed against the metallic wall and lips crashed against his own.

His heart dropped to his stomach and jolted back up to almost escape through his throat in a matter of seconds, so he gasped for air as soon as Hyungwon pulled away from that short kiss.

“Jesus.” Wonho wheezed, letting the feeling of Hyungwon wrapping his arms around him become natural.

“It’s Hyungwon, actually.” The man cackled at his own joke, giving Wonho a peck on the cheek.

“You think you’re funny, uh?” His voice came out too croaky, and the time traveler laughed again. Remembering that they were in an elevator, Wonho’s eyes were drawn to the electronic panel above the door that showed they were almost at the 7th floor. “We are close——”

Without breaking eye contact, Hyungwon reached forward and hit the stop button, making the elevator come to a halt.

“Not yet.” He asserted, sending a shiver down Wonho’s spine. “I missed you.”

Wonho looked up—because he had to, obviously—and observed Hyungwon’s pretty face bathed by the low lighting of that place, coming to the familiar conclusion that he was really in love with him. Not that Wonho wasn’t sure of it before, but more like he found himself really in love with Hyungwon at very random moments that didn’t seem to matter much in the big picture, but shined in Wonho’s memory whenever his mind diverted to thoughts of the time traveler.

“You are too tall.” Wonho then said, feeling Hyungwon’s breath ridiculously close to his face.

“I was genetically built like this.” The man retorted in a heartbeat, tilting his head to smirk at him. “You’re the one who’s too short.”

Feigning an offended look, Wonho tried to scowl at him, but knew he had lost it when Hyungwon broke into laughter. Not satisfied, the pink-haired stretched his legs to his sides until he was at the same height level than Wonho.

“Satisfied?”

“I hate you.” Wonho snickered, pulling him closer by the navy blazer he wore.

“Do you?” Hyungwon asked in a low tone, blatantly staring at the blond’s lips.

“Never.” Impossible deed. The corners of Wonho’s mouth quirked up, and he could feel his heart almost imploding. “Not even in a billion years.”
“Swear it?” Hyungwon’s eyes blazed with desire, and Wonho just wanted the whole multiverse to know that his heart belonged to him.

“I swear it.” The blond complied, hands on each side of Hyungwon’s face. “I swear it.”

“I miss Kkukkung.”

The living room was nearly silent apart from the noise of two characters of an American TV show discussing how to find someone, until Minhyuk voiced what Hyungwon also couldn’t ignore.

“Me too.” The time traveler agreed, from the couch he shared with Wonho. While Shownu lied down on the floor with a bunch of cushions and Kihyun by his side, Minhyuk sat opposite to his roommate, with Jooheon’s head on his lap. “Haven’t talked with him this week.”

“Me neither.” Minhyuk turned around quickly to face Hyungwon, propping himself up with his hands behind his back. “He said he was going on a little trip with his parents a few days ago, don’t really wanna ruin their moment.”

“He’s fine.” Shownu confidently assured him, without taking his eyes from the TV. “You’re just like that because you can’t sense him from here, Min.”

Jooheon shifted to lie on his side to face Shownu.

“Yesterday he woke me up at 4:00 a.m. because he had a dream Changkyun was eaten by a giant donut and insisted that was a real possibility.”

“I don’t trust the Americans!” The red-haired retorted, making Hyungwon snicker. “Should we call him?”

“It’s really early there, Minhyuk.” Kihyun advised. “He’s probably still—”

A ringtone started played loudly somewhere in the room and Hyungwon felt Wonho flinch next to him. He would’ve turned to check on the blond Constant if not for Minhyuk’s sudden jolt nearly smashing the coffee table in two as he launched himself forward to fetch his phone. A loud thump emerged right next to him as Jooheon’s head hit the floorboard, causing the man to groan in pain.

“KKUKKUNG!” Minhyuk shouted even louder than the voices coming from the TV, and his friends immediately flocked around the red-haired, including Jooheon who seemed to have forgotten his almost concussion. “GUYS, IT’S CHANGKYUN!”

Hyungwon heard a distance hey coming from the phone before he shifted forward in the couch and got up, bending his upper body down to get a better view of the screen. Wonho followed him.

It was another FaceTime call like the one on his birthday, so they could actually take a look at how the youngest Constant was.

“We were just talking about you!” Minhyuk laughed mid-sentence out of joy.

“Boy, it’s 6:00 a.m. in there!” Kihyun pointed out, shifting closer to the phone screen. “What are you doing?”
For what Hyungwon got to observe, Changkyun was in a closed location with dimmed lights, but quite enough to illuminate his face well; for some reason, he was wearing dark sunglasses while holding a champagne glass.

“We in this bitch…” He said, in English. “Getting crunk, eyebrows on fleek, the fuck.”

“I understand nothing.” Shownu quietly said, positioned behind Kihyun.

“Bro, you drinking this early?” Jooheon inquired, hands on Minhyuk’s shoulders to prop himself up.

On the other side of the screen, Changkyun put the glass down somewhere, which caused the camera to shake for a while.

“Man, those Harvard peeps party hard!” The boy laughed, switching to his mother tongue.

“Didn’t imagine these nerds could pull something like this, but they got the sauce! Anyways, how is y’all hyungs?”

“We’re fine.” Kihyun responded for them. “But we miss you.”

“Awww…” He pulled down his sunglasses only to add a wink to the finger heart he shot at them. “I’ll be back a few days after my birthday. Mom is gonna throw a party to show me off. I feel like a girl in 1878 in a ball full of suitors for my possible arranged marriage. Fuck the patriarchy, man.”

“Ah…” Minhyuk’s disappointed tone was short-lived because he knew it was good for Changkyun to reconnect with his parents. “Tell your parents we said hi. I’m happy you’re enjoying your time there, babe.”

“I miss you guys too!” The maknae moved closer to the camera until his face was all they could see. “Is everyone there? I see Kihyun hyung, Shownu hyung…” Minhyuk then remembered the time traveler was hovered above him and lifted his phone. “Oh! Hyungwon hyung, you dashing bastard! Wonho hyung!”

“We gotta rescue him from the US.” Jooheon playfully said. “He’s turning into a full American.”

The living room was filled with laughter and the boy oceans away from them giggled too, bidding a farewell since it was time for him to leave.

“I’ll text y’all the date I’m arriving! Come pick me up at the airport or I’ll find better hyungs. Also, check my new Twitter thread on the outfits in which I’d allow Jiyong to tie me up to a lamp post and raw me on spot.”

“I will absolutely not.” Wonho deadpanned, causing the others to cackle. “Take care, Kkukkung. Call us if you need anything. You know Hyungwon is just a wristwatch away from you.”

“I love you, Kkukkung.” Sending a finger heart close to the camera, Minhyuk beamed at the boy. “Also, bring me a little something or perish.”

“I will!” The camera trembled a bit as Changkyun waved eagerly at them. “Love you too, but ball is life and I gotta go!”

“Go to sleep, boy!” Kihyun interjected.

“LOVE YOU!”
And so with a bunch of kisses and finger hearts being shot at them, the call ended. The atmosphere in the room quickly brightened up a lot more with the boy’s semi-presence, and the time traveler pondered about how Changkyun was truly the backbone of their friendship. Nothing would be as fun and wholesome without him, and there was only appreciation in his heart for having the man around.

On his way back to the couch, Hyungwon felt fingers gently wrapping around his wrist and his eyes immediately shifted down to the hand on his arm.

Wonho wasted no time in pulling him back to sit down beside him, a bit closer to than they were before, just so he could hold Hyungwon’s hand under the junction between their knees as they sat cross-legged.

Within seconds, Hyungwon felt his face heating up like the magma under the crust of the earth and yanked his hand back before one of their friends could see.

Disregarding his affliction, Wonho bursted into laughter.

“Stop it.” He mumbled, trying his best to scowl at the blond Constant; Hyungwon just couldn’t get mad at his antics anymore, unfortunately.

“Cute.” The man mouthed at his reaction.

“Yah.” Kihyun’s voice drew their attention, only for Hyungwon to find the four men staring at them with a puzzled mien. “What’s going on?”

“I said his face got bloated for eating too much rice.”

“Stop lying, hyung.” Jooheon came in his defense, shaking his head in disapproval. “You know his metabolism is so fast that not even if he had eaten what we all ate all by himself, he’d still be the same.”

“You two give off such a weird vibe.” Shownu quietly commented, with his arms crossed over his chest. “Can’t put my finger on it, though.”

“Me neither.” Minhyuk agreed, sticking his nose in the air as if to smell something coming from them. Hyungwon’s face only got redder. “Y’all up to something?”

“Yeah.” Wonho responded in a booming voice. “We’re going on a date.”

Eyes widened instantly, Hyungwon abruptly turned to the man beside him to shot him an alarmed glare, and not much for his surprise, found Wonho smirking at him.

Their friends, momentarily silent with the affirmation, suddenly started guffawing loudly in the living room.

“Aish…” His red-haired friend made a pause in his gurgling laugh to point a finger at them. “Seriously, guys. What’s up with you two lately? All the giggling next to each other, going out without us… if it’s that nerdy bullshit, then I don’t mind.”

“Hey, I mind!” Kihyun interjected, launching himself forward. “What are you two working on? Stop leaving me out of things!”

“I just told you.” Wonho insisted, and this was one of the occasions Hyungwon wanted to punch him so that he would shut up — he knew his overreaction would do more harm than good, though.
“We’re going on a date. You can’t come with us. Go out with your boyfriend or something.”

“I should’ve poisoned when I had the chance.” Their shorter friend hissed at the blond Constant, who only chuckled. “Seriously.” Kihyun turned his head to Hyungwon. “Include me!”

“We…” The time traveler needlessly cleared his throat. “We’re finishing the device to shut down the wrinkle if you want to see…”

“Yes!”

As usual, their conversation plunged into a chaotic mood that mixed bickering with actual conversation, or at least attempts to. Whatever existing chance that they had taken Wonho serious vanished into thin air, but it didn’t stop Hyungwon from confronting the man as soon as the night ended and they were the only ones leaving the apartment.

“Why did you say that?” Hyungwon asked as soon as he fastened his own seatbelt on the passenger seat.

Yet, the blond simply shrugged with an innocent mien that didn’t belong to him.

“They asked. It’s the truth.”

“But—”

“Don’t worry.” The man assured, fastening his own seatbelt. “I told you. They don’t even consider us a possibility.”

Perhaps it was childish of him, but that somehow irked Hyungwon.

“That’s bullshit…” The time traveler blurted out under his breath.

“Hey.” Wonho reached out for his wrist, fingers sliding down until they were brushing against the palm of his hand. “Are you upset about it? I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

“They all laughed!” His voice came out higher than the pink-haired intended, but he didn’t care much. “They really think you like someone else.”

“Hyungwon.” His hand suddenly moved to settle under his chin, to grab his attention. “Are you really jealous of a nonexistent person?”

“Maybe.”

“Kitty.” Wonho’s voice dropped an octave, uttering the pet name in an American accent. “It doesn’t matter. You are the only one I want. I won’t joke around if you…”

“That’s not the problem. I guess it’s just me… I still struggle… I don’t know… how to deal with these new feelings.”

Resting his hand on the time traveler’s again, Wonho tittered.

“Love to hear you do have feelings for me.”

Oh, no. Hyungwon could feel the blushing coming.

“Shut up.”
Before he could’ve avoided it, Wonho extended both arms up to his face and lightly pinched his cheeks.

“You’re so damn cute.”

“Get off.” Hyungwon tried to grimace at him, despite the shy smile on his face. “I’ve been called herald of death before. I’m not cute.”

“Nah.” Wonho lovingly smiled, still pinching his cheeks. “Just a cute boy.”

Out of spite, the time traveler summoned the energy residing inside of him, causing his eyes to glow the usual blueish tone of light.

“That doesn’t scare me.” The man simply rubbed his thumbs on Hyungwon’s cheeks, unbothered. “Actually, is adorable.”

“Aish…” Hyungwon let out a heavy sigh, defeated by Wonho’s charms. His efforts to not divulge how lovely that was were rather subpar. “Just drive.”

Once again, the blond Constant giggled at Hyungwon’s face, pulling his hands away from him to rest them on the steering wheel.

“Whatever you say, kitty.”

With a kind of serenity that didn’t fit his latest asleep experience, Shownu focused on the way Kihyun’s chest rose and fell peacefully as the man soundly slept next to him wearing just boxers, face half buried on Shownu’s shoulder.

The last couple of weeks had been rather tough on his boyfriend, no matter how hard Kihyun tried to hide it. His ongoing arguments with his father were an infallible mood killer, which made Shownu feel like he wasn’t doing a good job in protecting Kihyun. Even though he knew there were more things in the world that he wouldn’t be able to shelter his boyfriend from than things that he actually could.

That’s why love had always been a complicated matter, but not one that he ever regretted.

To not disturb his boyfriend’s sleep any longer, Shownu put on a white tee and gym shorts and left his bedroom.

He knew he wasn’t the only one already awake, of course.

“Good morning, Minhyukkie.” He greeted his friend in their kitchen.

By the kitchen counter, his friend stopped sipping on his coffee mug to shoot him a stare that conveyed the clear message of are you kidding me right now.

“Don’t you sleep at Jooheon’s on Mondays?” Shownu continued, sitting opposite to him at the other side of the counter.

“I came back home last night.” He explained, pulling down the hood of his brown sweatshirt. “I wasn’t feeling well. Now I know why.”
“Minhyuk…”

“It had been a while, right, since it last happened?” A dry chuckle left Minhyuk’s mouth. “You know what I was thinking about, hyung? That time Hyungwon asked us if we wanted him to take away the foresight, and we said no. I’m not so sure if that was the right thing anymore. I’m tired of not knowing what these are.”

“Hey, I get frustrated too.” Shownu softly spoke as the corners of his mouth quirked up. “But at the end of the day, I guess we just have to wait. Our visions did help Hyungwon and the others after all, right?”

“Yeah…” By the way he gripped even harder on his coffee mug, Minhyuk didn’t seem more at ease. “But… I don’t know. That made me feel weird.”

That, referring to their latest shared premonitory dream. Maybe the strangest of all of the ones they had so far, and the fact that those visions helped them survive in other dimensions said a lot about the level of its weirdness.

Like waves crashing against the sea-shore, their consciousness within that dream was gradual and ferocious, sweeping across their bodies that laid on a vast and vibrant grass field, losing its limit somewhere in the horizon. In there, Shownu opened his eyes to find Minhyuk awake beside him, and the men quickly discovered that they could move, so they bolted upright.

Their skins radiated a white gleam that reminded Shownu of the way Hyungwon’s skin intensely glowed when the man used his powers, but what covered their bodies didn’t quite come from within, just simply shaping their figures with a fog-like bright light that covered the entirety of their frames.

In those dreams, they never talked, because deep down they knew it wasn’t necessary. Not even about the tantalizing lilac skies above their heads where the stars danced in innumerable different formations, a lot less dumbfounding to Shownu than it should probably be. Something within his chest was aware of where he should go, and he was pretty sure Minhyuk felt the same—his friend always did, so they followed their instincts.

The dreamlike scenario sharpened at every step towards a cliff at the north. They arrived faster than they would’ve in reality, as if they had teleported without noticing, but Shownu learned to not argue about the mechanisms of whatever place that was.

Side by side, Minhyuk and Shownu looked down at the murkiness while the sound of a rapid stream echoed across the cliff. Enthralled by it, Shownu could hear the distinct sound of water from where he stood, but there was nothing soothing about it.

Feeling Minhyuk’s hand on his arm, the older turned to face his friend only to find the latter pointing his finger at the sky.

The stars glided backwards across the purple firmament as two moons rose up in the sky, leisurely spinning around each other in a hypnotic act sheer beauty.

It was mesmerizing to watch, in the few seconds they were allowed to. Something else caught their attention and Minhyuk’s hand gripped Shownu’s wrist out of distress, the older could clearly tell.

Something acrid in his chest dropped to his stomach at the sight of the vicious meteor crossing the sky in the moons’ direction, because he knew what was about to happen.

Or so he thought. Because before he could see it all unfold, Shownu woke up.
“Me too.” The tanned man agreed, leaning his forearms over the counter. “Should we, uh, talk to Hyungwon about it?"

“No.” Minhyuk swiftly retorted. “I don’t know why…I think we shouldn’t tell the others. Especially Kihyunnie, with the thing with his dad going on…”

“I agree.” Shownu sighed, then nodded.

“By the way, do you have time?”

“Sure.” He nodded again, pulling one of his arms upwards on the counter so he could prop his chin up on his elbow. “What is it?”

“I’ve thought about it and…I’m going to change majors. I really want to teach kids. I thought about it for a long, long time. Really.”

“Hmm. I mean, if it’s what you want…I’ll support you no matter what. No need to worry about me, Minhyukk.”

“Hyung…” His friend pouted, and the older chuckled. “We started it together, I don’t want you to feel I’m leaving you behind.”

“Minhyuk.” Shownu lifted his head a bit to stare at him. “We live in the same apartment. Do what you feel it’s right.”

“Thanks. If Kkukkung was here, I wouldn’t be so jumpy about it. He knows what to say to calm me down. I wonder what he’s doing right now.”

Shownu snorted.

“Probably gaming?”

“Probably gaming.”

---

Wednesday arrived faster than Hyungwon had expected it to. The thought of having to wait, as always, was a bit agonizing, but the time traveler got too caught up in some diplomatic matters with the leaders of that world, always trying his best to help them in a way he thought it was fair, and barely noticed that it was the date night until that afternoon.

So, maybe it was just normal for him to be feeling so nervous about it.

“Stop pacing around.” Monbebe declared, flickering the lights on Hyungwon’s peripheral vision. “You’re giving me a headache.”

With a scoff, Hyungwon came to a halt in the middle of the main wagon and looked up at the ceiling.

“You don’t have a head to have a headache.”

“And yet, you have managed to give me one. What is there to fret about? Your level of anxiety is of someone about to go to war. And you went to war, multiple times, and was not even remotely close
“Do I look good?” The time traveler picked the hem of his blazer to show it off.

After much internal debate and carefully considering every single piece of clothing he owned, Hyungwon opted to wear a simple double-breasted coal black suit without a tie, so the round locket necklace Wonho gave him could be at display over his chest. The time traveler felt like he wasn’t doing enough, though, so he decided to style his hair the way Kihyun taught him to once, pushing his bangs up so his forehead was completely at sight.

“On what human standards should I judge this?”

“Good grief, Monbebe. Can’t you just be supportive and say I look nice?”

“The amity with the Constants turned you into a very chaotic human, Chae Hyungwon.” She pointed out. “You’re handsomer than average, and compared to what I’ve just searched on men’s formal outfits in Korea, you do indeed look pleasant to the eye. Also, Wonho is entering the subway station right now.”

Faster than he’d like to admit, Hyungwon darted out of the train towards the escalators, spotting the Constant at the top in his hurry to climb the steps.

Under the clear fluorescent lights, Wonho’s eyes sparkled with surprise. Once the man came to a halt, Hyungwon observed everything from how his blond hair seemed even lighter under that illumination to the way Wonho was dressed in a black turtleneck under a gray tweed blazer, and pants of same fabric and color.

“What are you doing?” Wonho questioned, walking down the steps to close the distance between them. “I was coming to get you.”

Without hesitation, Hyungwon wrapped his arms around the man’s neck to hug him.

“I missed you.”

Chuckling, Wonho enveloped him in his arms.

“Still…” He began, almost in a murmur on his ear. “I would’ve gone to you. Hey.” He pulled away, still resting his hands on the time traveler’s waist. “Let me see you properly.”

Hyungwon felt too self-aware of the state he must’ve been after all that running and tried to tidy himself up as much as possible, especially his hair.

“You look beautiful. As always.”

“Thank you.” The time traveler gave him a half-smile, looking down at his suit. “This was a gift from one of the most respectable human clans in Europa after I helped them fix a radiation issue.”

The shorter man laughed at his remark.

“As expected of our Hyungwon.” He chuckled one last time before taking Hyungwon’s hand into his own. “Let’s go.”

Although he felt euphoric to the point of feeling a bit dizzy, Hyungwon followed him without asking any questions. He didn’t remember the last time he got so nervous, so Hyungwon allowed the man to guide him towards his car and smiled from ear-to-ear when Wonho first opened the
door to him, calling him royalty.

Because the reasoning behind everything regarding his feelings for Wonho was that he profoundly trusted him. As a friend, as a work partner, as a lover. Whatever they went through while getting accustomed to each other’s personalities paid off in the end, for every moment he spent with Wonho, this Wonho who kissed him and held him tight in his arms, was earned with utmost dedication.

“For you.” Hyungwon heard the blond Constant say from beside him, while the time traveler fastened his seatbelt.

He craned his neck to the side to find a majestic bouquet of red roses being given to him.

“Flowers?”

“Flowers.” Wonho smiled even wider. “Like you deserve it.”

“Oh.” The pink-haired tittered, taking the bouquet in his hands. A single sniff of the roses itself was a delightful experience. “Thank you. I will cherish them.”

“There’s 50 of them.” The Constant told him. “Roses. I looked it up online. It means unconditional love.”

“You sure put a lot of effort into this, Dr. Shin.” He teased, hugging the bouquet with a smirk.

Before turning the car on, Wonho shifted to Hyungwon’s side a bit and stared directly at him with a playful grin.

“Anything for you, kitty.”

Not even the roses were nearly as red as the time traveler’s face after that.

The drive was filled with songs Wonho let Hyungwon choose, as always, and the time traveler’s nerves calmed down a little bit. It was also comforting to notice that Wonho was also quite anxious about their date, just so he wouldn’t be the only one with high chances of making a fool out of himself. It was alright to be fools together, he concluded with an affectionate smile on his face while listening to the blond telling him how his day had gone.

About 20 minutes later, Hyungwon discovered that their destination was an enormous fancy hotel the time traveler had never been to or ever seen around in his daily walks, mainly because that neighborhood usually wasn’t in his priority when working. It was still quite a striking building, he had to admit.

Wonho drove his car in the underground parking lot, traversing with ease in that setting that the man certainly had been there before.

“How are you?” He mumbled as they entered the elevator, grabbing Hyungwon’s pinky with his own.

“Excited.” Hyungwon revealed, shifting closer to the man. “I’m on my first date, with my first boyfriend, in the first universe I’ve ever felt like I belonged to. You gave me so many firsts.”

For a few seconds, Wonho’s tender gaze fixated on the time traveler, with an uncanny determination.
“What?” The taller inquired.

“I’m just trying to figure out how to give you the entire world.” He said, in a serious tone.

“I’ve been offered worlds before.” The taller replied, in a silvery voice. “There’s a difference between possessing and belonging, Wonho, and most humans don’t get it. Anyone can possess anything, but not everyone can easily belong to something, or someone. The atoms inside our bodies have been here before us and will turn into something else after we are gone, but I’d like to believe my atoms will recognize yours in the universe to exist after the fall of this universe, so we can find each other again.”

A myriad of words and sentences could’ve left Wonho’s mouth after that, but instead, the man chose to rely on the message that his silent, devoted gaze conveyed to the time traveler. Something effervesced in the warmth of that noiseless atmosphere, and all Hyungwon wanted to do was kiss him until the end of the multiverse.

But before he could fully acknowledge it, the elevator doors opened again.

Two middle-aged women dressed in fancy dresses joined them and Wonho suddenly jolted to the side, away from Hyungwon.

While he bid goodnight to the women, the time traveler frowned at the situation.

It was only when they arrived at the 28th floor, where the second restaurant in that hotel was located, that Hyungwon questioned him about it.

“What did you do that in the elevator?” He brought forth, as soon as they sat down at the table they were guided to by the hostess.

Sitting in front of him, Wonho calmly laid the menu in his hand down before making eye contact.

“You know this country isn’t very accepting of same-sex relationships, Hyungwon. I didn’t want to end up putting us in an uncomfortable situation, especially tonight of all nights.”

Hyungwon glanced around the restaurant and, for the first time that night, felt the ambience subtly change. The place was no longer so cozy, even though a pleasant jazz song was playing softly in the background. The only other diners near the window they were seated were a man and a woman, a few tables away — the rest of the place was quite empty, and Hyungwon felt grateful for that, for reasons he couldn’t quite place.

“Oh.” The pink-haired’s face couldn’t help but fall. “It’s just such a retrogressive mindset that I keep forgetting. I don’t like it. At all.”

“We can only hope it will change, one day. Just like it has happened in a lot of western countries, even though it’s not completely safe for us anywhere.”

Humans of many worlds had it rough in different moments in time because of inherent prejudice against diversity, and the time traveler had witnessed it more times than he’d like to have had. Now that he was in a relationship of his own, it was even more palpable for him to understand the struggles of people like them trying to survive in a society that didn’t accept them.

So Hyungwon nodded, taking a deep breath before settling his forearms over the table.

“I’ll talk to the President about it next time.”
“What president?” The blond asked, busying himself with the menu again.

“Of South Korea.”

“Of South Korea?” His eyes went round, putting the menu down again. “You actually meet the President?”

“Of course.” Hyungwon grinned, leaning his back against the leather chair. “Who do you think is counseling him to make a definitive peace treaty with North Korea?”

“You? Really?”

Hyungwon chuckled.

“What do you think I do with the government?”

“I don’t know. I thought you only talked with the military people, or something…”

“Only when they need my help in a case.” He explained. “Usually, I deal directly with the President’s staff in the Blue House.”

“Whoa… You’re so cool.” Wonho snickered, looking over Hyungwon’s shoulder to lift his hand in someone’s direction. “Ready to order?”

The food was delicious, Hyungwon had admit. Regardless of how the place looked way more expensive than it needed to be, all the dishes they ordered were nothing less than mouth-watering. In the middle of his rush to get dressed up earlier, he forgot to eat, and his hunger made itself known very quickly at the sight of food.

Which was probably the reason why they didn’t chat much during the dinner. Wonho talked once in a while, though, to ask if there was something else he’d like to order, if the food was of his taste, or if he was having a good time. And Hyungwon was, carefully picking up every second of their time together to store in a safe place inside of his mind, to never forget how loved and happy he felt that night.

A part of Hyungwon still find it odd how he could disconnect from the rest of the multiverse whenever he was alone with Wonho, either working together or simply hanging out—quite daring too, the tiny voice in the back of his mind told him. There were still too many perils waiting for them out there, and that had Hyungwon wondering about the future.

Specifically, the time he’d have with Wonho in this universe.

“Wonho.” The time traveler called, grabbing his hand as they walked in the underground parking lot.

He turned around quickly to face Hyungwon.

“Hmm?”

“Thank you. For not hating me like your doubles did and, most importantly, for loving me. For patiently teaching me things I don’t know when it comes to human dynamics, including how to love. These weeks we’ve been together meant so much to me I don’t even know how to put it into words. But I do know, I’m sure already, that I don’t want this to end. I want to go on more dates with you. I want to do all the things normal couples do, if you just wait a little more until I’m confident about telling the others…”
“Hyungwon-ah.” Wonho squeezed his hand, showing a smile that could melt steel. “What bad thing has waiting ever done to me? Nothing, when it’s about you. I can wait, I really can. There’s more eternity in a minute with you than in a whole life alone. So don’t worry about me. I will always be here to welcome you into my arms. Where you belong.”

And he did, wrapping an arm around Hyungwon’s waist to pull him closer. His heart thumped so aggressively in his chest that he could hear it on his ears.

“Why are we doing this here?” The blond chuckled, untangling their fingers to encircle Hyungwon’s waist as a whole. “In a parking lot? We are such a weird couple.”

“I’m an immigrant time traveler from a lost world. You knew what you were getting yourself into, Wonho.”

“And I love it.” He snorted, pulling an arm away from his waist to hold his hand again. “Come on, the date night isn’t over yet.”

“No?”

“No. Now we’re going to have fun!” Wonho affirmed.

Which was, unexpectedly, a lie.

“I hate this.” Hyungwon scurried back to the cushioned benches after his fifth attempt at bowling. “Give me my phone. I will learn how to play this in a minute.”

“No!” Wonho cackled, sliding the time traveler’s phone in his trousers’ pocket while sitting opposite to him. “This is the fair way. Come on, just try to play it without help. You’re doing great!”

The glare Hyungwon shot at him could’ve been damaging if he wanted to.

Instead, the time traveler sunk in his seat in the U shaped bench, letting out a loud groan that echoed through the private bowling room they were in.

Wonho laughed even harder, rounding the table in the middle of it to get to his side.

As soon as he plopped down next to the pink-haired, Hyungwon bolted upright and pointed a finger at him.

“You’re enjoying this a little bit too much, aren’t you?”

“No…” He pouted, which did things to Hyungwon’s stomach. “Okay. Maybe a little. It’s just I had never seen you being bad at something. There’s a small sense of satisfaction to it.”

“I did exactly the same thing you did and yet you’re winning!”

“But Hyungwon-ah…” Wonho poked his cheek a couple of times, shifting closer. “Does it matter? You already won my heart.”

Was he ever get used to that man’s cheesiness? Probably not.

“Have you never seen me playing a video game with our friends? I become very mean. I’m way too competitive.”

“Yeah, but what prize is bigger and better than receiving all my love?”
“Yah.” Hyungwon snickered against his own will, slapping him in the arm. “Were you this sappy with your previous boyfriends?”

“Not really.” He beamed at him, and the time traveler felt his insides melt. “It was quite the other way around, actually. They were a lot clingier. Guess this might be karma, after all.”

“Karma seems to be always on your tail, Dr. Shin.”

“For sure.” Wonho shrugged and pointed his finger at the electronic panel keeping tabs on the game. “But that’s not what’s happening right now.”

Shooting him another scowl, the time traveler responded as fiercely as possible.

“I will literally destroy you.”

Which he didn’t, regardless of many attempts.

After hours of frustration and a lot of cackling (mostly from Wonho), the night was nearing its end as they drove away from the bowling place.

“It’s almost 11:00 p.m.” The blond informed him as they stopped at a red light. “Do you wanna eat anything or go anywhere else?”

Leisurely, Hyungwon turned his head to the side to face him.

“Yes. I want to go to your place. I don’t want to be apart from you tonight.”

After a brief silence, a flustered Wonho replied.

“You really… uh… Okay, okay. Alright!” He blurted out, overflowing with nervousness while gripping the steering wheel. “We good! We can watch a movie, or a TV show, I mean, we still didn’t finish the 9th season of Doctor Who, so we can—”

“Good grief!” Hyungwon interrupted him with a chortle. “Calm down. Also, the light is green.”

Nodding frantically, the man went back to driving. Hyungwon laughed again.

“Thank God you didn’t say that while I was driving.” Wonho confessed. “Or else I might’ve crashed this car into a lamp post or something. You’re a safety hazard.”

“Don’t worry.” The time traveler flashed a disarming smile. “I would protect you. I will always protect you.”

Quickly glancing to his side, Wonho gave him a half-smile.

“Sometimes it feels like I’m Lois Lane dating Clark Kent knowing he’s also Superman from the very beginning.”

“I can’t fly.” Hyungwon commented.

“But you could build a device that would help you fly, so I rest my case.”

“Fine.” A snort came out of the pink-haired’s mouth. “You’re right.”

“Lovely. Being right is my second most favorite thing in the world. You’re number one.”
A week passed in the blink of an eye to Wonho, and whatever was the cause of the rapid motion of time didn’t matter, not when he got to spend his time hanging out with Hyungwon and feeling the delighted sense of accomplishment as almost all of his academic works were in the right path. In simpler terms, Wonho didn’t remember the last time he had ever felt as happy and accomplished in all the areas of his life, and from time to time that scared him a little bit.

But not when he was with Hyungwon. Their first date, exactly a week ago, was just the first of many—they had two more since then, usually ending up with the warmth of Hyungwon’s body against his as the time traveler fell asleep in the coziness of his arms while they were watching a movie. It was beyond perfect, and Wonho didn’t see change any time soon.

The most important event of the day wasn’t specifically about them, though; Changkyun was finally coming back from America and they all missed the boy too much to not be excited for his return.

“Kitty.”

From the entrance to the heart of the machine, Wonho waved at the time traveler who was sitting on the floor with a cylindrical gadget in hands. A gadget that Hyungwon eagerly chucked across the room as soon as he saw him.

“Wonho!”

His giddy voice and easy mien made him look like an excited toddler, which, combined with his antics, had Wonho laughing.

“Someone is having a good day.” He giggled before being engulfed into a hug.

“I missed you.” Hyungwon replied, pulling away to plant a peck on Wonho’s lips.

Which was only the beginning of many to come; the time traveler’s determined mission to pepper his entire face with kisses was a success, but that only made Wonho laugh even harder.

“Whoa…” When he finally managed to get a hold of his face, the blond’s cheeks were already burning. “Excited kitty, uh?”

“I’m happy to see you.” Hyungwon broadly smiled, tangling his own fingers on the back of Wonho’s neck. “I’m happy to see Changkyun soon.”

“Me too. I really missed that weirdo. When did Kihyun say they were bringing him here?” Wonho asked.

“At four.” He responded, raising his head to the roof. “Monbebe, what time is it?”

“4:35 p.m., Korean Standard Time. Also, if you’re going to keep on kissing, get out of this room. This is literally the core of my system, have some respect.”

Hyungwon scoffed before retorting, knowing that he was feeding the banter.
“And I will literally insert a virus in there to shut you down if you don’t shut up.”

“Says the man who named me Monbebe. You’d be lost in here without me, fool. Ah. Kihyun, Jooheon and Changkyun have arrived.”

“Finally.” The taller beamed at Wonho, who could only wonder how he got cuter every day. “Let’s go!”

A funny trivia to know about Hyungwon was that he was really bad at measuring his own strength when influenced by extreme joy. Wonho was reminded of this again when he was yanked across the wagons without a pause to catch his breath. As always, the blond found that extremely endearing and let him continue without question his actions. The time traveler only let go of Wonho’s hand the moment he spotted their friends entering the main wagon, choosing to sprint in their direction instead.

“Changkyun!”

Their youngest waved both arms at him with a giant smile that turned into a giggle when Hyungwon launched himself onto him.

“Shownu and Min haven’t arrived?” Kihyun asked, getting on his tip-toes to peep over Wonho’s shoulder.

“We are here.” A sudden voice arose, and Wonho spotted his same-age friend and Minhyuk entering the train. “Where is—”

Wonho’s blood ran cold at the sight of Shownu’s eyes turning white before the man could finish his sentence, sending Minhyuk and Shownu to collapse against the floor of the wagon within seconds.

“SHOWNU!”

“MINHYUK!”

His friends ran towards their respective boyfriends, and Wonho moved at the same speed towards them, even though he had no idea what to do in these situations.

“What’s going on?” Jooheon cried, holding Minhyuk’s head in his lap.

Seconds turned into minutes, and nothing seemed to bring them back from whatever foresight they were experiencing at that moment.

It felt weird to the core, because as long as Wonho remembered, those episodes didn’t last for this long.

“They’re not coming back!” Kihyun barked, lightly tapping on his boyfriend’s face. “Hyungwon? What’s happening?”

Hyungwon inhaled sharply and squatted next to them with a terrified mien, allowing Wonho to guess what his answer was going to be.

“I don’t know.” He answered, as the blond expected.

The air got dense enough to make Wonho feel like he was choking on nothing. The feeling of dread grew roots in his nerves, crippling his nerves. His gaze, now fixated on Hyungwon, captured
the moment his phone buzzed in the pocket of his burgundy blazer, distracting him from the scene. Whatever message the device conveyed drained the color from Hyungwon’s face, with an expression of profound terror overtaking his mien.

“Hyungwon?” He called the pink-haired, and the man turned to his side to face him. Instead of clarifying the reason for his sudden terror, the time traveler just handed Wonho his phone.

Three messages were open, and Monbebe’s name sat on the top center of the screen.

“This is not Changkyun.

This is not Changkyun.

This is not Changkyun.”

Chapter End Notes

we are here but changkyun ain't (eyes emoji)
sorry bout that but this chapter was 99% cute so yall cant really complain also they CUTE this has tired me jdfghghhd but anyways, the new arc IS COMING i'll post it before mx's comeback because who knows if i'm gonna be alive after it

see you soon, kids
Redamancy, part 1

Chapter Summary

— redamancy
from the new latin redamantia, from the classical latin redamō (“i requite love”,
transitive verb).
(n) the act of loving in return.

Chapter Notes

well well well it has been some time right.
i know, this is late as shit. but im dumb and cant manage the mx cb with writing, plus i
had some difficulty with this chapter........
anyways yall dont need to hear it. just know that im NOT abandoning this story.
i couldnt even if i wanted to, i must finish every story i started.
AND THIS CHAPTER IS 22K TO COMPENSATE THE WAIT!

anyways, enjoy it (or not)
and stream play it cool

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"If I had had words to speak such a thing, I would have. But there were none that seemed big
enough for it, to hold that swelling truth. As if he had heard me, he reached for my hand. I did not
need to look; his fingers were etched into my memory, slender and petal-veined, strong and quick
and never wrong."

*Madeline Miller, “The Song of Achilles”*

One.

Hyungwon heard him move. A glance to his side.

Two.

Tiny click against the wall.

Three.

Lights out.

It happened once before, in a situation too complicated to be explained quickly. The matter of
importance was that the train was entirely plunged into darkness.

Ever since the episode with the nanochip implanted in him, Hyungwon never thought about
inflicting harm on himself. Regardless of the circumstances that led him to live that life, it was only right for him to still try his best to protect those in need, those who didn’t have anyone else to look over them.

Yet, it felt like instantaneous suicide the way his body jolted forward to cover Wonho’s as soon as he heard the knowing strident sound of a blaster being turned on; there was no time for any other reaction, so Hyungwon took the shot.

Fast and clean, the fired bolt of laser sliced his clothes like an iron spear cutting through his back, and his friends started shouting, as expected in that terrifying situation. A pained scream got stuck in his throat as he hissed, for Hyungwon knew he couldn’t let the situation get out of control and prepared himself to fight back.

With one hand behind his back, a force field was instantly lifted to protect his friends, while the fiery energy orb that rapidly formed in his hands was launched towards the attacking party within seconds, cutting through the darkness like a shooting star.

As soon as Hyungwon got up, his body abruptly reminded him of the acute pain down his back that burned more intensely every time he moved, but that wasn’t important — not when someone wearing Changkyun’s face was shooting at the other Constants with an ungodly rage, one that could’ve never been seen in the face of the real Changkyun.

The energy orb hit the pretender squarely in the stomach, with enough strength to launch them across the main wagon to hit the floor of the second one.

He wasn’t defeated yet, Hyungwon knew. Pulling down the force field on the Constants, now he had full capacity to deal with the impostor, even if his initial plan to control his emotions was on the brink of failure.

Someone called his name, but the buzz in Hyungwon’s ears made it hard to distinguish his friends’ voices, but that was also not important at the moment.

What should be done wasn’t for their eyes to see, anyway.

Hyungwon rushed down to the next wagon using the light of his inner energy as a guide and nearly got shot again, if it weren’t for his fast reaction in bringing a force field in front of his body; his initial idea to shoot another energy sphere would work well, but it was faster to use the force field itself as a weapon when its intention was reversed.

As soon as it was launched, it struck the faux Changkyun at full power and he fell on his back, shrieking out of agony, after receiving such massive amount of energy, which gave Hyungwon the opportunity to step forward and kick the gun out of his hand.

“MONBEBE!” The pink-haired shouted at the same time that the lights of the train turned on again, getting closer to the attacker. “HOLD HIM DOWN!”

In a second, small cracks surfaced on the floor around where the pretender screeched in pain, bringing out steel chains to leash his legs and arms to prevent him from moving.

Everything outside the strangeness of the bubble of that wagon sounded way too detached from reality for Hyungwon to care, but everything inside of it had its intensity amplified to the maximum. It was a weird moment to feel more alive than ever, Hyungwon admitted, but his body pulsed in the very core of his being, from the way he could hear the blood dripping off his clothes to how loud his heartbeat could be heard thumping in his ears.
The time traveler didn’t want to acknowledge how much the injure in his back hurt because individual pain doesn’t matter when you are in a battlefield, only what will come from it. To others, maybe it didn’t look like one, but Hyungwon had ventured himself into too many wars to not notice what a combat zone was like.

Trying his best to push his anger and distress to the bottom of his chest, the time traveler threw himself on the floor next to the wrongdoer.

The faux Changkyun panted heavily, wriggling like an animal caught in a trap, trying to free himself from the chains that shackled his whole body, and it was exactly in that moment that Hyungwon felt like he could burst into tears at the sight of someone identical to his friend in such horrible situation.

A twinge crossed his back and the time traveler bit his lower lip to hold in a groan, choosing to put himself last.

“Who—Who are you?” He nearly shouted, toning his voice down along the way.

But the person — or whatever they were — didn’t reply right away, still uselessly squirming to get rid of the chains. Once they realized it was impossible, they gave up.

“Answer while I’m still asking nicely.” Hyungwon adverted.

The faux Changkyun simpered, turning his head to the left to stare at the time traveler.

“I’ve heard… that this is your native language.”

And it was. Hyungwon couldn’t help but to be stunned by hearing someone speaking it so fluently, as if they were from his lost world.

“You…” His lips quivered while speaking his mother tongue, and he had to remind himself to get it together. “You are from…”

“No.” Still grinning, the man continued to speak in Hyungwon’s mother tongue. “But we do know your people. You will hear from them soon, too.”

“Where is Changkyun?” Hyungwon urged, now in Korean. “Why you—”

Instead of a reply, a loud guffaw.

“The makers meet their ends.” The pretender informed, still in Hyungwon’s first language, in a menacing tone. “And so do I.”

From where he was kneeled down, Hyungwon watched in horror as the man slid his tongue across his back teeth till something fell on his tongue, because he knew what was about to happen.

He also knew it was too late.

“NO!” He shouted as he launched himself forward to grab the man’s head. “NO!”

Swiftly, he gathered twice the energy in his hand and pressed against the man’s chest in an attempt to knock him out so he couldn’t proceed with his action, but as soon as Hyungwon heard a feeble click arising, the time traveler stopped.

A white foam came out of the mouth of the faux Changkyun as the man writhed in his lasts moments of life.
“FUCK!” Hyungwon yelled, smashing his fist against the floor of the wagon. “FUCK! FUCK!”

“Hyungwon.”

“WHAT?!”

The flickering lights above his head had passed unnoticed until he craned his neck up.

“The Constants did not suffer any injury. But you are—”

“Save it.” He blurted out, trying to get back on his feet; the wincing pain on his back, especially on the lower part, didn’t help, though.

“Hyungwon.”

A different voice called his name this time, one that he recognized in less than a second.

From the passage between the main and second wagon, Wonho stared at him with frightened eyes.

It also didn’t take him too long to lay eyes on the lifeless body beside Hyungwon.

“Changkyun…”

“It’s not him.” Hyungwon clarified, and the sudden urge to sob was coming back; work was still left to be done, though. “Monbebe.”

In a blink of an eye, the lights above their heads twinkled again.

“Gather all the information you can find on the subject. By any means necessary. I want a full report in 20 minutes.”

“Yes, Hyungwon.”

“You’re bleeding.” Wonho rushed towards him, but Hyungwon held a hand in front of his body. “You need to—”

“Not now.”

His response was rather cold, but so much was going through Hyungwon’s mind at that moment that he didn’t know the proper way to deal with every issue that was falling over him.

With a deep breath, the time traveler masked his discomfort as much as possible, he passed past the blond Constant to go to his friends, still on the floor of the main wagon.

Rocking back and forth with Minhyuk’s body in his arms, Jooheon bawled his eyes out with his boyfriend’s sudden coma that didn’t seem to come to an end. Beside him, Kihyun tried his best to wake Shownu up from whatever episode they have could been facing, but didn’t fight the tears rolling down his face.

“Hey.” His throaty voice echoed through the wagon, earning their attention. “Move them to the med bay so we can run a checkup. And observe them.”


“I don’t know.” Hyungwon replied right away, plastering a smile on his face. “But I will find out.
Do you trust me, right?”

“Yeah…”

“Hyung will solve all of this, Jooheon.” He tried his best to reassure both the man and himself. “For now, they need a place to rest.”

“Come on.” Wonho’s voice came from behind Hyungwon, but wasn’t directed at him.

With a strained grunt, the blond now hurled Shownu’s inert body up so Kihyun could get on his feet and hold onto the other side of the tanned man, to lead him to the med bay.

Jooheon was doing well by carrying Minhyuk by himself, so Hyungwon didn’t feel the need to offer to help. Instead, he lifted his head to give more directions to his A.I.

“Monbebe. I want updates of their health statuses every hour.”

“Yes, Hyungwon.”

In the newfound emptiness of that wagon, Hyungwon felt a kind of sorrow that hadn’t hit him in a long time.

Mainly because he never had so much to lose before, and used not to care at all about his well-being as long as he could be of some help.

The point was the difficulty to wrap around his mind around how fast things had turned out so badly. That was supposed to be a day of celebration, of hearing the questionable stories Changkyun had to tell them over dinner about his time in the United States so they would laugh all night long at their maknae’s antics.

His eyes started to water at the thought of Changkyun out there, on his own, possibly in the company of people that could hurt him somehow.

But it was still not the place or time for his emotions to take over, so Hyungwon chose to take the path down to his personal room to mend his wounds — a trail of blood was left behind, but he counted on Monbebe to clean that up quickly.

After taking his now perforated blazer and shirt, the time traveler examined the damage of that blaster gun on his back in the 2-meter long mirror of his bathroom. It would heal, Hyungwon knew, but leaving it exposed wouldn’t be of much help to make him feel more comfortable in the process, so the pink-haired patched his back up with the few antiseptics and gauzes he found in a box under the sink.

Of course it wasn’t still completely painless, but Hyungwon kept reminding himself that he had worse situations than that, that it was okay, that he’d survive. He always did, and now he had to in order to get Changkyun back and help his friends with whatever they were going through.

He was finishing buttoning up a brand new long-sleeved black shirt when a couple of knocks arose on the other side of his door.

“Unlock.”

As expected, Wonho.

The man stood by the threshold as if he had never been at that place before; an ashamed look
crossed his face as Wonho stared at the floor, with his hands behind his back.

“I came to see you…” He announced, closing the door behind him.

“How are Minhyuk and Shownu?” Still with his back turned to him, Hyungwon moved to the important matter.

“Still the same.” Wonho sighed deeply. “Deep sleep, according to Monbebe.”

Even without looking, Hyungwon could feel the blond man moving towards him and thought about dodging for a second, but didn’t wince when Wonho’s hands landed on his hips.

“How bad is the injury? Do you—”

“I took care of it.” Hyungwon responded in a toneless voice, and he didn’t know why. “I will heal, as always.”

“Hum… Does it hurt a lot?”

Whatever urge to cry that resided in Hyungwon’s body was drained out of it in the bath he took when he poured his heart out in the most silent way possible, afraid the others could hear even a snippet of it. He had to be strong for all of them, after all.

But at that moment, with Wonho’s thumbs drawing small circles on his waist, Hyungwon considered breaking into tears again.

He couldn’t, though.

“I’m fine.” Hyungwon turned around before his feelings could get the best of him, gently pulling Wonho’s hands away.

“It’s not your fault.” Wonho claimed, decisively staring at him.

“It is.” He scoffed, sounding more mean than he intended to. “If not mine, who else’s?”

“The people who…” He could tell in Wonho’s wavering voice that it was still hard to acknowledge Changkyun’s forced absence. “Whoever took Changkyun. They’re at fault, not you.”

“I should have been looking after him, Wonho. That’s my duty! And I failed. I failed and they took him, and he’s out there imprisoned, wondering if we—”

“You can’t protect us from everything, Hyungwon. Even if you locked us in a room for the rest of our lives, under your watch, we still could face perils. But no. We are all trying to live our lives, and we know about the risks.”

“Do you?” The taller took a step backward, rubbing his face. “Because we don’t know what they might have been doing to him. What if he’s already dead, Wonho? Whose responsibility it is if not MINE? MINE!”

The sorrow in Wonho’s gaze pierced through Hyungwon’s heart.

“He’s not dead. You don’t believe that, so stop it. We are going to find him and bring—”

“There’s no ‘we’.” Hyungwon shook his head, tasting something bitter on his mouth. “I am going to find him and bring him back on my own.”
“Are we seriously going back to this?” It was now Wonho’s time to shake his head at him, seeming more disappointed than anything else. “We are stronger together. You know that.”

“If so, how come this is happening? Uh? How come Changkyun was kidnapped under my nose, in this universe while I was busying myself with distractions? It was my duty to—”

“Wait.” Wonho said, gesturing for him to stop. “Are you saying… no, wait, are you calling what we have a distraction? Are you saying every moment we spent together was a goddamn distraction to you?”

Something twisted and pulled his stomach while Hyungwon swallowed slowly, breaking eye contact.

“Wonho…”

“Listen.” He huffed, turning his gaze away. “There’s nothing in the kitchen so…”

“Wonho.” His voice softened, for Hyungwon was afraid of losing him too. “I—”

“I’m going to buy some groceries since the kids won’t want to leave Minhyuk and Shownu alone. See you later.”

The blond was fast in bolting out of the room, but Hyungwon tried to follow him anyway.

“Wonho. Wonho!” He called multiple times across the control room, but Wonho still walked faster and stormed out of the train.

Before he could hold them back, tears rolled down his face as a prelude of the frantic sobbing that would soon arrive. Everything in his chest burned as he panted heavily in a foolish attempt to control his respiration and Hyungwon felt like the entire world around him was being torn to pieces. Yet, he couldn’t bring himself to find motivation to do something about it — there was always some beauty even in destruction, but what prevailed in his body memory was the knowing feeling that he was holding onto something that wasn’t there anymore.

Not even the wound on his back hurt so much like the possibility of being all alone again.

Crouching down, Hyungwon poured his heart out in the middle of the control room, engulfed by an anguish that he, unfortunately, was rather acquainted with.

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Wonho should’ve recognized that everything was going too smooth to continue for much longer.

But he was blinded by the fulfillment that being with Hyungwon and seeing his friends happy brought upon him, fooling himself, at least for those moments, that there was no other possible lifestyle beyond that one. He should’ve known that such peace wasn’t going to last.

Most importantly, Wonho should’ve paid more attention to Changkyun ever since Hyungwon mentioned people in the multiverse were out to get his doubles; ever since their youngest was attacked in his university’s library, maybe. No, it was a clear warning sign that he ignored to prioritize his feelings towards Hyungwon.

Wonho couldn’t help but to feel a bit guilty.
He would’ve stayed in the train with the others if not for Kihyun’s insistence that he should go home and rest, that, no, there was no need for him to tire himself out like that. Wonho had never seen Kihyun so physically and mentally disturbed like that in all their years of friendship, and deep down he wished he could do something to ease his friend’s pain by bringing Minhyuk and Shownu back to normal.

But he was useless in such issue. No matter how high his IQ was, Wonho was still not equipped to handle a matter like that. And he hated it, profoundly.

Deep in his thoughts at his home office, Wonho nearly jumped out of his leather chair when he heard knocks coming from the other side of the door.

Which, all things considered, would’ve been way more bloodcurdling if he didn’t know who it was, bearing in mind that he was alone in the penthouse.

“Come in.” He said, pushing his body up on the chair.

Pink locks slowly emerged through the breach made by the open door, with big curious eyes peeking at him.

Wonho almost laughed but held it back, because he was quickly reminded that he was supposed to be mad at him.

“Come in.” The blond repeated, leaning his elbows over his office’s desk.

So Hyungwon did, quietly closing the door behind him before strolling towards Wonho, with his hands behind his back.

“Hello.” His voice came out a bit hoarse, in the typical way it always did when he cried for too long. Wonho felt a pang in his heart. “Do I interrupt?”

“No. I was just… thinking.”

“Here.” Hyungwon suddenly put a box of brownies in front of him, over the desk. “Have you eaten?”

Once again, Wonho nearly smiled. But he still felt pretty upset, and wasn’t going to deny it.

“I did. Were you going to fix me dinner with brownies?”

“No…” He let out a tiny sigh, dropping his shoulders as he buried his nails on his palms. “This is… for the apology. I brought it to say I’m sorry. I’m sorry for what I said earlier. I didn’t mean it. I’m just…”


“All of the above.” The taller snorted, rubbing his face with both hands.

That’s all it took for Wonho to give in and accept his boyfriend’s apology. Although there wasn’t a thing he could do by staying with his friend, to be by Hyungwon’s side was a natural instinct, even if he wasn’t of much help to his boyfriend either.

“Come here.” He beckoned for the pink-haired to round his desk, and the man obeyed. As soon as Hyungwon leaned his lower back against his desk, Wonho took a hold of his hand. “Can’t lie and say it didn’t hurt to hear that, Hyungwon. I take us very seriously, and that also means respecting
what you do. I never thought I could be hindering your work in such way.”

“You’re not.” His reply was fast. “I’m sorry, I was… wrong in saying that. It isn’t how I felt, or feel… I was… I am lost. In this situation. I’m trying to make sense of things.”

“I know, I know.” Unconsciously, Wonho pulled him closer. “But honey, you can’t shut me out. You can’t shut us out, not after everything we went through that always proved that we are stronger together. What happened with Changkyun is not your fault. Not everything that happens in the multiverse is your responsibility, Hyungwon. You’re just one man in a land of countless beings. And you’re already doing more than what’s asked of you, so there’s nothing wrong with allowing yourself to experience happiness. Love isn’t a weakness. Never was, never will be.”

“Wonho…” He sniffled, and the blond could tell he was about to tear up. “I feel like… I’m losing everyone I care about. I don’t know what to do, where to start…”

“Hey…” Wonho tugged him even closer, hauling his chair back so he could pull Hyungwon to sit on his lap. “This is why I’m telling you all this. You’re not alone anymore. I am here, the kids are staying strong…”

“Shownu and Minhyuk still didn’t wake up.” Hyungwon whimpered, drawing his arm around Wonho’s neck. “It’s too dangerous for me to go into their minds while they’re in the middle of… this. I can’t risk it.”

To bring his boyfriend’s attention to him, Wonho encircled the time traveler’s waist with one arm and used his free hand to caress his cheek.

“They will come back from this.” He tried to reassure Hyungwon, even though he knew nothing about it. “Whatever they are facing now, they can do it. Have faith in them. Like I have faith we will find Changkyun and bring him back home.”

Sighing deeply, Hyungwon rested his forehead on Wonho’s shoulder for a couple of seconds before shooting a dispirited gaze at him.

“He’s already out of this universe…”

“I know.” The blond gave a weak nod.

“You do?”

“I only imagined that, if Changkyun was still in this world, Monbebe would’ve found him by now. Also, they went to the extreme of using a double of Kyun…”

“So while the energy was disrupted in the train, they opened a breach in this universe’s shield and left.” His boyfriend explained, pursing his lips. “Changkyun’s double… is also… complicated. But I’m almost sure non-humans are involved.”

“So…” Wonho sighed, adding that new information to his thoughts. “Aliens?”

“That’s a slur, you know.” A sheepish smile blossomed on his face. “The preferred term is extraterrestrials. But, yes, I think so. I tried to track the ring I gave Changkyun for emergencies but it’s off signal, so clearly whoever took him knew its purpose. I really want to believe he’s okay, Wonho. He’s alone out there, maybe being mistreated… My heart hurts.”

“Kkukkung is a strong one, kitty.” Wonho reassured his boyfriend, stroking his cheek again. “And he knows we are coming for him. We are his hyungs. We have to be strong for him, okay?”
“I don’t know if I can handle losing him, Wonho.” Hyungwon’s tone became deeper as he choked back a sob. “I can’t handle losing any of you.”

“You won’t.” He pulled the time traveler’s face closer to his own until he could feel Hyungwon’s breath on his face. “I’m always gonna be here with you. You hear me? Wherever it is, I’m coming with you. I’m not going anywhere you can’t find me.”

“Promise?”

“I love you, Hyungwon. This is my promise.”

In that dimmed ambience, Wonho could read something in his boyfriend’s face that made him feel like the man had something to say, but didn’t quite know how.

“I wish this was the right moment.” Hyungwon uttered, quietly.

“For what?”

“You will know.” Quickly, he flashed a tender smile at Wonho, leaning his head on his shoulder. “I’m so tired, Wonho… My back has healed, but I still feel my entire body aching.”

“Stay with me tonight. I will take care of you.”

“I should go back to the train. If there’s a…”

“If there’s something urgent…” He cut him off, smiling at his boyfriend that still was mouth agape. “Monbebe will find a way to let us know. We’ll keep our phones close, so try to relax for tonight. I’ll protect you.”

“I trust you, Wonho. I really do.”

“Good.” He shot him a rapid smirk before pulling his hand from Hyungwon’s face to slid it under his knees, lifting the time traveler bridal style.

After squealing, Hyungwon playfully hit him in the arm.

“Damnit! My heart almost stopped! And I can still walk, Dr. Shin.”

“I know. But I said I was going to take care of you, so I’m going to spoil you as much as I can, my prince.”

Hyungwon huffed at his silliness, but still wrapped both arms around Wonho’s neck to hold onto him properly.

“Did I tell you about the time the crown prince of Mexico asked for my hand in marriage?”

With a snort, Wonho began strolling outside his home office while Hyungwon told him one of the many stories of his long lifetime that the blond hadn’t heard it yet. Most of the time, Wonho wished he had been there with the time traveler so that Hyungwon could have someone to share those experiences with, but Wonho was also quite alright with unveiling new mysteries about that pink-haired man — a privilege, that, maybe, he was the only one in the multiverse to ever have attained.
One didn’t need to ponder for long why the silence reigned in the train’s kitchen that morning, which was probably the thing keeping Hyungwon outside the room, with his back against the wall near the entrance listening to his friends’ conversation.

“You need to eat.” Wonho’s voice arose in there, alongside the noise of a plate gliding against the metallic table. “You always nag us to eat, but you can’t do it yourself?”

“I’m not hungry.” Kihyun replied, in the most crestfallen tone Hyungwon ever had heard from him. “Wonho, what if he doesn’t…”

“He will.” The blond Constant responded in a heartbeat. “Jooheonnie. They will come back from this. I’m sure.”

“Yeah…” Despondently, Jooheon’s voice was so small that the time traveler had to focus to hear it properly. “But when? Monbebe said their health condition is stable. There’s nothing stopping them from waking up.”

“You guys know it’s different.” Wonho reminded them. “This… connection they have with Time or whatever this is… we can’t fully understand how it works. But I believe there’s a purpose for this to be happening, just like always does. They will come back to tell us.”

There was no way to deny the major fluttering in his heart when he thought about the development of Wonho’s behavior towards him. Of course, the fact that the man was in love with Hyungwon was certainly reassuring, but it was still a bit staggering to think how, months before, the blond Constant would be the first trying to pick a fight with him over everything that was going on, quickly putting the blame on the time traveler. Now, after what it felt years instead of months, it was Wonho’s faith on him that gave Hyungwon strength to keep going so far, and in the end revived the hope inside of him.

“Hi.” Hyungwon swiftly waved at them after opening the kitchen’s door.

The men immediately turned their heads to him.

“Any news?” Kihyun promptly asked.

“Not yet.” He told them, watching their faces fall again. “But I think I’m on the right track about Changkyun. Would you like to hear about it?”

Silently agreeing, the men followed Hyungwon to the control room.

“So…” The time traveler turned on his heels after pressing a point of the center panel, making all the information he gathered appear on the windshield panels. “Who we… dealt with yesterday was a clone of Changkyun. Cloning is strictly forbidden to humans in the observable multiverse, though.”

“Just humans?” Jooheon seemed surprised.

“Yes.” Hyungwon assented, placing his hands over the center panels’ frame. “Our race experienced a lot of issues with it throughout time, so the Council banned it for human use in all the self-aware universes. You know, the ones that already know about the multiverse and joined Coalition to share knowledge among each other. So yes, the odds are that another race kidnapped Changkyun. Monbebe, show every non-human insurgent movement against the Constants in the multiverse.”
Dozens of tiny blue boxes with the name and location of those races filled the screen in front of them.

“Alright.” Hyungwon continued. “Now eliminate the ones with pacifist records.”

A batch of blue boxes disappeared from the screen.

“Eliminate the ones who haven’t been in this universe’s vicinity in the past year.”

Another batch vanished, leaving behind precisely 14 of them.

“Now cross references with the type of material used to fabricate Changkyun’s clone. How many of them are known to use it?”

Hyungwon was really hoping that specifically one was left behind, but luck wasn’t on his side that day.

After the final leveling, only 5 remained.

“So these are the suspects?” Kihyun asked, crossing his arms over his chest. “How can we be sure?”

“Monbebe is working her ways through the multiverse records to locate these specific factions, but it’s a bit complicated since we have to do it furtively because of my banishment.”

“Do you think that your people are involved in this?” Jooheon now questioned, taking his eyes off the windshield screens. “I mean, they’ve been up to no good lately…”

“I thought so, at first.” The time traveler clarified, scratching the back of his neck. “Especially after Changkyun’s clone spoke in my native language to me.”

“That’s your native language?” Wonho sounded surprised, taking a step forward.

“Yes.” The corners of Hyungwon’s mouth quirked up out of habit. “The same one you briefly heard in the Elysium, and at that time during the library attack, and when I woke up in your apart—I mean… when we fell asleep working on the wrinkle and I woke up speaking it. I don’t think my world is involved in this one, though.”

“Why?” The blond inquired.

“My people doesn’t take hostages. And if someone went to such lengths as creating a clone of Changkyun to diverge our attention, they’re definitely not my people. As I mentioned to you and Changkyun a while ago, that attack in the library was more of a warning to me than an actual assassination attempt. If they want someone dead, one will be dead before one realizes what’s happening.”

“That assuming that Changkyun is still alive.” Kihyun brought forth, with a deep sigh. “Wasn’t this universe locked up? How did they enter? And how did they leave?”

“My best guess is that they’ve been here for a long time, Kihyun.” The time traveler wasn’t 100% sure of anything, but he pondered over the most likely possibility. “Just like those who kidnapped you back in the military base last year, who had been here before I could seal the entrance. As for how they left…” Sticking his hand in the pocket of his trousers, the pink-haired retrieved a round white device the size of a tennis ball, handing it to his shorter friend. “I found it on the main wagon. This is a very advanced version of what could be considered an electromagnetic pulse. It
may seem harmless, but it can take down an entire planet for exactly 45 seconds. That’s what the clone was used to allow the kidnappers to escape, even if it meant his destruction.”

“You said those people who have something against us…” Jooheon gestured mindlessly. “They’re mostly after Kyun’s doubles. So they planned this whole time, months, just to take him? Now?”

“They think of Changkyun as the most dangerous of all of you. I didn’t mention before because I didn’t want to scare you since the shielding I put in this universe was working well…” Hyungwon sighed, bringing a hand to his face. “I see my mistake now. A few months ago, Monbebe picked up a rumor in the Multiverse Frequency that a mass kidnapping was about to occur, but the sources were too fishy, so I didn’t think it was real. I’m sorry. I should’ve taken better care of him. I didn’t think it was dangerous for him to go to America…”

“Yah…” Kihyun called him out. “It’s not your fault. By the way, his parents…”

“They are fine.” The time traveler guaranteed, with a quick nod. “I don’t think they have noticed. Which means whoever took him must have made the change somewhere in the airport since his father dropped him there. Monbebe was keeping an eye in Changkyun and she didn’t notice it, so they knew they were being observed.”

“Do you think…” His shortest friend bit his lower lip, seeming a bit indecisive. “That Shownu and Minhyuk, I don’t know, felt it? They collapsed as soon as they entered the train…”

“It’s possible. But I can’t be sure about it. Regardless of their abilities being a consequence of the method I used to get in touch with them in the past, I do not know more than any of you how it works. But I know someone who does. Monbebe is already tracking her down.”

“Her?” Jooheon raised an eyebrow.

At the abrupt sound of the door of the control room being slammed against the wall after a sudden opening, Hyungwon jumped backwards in automatic defense mode to protect his friends, feeling the energy within swarm through his body to concentrate on his hands.

No foe or imminent attack waited for them though; instead, as a disheveled Shownu and an incredibly pale Minhyuk were the ones bursting through the door, scurrying towards the panels. Hyungwon didn’t know why, but he moved out of the way for them.

“Min?” Visibly taken aback, Jooheon called for his boyfriend, whose eyes were fixated on the windshield screens.

“Shownu? Shownu?” Kihyun, on the other hand, approached his boyfriend by placing a hand on his biceps, but the man paid him no mind.

The entranced state in which both of them were in only ended a second later when Shownu and Minhyuk pointed at the same area of the screen, where one of the blue boxes containing information of possible kidnappers were.

“We need…” His red-haired friend started, arm shuddering as he kept it up.

“…to go there.” Shownu finished the line of thought.

Also known as the universe Hyungwon was hoping he wouldn’t have to go to.

“How…” Hyungwon began, looking back and forth between them and the windshield screen. “Are you sure?”
“Yes.” They immediately responded, in unison.

“Alright…” Concern now dawned on the time traveler, who now approached Minhyuk and Shownu. “What happened… to you two?”

“We don’t have time.” Minhyuk was blunt, brusquely turning his head to face Hyungwon. “The call is coming.”

“Call?” Hyungwon’s forehead creased out of confusion.

A shrill noise echoed through the control room, one that Hyungwon hadn’t heard in so long that it took him a few seconds to identify where it came from.

Without looking back, he dashed through the room towards the main wagon, coming to a halt as soon as he confirmed his prediction about the origin of the sound.

“That phone works?” Jooheon questioned, coming behind him.

His friend pointed at the very same landline phone glued to the wall that Hyungwon was staring at, currently doing something it hadn’t done before in two centuries.

It was ringing.

“It’s a one-way line.” Hyungwon explained, without taking his eyes off of it. “It can only receive calls.”

“So…” He heard Wonho clearing his throat, taking a step forward to stand beside him. “Are you going to take it…?”

“You must.” Shownu declared, making Hyungwon turn around. “You must.”

“You know it’s them.” The time traveler had no doubt, as soon as he saw the look in his friend’s eyes. “No one but them know about the existence of this number.”

“Hyungwon-ah.” Fingers wrapped around his wrist, and Hyungwon turned to his left to stare at Minhyuk. “Please. For Changkyun.”

A barely inaudible huff escaped Hyungwon’s mouth at the same time he felt like his time machine was getting smaller with each passing second and something clogged his throat, making it impossible for oxygen to make its ways inside his chest.

But he gave in, even though every fiber of his being blasted a warning siren against it.

Everything seemed easier in his imagination, where the time traveler knew he had to deal with that sooner or later, always imagining a version of himself whose legs didn’t feel as heavy as an anchor as he walked towards the phone.

It didn’t matter, Hyungwon told himself. He’d swallow his pride and anxiety if that meant to have the chance to bring his friend back home.

Such decision didn’t stop his hands from trembling so bad that he decided to clutch the side of his trousers in an attempt to lessen the effects of anxiety.

But what made Hyungwon feel like he was choking on thin air was the silence that came from his friends. No one dared to utter a word to break that noiseless atmosphere, and even though he understood their caution and concern, deep down Hyungwon wished they were being more vocal
about how they felt about it.

Changkyun. For Changkyun. For Changkyun.

A chant in his head, to remind him of the reason of it all.

Hyungwon’s initial plan was to slowly reach for the phone, but the overthinking tendency rising in his head would feed on it, so Hyungwon decided just to pull it all at once.

Bringing it down until its cord was fully stretched towards the floor while leaning against the wagon’s wall, Hyungwon finally let go and took a few step backwards.

As expected, the reality around them shifted into a completely different one, specifically to the caller’s surroundings.

“Oh, SHIT!” Jooheon squealed, grabbing the time traveler’s attention.

“What the hell?” Kihyun’s voice echoed through the place, in a very distressed tone.

“Oh.” Hyungwon’s eyes went round at the remembrance that the Constants didn’t expect that to happen, so he turned around to soothe their nerves. “It’s alright. We are still in the train. It’s just…” He gestured around. “An in-person call. Literally.”

“CHW-000115.”

Ah, fuck.

The time traveler closed his eyes for a brief moment as he swallowed the start of his annoyance at hearing his “name” spoken in his native language, while the others glanced around the new found location with a mix of amazement and wariness in their eyes.

Nothing much out of the ordinary for them, Hyungwon concluded after a brief inspection. The call setting looked like a conference room, but with a myriad of pallid bookshelves, bronze sculptures and a single window and chair right in front of him, immersed by a whitish grey light shimmering across the place.

“My name is Hyungwon.” He hissed, settling his hands behind his back. “How many times do I have to say that? And speak in Korean. My friends are here too.”

He knew who to expect by the sound of their voice only — his memory was excellent in recollecting sounds, especially the ones he wished to forget.

With one leg crossed over the other, one of the highest members of the Multiverse Council sat on the only chair in the room — a simple wooden one placed right next to the window, basking his dark-skinned face in the insipid daylight as he shifted forward a bit, just so he could be fully facing the time traveler. Regardless of their past, Hyungwon found a bit odd that he never learned that man’s name, nor was interested in knowing.

“There are matters of more importance.” The man simply replied (in Korean, at least), while quietly positioned his hands over his lap.

His attires were simpler than usual; a long pine green robe with silver runic details around its edges, and silver chain around his neck.

“I’ll give you 5 minutes before I end this call.” Hyungwon warned.
“Insurgencies have spread to a catastrophic level.” He began, staring at the time traveler without batting his eyelashes. “The sentiment of hatred towards the Constants have grown immensely across this universe, to the point where dozens of human colonies have been wiped out by those terrorists. You know I’m talking about the Hundun. Now, other races have joined the them in an attempt to eradicate the human race in every galaxy that has humans in it. The colonies have been trying to defend themselves the best way they can, but the Hundun and their associates have the upper hand. We need—”

“I’m sorry.” Hyungwon cut him off, crossing his arms over his chest. “But why are you informing me about this?”

It was quite satisfying to see a reluctance building up on the man’s face.

“We need your help.” The Council member slowly stated, eyes still fixated on the time traveler. “The human race will be extinct in this universe if they keep this wave of attacks. Thousands have perished already.”

“I am sorry.” He repeated himself, with a nonchalant tone. “But I am restricted to the universe I am inserted into, as you and the rest of the Council decided I should’ve been.”

“I have spoken with them.” The man quickly responded. “The Council agreed to lift the decree temporarily so you can—”

“Temporarily?” The pink-haired man chuckled. “Is this a joke? The only reason I’m respecting this restriction order is because I don’t want any universe to get in trouble because of my actions. You people have accused me of manipulating the will of my friends and conspiring with the people of my world without a single proof of such things.”

“There are matters of more importance right now.” Wavering, the man’s voice got a bit higher. “You need—”

“No.” Hyungwon’s tone was decisive as he clenched one fist. “I told you this would happen, didn’t I? That one of you would come asking for my help, and that I would turn a blind eye just like you people did to me back then. No bargains.”

“Are you insane? Millions—Quadrillions will DIE!” And that was it. The insolent shout that Hyungwon was used to hear from him. “Don’t you see? This is bigger than—”

“One of my friends is missing. He needs me. You can ask someone else for help. I’m not the only one with abilities in the multiverse.”

“There’s no one like you, CHW-000115.” The Council man affirmed before standing up. “And you know it. All I’m asking is—”

“No, no.” A dry chuckle escaped Hyungwon’s mouth as he took a step forward. “You’re not asking for help. You’re saying you want to use me for purposes that benefit you, then toss me aside right after because even after all I have done for the multiverse in the past centuries, you still think I’m a menace. Always did. All because I happen to be from a genocidal universe, which I had no contact at all ever since their supposed destruction. You never trusted me, and you never will. So yes, I will prioritize the safety of someone who risked his life for me multiple times.”

“We know your Constant’s abduction is tied to our conflict. Our active communications managed to—”

“I will find Changkyun on my own.” Hyungwon sputtered, abruptly burying his hands in the
pockets of his trousers. “Good luck.”

Lifting his head towards the ceiling, the time traveler prepared for the final order.

“Monbebe, end this call.”

In waves, the pixels that composed that false scenario dispersed into reality, and Hyungwon didn’t look back.

He hated how the floor beneath his feet felt like quicksand trying to sink him into going back in his verdict, as if the past didn’t pulse across his entire skin because only Hyungwon knew how many times he had to pick himself up from the dust or else he’d perish — rarely a helpful hand was offered, specially by the type of people that Council member was.

“Hyungwon.”

The time traveler flinched and clutched his heavy chest with one hand at the acknowledgement that his friends were still there — had always been, witnessing the entire name. Wonho’s voice, calling his name, was a reminder.

“I’m sorry you had to watch that.” Hyungwon began, strolling in their direction. “I can’t—”

“Why did you do that?” Shownu interrupted him, with such disappointed mien that it made Hyungwon feel a little bad.

“You know that Changkyun is in that world.” Minhyuk affirmed, stepping ahead of his boyfriend. “Why would you do that?”

“I am going to find Changkyun.” The time traveler reassured them, crossing his arms over his chest. “Without his help and permission to enter his universe.”

“This isn’t just about that.” Minhyuk barked back. “We, Shownu hyung and I, have to go there. And you have to help them.”

His clenched jaw was a sign that Hyungwon wasn’t having the best of moments.

“Like I said…” He explained, exhaling weakly. “I’m not the only person with abilities in the multiverse. He, like the rest of the Council, just wish for my presence when it’s convenient for them.”

“That’s not what matters.” His friend retorted, shaking his head. “What matters right now is that everything has to work the way is supposed to. The right move is to say yes. You still have time to say you changed your mind and—”

“You don’t get it, Minhyuk.” The time traveler could feel his resentment building up inside his chest, and did his best to control it. “You haven’t been treated like garbage by those people. I told them that day that they would regret restricting me to this universe.”

“I can sense how you feel, Hyungwon.” His red-haired friend sighed. “But this isn’t the way. This isn’t just about Changkyun and you know it.”

“Changkyun is my main concern.”

“What about all the people dying in that war?” A difference voice asked. Wonho, standing behind Minhyuk. “Are you really not gonna help them?”
As much as he’d like to say he didn’t care, Hyungwon did, even after the animosities between him and the Council. But he couldn’t go back on his word now, or they’d never take him seriously.

Hyungwon swallowed before answering.

“After I get to Changkyun…”

“It could be too late.” Wonho opined. “And if Shownu and Minhyuk are so sure we gotta go there, we should. You know their… visions always prove to be true.”

The pink-haired traveler let out a dry chuckle.

“Wasn’t it you who told me I should stand up for myself? Because this is what I’m doing. They can’t keep treating me as an object of war just to shut me down later.”

“This isn’t the way, Hyungwon.” The blond replied, in a softer tone. “And deep down, you know it.”

“You of all people should understand.” Hyungwon’s voice, on the other hand, came out full of pain, struggling to not falter with his spiking emotions. “They knew I was locked in that cage all those years and did nothing to help me. You know how traumatizing that was to me. How can you say that?”

“Because people are dying, Hyungwon.” He took a step forward, almost reaching out for the pink-haired. “Innocent people are dying because they are the same species as us. We can find a way to save Kyun and help those people at the same time.”

“I’m not the only one who can help!” Hyungwon’s frustration only got grew with the following seconds, and it was so hard to breath that the man was now panting. “Can’t you fathom how big the multiverse is? There’s people perfectly capable of providing aid. But no, they have to come to me just to remember I’m an idiot who will run in whatever direction they want because of my instinct to help people.”

“You’re not an idiot for that.” Wonho frowned, face full of despondency. “It’s part of who you are. The Hyungwon I know wouldn’t turn his back to people in need. There’s better ways to stand up for yourself.”

“Changkyun is my priority right now.” He barked, unable to care about how harsh he sounded. “I have to find him.”

“And do you really think Changkyun wouldn’t care what happens to those people fighting a war?”

This time, Hyungwon swallowed more bitterly.

“They will call someone else.” He declared, spewing words through gritted teeth. “Clans from other universes will meddle in. It’s the universe of a Council member, after all.”

“Then let us go.” Shownu pleaded. “Take us there, and we will help them. Our energy is powerful.”

“No.” Hyungwon frowned, frantically shaking his head. “I won’t put you in danger.”

“You are going there anyway.” Minhyuk pointed out, with a shrug. “You just need to drop us in the right spot.”
“No, Minhyuk. It’s not just a world at war. It’s their entire universe, and they’re specifically hunting humans. It’s too dangerous.”

“It’s meant to be.” Shownu said, in such a calm tone that was a bit infuriating.

“We can harness our energy to help them.” Wonho spoke. “Just like we did when you needed to escape the time loop and—”

“I SAID NO!” Regret immediately struck his chest after shouting at his friends, but he should’ve seen it coming. Yet, he lowered his tone back to normal. “We must find Changkyun and…”

“You know, deep down.” Minhyuk brought forth. “You know what must be done and I can sense it in you that—”

“Stop it, Minhyuk.” His tone came out harsher than he had ever directed it to his friend before. He felt hurt, and was doing a bad job at controlling his feelings. “Whatever you sense isn’t even close to what I feel about it. You can’t grasp what I’ve been through even if you wanted. This is the end of the conversation, by the way.”

Without looking back, he passed by his friends at a fast speed towards the control room, quickly moving in his personal room’s direction. He didn’t mean to slam its door with such strength, but Hyungwon’s entire body burned as if lava flew through his veins; he was still human, too much human to not be affected by the conflicting emotions engulfing his entire being into a sea of fears about revisiting the past, and the perilous future.

“So, what happened to you guys?”

Wonho hated the silence immersing the table in a gloomy atmosphere in Shownu and Minhyuk’s kitchen, especially because he knew it was a moment in which Changkyun would usually break the quietness of their lunch with one of his witty remarks and they’d laugh, shaking their heads at such uniqueness confined in just one man.

But where Changkyun’s seat was now just an empty space that made Wonho’s heart hurt so badly he teared up if he pondered too much about it.

His same-age friend was the first to react to his question, followed by a still concerned Kihyun who stared at his boyfriend to wait for his response.

“Not much.” Shownu muttered, toying with the food in his plate.

“You were out for almost a whole day.” Kihyun pointed out.

“Didn’t feel like a long time for us.” Minhyuk, sitting across his same-age friend, was the one to reply. “Argh… we didn’t tell you guys, but a few days after that night Kyun called us from America, Shownu hyung and I had a dream…”

“About what?” Jooheon quickly turned his head to the side to gaze at his boyfriend.

“It wasn’t clear.” The red-haired continued, pushing his plate away from him. He barely ate anything, though. “We were in this green field under a purple sky watching two moons rise in the
horizon and then a meteor appeared… literally just that. But…”

“But?” Wonho leaned forward, placing his elbows over the table.

“Yesterday, when we blacked out… we woke up in… I mean, we went back to that same place, walked the same path, saw the same moons… but this time, we weren’t alone. This woman came out of nowhere and told us everything. That Kyun was taken, where and by who he was taken, that we need to find her, and…”

“We can’t say the rest.” Shownu stated, dropping his chopsticks.

“What do you mean you CAN’T say?” Kihyun nearly jumped off his seat. “Do you know how worried we were? I thought—” His friend choked back a sob. Wonho wanted to hug him, but he didn’t have a chance yet. “‘What if they never wake up?’, I thought. ‘Am I really gonna lose my friend and my boyfriend like this?’, I thought…”

Over the table, Shownu reached out for his boyfriend’s hand, but that only made tears roll down his cheeks.

“Kihyun…” The man softly spoke. “I’m alright. We are alright.”

“No,” Kihyun shook his head, using the back of his free hand to wipe the tears off his face. “We’re not. Not a single person in here is okay. God, how the fuck do we know if Changkyun is okay? Is he even still alive?”

“He is.” Shownu nodded, drawing circles on his boyfriend’s hand with his thumb. “We can feel it. And she told us they need him alive.”

“Who the hell is ‘she’?” Wonho decided to question.

“She didn’t give us a name.” Minhyuk responded, leaning his head on Jooheon’s shoulder. “But we can trust her. She wants to help, but we need to go there first. To that universe Hyungwon doesn’t want to set foot on.”

“Is she there?” The blond asked.

Shownu and Minhyuk nodded, at the same time.

“Is Kyun also there? Are you sure?”

The men nodded again.

“Then we need to convince Hyungwon hyung.” Jooheon declared, wrapping an arm around Minhyuk’s waist.

“I’d talk to him, but…” Minhyuk sighed. Wonho could feel the man’s exhaustion and sorrow in the way he talked. “I think he probably hates me right now after we kinda argued earlier…”

“He doesn’t hate you, Min.” Jooheon reassured his boyfriend. “Hyungwon hyung doesn’t hate anybody. He’s probably just overwhelmed by everything that is going on.”

“By the way…” Out of the blue, Kihyun turned his head to Wonho, who sat at the head of the table. “What did Hyungwon mean when he said you of all people should understand how he felt?”

That attracted his friends’ attention to him, and, for a moment, Wonho considered if he should make up a lie that they’d buy, but for some reason he didn’t feel like he had to do such thing.
Instead, Wonho explained what happened.

“That day you and Changkyun were attacked at the university... After Hyungwon and I fell from the first floor, those people kept provoking Hyungwon... I think they did because they were speaking in that weird language, you know, Hyungwon’s native language... and he was losing it. He was going to end up killing them if I didn’t stop him and I knew he wouldn’t want that...”

“Cut to the chase, Wonho.” Minhyuk raised an eyebrow at him.

“Well, what happened is that I had to stop him, so I grabbed his arm while he was...” The blond gestured around himself. “You know, fully glowing... and, I don’t know why or how, but... I saw his life, through his eyes. It was like I was Hyungwon, in those memories. And I saw... That time he was caged, what they did to him, how he escaped...”

“Oh.” Kihyun looked away, mouth agape with his answer. “So that’s why you two got close...”

“Sort of.” Wonho blew hair through his nose as he snorted. Well, it wasn’t entirely wrong, just disregarded the fact that he was already in love with Hyungwon for a while before that happened. “The same happened to him... he saw my memories. From my first life.”

“Now your friendship makes sense.” Minhyuk commented as the corners of his mouth quirked up. “Maybe it was the universe finding a way for you two to bond.”

“Yeah.” He awkwardly laughed again. “I should go check on him, by the way. He didn’t even leave his room to say goodbye when we left.”

“We should go too.” Kihyun proposed, looking around the table.

“No, no.” Wonho waved at them dismissively. “You guys should rest. You and Jooheon spent the whole night watching over them... just rest, all of you. I’ll try to convince Hyungwon.”

A thought that seemed way less unnerving in his head than in the actual execution of it.

It was a bit past 2:00 p.m. when Wonho set foot on the train again and immediately asked Monbebe for Hyungwon’s whereabouts. Without further ado, she directed him to where the time traveler was; from the A.I., Wonho expected at least a mocking commentary, but her voice sounded so downcast that left him wondering if it was possible for her to be upset about Changkyun’s kidnapping.

At first, from the entrance of the maknae’s bedroom in that time machine, Wonho thought Hyungwon was sleeping by the way he was curled up into a ball, embracing his legs against his chest. However, after squinting at him a little, Wonho noticed that his eyes were only half-closed, staring at nowhere in particular.

So he decided to knock on the already open door.

“Hey.”

The time traveler lifted his head to stare at him, then proceeded to shift in bed to sit up.

As the silence ensued, the blond spoke again.

“I thought only Kyun could unlock this place.”

It was actually the first time Wonho had ever been in the room Hyungwon made for their friend;
around the platform bed pushed against the wall in the middle of the room, the space was filled with a shelf half full of textbooks the maknae probably used to study for the college entrance exam and half full of BigBang albums, while a large desk on the opposite side next to the wall with three laptops and other electronic devices on it, alongside a G-Dragon standee.

Wonho almost chuckled at the sight of it.

“I asked Monbebe…” Hyungwon began, but his voice came out too hoarse, so he cleared his throat. “To unlock it. I miss him.”

The way he said his last sentence was so frail and worn out that Wonho felt something twist and pull in his chest.

“Me too.” Still from the entrance, he replied with a half-smile. “Can we talk?”

The pink-haired man shrugged.

“I guess.” Hyungwon mumbled, sitting cross-legged.

Taking that as a sign he could get closer, Wonho sauntered towards him and took a seat next to his boyfriend.

“Did you eat?” It was his first question. Hyungwon looked so pale.

“I did.” He replied, in a small voice. His disheveled hair now fell over his face, making Wonho notice how exhausted he seemed to be. “I ate… ramen earlier. Wonho…” A loud sigh. “I’m sorry.”

“Hey…” Wonho took his hand into his own, caressing it. “You’re under a lot of stress, and this came into play just to worsen things… Don’t be too hard on yourself.”

“I detest when you, all of you, see me like that…” Diverting his gaze to their hands brought together, the time traveler swallowed. “It’s just… such an ugly side of me.”

“We all have that.” He comforted his boyfriend. “It’s okay. But… that’s what I came here to talk to you about. You know that, right?”

Craning his neck up, now his eyes met with Wonho’s again.

“I wish you wouldn’t.”

“Me too.” Wonho felt a small pang in his heart, but he knew it was necessary. “I just can’t support you when you’re not doing the right thing. And you know that. Don’t let yourself be blinded by resentment, or anger. You are the best of us, Hyungwon.”

“I just hate…” His voice cracked mid-sentence. “I don’t understand. All my life… I’ve been trying to make up for the damage my people left in the multiverse, but they still see me as just another murderer. What do they expect of me?”

“Do you want their approval?”

“At first, maybe. I didn’t mention before, but… I lived with a few members of the Council for a while. They found me after I escaped from that cage, and taught me a lot of valuable things… Then one day, I overheard a conversation about how they were still evaluating how dangerous I was… and how to proceed since I was now ‘out of restraint’. They knew, all that time, that I was in that horrible place… and did nothing to help me. So, after that, I ran away. The rest is history.”
Wonho didn’t know what he should say after hearing such thing, so he tightened the hold on Hyungwon’s hand and remained in silent for a moment, only nodding in acknowledgment.

“Like I said earlier…” The blond began, after a minute. “I understand your feelings towards them. But we need to focus on the things that we can do now. And you do know that, regardless of being that guy’s universe, the lives of those people matter. I don’t want to see you regret your actions in the future.”

“It’s not even just that right now.” Hyungwon commented, pulling his hand away from Wonho’s to rub his face with both of them. “Monbebe captured new activity in the wrinkle. My people is making a move again.”

Instantly, Wonho’s eyes widened.

“Then we have to close it. How soon can we finish the device? Maybe if we—”

“That’s not the point.” Hyungwon shook his head. “It all depends of me, in the end. I am the one who has to bring the device with me to the fourth dimension and make things work from there. It will wear me out for days after. We don’t have days. I have to choose.”

“Hmm…” The blond looked away, pondering their situation. “Can we predict when the wrinkle will be used? And to where?”

“Not really. Monbebe only detects the spiking activities, like your world does with tsunamis. We can’t predict when it will happen. I won’t be surprised if they manage to find out that I’ll leave this universe and try something here.”

“So…”

“I’m choosing Changkyun.” Hyungwon affirmed, turning his head to him with one of the most sorrowful gazes Wonho had ever witnessed. “I can’t leave him. I can’t lose him. Maybe I have become too selfish…”

“Everybody is, kitty.” His best soothing smile was now displayed on his face. “But we can do this. Together. We will bear the weight of the consequences together.”

“I wish I could leave you all out of this.”

“You can’t.” Wonho flashed a feeble smile, wrapping an arm around the time traveler’s waist to pull him closer. “Kyun is waiting for his hyungs to come for him. So we go.”

“Argh…” Hyungwon sighed loudly, leaning his head on the blond’s shoulder. “Thank you. For being with me right now.”

“I’ll always be.” He said, with more conviction than ever. “I’ll always be here for you.”

With a little nod, the pink-haired pulled away and pressed a soft kiss against Wonho’s lips, holding the latter’s face with both hands. A contented sigh escaped Hyungwon’s mouth as they parted away for oxygen, resting his forehead against the blond’s.

“Wonho…” He murmured, and Wonho could feel every atom of his body yearning to be mingled with Hyungwon’s. “Will you come with me?”
For a brief moment, the blond considered why that question was necessary, and a visible confusion dawned on his face. The Wonho from 2018 could’ve refused, for sure, but not the Wonho he currently was. Not the Wonho who felt like he’d follow Hyungwon until the end of the multiverse without a single question — a statement that should’ve felt way scarier than it actually did.

“Yes.” He answered, centimeters away from his boyfriend’s face. Still too distant, his body claimed. “Yes.”

“After all of this comes to an end…” His voice got huskier, and Wonho felt goosebumps all over his body. “I want to take you somewhere. I have something important to say.”

What? Is it about us? Is it... about his feelings?

“Okay.” Wonho said instead, shooing the considerations away.

“I’ll have Monbebe call him.” The taller abruptly said, blowing air through his nose.

“Really?” Wonho craned his neck up, with a surprised mien.

“My priority is still Changkyun, though.”

“We’ll make it work.” He flashed a big smile at the time traveler. “We can do this.”

Hyungwon nodded as the corners of his mouth turned up.

“We leave tonight. Tell the others.”

Everything was arranged for their friends to meet Hyungwon and Wonho there at 8:00 p.m., so the two of them decided to kill time watching Doctor Who to distract themselves during those hours, as if the world outside Wonho’s bedroom wasn’t beginning to fall apart. Whatever Time had prepared for them, it’d be alright as long as they were together.

Plus, it was always amusing to witness Hyungwon’s reaction to science fiction.

“So... she died.” Wonho heard him say, with a puzzled tone. “But he kept himself on that loop for billions of years until he escaped and took her from her timeline a moment before her death, trapping her body in some sort of biological time loop that keeps her alive, but in a different way... And to keep each other safe, she erased his memories of her.”

“Yeah.” Wonho snorted, tightening his hold around his boyfriend, who lied in-between his legs on his bed.

“That’s sad.” He said, with a small huff. The blond tilted his head to the side just in time to see him pout. “But understandable, due the plot. It is actually a very nice one. Still sad, though.”

“We gotta make sacrifices for the people we love.” Wonho added, running his fingers through his boyfriend’s hair. “Life is like that.”

“Well, I only have one life.” Hyungwon sighed contentedly, giving a more relaxed vibe. “And I’m going to live it with you.”

“Don’t say it like that.”

The pink-haired seemed to have picked up the disturbance in his tone.
“Why?” Hyungwon turned his upper body around to face him, and Wonho let go of him so he could move better.

“Because…” Licking his lips, Wonho looked down and away. “Back then, when you said you felt trapped here, sometimes…”

“Wonho.” His hand rested on the blond’s biceps. “That’s not what—”

“Lemme finish, will you?” His gaze returned to his boyfriend, but his gaze was still unsure. “I felt so bad that you were being forced to stay here and, maybe, when you get those guys to drop the restriction, you will find out you’re happier when you’re just travelling…”

“Wonho.” The time traveler repeated, gliding his hand over his arm all the way till his neck. “I won’t lie. I do enjoy my freedom above everything else.”

_Ouch._

“But that doesn’t mean I feel miserable here. You and the others have made a home out of this universe for me. Do you think that means nothing? I… we… I don’t want us to end. I don’t want to watch you grow old alone… I want to share the same life. After, you know, I manage to stop my people from doing whatever they plan to, I want to live with you. Here.”

“Hyungwon…” Wonho’s face was growing hotter, so he took a deep breath. “You should think more about it. It’s a big deal.”

“Do you…” He drew his lower lip between his teeth. “Is this too much? Too early? I have no idea of the ideal pace. I’m just acting according to how I feel.”

“That’s why I’m saying you should think about it a bit more.”

“I’m not following it.”

“This whole situation and… you don’t need to hurry things. You… Be sure of your feelings first. It’s the best for both of us.”

Hyungwon’s gaze, now lingered against the surface of Wonho’s entire skin, even though his boyfriend only stared at his face; to be with that man was to be at his most vulnerable state, and Wonho had to learn to embrace it in his endeavor to make his way into Hyungwon’s heart.

For a moment, Wonho thought he was about to say something, but whatever it was got lost in the subtext of those seconds that fell between them until the train’s A.I. broke the silence.

“There’s an issue occurring in front of the escalators. You should go.”

“What?” They exclaimed, in unison, sharing a confused look.

There was no time for much questioning, they both knew. Wonho and Hyungwon jumped out of the bed and dashed across the wagons within less than a minute. Most importantly, it was impossible to ignore the acrid taste in the blond’s mouth after Monbebe’s statement, dropping to his stomach as Wonho felt his blood run cold.

As soon as the doors opened, Hyungwon leaped forward and took the lead, forcing Wonho to run faster to catch up to him.

Way before they could reach the top of the broken escalator, booming and angry voices spread
across the station — Wonho’s first instinct was to freeze in spot, recalling things he’d rather forget completely, but Hyungwon grabbed his hand and led the way, like always.

Wonho was about to climb up the last step when he heard a stronger yell.

“WHAT DO YOU EVEN WANT FROM ME?”

Kihyun’s voice, undoubtedly. Throughout the years, Wonho himself had been shouted at too many times to not recognize his best friend’s voice within a second.

“I WANT YOU TO REALIZE THIS IS RIDICULOUS!”

Another known voice. This time, unfortunately.

A shiver went down his spine and Wonho clasped Hyungwon’s wrist with both hands, with a knowing fear explicit on his face. His boyfriend turned around and looked back and forth between Wonho’s hold on him and the latter’s face, giving him a quick smile to reassure the blond that everything would be okay.

Not what seemed to be, but Wonho trusted that man with his life.

“EVERYTHING I DO IS RIDICULOUS TO YOU! ALWAYS”! Now in their visual field, Kihyun’s eyes watered while arguing with his father. “WHY DON’T YOU JUST PRETEND I’M NOT YOUR SON ANYMORE?”

Wonho felt a twinge of fear strike him in the chest. That hit way too close to home.

“What’s going on here?” Hyungwon’s orotund voice cut through the father-son discussion, who turned their heads to the time traveler.

Scanning through the ambience, Wonho noticed the startled mien in the rest of his friends’ faces, who stood a few steps behind Kihyun and his dad.

“Hyungwon…” His best friend began, with a feeble voice. He sounded kind of… ashamed.

“So you are the one.” Kihyun’s dad sputtered, in an accusatory tone.

The General, how Wonho always referred to him ever since he became friends with Kihyun, was all dressed up in the military uniform the blond was used to see him wear most of the times he had the unpleasant experience of meeting the guy.

Nothing against Kihyun, though. All against that man and how he always managed to make his friend feel like shit.

“That’s Kihyun’s dad.” Wonho whispered to the time traveler, coyly pointing at the man in his 50s, with dark brown hair and a height similar to Kihyun’s.

Hyungwon’s eyes widened briefly at the new information.

“May I know the cause—”

“What did you tell him?” The General interrupted his boyfriend’s question. Wonho could feel the annoyance crawling up his chest. “What did you tell my son to brainwash him to still follow you around? Who are you? What even are you?”

Asshole.
Still, Wonho tried to meddle in.

“Sir, that’s not—”

“I’m not talking to you, Shin.” If a glare could kill, the one the general shot at him would’ve make the blond drop dead immediately. “You’re probably at fault in this too.”

Wonho opened his mouth to retort that statement, but the pink-haired man raised an instructive hand at him.

“Do not speak with my friends like that.” Hyungwon said, in a calm and yet sort of terrifying tone. Which was also kinda hot, but that wasn’t the point. “If you are mad at me, direct your anger at me. Even though I have no idea why, or how someone with your rank didn’t realize that coming here is out of your boundaries.”

“I don’t know why the government is protecting you.” The man began, not less infuriated than before. “But Kihyun is my son, my only son, and everything that it’s known about you in the military is that you are dangerous. Whatever you did or said to make my son join you in whatever insanity this is, stop it now. I’m warning you.”

“Dad, stop it!” Kihyun cried, now being held back by Shownu.

“Be quiet, Kihyun!” He scolded his son, without even turning around to face Wonho’s friend. “God knows I should’ve done this sooner.”

“I’m going to say it again.” Hyungwon coolly took a step forward, and Wonho realized he was holding his breath. His boyfriend didn’t even blink, giving off that vibe of someone who could break you in half if they wanted to. “Do not speak with my friends like that. I don’t care if you are Kihyun’s father. You owe him the same respect you claim to deserve. And I didn’t do or say anything to him. Kihyun, and all of them, came here because they wanted to. I never forced them to do anything.”

The General didn’t seem convinced.

“As if I could believe anything someone—something like you says.”

Only God knew how much of willpower was necessary for Wonho not to tell that guy to fuck off.

His boyfriend, on the other hand, didn’t seem daunted at all by the offenses.

“I don’t owe you any explanation, Mr. Yoo.”

“It’s General Yoo.”

“Whatever.” Hyungwon rolled his eyes, almost making the blond chuckle. “You hum—you people with your titles… it’s tiring.” Tilting his head to the side, he beckoned their friends to join them.

“Come on. Let’s go inside.”

Jooheon and Minhyuk were the first to scurry down the hall and pass by them, while Kihyun only began to move in their direction when Shownu got a hold of his hand, slowly leading him inside the subway station.

Before Hyungwon and Wonho turned around, they heard the sound of sneakers skimming violently against the ground after an abrupt stop.
“Let go.” Kihyun hissed, glaring at his father’s fingers wrapped around his wrist. “Let go, dad!”

Beside his shorter friend, Shownu didn’t seem amused by the situation, but let his boyfriend handle it.

“Kihyun, this man is dangerous.” The General pleaded, in a very not gentle way. “I’m trying to protect you.”

“No, you’re not.” His friend barked back. “I bet you’re trying to protect your reputation. How many of your Army buddies are probably against Hyungwon’s presence here and knows he’s my friend? Uh? UH?”

When met with silence, Kihyun yanked his arm away from his father’s hold and started dragging Shownu towards the escalators.

“General Yoo.” Hyungwon bowed quickly, turning on his heels.

Wonho was about to follow his boyfriend when the sound of a gun being cocked behind him had him freezing on spot.

By the way their friends turned around quickly, the blond was sure they heard it too.

“Tell him to stay out of this.” Kihyun’s dad ordered, aiming his handgun at Hyungwon’s head. “Say it. To Kihyun. Or I swear it, I will—”

“What?” Hyungwon blurted out, nonchalantly glancing over his shoulder before fully turning around. “Are you going to shoot me?”

“DAD, STOP!” Kihyun pleaded as he tried to make his way back in their direction, but Shownu held him back again.

“Hyungwon.” Startled, Wonho tugged on the time traveler’s sleeve.

“It’s alright.” He said, tangling their fingers together with a tiny grin on his face.

Such gentle sight vanished in the second that took Hyungwon to turn his head back to Kihyun’s father, who still pointed his gun at him. With a grip on Wonho’s hand, the pink-haired took a step forward in the man’s direction.

“What?” Hyungwon raised an eyebrow at the General. “I thought you were going to shoot me.”

“Tell my son to stay away from you.” The man repeated, visibly surprised by Hyungwon’s boldness.

“I’m not the boss of him. I’m his friend. He’s an adult and can make his own choices.”

“And his choices will end up killing him if he stays next to you.” The General barked, and his arms wavered with his commotion. “The government may think you’re a good asset, but to me you’re just an aberration. I don’t want my only son—”

“I’ve lived longer than at least three generations of your family.” Hyungwon suddenly spouted, still in his modulated tone. Wonho held his hand even tighter. “Whatever you think of me isn’t anything that I haven’t heard before. Don’t start threats you won’t finish, General. It’s embarrassing. And to be frank, if you’re not going to shoot me, I have places to be. Suit yourself.”

Just like that, as if he didn’t have a gun aimed at his head, Hyungwon casually turned around, hand
still on Wonho’s, and walked away while the blond looked back and forth between his boyfriend and Kihyun’s father, whom seemed quite dumbfounded by the time traveler’s words.

And so was Wonho, because that was the coolest and hottest thing he had ever seen someone do.

As he hoped, the General didn’t follow them down the stairs and everybody walked to the train in an absolute silence.

“Hyungwon…”

It was Kihyun’s voice who cut through the quiet ambience of the main wagon by breaking into a violent sob.

The time traveler let go of Wonho’s hand and strolled in their friend’s direction, placing his hands on each side of Kihyun’s face.

“Do not apologize.” Hyungwon said, in a silvery tone. “It’s not your fault and you know that.”

“He…” A hiccup interrupted Kihyun’s sentence. “He could have…”

“Shot me?” His boyfriend finished it for their friend. “Not really. I’ve been shot before, Kihyun. More times than I’d like to admit. I know the look of someone willing to fire a gun.”

Hyungwon’s intention was to soothe Kihyun’s nerves, of course, but that only made the man cry even more; moving forward behind Kihyun, Minhyuk and Jooheon now had their hands on each of his friend’s shoulders.

“I’m sorry…”

“Kihyun. My friend.” Maintaining his calm aura, Hyungwon pulled his hands away from Kihyun’s face to hold his hands. “Don’t be so hard on yourself. Do you still want to go in this trip?”

“Yes. Yes.” His tears ceased and Kihyun sniffled, pulling one of his hands away from Hyungwon’s grip to rub his face. He seemed visibly calmer, and Wonho blamed it on his boyfriend’s natural calming effect. “Changkyun needs me. All of us.”

“Alright.” A short-lived smile appeared on Hyungwon’s face before he let go of Kihyun’s hand, and Wonho couldn’t help but to smile too. “Rest now. We have a long path ahead of us.”

“Come on.” Shownu, who stood beside Kihyun, tugged his boyfriend by the sleeve of his denim jacket. “Thanks, Hyungwon-ah.”

A multitude of things could’ve been said as a response, but his boyfriend simply nodded and drew his hands behind his back instead, watching his friends stroll inside the inner wagons.

Wonho felt like he was watching what happened behind the curtains when a play came to an end — the actors came out of their character and that brand new magical world displayed before to the foreign eyes of the public crashed against the fabric of reality.

Because that’s what Wonho expected it to happen. He wanted to see the truth in Hyungwon’s heart about the absurdity that had happened to them, to him, and be able to be there for his boyfriend if he needed someone to hold his hand, to lend his shoulder if he needed to pour out his struggles through his tears.

His expectations seldom met with the truth, though.
“Did you send the message to inform them of our visit?” Hyungwon asked his A.I., lifting his head to gaze at the ceiling.

“Of course.” Monbebe quickly replied with her twinkling lights.

At that point, they were the only ones left in the main wagon, so Wonho didn’t hold back hesitate and jolted forward to wrap his arms around his boyfriend.

“Wonho.” Hyungwon tapped on his lower back. “What are you doing? Someone could see—”

“You are insane.” He blurted, abruptly pulling away, but still keeping the pink-haired man close. “Are you okay?”

Hyungwon furrowed his eyebrows, which was cute, but not the main point.

“Of course.” The time traveler tilted his head, still puzzled by his question. “Why are you—”

“He pointed a gun to your head, Hyungwon. Holy shit. And he kept talking to you like that, which really pissed me off. If it weren’t for Kihyun’s sake…”

Out of nowhere, the taller man laughed.

“You have to get used to these kind of things if you want to stay by my side. A lot of people in the multiverse don’t like me.”

“Hell no.” Wonho pulled away completely and took a step back. “I won’t let people talk to you like that anymore.”

A snort escaped Hyungwon’s mouth, and the taller man shook his head.

“Don’t be silly. Are you going to fight them all?”

“You bet your ass I am. You could’ve been shot!”

“Ah, no way.” Hyungwon dismissively waved at him. “Moreover, it’s just a bullet.”

“People die from just a bullet, moron.”

“Do they?”

There was no use in continuing that conversation because Wonho knew he was being teased, so he rolled his eyes at Hyungwon and walked past him to make his way out of the main wagon.

“Hey.” Hyungwon swiftly wrapped his fingers around Wonho’s wrist, and the latter came to a halt. “Leave your door open. I’ll be there in 10.”

Goddamn.

Wonho’s face flushed so fast that he was sure he was as red as a tomato by the time Hyungwon made his way towards the control room, with a smirk on his mouth.

And of course he did as the time traveler said, because he was too smitten to deny anything that man could’ve ever asked, even if it was as impossible as obtaining a star from the sky.
Hyungwon’s steps slowed down as he got closer to Wonho’s bedroom, observing the lights still turned on in Minhyuk’s bedroom from the breach at the bottom of the door, two doors ahead of his boyfriend’s. Part of him wished he was better in putting his feelings into words and say to his friend that he wasn’t mad about their discussion that morning, but, on the other hand, Hyungwon didn’t know what was enough to be said, or if there was something to be said at all, considering the situation they were in. Wonho told him multiple times that they should just bury the hatchet, since there were no hard feelings to even begin with.

He’d do that, Hyungwon decided. Once the seven of them were back together, they would have time to discuss any issues bothering them. That’s what Hyungwon longed for — a time where everything would be alright.

It was strange to still feel the lingering presence of Changkyun’s aura in the maknae’s room, right behind him. Time was never one born to make sense, but sometimes Hyungwon wondered what it was about human relationships that was so raw to the point of the possibility of being separated from someone, forever, was an excruciating experience.

After what seemed to be a minute, the time traveler realized he was holding his breath while gazing at his youngest friend’s bedroom door, and he felt like crying until dehydration knocked him out for good.

*Changkyun-ah, hold on. I’m coming for you.*

What if it was already too late? Hyungwon didn’t want to think of this chance, but it seemed to haunt his thoughts every now and then. He consoled himself with the fact that Changkyun was a Constant, and regardless of whatever twisted agenda those people had against Constants, they clearly needed the maknae for something.

But there was nothing he could do about it before arriving in the Council member’s universe, Hyungwon concluded. What he could do, for the moment, was to try to not feel so miserable all the time. It was rather exhausting.

At the perfect timing, his attention was diverted to the sound of a door closing inside of Wonho’s bedroom, and Hyungwon realized he had found his temporary escape from the rest of the multiverse.

Pushing the already open front door just a little more so he could get in, the time traveler now watched his boyfriend put on a red tee combined with grey sweatpants.

He had to admit that the view already cheered him up a little bit.

Almost a minute passed and Wonho hadn’t noticed his presence, so Hyungwon decided to sneak behind him and poke his neck.

The man nearly squealed out loud, jumping sideways before swiftly turning around with a frightened mien.

“Holy shit…” Wonho gasped, bringing a hand to his chest.

“Sorry.” Hyungwon chuckled, taking a step back. “Couldn’t resist.”

“What a brat.” But in the end, the Constant ended up laughing too. “God, you’re gonna be the death of me. So… uh… want me to lock the door?”
Tilting his head a little bit, Hyungwon gave him a half-smile.

“You should.” He replied, in a low tone.

“Alright.” Wonho snorted, twiddling the hem of his shirt before saying the voice command. “Lock. See? Now no one can—”

Most of the time, Hyungwon thought his boyfriend was adorable when possessed by some nervousness that made him babble like a nervous child, but right now, he really needed Wonho to shut up and kiss him.

To acknowledge the notion of someone else’s body feeling as familiar to him as his own was still as odd as it was addictive; Hyungwon’s lips molding perfectly against Wonho’s lips gave him the sensation they had been doing that for hundreds of years, when in reality hardly a month had gone by since they became an item.

As expected, Wonho gasped intensely once the pink-haired smirked and slid his tongue inside his mouth, pulling him closer by the waist so that no space could ever exist between them.

Such reaction was rather pleasing, so Hyungwon smiled again in the middle of their kiss just as Wonho huffed even harder — it made him laugh and pull away, deciding to give the man a break to catch up to what was happening. Noteworthy, as always, was how sharply his boyfriend inhaled as the time traveler skimmed his teeth down his neck.

It was funny to think about how fast that muscular man melted under his touch, but Hyungwon wasn’t going to complain; instead, he seized his upper hand and started leading his boyfriend towards the platform bed by placing a hand on his waist, while the other snuck up inside the blond’s shirt.

Another loud gasp escaped Wonho’s mouth once Hyungwon raked his teeth around his collarbones and his hand flew to get a hold of the time traveler’s hair — one of Hyungwon’s weaknesses, he admitted, but that didn’t stop him from keep moving them forward until he heard the back of Wonho’s legs hit the bedframe.

His boyfriend frequently said that it was both a blessing and a curse that Hyungwon learned things too fast, because, apparently, it made Wonho struggle way more to hold himself back because, according to the blond Constant, Hyungwon was a walking temptation.

With this thought in mind, the time traveler giggled before he pushed Wonho down against the mattress.

“Jesus…” Wonho panted as he crashed against the bed, propping himself up on his hands behind his back.

“I told you.” Without hesitancy, he settled one knee on each side of Wonho’s thighs and sat down on his lap. “The name is Hyungwon.”

“Uh… May-Maybe, uh, slow down?”

Hyungwon’s bangs fell off his forehead when he leaned forward, settling a hand under Wonho’s chin and another over his shoulder.

“Why?” He asked, haphazardly moving his thumb across the blond’s cheek.

“Because you… you said… you wanted to go slow?” His voice came out a bit too high-pitched,
and the pink-haired wanted to laugh. Yet, he held back. “Hyungwon…”

“I want to stop thinking.” Hyungwon confessed, with a tiny sigh. “This might be the last peaceful moment we’ll get in… who knows.”

“Still…” The Constant licked his lips, promptly chewing on his lower lip. “The kids are nearby…”

“I have improved the sound system in all the bedrooms. As long as we don’t scream at the top of our lungs…”

“Wait.” He furrowed his brows at him, with a smirk. “You did that with this…” Wonho gestured between them. “Purpose?”

“Maybe.” The pink-haired snickered, now running his fingers through Wonho’s slightly wet hair. So beautiful. “I’m terrified, Wonho. It reminds me of how I felt after I escaped from that cage… And I know I’m not alone this time, but this, somehow, it’s even more frightening. There’s so many fates on my shoulders… I don’t know if I have the right to wish this, but… I want to stop thinking, just for these seven hours that will take us to get there. Please?”

Wonho’s expression shifted to a concerned one.

“Hyungwon-ah…” The man’s tone was low, just for the time traveler to hear. Wonho grabbed the hand that was on his hair and tangled their fingers together. “I wish I could take some of your struggles off your back, but I can’t…”

“It’s alright.” His mouth curved into a tiny smile. “A year ago, I was fighting all by myself, with no life plans beyond stopping The Eye… I have so much now, Wonho. I don’t know how to put my feelings into words well, but…”

“You don’t have to.”

“But I want to.”

“Want what?”

Hyungwon pondered for a second.

“I want…” His gaze roamed around his boyfriend’s face, and the time traveler grinned. “To verbalize how I feel. The same way you do.”

“We are very different people, Hyungwon.” He said, kissing the back of Hyungwon’s hand for a little longer than usual, brushing his lips against it. “Don’t worry about this.”

“It is not a worry.” He assured the blond, pulling away the hand under Wonho’s chin. “It is a desire.”

Wonho’s lips parted swiftly, as if he was about to say something, but was clearly taken aback when Hyungwon started to take his blazer off.

“Hyungwon.” He mumbled, eyes fixated on the way the pink-haired moved on his lap. “We should talk… about…”

“Sex?” Hyungwon snorted at the way the man’s eyes went round. “Come on, Wonho. I know how it works.”

“Y-Yeah, but… this isn’t… the moment?”
“That I know.” After tossing his navy blazer somewhere behind him, he started working on his button up shirt. “I just want to feel you. Touch. To be touched. Is it okay?”

Before Hyungwon could reach the second button at the top of his shirt, Wonho’s hand stopped his fingers from moving.

“Lemme do it.” He said, looking back and forth between the shirt and Hyungwon’s face. At the latter’s approving nod, his focus shifted completely to his task.

The time traveler couldn’t explain why he chose that exact moment to slow down his perception of time. It could’ve been because his body shivered alongside Wonho’s hands trembling at every button he reached, or also because Hyungwon found himself in such a privileged spot to admire his boyfriend’s features — his sharp jaw, the straight shape of his low nose bridge, his adorable ears almost entirely red, his eyelashes batting so fast that in slow motion, made Wonho look somewhat like a piece of a dream — maybe he was, Hyungwon thought. Maybe Wonho was too good to be true, and maybe Hyungwon had too many flaws to deserve someone like him.

Hypotheses that crumbled under the heat radiating from their bodies close to each other, but never close enough to grasp the ungraspable — only the union of their souls.

Hyungwon was yanked back to the reality when he felt Wonho’s fingers brushing rapidly against his bare skin and let out a small gasp.

“Sorry.” The blond muttered, quickly working on the last button.

“It’s alright.” Hyungwon guaranteed, letting out a snort. “Just… don’t expect much.”

This time, he didn’t flinch when Wonho calmly pushed his shirt off of his shoulder, smoothly stretching his arms behind his back to let it hit the floor.

And just like that, Hyungwon was struck by an extreme self-awareness of his body being displayed like that to someone for the first time, so he wrapped his arms around his torso.

“Hey, hey, hey.” Wonho grasped his wrists, tenderly pulling his arms down. “You’re beautiful.”

“I’m… kind of embarrassed now.”

“Don’t be.” He flashed the pink-haired a bright smile, and Hyungwon could feel warmth immersing his chest. “I love you, so, so much.”

Me too, I think.

I’ll say it, one day.

I swear it.

Even if he felt brutally exposed, Hyungwon let Wonho guide him through those unknown meadows of being human that inferred the need for someone’s touch — the more you get, the more you want. How could the time traveler ever come back to his old life after experience that myriad of sensations he had deprived himself of feeling?

Not that Hyungwon wanted that anytime soon, anyway.

His heart almost leapt out of his ribcage when his boyfriend effortlessly stood up with Hyungwon still attached to him, placing his hands under the time traveler’s knees to lift him up.
There was it again: familiarity. His muscles stiffened and relaxed at an alarming rate as Hyungwon wrapped his arms around the blond’s neck, letting himself be manhandled with utmost care and an insane devoted trust shared between them — like a thousand-year lover, the blond seemed to know the all routes to the mysteries across his body. Hyungwon gulped as he was laid down in bed, feeling hot and cold, anxious and calm, a bit dizzy — almost everything, all at the same time. It was like dying and being brought back to life over and over again, and Hyungwon loved it.

His head now resting against one of the pillows and Wonho hovered over him with a smile filled with so much love and care that Hyungwon forgot the slight numbness of his limbs and stretched forward, hand pulling Wonho down by the neck.

“My turn.” The time traveler informed, reaching out for the hem of Wonho’s shirt.

The Constant, now on top of him, laughed at how clumsily the pink-haired man was in pulling Wonho’s shirt up, totally ignoring Hyungwon’s wishes for him to shut up.

In the end, Wonho finished the job and chucked it without looking, staring at him as if Hyungwon was a piece of art to be examined for a long time.

In Hyungwon’s case, his eyes couldn’t help but to roam across his boyfriend’s well-defined torso with the need to touch, so he did.

“You are the real beauty.” Hyungwon spoke, in a raucous voice.

“You know…” Wonho hummed, mildly pushing Hyungwon’s bangs up. “I don’t think I’ve ever been this intimate with someone.”

The time traveler’s forehead creased.

“But you had—”

“Sex doesn’t equal intimacy, kitty. I’ve had movie nights with you that were more intimate than all the times I slept with someone before.”

A smile from ear-to-ear showed up on Hyungwon’s face, even though he didn’t completely understand why. Maybe were the never-ending lovely words that came out of Wonho’s mouth on a daily basis, or because there wasn’t a time that they were together that he didn’t make Hyungwon feel somewhat special — not because of what he could do, but simply for who he was: a man learning that his way of love could go beyond fighting a war, comforted by the conviction that in whatever he lacked, Wonho was there to complement.

A new and incredibly ordinary type of special that Hyungwon never thought he’d achieve.

Hyungwon’s hand on the back of the blond’s neck helped pull him down into a lazy kiss; Wonho sighed contentedly in the middle of it, which always caused the time traveler’s stomach to act up with the so-called butterflies — countless ones, the cause of his smiles against his boyfriend’s mouth.

Slowly, but deeper — there were too many types of kisses they shared for Hyungwon to ever choose a favorite, but that particular closeness of skin against skin made him feel like his insides were catching fire, causing his body to gleam with his inner energy as it did, sometimes, when they were in moments like that.

“Shit.” He broke the kiss harshly, shifting his gaze down his body that already emitted his inner blueish light. “Sorry, I’m sorry. I thought I had…” Out of frustration, he jiggled his arm to make it
“Shh…” Wonho muttered before diving into the crook of his neck and Hyungwon shamelessly gulped, for that didn’t help his situation at all.

“Shit…” Hyungwon hissed, instinctively clutching onto his boyfriend’s naked back. “Wonho…”

“I don’t mind.” He said, in a husky tone against his skin only to pull his lips away to voice a command. “Lights at 60%.”

Under the dimmed atmosphere, goosebumps ran through his body and Hyungwon could barely breathe — the anticipation of navigating on those uncharted oceans he was about to be engulfed by made his mind go completely blank, only aware of the name of the man on top of him, so god-like that Hyungwon wondered why it took so long for him to worship the blond man.

While the pink-haired enjoyed the thrill of those silent moments, Wonho’s hands began ghosting up and down his waist, his thighs, but never actually touching him. If anything, it felt like a mild torture and there was only so much Hyungwon could take.

Securing a hold on his boyfriend’s waist, the time traveler easily rolled him over in bed, much to the latter’s surprise.

A surprise that turned into a boisterous laughter.

“Sometimes I forget.” Wonho commented, as Hyungwon pushed up on top of his boyfriend so that he could he sitting over his stomach. “That you’re actually really strong. I’m not used to be manhandled by someone with noodle arms.”

Hyungwon snorted.

“I like it.” The pink-haired settled his hands over Wonho’s ribcage to bend over, planting kisses under his chin. “People underestimate me, so I use that as an asset.”

“I like it too.” Hands still hovering over the curves of Hyungwon’s body, Wonho hummed. “I like everything about you.”

With that, Hyungwon pushed himself back up again.

“Then touch me.”

Wonho stared at him for a few seconds, then raised a brow.

“You do know that there are other connotations to this, right?”

“Sure.” He responded with a little nod, letting his fingers skim across the toned surface of Wonho’s torso. The latter wheezed, closing his eyes for a moment. “Do I need to tell you exactly what I want you to do with me?”

“No.” Wonho shook his head, then flipped him in bed. “Lemme do this.” A hand, right under his ribs, and Hyungwon inhaled sharply. “I will make you feel good.”

“I want to…” His boyfriend’s free hand slid under his neck, and Hyungwon wasted no time in throwing a leg around Wonho’s waist. “Feel good.”

The strength that Wonho’s thrust enforced against his body when they kissed again was enough to fully have Hyungwon’s back against the mattress and suddenly, he fell into the fire again; more
ardently, more fiercely as his boyfriend’s fingers drew a crooked line all the way up his chest and Hyungwon let out a tiny groan, but quite enough to fuel Wonho into working his tongue inside the pink-haired’s mouth, earning a louder moan from the time traveler.

Not satisfied, his boyfriend kept building up a daring pace that he knew Hyungwon liked, grinding his body against Hyungwon as his hands moved down his butt, until he was sure Hyungwon was melting against the sheets.

Wonho pulled away from the kiss by sinking his teeth on Hyungwon’s lower lip and sucking on it, earning a slightly louder grunt out of the time traveler who barely had any time to catch his breath, but buried his nails on his boyfriend’s back out of reflex; Regardless, Wonho’s head dived into his neck in a mess of teeth and lips that left love marks on his skin even though they never lasted too long because of his fast healing.

Barely anything besides the rustling of the sheets beneath them and Hyungwon’s tiny moans could be heard inside that room, and Hyungwon loved it. He loved it so much that if he could, he’d make the entire multiverse out of all the elements that formed Wonho’s body pressed against his own, for nothing dared to keep them apart.

His boyfriend’s mouth shifted upward just so that the blond could catch his earlobe between his teeth and Hyungwon’s breath got caught in his throat, sinking his nails into his boyfriend’s back again so badly it might have had hurt him. Wonho didn’t even flinch with his reaction, though, and secured a hand on Hyungwon’s waist as he lowered himself over him.

“I love you.” The man murmured while planting kisses across his collarbones, and Hyungwon’s gaze shifted downwards to watch the way his boyfriend moved above him. “I love you… so much.”

Instead of becoming stronger, as Hyungwon thought it would, the glowing energy inside his body faded away into a faint glimmer, more stable and less annoying; it made Hyungwon feel more comfortable with being himself, even though his attention was easily diverted to Wonho being more gorgeous than ever as he leisurely dragged his lips down the time traveler’s chest.

If Hyungwon were to tell he imagined that being loved, completely and unconditionally, felt even remotely close to that, he would be lying. Nothing in the pink-haired’s imagination could’ve seen that coming — no one ever told him that being in love was to live in the center of a whirlwind of sensations. Every touch, every kiss, every warmth in Wonho’s body that became a warmth in Hyungwon’s body was proof that they completed each other like pieces of a puzzle that no one ever thought it’d fit, but it did, it did and Hyungwon was so happy to have him by his side that he could cry just from thinking about it.

Maybe what imploded in his chest that was enough to have his whole body shuddering and what also blossomed in his heart whenever Wonho’s image appeared in his thoughts — a constant occurrence, lately — was what humans called love. It wasn’t a mere physical attraction or a simple infatuation, so what else could be?

“Wonho…” Hyungwon whimpered, quietly hissing once he felt one of the blond’s hands sliding down his still clothed thighs. “I lo—”

All his ability to speak or think properly was shut down as Wonho’s tongue swirled around his nipple without a single hurry, making Hyungwon arch his back with such ferocity that the time traveler minded the amount of strength he put into it, or else he’d end up shoving his boyfriend across the room.
One hand ended up clutching the sheets under him while the other buried itself in Wonho’s hair; Hyungwon’s erratic respiration was now just a part of who he was under the touch of the blond Constant, thrusting against his boyfriend as if his life depended on it. Anyone could feel Hyungwon’s hunger, but Wonho took his time making sure that his kisses fell all over Hyungwon like meteors entering a planet’s atmosphere.

Hyungwon had to fight against the desire of shutting his eyes to the rest of the world and let himself sink into that pleasure; he wanted to watch, to engrave every single second of those moments together in a corner of his mind that could never be shaken by outside forces, even though his body retained memories quite automatically.

At some point, the time traveler couldn’t tell anymore where his body ended and Wonho’s began — whatever trick of nature that allowed such thing to happen was mesmerizing, Hyungwon concluded. He could spend an eternity under the blond Constant kissing every single spot of his body, whispering sweet nothings against his skin and marking it forever in a language that only Hyungwon could read. Maybe forever, as a concept that humans were so fond of, could be found in those rare moments of shared infinity.

One forever spent laughing at the sheepish way Wonho got rid of the pink-haired’s pants, chucked away across the room like the rest of their clothes, promptly gasping when his mouth and hands traced paths in his skin that no one had reached before. Another forever spent groaning with a need that Hyungwon hadn’t met before, because he was being unfolded, layer by layer, by the only man he ever wanted to be with.

As his hand went numb, Hyungwon let go of boyfriend’s hair to grab the other side of the bed sheets and he legitimately thought he was going to explode; the build up to such new wonder was like nothing he could ever have done all by himself — there was no magic in it, not like the ones pouring from the hands and mouth of Wonho. No, he could never have sweet and rough touch that Wonho had as he kept a steady rhythm that only made it harder for Hyungwon to keep his voice low. Nothing in the multiverse could be compared to the shiver that went up his spine as the blond kept his gaze on him the whole time. Hyungwon had never felt so vulnerable before — his nakedness went beyond physical, plunging much deeper till a point that he mused if Wonho could see straight through his skin, profoundly into the very essence of who he was.

More importantly, it was reciprocal.

Wonho’s mouth on him lead him through every level of pleasure Hyungwon could have achieved, leaving the time traveler feeling worn-out and ecstatic at the same time as he panted violently after it was done, wide eyes searching for a part of him that didn’t feel torpid by that first experience.

Caring as always, Wonho trailed a path of kisses up his chest at the same time he pulled Hyungwon’s boxers up again.

“You okay?” His boyfriend asked, pushing his sweaty pink bangs off of his forehead. “How was it?”

The part of his brain that formed sentences wasn’t still fully back on track, so Hyungwon gave him a thumbs up. Wonho bursted into laughter.

“Good.” Wonho leaned down and pressed a kiss against his forehead, just before rolling to the side and getting off bed.

“Where…” Hyungwon managed to utter, propping himself up on his elbows behind his back.
“To the bathroom.” The blond replied. “I gotta… uh… take care of it.”

His eyes shifted to the bulge in his boyfriend’s pants and then a bulb lit up in his mind. How careless of him.

“Oh…” He stared at it for longer than he should’ve, but Hyungwon had a tendency to zone out. “I can… go with you. I’m sorry, I’m so selfish that—”

“Calm down.” Wonho cackled, scurrying back to bed to kiss the top of his head. “We have the rest of our lives to live more moments like this. I just wanted to make you feel good today. Was your first time, right? Did it feel good?”

A quick nod.

“Nice.” The corners of his mouth quirked up, and Hyungwon’s heart skipped a beat. “Now while I’m gone, put the comforter and pillows on the floor. We need to sleep a bit. Okay?”

Another nod, now accompanied with an ear-to-ear grin.

When the blond returned a few moments later, he was rambling about something the time traveler couldn’t hear properly until he spotted Hyungwon sitting over the comforter, wearing just his button up shirt and boxers.

“Shit.” Was what came out of Wonho’s mouth, gaze fixated on Hyungwon on the floor. “I can’t believe I get to see the sight of an angel.”

“Oh, no.” The pink-haired grunted as he covered his face in embarrassment. “Stop being sappy and lie down with me.”

He bowed theatrically, and Hyungwon let out a chuckle.

“Your wish is my command.”

“Alright, listen up!”

Technically, Wonho was listening to whatever his boyfriend was about to say, but his eyes stared intently at the round blue pill on his hand, not really sure of its effects.

“First of all, this is not Earth.”

“Wait, what?” Jooheon was confused. On his peripheral vision, he could see the younger frowning.

“In this universe, humans have left Earth thousands of years ago. Only the Council member you’ve met in the call and his clan live there, in Buzhou, but with the attacks, most of the human refugees have gathered there.”

“How many?” Kihyun asked, from the opposite bench in the main wagon.

“More or less 15 trillion.”

“HOLY SHIT!” His best friend shouted, mouth agape at the time traveler’s answer. “So many…
All of them depend on us?"

From the center of the wagon, between Kihyun and Wonho’s benches, Hyungwon stared at his shorter friend for a few seconds before replying, as if he was pondering on what was proper to say.

“We are all fighting our own battles. We have to focus on Changkyun first.”

“Hyungwon-ah.” Shownu called, standing beside Wonho with one shoulder leaning on the iron bars. “Minhyuk and I. We’re not going with you.”

“I know.” The time traveler turned around, squatting to check on the duffel bag he had put everything he thought he was going to need for that journey. “I’ll ask someone to take you to her.”

“Wait.” Kihyun raised a hand. “What are you talking about? Her?” He abruptly turned to face his boyfriend. “And where are you going?”

“They call her the Priestess.” Hyungwon said, standing up again. “She is… something else.”

Kihyun wasn’t finished.

“So you’re just gonna trust your… vision and go meet this woman you’ve never actually met in real life before? You’re both nuts.”

Minhyuk, who sat between Jooheon and Wonho, leaned forward with empathetic eyes towards his same-age friend.

“That’s how it’s supposed to happen, Kihyunnie.”

“I hate this psychic bullshit.” Kihyun sputtered, and Wonho heard Shownu sigh beside him. “We’re all supposed to go save Changkyun together.”

“This is for Changkyun, Kihyun-ah.” Shownu explained, in his sotto voce. “Our actions come together to help him.”

“Sure, sure, sure.” Jooheon nodded frantically, to distract himself from his nervousness. “But what’s exactly our plan? How are we gonna find out where Kyun is?”

“As soon as we arrive, in 15 minutes, Monbebe is going to hack into every system in this universe for any trace of Changkyun.”

“Are they allowing it?” Kihyun inquired.

Wonho’s boyfriend raised a brow at his friend.

“Of course not. But Monbebe is one of the best A.I.s in the multiverse, so she knows how to cover her tracks. In the meantime, we’ll have a meeting with the locals.”

“But hyung is going to help them, right?” Jooheon asked, twiddling his fingers.

Turning around to face Wonho’s side of the wagon, Hyungwon had an expression in his face that made things way too real for Wonho’s anxiety levels not to spike up.

“Changkyun first.” The time traveler affirmed, inhaling sharply. “Do your clothes fit well?”

Wonho looked down at himself, all dressed in a black garment his boyfriend gave them; the pants, turtleneck and jacket seemed to be made of a material that resembled leather, but it was way more
comfortable than such thing would be in their world. Hyungwon also gave them black boots, also quite comfy.

Which was funny, comparing to how Hyungwon still dressed himself in one of his usual black suits, except this time his boyfriend picked the white sneakers Jooheon gave him for Christmas to accompany the look.

“Yeah.” Minhyuk replied, running a hand down his chest. “It’s comfy.”

“And bulletproof.” The time traveler added. “Also, it adapts to your body temperature so you won’t feel too hot or too cold in any environment.”

“So…” Wonho spoke for the first time, taking the round pill between his thumb and index finger. “What are these for?”

“Strengthening your immune system. You are not on Earth, so you might be susceptible to bacteria your body doesn’t know how to fight off. This helps.”

“Did you take it?” The blond asked, not really sure of the reason.

“Don’t need to.” Hyungwon shrugged it off. “I’ve been here before.”

“When?” Kihyun was curious to know.

“When I lived here.” He said, as if it was on the same level of casualty as telling them that they were in a time machine that could cross dimensions. “We will be arriving soon, so please place your electronic devices in the basket over the kitchen’s table, alright?”

Wonho had left his phone in his bedroom earlier, so the blond guessed he didn’t have anything else to drop there.

But the kids did as asked, even if the despondency in their auras was pretty evident to Wonho. But what else could be expected when they had no idea where their maknae was, and rescuing him also meant facing a world that was hunting humans?

“Take the damn pill, Wonho.” Hyungwon’s voice startled him a little, so he looked up at the time traveler, who now stood next to him. “Are you a child?”

“There’s no water.” He pointed out, shrugging.

“There’s no need. It melts easily in your mouth.”

“That sounds fucking disgusting.” Wonho snorted, grimacing at the pill in his hand.

His boyfriend caught him off-guard and snatched the pill off of his hand, forcing Wonho’s mouth open by squeezing his cheeks. Everything happened so fast that when the blond noticed, the damn thing was already melting over his tongue. It tasted like plastic, but he guessed it could always have been worse.

“Argh…” He scrunched up his entire face, squirming as he swallowed the rest of the pill. “Meanie.”

Yet, he couldn’t keep the grimace for much longer once Hyungwon pecked him in the lips.

“We don’t have time, dear.” Hyungwon flashed him a smile, then proceeded to stroll towards the control room, as if he just hadn’t inflicted severe damage on Wonho’s heart, mind and soul.
Dear.

Freaking dear.

It was possible that he zoned out for a bit, for when his friends returned to the main wagon a few minutes later, Wonho still had a stupid smile on his face.

“What the hell is that on your face?” Kihyun asked, with a sort of disgusted mien.

“Are you having a mental breakdown?” Minhyuk’s voice was completely serious. “Reschedule it. We ain’t got time for that now.”

“I minute.” Hyungwon’s voice arose in the wagon again, as his boyfriend walked towards the duffel bag he had left on the floor. “Remember: do as I say. Everything in here is dangerous, especially because you are Constants. Don’t trust anyone easily.”

No response was uttered, but all his friends nodded in their particular speed.

Underneath his feet, Wonho could feel the train coming to a halt as they arrived at their expected destination. The wagon’s glass windows, who usually were pitch black during their time in the wormhole, now faded into the light patterns that formed foggy images of the outside world, but Wonho couldn’t really tell what was there.

“Oh, crap.” Wonho heard Hyungwon say, while the pink-haired stood in front of the main wagon’s door. When he looked up to see what it was about, he noticed Hyungwon staring at him. “I forgot.”

“What?” Kihyun and Minhyuk said at the same time.

“Wonho…” His boyfriend already sounded apologetic, making his way through their friends to get to him at the end of the line that formed behind Hyungwon. “I forgot to mention that… uh… we are actually above the ground.”

“What?” It was his time to question.

“This is kind of a sacred land, so humans built cities in the sky. We are really… really far from the ground.”

A sudden dizziness struck the blond as he imagined what it would be like if he stepped into the wrong spot around there and fell. He hated it already.

“Shit, he’s panicking.” Kihyun rushed to his side, more dramatically than necessary. “Uh… it’s fine, just forget we’re hundreds of kilometers away from the ground and that you’re safe!”

“How the hell am I gonna forget that now?” Wonho turned his head to him, hearing his heart racing with the anxiety that engulfed his body. “Oh no, there’s no escape and—”

“Here.” Without thinking twice, Hyungwon grabbed his hand. “I’ll help you.”

“Yeah!” Kihyun said, a bit too loudly, pointing at the time traveler. “Do your… calming thing.”

“Scientific much.” Minhyuk said under his breath.

Wonho looked down at their fingers tangled together in front of almost all their friends and felt a bit embarrassed.

“This is awkward.” He commented in a small voice, hearing Hyungwon chuckle beside him.
“Well, you either hold his damn hand or stay here.” Kihyun announced, without much sympathy. “Wouldn’t change anything, though, cuz we still up in the sky anyway.”

As soon as they stepped out of the train, the first thing Wonho noticed was how the atmosphere got colder just for a moment; his thermal clothes certainly did the job of warming him up, but he wondered how cold was indeed in that planet.

The train and Monbebe were left behind in a sort of colossal purple garden, filled with a multitude of different plants that seemed like something that came out of an anime; they took a short walk towards the only door in the room, in the north corner of that place.

“Where the hell are we?” Jooheon questioned as Hyungwon opened the door with ease, as if he knew that place back to back.

“An interdimensional garage.”

Which would’ve sounded funnier if Hyungwon didn’t seem so tense himself; Wonho rubbed his thumb on his boyfriend’s hand, hoping it would ease his mood.

They walked down a blue corridor with moving paintings on the wall that scared the living shit out of Jooheon at first sight, only to be greeted by the Council member they had previously spoken with and his small retinue; two extremely lanky black women towered above them, being at least 3 meters tall, accompanied by someone who was definitely not human if the emerald color of their skin and triple ears could tell someone. They slightly looked like they were, perhaps, a male, but Wonho didn’t want to assume anything and offend the person.

The Council member, the black guy Hyungwon wasn’t very fond of, didn’t hide his curiosity at the sight of Hyungwon and Wonho holding hands, but didn’t mention anything about it.

“Greetings, CHW—”

“Don’t you get tired?” Kihyun sputtered, standing on the other side of the time traveler. “Using this big ass title when you could call him by his damn name?”

For a moment, the man seemed a bit taken aback by his friend’s boldness, but at the same time Wonho felt Hyungwon’s body jiggling when the latter chortled, so the blond didn’t really care.

“Oh alright.” The man nodded, with his hands behind his back. “Welcome to Buzhou, Constants. And Hyungwon.”

Out of habit, Wonho and the others bowed to them, but his firm hold on Hyungwon’s hand could tell him that his boyfriend didn’t do the same. Not that it mattered, after all.

Engulfed in a silence that almost felt a tad eerie, they were escorted to a room that was completely made of glass. Even the fucking floor was of same material; Wonho could see the goddamn clouds floating beneath them and tightened his hold on Hyungwon’s hand as the dizziness hit him squarely in the face.

“Turn on the ground shields.” With his eyes shut, the blond heard his boyfriend voicing the order. “Wonho has acrophobia.”

“This shit is low-key disturbing to me too.” Jooheon’s voice, coming from behind him, confessed.

A few seconds later, a muffled sound of metal clinking against metal arose in the distance.
“It’s alright.” Hyungwon murmured next to his ear, and a shiver went down his spine.

When Wonho opened his eyes again, the floor underneath them was pitch black, but the memory of what he had seen was still fresh in his mind; he only moved forward because his boyfriend sort of dragged the blond with him.

“Shall we start the briefing?” The black man said, positioning himself in front of the north wall with his crew behind him.

“Go ahead.” Hyungwon nodded.

The green man behind him clicked on a point in his arm and the entire room shifted into a different ambience, as if they were actually transported to a different location — it would’ve felt more real if the ground wasn’t pitch black because of Wonho’s phobia, but he understood the intention.

Such transition almost knocked the wind out of him, though. The misty atmosphere that covered the skies above their heads made Wonho feel like he was in some sort of Lovecraftian scenario in the middle of some galaxy, walking towards the ledge of what seemed a colossal dome of steel; the black man and his committee moved around while the Council member talked.

“This is where the remaining human colonies have assembled.” The man stated, pointing at the inside of the dome.

Hyungwon, once again, pulled Wonho with him as he leaned over to check the ledge. The blond took a deep breath before peaking downwards.

When he did, what he saw was thousands of billions of people — a majority that he could observe was composed of humans, but with a lot of extraterrestrials too — gathered within a gargantuan dome that extended itself for too many kilometers for Wonho to have a precise idea; maybe, his mind quickly calculated, roughly that at least 500 football stadiums could fit in half of that space. His head started to hurt a bit.

Beside him, Hyungwon sighed with frustration.

“You know this is the easiest target for the Hundun and their allies, right?”

“For sure.” The Council member quickly responded. “Many of them were spread across Buzhou, but colonies kept coming here for protection. We couldn’t manage all of them if they were all in different places. As you know, Buzhou isn’t a planet meant to be heavily populated. This is how we can afford to feed them and keep them safe. But we are running out of resources. Not many days ago, the enemy committee has blocked our signals, so we cannot ask for help. Many galaxies are afraid to offer help, anyway.”

“How long till the resources end?” Wonho heard Kihyun ask, behind him.

“A few weeks, at best.”

“Then it should be enough.” Hyungwon commented, turning around to return to where he stood before and bringing Wonho with him.
“Enough?” The black man questioned.

Unhurriedly, his boyfriend peered over his shoulder before turning around to face the man.

“Enough to wait until I return. I have to find Changkyun first.”

“Did you not understand the severity of this case?”

“I do. It’s not my first time seeing a situation like this, so of course I get it. But Changkyun is out there, somewhere, and he needs me.”

“So are you choosing him over trillions of people that need your protection? Because he’s a Constant?”

“Because he is my friend. Because he is my brother, and he’s in a strange place, afraid of dying far away from home. I couldn’t bear to lose him. Any of them. That has always been your worst fear for me, right? Selfishness. That, and the possibility of me turning into an actual vile monster, right? One of the two came true. I am selfish. I clearly told you that I came to find Changkyun first.”

Distraught by their discussion, the black man was about to say something when a low and muffled ring in Hyungwon’s pocket grabbed everyone’s attention.

“It’s Monbebe.” Hyungwon announced, and their friends flocked around the pink-haired. From what Wonho could see over his boyfriend’s shoulder, there was just a bunch of numbers and scales. “We got a solar system. Once there, we can—”

“Is it the Almeda System?” They heard the Council man meddle in.

“Yes.” Hyungwon nodded.

“Number 0117, tablet.”

The green person — aka number 0117 — shifted forward, handing the object to the Council member.

“This is the last transmission our scanners picked up before they shut us down.” He said, swiping his fingers over the screen before handing the device to Hyungwon. “Their movements have been constant to one planet in that area. Maybe it can be where your… friend is being kept on. Consider this a token of my willingness to work well together.”

“You mean a payment.” Hyungwon scoffed. “In any other situation, I would say no. But thank you. It will narrow down our search.”

“All but Minhyuk and Shownu.” His boyfriend pointed at these two in the back. “They came to see the Priestess. Let her in, she’s probably already close. Warp drive?”

“Limited. Our resources, as mentioned, are becoming scarce. So your journey will take longer than usual.”

“How long?”

“3 days to get there, I think. I’m sure you can find a way to seize one of their ships and come back way faster.”
“Alright. May you be safe while I return.”

“I wish you the same… Hyungwon.”

From time to time, Hyungwon concluded that remembering too many things was more of a nuisance than an actual advantage. The time traveler felt himself wade out into the past as he looked down at the lower level of the first tower of the structure in the sky, facing a crowded hall that led to an closed area that Hyungwon supposed it was being used to help the survivors, somehow; it used to be an abandoned place back in the day, but now the overpopulation didn’t make such thing possible anymore.

By the gates on the east side, he saw the guards scanning the Priestess for possible dangerous materials before letting her in, unaware that the danger was the woman herself. A sigh instantly left Hyungwon’s mouth.

“Hyungwon!” She yelled from the small staircase that led to the upper level where he was. When Hyungwon looked over his shoulder, she was waving at him.

“Oh, no.” He muttered under his breath, knowing she couldn’t be avoided now.

It was a little disturbing and comforting at the same time that she was dressed up the same way she did the last time Hyungwon saw her, a little less than 300 years earlier — tight leather pants under a long-sleeved red silk dress that reached her knees, whereas the material from behind her was way longer than in the front. Her long, golden hair was unaffected by the passage of time just like her face features that made her look like a 30 year-old.

Not true, by the way.

That woman was older than anyone Hyungwon had ever met. Once he heard some people say she was as old as the birth of that multiverse, but the time traveler wasn’t sure of it. She was the type of person to seem very bright and friendly, but it was a mistake to think she’d do something that wasn’t a matter of her interest. She got close to people for a reason, never out of sympathy.

Hyungwon almost forgot about it for a second by seeing her big smile while hopping in his direction, unbothered by the passersby around them.

“Hyungwon!” She exclaimed again, as if she was actually surprised to see him. “Chae Hyungwon. Heard through the grapevine that you got yourself a last name. It’s pretty.”

“Priestess.” He nodded. “They are over there.”

“I know.” Now she was the one nodding, with a smirk on her face and a raucous voice. “What’s the hurry? It has been ages since we last saw each other.”

“People are dying, Priestess. My friend is in peril.”

“Ah…” She clicked her tongue, with a dismissive hand wave. “Stop calling me that, will you? It’s CL to you. C. L. We are basically family.”

“We are absolutely not.” Hyungwon scoffed loudly. “At best, you are an acquaintance that I once
thought to have interest in guiding me through my abilities. Your only intent was only to release power that you didn’t even know if I could control.”

“There are worse ways, Hyungwon. Time taught you that.”

“Bullshit.” Between a huff and a sigh, Hyungwon closed his eyes for a second and crossed his arms over his chest. “Anyway… I will trust Minhyuk and Shownu’s safety to you. If anything happens to them, I will hunt you down and kill you.”

“I believe you.” She calmly said, bringing her hand close to her face to wave him goodbye.

Like a harsh breeze, the Priestess left as quickly as she came, sauntering in Hyungwon’s friends’ direction. He really wished he could convince them to leave with him, so the time traveler could have the ability to protect them, but Hyungwon knew it was useless; Minhyuk and Shownu’s matters were ones of Time itself, and not even Hyungwon could interfere with it.

A sudden thought about the wrinkle came to his mind. Would it be okay until he could fix everything he had to in that universe? His people never had a better chance to attack his friends’ world, and the worse could be about to come.

“Hyungwon-ah.”

The time traveler quickly turned around as his brain swiftly filtered his boyfriend’s voice amongst the chattering around him.

“Hey.” Hyungwon stepped forward, with a fast bow to the man who was accompanying Wonho. “How was it? It’s not needles, I told you.”

Wonho chuckled.

“It’s fine.” He assured, wrapping his fingers around Hyungwon’s wrist. “I feel really better now. Maybe that pill they made especially for me really cured my phobia.”

“Not really.” The dark green skinned person beside him, the same one who was with the Council member when they arrived, pointed out in a very thick accent. His Korean was quite remarkable for someone who learned it quickly. “You have to take once a day.”

“A man can dream.” Wonho shrugged.

“Excuse me.” Hyungwon extended his hand to the stranger. “I didn’t catch your name.”

The person froze for a moment, staring back and forth between Wonho and Hyungwon.

“Is the Xiezhi talking to me?” He muttered to Wonho, as if the time traveler couldn’t hear it.

“Yeah?” Wonho chuckled. “He’s cool.”

“But he is the Xiezhi!” The stranger insisted. However, in a quick turn, the man fell to his knees and bent his upper body towards the ground. “I have no name, Xiezhi, but it is an honor to speak to you.”

“Oh, no.” Hyungwon beckoned in the person’s direction. “Please, get up. Really. Don’t bow to me, please.”

“Why don’t you have a name?” Wonho brought forth, with some naivety.
“Wonho…” He lowered his voice. “Slaves don’t get names. They get numbers.”

His boyfriend looked between the green skinned stranger, whom seemed unfazed by Hyungwon’s statement, and Hyungwon, with a shocked mien — mouth agape and all.

“You’re shitting me. Why come an advanced civilization still have slaves?”

“It depends on the planet. Just because humans abolished it, doesn’t mean other races did. Some are still… yeah. Are you a refugee?”

“Yes.” The stranger replied, with a tiny smile full of proud. “I helped the human colony of my planet escape, and came here with them.”

“Fucked up.” Wonho barked.

“Never thought a Constant would curse so much.” The person shared.

Hyungwon chuckled.

“You haven’t spent 5 minutes alone with Kihyun.” The time traveler said.

“Anyway.” The stranger brought both hands over his heart, one on top of another. “I’ll leave you two alone. Call for me if you need anything.”

Hyungwon turned to his boyfriend again.

“Ready to leave? I don’t remember if you get motion sickness, because it’s a spaceship and—”

Wonho’s mien suddenly took a 180º turn, falling into a stern expression that gave Hyungwon a bit of goosebumps.

“We need to talk.”

Something unpleasant dropped to Hyungwon’s stomach like an apple giving in into the push of gravity, but he led them somewhere quieter and more private to hear what Wonho had to say.

The room in which they were now was one of the few still vacant in the Three Towers structure — a very tiny room with a red glass window on the left side between the junction of the second and third tower, where Hyungwon used to hide when he couldn’t bear being among crowds back in the day.

“Is there something wrong?” He began, for the nervousness was already eating him alive.

“I can’t go with you, Hyungwon.”

Hyungwon felt a bit lightheaded, legs swaying as if the ground beneath his feet was trembling.

“What?”

“I have to help these people.” Wonho stated, which was only the beginning of his speech. “I have training and maybe I can help them with physics too once I get a hold of how things work here. Besides, they can harness my energy just like you did when you got stuck in that loop. I mean, you were deceived that you were stuck, but—”

“No.” Hyungwon dictated, shaking his head. “You don’t know what you’re saying. You don’t understand the extent of this war and what it entails. You’ve never been to something like this.”
“But I’ve lived in a world where war was all I know, Hyungwon. And you know it. You saw it. My life back then, just like I saw yours. I can’t let these people behind.”

“You’re doing this because you feel guilty about your original world? Then blame me. Go back to blame me, but come with me. I can’t protect you from there.”

“My love…” He said, reaching out for Hyungwon’s face. The latter jerked away from his touch out of pettiness. “There are things you need to let me face it alone. Maybe that’s my reason for coming here.”

“What about Kyun, uh?” He snapped his head towards his boyfriend. “What about ‘let’s save Changkyun together’? Was it a lie? Do you even care?”

“Of course, Hyungwon. But he has you and Kihyun and Jooheon… these people here are on their own. You said Constants are powerful beings, right? I can use this power to help defend them while you’re away. Understand me.”

“I can’t.” Hyungwon sniffed, keeping himself from breaking down. “And I won’t. I will shove you into that ship if I have to.”

“You won’t.” Wonho softly smiled at him. Asshole. “You’re not that kind of person. You respect me just as much as I respect you. This is the right thing to do, kitty. Please, trust me. Just like I trust that you will do whatever it takes to save our Changkyun.”

“I…” Words got caught in his throat as his eyes started to water. Hyungwon simply didn’t know what to do, or what to say, or what simply was right and wrong anymore. He just wanted to explode from all the frustration taking over his being. “I hate you for doing this.”

Beyond betrayed, Hyungwon felt like he was losing a part of him he’d never get back, even if that made no sense to anyone, including him. He couldn’t bear standing there anymore. Overwhelmed by the hyperventilation crisis about to take over his lungs and prevent him to breathe Hyungwon stormed out of the room with calls for his name fading away in the background.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for the patience. we entering the Serious Plot so be ready for the thunderstorm
also, im not really good at writing sort of smut, so this is how i feel comfortable doing it. you can skip if you want to, ofc.

thank you for your patience <3
see you soon uwu
Redamancy, part 2

Chapter Notes

hello! i’m alive, and so is this story!
first of all, HAPPY BIRTHDAY KKUKKUNG ILY BABY (it’s the 26th here so it still counts)
i apologize for this almost year long hiatus. a lot happened in my life and also with mx, so these things kept me holding back. but as i said before, i’m not abandoning this story (i can't abandon anything unfinished). you might want to reread the last chapter before reading this in case you don't remember what's going on — even i did it, so, you know
thank you if you're still reading this. it means a lot to me.
now here's almost 16k!
enjoy (or not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Chiron had said once that nations were the most foolish of mortal inventions. ‘No man is worth more than another, wherever he is from.’

‘But what if he is your friend?’ Achilles had asked him, feet kicked up on the wall of the rose-quartz cave. ‘Or your brother? Should you treat him the same as a stranger?’

‘You ask a question that philosophers argue over,’ Chiron had said. ‘He is worth more to you, perhaps. But the stranger is someone else’s friend and brother. So which life is more important?’”

Madeline Miller, “The Song of Achilles”

2 DAYS BEFORE THE CONSTANTS’ ARRIVAL IN BUZHOU, SOMEWHERE IN THE ALMEDA SYSTEM

Being kidnapped by aliens was not going how Changkyun thought it would.

Sure, he didn’t get his being-sucked-into-spaceship-in-the-sky moment like he preferred, an ode to everything he grew up watching despite his parents’ chuckles, but Changkyun thought he deserved at least to get a look of whoever had knocked him out in the airport bathroom when he was about to go back to Korea.

The last thing he remembered was seeing a white blur in his peripheral vision as soon as he entered said bathroom and then waking up in a grey box without any window or door, but well illuminated and with enough oxygen, somehow, to keep him alive.

This had to be the most boring abduction in history.

It wasn’t like Changkyun wasn’t afraid, though. Succinctly put, the make-a-joke coping mechanism was currently his only defense.
"COMING OUT OF MY CAGE AND I’VE BEEN DOING JUST FINE!" He sang, at the top of his lungs, intentionally off-key. "GOTTA GOTTA BE DOWN CUZ I WANT IT ALL! IT STARTED OUT WITH A KISS HOW DID IT END UP LIKE THIS?"

His tiny chuckle at himself was interrupted by the wall in front of him cracking in half like the automatic doors in malls, allowing a bunch of four-eyed people with white skin and hair, dressed in grey garments, to make their way inside the box leisurely.

Their whiteness wasn’t human — everything about their tall bodies (Changkyun was sure they were over 2 meters tall) was as white as milk. From their slicked back hair to their hands, even glimpses of the parts of their ankles left uncovered by their burgundy attires were pale. That made him want to squirm.

Speaking of clothes, they seemed to be wearing something like the military uniforms he had seen on his own race, but just plain. The thick technical uniforms used for combat were familiar, but their shoes were strange, molded to be completely square.

“Damn, man.” Changkyun shook his head in disapproval, still sitting. “Gotta be honest with y’all, this abduction is getting a bad review from me.”

Of the five individuals staring emotionlessly at him, the one in the middle took a step forward.

“You are a very loud creature.” The big whitie nonchalantly spoke in Korean, much to Changkyun’s surprise. Their voice was way too hoarse, as if the person had a bad flu or something. He would soon find out that they all talked like that.

“You speak Korean?”

“We have learned many languages to be able to communicate with countless Constants.” The same dude explained, with a sort of constipated expression. “Yours is too easy.”

“Alright, alright.” Changkyun clicked his tongue, unhurriedly standing up. “So, what goes on in here? What the heck do you want from me? Some Constant thing, I imagine. Damn, it sucks to be popular.”

“You are a very loud creature.” The person repeated again, while the others behind them shared a dull look. “But you are a Deadly Constant.”


“You give yourself little to no credit, Deadly Constant.” The alien continued, still expressionless. “You are not the only version of yourself here. However, your connection with the Xiezhi is why we are giving you this private place.”

“You know my hyungs are coming for me, right? You can’t win against all the Constants together, plus Hyungwon. He ain’t gonna be pleased to know you guys took me.”

“We are aware. We know that they will come, Deadly Constant. But…” Leaning his head forward a little, the white alien seemed to measure his words. “Are they going to like what they will find?”

“You…” Changkyun swallowed, feeling fear rushing up his spine. “All this just to kill me?”

“Oh. Of course not. You and your doubles have a very important mission in this universe. One that will consolidate our ideas across the multiverse. One that will prove that the Constants are a
menace to be eliminated immediately.”

Changkyun took a step backwards out of instinct.

“What?”

Meanwhile, the alien who spoke to him lifted a hand and one of the creatures behind him placed a glass box on his palm.

Something glowed inside of it, but Changkyun couldn’t tell what it was from that distance.

“Your race pretends to condemn lunacy.” His tone got deeper as he spoke, strolling in Changkyun’s direction. Changkyun stepped backwards until he hit the wall. “When, in reality, the ones who left a mark on your kind’s history had embraced so profoundly the freedom brought by their plunge into madness that such contradictory behavior seems to come from a lack of understanding.”

“Yah.” Changkyun’s head twitched, pointing a finger at the aliens. “Stay back.”

“Constants are the epitome of unfairness, Deadly One. Why would the multiverse bless only one race with such power? What’s so… special about humans? We wondered, for thousands of generations. The conclusion we came to was that we must fight injustice by ourselves so the multiverse can keep thriving without being kept hostage by the human will. Soon, every single race in the multiverse will think like that too.”

Changkyun inhaled sharply, clutching the wall out of mild despair. Rare were the opportunities in which he allowed himself to freak out, but Changkyun was considering giving in when he found himself alone in the middle of nowhere, maybe not even in his universe.

“My friends will come.” He blurted, looking back and forth between the white alien and the glass box glowing in his hand. “Stay back! My friends won’t forgive—if you hurt me!”

For the first time since his arrival, a glimpse of a crooked smile appeared on the dull alien’s mien.

“I’m not going to hurt you, Deadly One. I am going to…set you free.”

On its own, whatever was restrained what was inside the glass box set itself free as the glass walls came down to hit the floor. It was only then that Changkyun realized what it was.

A red, glowing rose.

Changkyun held his breath, tantalized by the existence of it.

But his admiration didn’t last, since it zipped towards him with a speed that defied every law of physics that he had ever learned about, but it wasn’t quite the time to point that out — at least not when the rose’s stem wrapped around his neck with such strength that knocked the wind out of him, bringing Changkyun to the floor.

He tried to pull it away, but as it happens sometimes, Changkyun missed the point of it all. The stem was only the base to the operation as he felt the rose undoing itself; petals now skimmed under his chin like the soft touch of a loved one, but it lacked the warmth of a human connection. Its fakeness made Changkyun want to puke and drag it away from him, but he couldn’t — whatever that was made of, it compelled him to fall even further into the floor.

Now scattered across his face, the petals’ final move was to cover Changkyun’s mouth and eyes
with much more force than it did to the rest of his face, digging itself inside his eyeballs and throat, urging a scream out of him.

The last thing that crossed Changkyun’s mind was neither of the gleaming rose or the aliens, but his parents and his friends out there. Deep down, he knew this was the first time, that he considered that the possibility he could die was real — almost graspable.

But I don’t wanna die.

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3 DAYS AFTER HYUNGWON, JOOHEON AND KIH-YUN’S DEPARTURE FROM BUZHOU. 1 HOUR BEFORE THE LAST WARP DRIVE TO THE ALMEDA SYSTEM.

“Ah, come on!” Jooheon whined, with the palm of his hands glued to the spaceship’s glass window. “I can’t believe there’s a flat planet out here.”

Much to his own surprise, Hyungwon chuckled from white couch at the communal space at the center of the ship, between the flight deck and the back of the spaceship where rooms, kitchen and weaponry were. The time traveler chose to instantly to turn down the Council member’s offer for guns, leaving with a quick bow towards the dark-skinned man and an eyebrow raised at the Priestess, who stood behind Shownu and Minhyuk while the two said their goodbyes to their boyfriends.

Knowing his friend’s softness, the Hyungwon thought Jooheon would be the one to cry before parting ways with Minhyuk when in reality it was Kihyun that clung to Shownu’s chest and, with a reddened face, made him promise that they would see each other again. Shownu, much to his irritation, simply laughed at the shorter man and did as he was told to, telling Kihyun to be careful and come back quickly.

It was sweet to watch, but a poignant reminder that unconsciously, Hyungwon looked among the small crowd that sent them off for any sign of Wonho.

Predictable, though, since their last conversation was nothing but terrible. Hyungwon yelled things at his boyfriend that he wasn’t proud of when he finally calmed down, but it was already too late to grab the words he spouted and shove them down his own throat; now, only the consequences mattered.

As his train of thought fell back into memories of his boyfriend, Hyungwon remembered the last bit of their discussion.

“You’re being naïve, Wonho.” The time traveler barked at the blond in front of their friends, in a private room given by 0117. “How can I make you understand that this is nothing you can handle? You’re a human, just like the trillions of them here. You can’t fight—”

“But I’m a Constant, remember?” Wonho softly spoke, and Hyungwon almost asked why his voice was tender when they were having one of their worst fights. “You always talk about how we are so important and how we can do so much for our universe, why is it different now? Trillions of people could be under attack at any moment, and the last thing I checked you can’t be in two places at the same time.”
“I will come back!” Hyungwon threw his arms upwards, trying to make a point. “I will come back for these people after I—”

“After you get Kyun back, I get it. I am worried about him too, every minute that passes…”

“Are you?” The taller could feel the bitterness in his comment. “Because we crossed the multiverse to get our friend back, or so I thought.”

That’s when the look came. A look full of misery, one that Hyungwon never thought it would hurt so much.

No one had the nerve to break the silence in the room, so Wonho spoke again after a minute.

“Changkyun is my friend, and I love him. And I want him back with us and alive just as much as anyone in this room. You can’t fight every battle, so I thought I could be of some help by offering my Constant energy to these people living in fear. Yes, after you come back you will deal with everything, but what the hell will happen till then, Hyungwon? These people, trillions of them. They have no one. Changkyun has you and Jooheon and Kihyun. You still don’t understand why having friends matter, right? We are here to help, at all the fronts. But now you claim I don’t give a fuck about Kyun? Because I want to help these people, because I’m more useful here? But good to know what you think about me, I guess.”

No glances were shot at the time traveler before Wonho slammed the door behind him, startling the rest of their friends. But not Hyungwon, because deep down he knew he had crossed a line and he didn’t know if he could come back from.

“No way, Honey.” Kihyun’s voice became more prominent to Hyungwon’s ears, and he was pulled back to reality. “The Earth can’t be flat.”

“We just passed by a flat planet!” Jooheon’s tone was a bit higher than usual, quite excited. “So why couldn’t our planet—”

“Lee Jooheon.” His friend sounded deeply offended. “How can you say that? You’re the guy who’s going to prove to our people that the multiverse exists! Hyungwon-ah, tell him that our planet isn’t flat.”

Without the need of meddling in their shenanigans, Hyungwon got off the couch and strolled towards the window Jooheon was previously next to, looking down and up at the infinite amount of void in that universe. A sigh came out instantly.

“The Earth is not flat.” Hyungwon said, as if he was reading a script from inside his head.

Strangely, silence ensued.

“Hyungwon-ah.” His fellow 93 liner called his name with a type of sympathy Hyungwon didn’t know what to make of. “Are you okay?”

“Is it…” Jooheon glanced up and down a couple of times before finishing his sentence. “Because of… Wonho hyung? You… He…”

“I’m thinking of Changkyun.” He lied, turning his back to the outer space. “We will get to him soon.”
Nothing inside his mind could be of use to argue why he was forcing himself to fake a smile to his friends, mainly because he knew that Kihyun and Jooheon didn’t buy it at all. As time went by, the time traveler became more and more transparent to his friends; he hadn’t decided yet if that was the sign of a deep connection or a liability.

“Xiezhi.”

A raucous voice came from one of the black giant android twins, the same ones who were accompanying the Council member at their arrival in Buzhou. The man insisted for Hyungwon to take the androids with him on his journey to Almeda, since the time traveler refused the aid of weapons.

As soon as they entered the ship, Hyungwon found out that, as expected, they didn’t have names and he certainly wasn’t about to repeat B12589-00P and B22590-00P every time he talked to them.

“Yes, B2?”

“You have received an in-person recorded message from your time traveling machine.”

“FROM WHO?” Jooheon nearly jumped off the C shaped sofa, in B2’s direction.

“The Constant Shin Hoseok.” She said, toning her modulated, robotic voice down. “That came with you to Buzhou.”

“Is it for me?” Hyungwon questioned the android, looking all the way up of her 3-meter body.

“Message sent to the Xiezhi only.”

“Alright.” The time traveler nodded, burying his nails in the palm of his hands. “Transfer it to room 1. I’ll watch it there.”

Before anything, a deep breath was needed; Hyungwon tried to be unshaken in front of his friends, excusing himself to the room he took for himself when they boarded, 3 days earlier.

Door locked, the time traveler felt like he was about to collapse — not because it was a message from his boyfriend, whom he fought with before going on this voyage, but because being all by himself even for a couple of minutes was enough to haul him by the ankles towards a sea of overthinking and anxiety, and Hyungwon didn’t have the privilege of that.

He should’ve known better than to think he was Wonho-proof.

As estimated, the room Hyungwon was in was shifted into the shape of the main wagon of his time machine, and Wonho stood there, right in front of him, looking way too graspable.

Hyungwon’s legs almost gave up.

“Hey.” His voice. Crap, how Hyungwon missed his voice and everything connected to it. His boyfriend looked a bit worn-out, still wearing the same clothes that Hyungwon had him put on for self-protection. “Uh... so... this is a bit awkward because Monbebe is the one recording this...”

A chortle almost escaped his mouth when his boyfriend looked up and the ceiling lights started to flicker.

“Just be your cheesy self.” Monbebe gave him a pass, which caused Wonho to chuckle.

“Alright, alright. Hmm... so, this is a message...”
“Wonho…” Hyungwon sighed to himself, feeling warmth spreading across his chest.

“Look.” Out of nowhere, his boyfriend cleared his throat and took a step forward, so Hyungwon took one too. “I know we left things in a bad place when you… Couples fight, it’s fine. You can even hate me like you said…”

“No.” Hyungwon suddenly felt the urgency to correct the blond, even though the real Wonho couldn’t hear him. “I don’t hate you. I never could. I…”

“I’m fine. I’ve been… getting to know as many people as I can. The process of harnessing energy out of me wears me out a bit, so I need several breaks during the day. Don’t worry, though. It is for a good cause. Their shields have gained an enormous boost with my energy strengthening them.”

Looking at the floor, Wonho made a short pause. “I miss you, in case you’re wondering.”

Hyungwon held back a sob.

“I miss you too.” He replied to Wonho’s hologram.

“Hyungwon. Come back as soon as possible.” His mien dived into a somber ocean, and Hyungwon held his breath. “There was an attack today. One of the shields of the second tower was damaged by them, but no casualties.” Once again, Wonho looked down and away, wrapping his arms around himself. “Hyungwon…” His tone suddenly dropped to a very low one, and the time traveler felt goosebumps. “I have a bad feeling about this. Do what you gotta do and come back. I feel like this is… bigger than us. I haven’t seen Shownu or Minhyuk ever since they left with that woman… should I be worried? I wish I could call you. I wish I could be in two places at the same time.”

“Me too.” Hyungwon reached out for the face that wasn’t there, looking for any sign of acknowledgment.

“I love you.”

“Me too.”

“I love you, Hyungwon.” Wonho’s eyes bore holes into his skin, and the time traveler couldn’t keep the tears from falling down. “No matter what happens, you come back to me, okay?”

“I love you too.” The time traveler found himself saying as he tried to reach for the holographic version of his boyfriend; getting nothing but pixels. “I’m sorry I didn’t say it before.”

As if it was a response to Hyungwon’s remark, his boyfriend smiled brightly.

“Take care of yourself and the other weirdos out there in space. Kyun needs you right now.” At the last minute, a dorky smile that made Hyungwon’s heart miss a beat. “Kick some asses, Kitty. See you soon.”

Hyungwon’s hands once again reached out for what wasn’t there, launching himself towards Wonho’s hologram as it vanished alongside its reality — temporary pixels that were never crueler than at that moment.

From the moment that he fell on his knees, the time traveler couldn’t hear anything over the sound of his own breakdown; he couldn’t remember a time when his own sobs had been that loud.

There were times where Hyungwon did regret feeling too much, especially in critical situations like the one they were in — he needed to be strong for all of them, not crying on the floor of a spaceship in an unknown system. But it was too late to come back from the moments carved on his
skin, from the sensations that seemed to be what made him into a human being.

The pink-haired man could feel his lungs begging for a break, but he couldn’t breathe properly even if he wanted to.

“Oh shit. Hyungwon-ah?”

Kihyun’s voice, Hyungwon could tell even amidst the mess of his heart and mind. His eyes, blurred by the tears, shifted towards his hands and so he noticed the amount of energy he was radiating without even noticing — was his friend scared of him? It didn’t matter, Hyungwon needed to regain control.

“I can’t—” The time traveler jiggled his arms with more strength, but couldn’t regain domain over his own energy. “It doesn’t…”

“Hey, hey, hey.” Kihyun kneeled down in front of him, and Hyungwon pushed himself back to not hurt his friend. “Look at me, okay? Chae Hyungwon, look at me, only at me. I’m breathing just fine, right? You need to do the same, or else you might explode this ship.”

Feeling another bolt of energy cross his spine, Hyungwon’s head tilted upwards and he could see the lights flickering so fast it made him a little dizzy.

“I can’t—” He mumbled, choking back a sob.

“Hyungwon, listen to me!” Kihyun’s tone was a tad harsher this time, and Hyungwon couldn’t help but to feel bad. “We came this far for Changkyun. Are you going to abandon him? Are you going to let him die?”

“No!” The time traveler crawled forward this time, and Kihyun stood up. “He… needs me. They all need me.”

“You can do it.” His friend assured him, with a tiny smile. “Come on. Come on!”

Hyungwon turned his gaze back to his hands, fixating his eyes on the energy within him; they were one, under his control. No one but Time could ever have any ownership over him because freedom was a privilege not everybody had, and Hyungwon wasn’t about to let his emotions go overboard.

He was the God of himself in full control, a tiny voice in the back of his head reminded him.

Putting all the force he had in his body into stabilizing his energy, Hyungwon’s breath slowly got back to normal leading to his inner energy fading away, like a flame slowly coming to an end as a candle burns out.

“Jesus…” Kihyun blurted as he dropped to the floor next to him. “For a moment, I thought you were really going to cause the ship to explode.”

“I’m sorry…” Hyungwon mumbled, swallowing his desire to start crying again.

“Why were you crying?” His friend’s voice softened, just like it did when Kihyun was concerned about someone. “Was it about Wonho’s—”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

As he pressed his legs against his chest, Hyungwon watched Kihyun sit cross-legged.

“He was a dick to you in that message, right? I knew it. I’m going to kick his ass once we go back
“Kihyun.” The time traveler’s voice was small, accompanied by a shy grin. “I’m fine, and he’s fine. We didn’t fight. Now, come on.” Faster than his friend could keep up, Hyungwon got to his feet again. “It’s almost time for the warp drive to the Almeda system.”

Hyungwon almost had one foot out of the room when his friend, still on the floor, asked something else.

“Do you think…” Kihyun bit his lip, fidgeting. “Are they expecting us to come? Because of our Changkyun?”

“Most certainly.” The pink-haired nodded, reviewing his plan in his mind. “What they don’t expect is that we are going to surrender.”

Kihyun’s eyes went round with surprise.

“WE WHAT?”

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**BUZHO, CURRENT TIME**

“Are you ready, Mr. Shin?”

A part of Wonho still felt slightly terrified as he gazed through the glass wall. The sight of fluffy, flawless white clouds outside was a statement that made it clear that — no, he hadn’t been in a super long nightmare, he really was living in a gargantuan structure in the sky.

He was okay, though. Wonho had taken his anti-acrophobia pill earlier when 0117 came to wake him up for what the blond started calling the “draining session” of the day. It’s what he’d named the sessions where he donated his “Constant energy” in order to strengthen their defenses; nothing he’d say it was a pleasure, but it was worth it.

“Is this gonna hurt again?” Wonho questioned the nurse, a human male sent specifically to deal with him because he could speak the ‘traditional’ Korean language.

Aron Kwak was a young man, maybe Wonho’s age, with round glasses and the stern face of someone whom had seen things a man his age couldn’t dream of. War always turns boys into men, and men into scarred creatures.

“The usual.” Aron replied before clearing his throat, pulling the steel cart that had a sphere on top of it all the way towards the white armchair Wonho was sitting on. “As I told you before. When done alone, the process is not pain-free. Ideally this should be done by all the Constants, together.”

“But when Hyungwon did it, last year, we just felt a little bit of pain.”

“The Xiezhi probably transferred most of the charge that happens during the process to himself.” His nurse explained, checking his pulse while he connected a plastic plug to the junction between his forearm and his biceps. “I haven’t seen the device he used, so that’s my best guess.”

It got him thinking how much Hyungwon had endured before for their sake.
To an outsider, the process was pretty simple: all Wonho had to do was keep his hand on the sphere for 15 minutes while the “special” energy in his body was being channeled to that steel cart and redistributed later to whatever the Council leader thought was best.

So the pain came, but not in a way that Wonho could find words to explain. It was like he could feel every atom in his body trembling at the same frequency while tiny needles were inserted all over his insides, piercing through his soul or whatever the human race has beyond what their eyes can see.

0117 came to fetch him once it was done, with the usual wheelchair since Wonho couldn’t bear walking after every session.

“Are you okay, sir?” The boy asked, after helping him get in the chair.

“Don’t sir me, we’ve talked about this.” Wonho reminded him, with a soft chuckle.

“Should I call you hyung, then?” The green boy shot a smile at him. “I read about your culture as well when I was learning your language a few days ago.”

Wonho hummed and closed his eyes as 0117 pressed a few buttons on the side of the wheelchair, making it hover above the ground and follow 0117 as he strolled down the hallway, now with Wonho by his side.

“How…” His trail of thought got lost as he made the sequence, so Wonho made a pause. “Oh, remembered. Talked… about, you know, name.”

“Whose name?” While checking Wonho’s pulse, the boy inquired.

“Yours, kid. Weren’t we talking about you getting a name yesterday after the visits?”

“Ahh… I couldn’t think of anything. I think 0117 suits me.”

At such nonsense, Wonho opened his eyes to stare at the boy.

“You chose a pronoun for me to address you by, why not a name? 0117 is not a name.”

“I haven’t had time.” He tried to explain, pulling his arms behind his back. “With our visits down the dome and other tasks the Great Council member has asked of me, I couldn’t think of anything.”

“Think now.” Wonho sighed, leaning his back further against the wheelchair as it continued to move on its own when they rounded the corridor. “You have the right to have a name.”

The green boy flashed a tiny smile.

“You humans are obsessed with naming things. Even inanimate things! I find it hilarious.”

“We name everything that matters to us.” Wonho tried to make him understand his point. “We label everything in the name of hope, of dignity, of love. It’s important. You are important too, buddy.”

“Buddy…? Are we… friends?”

Wonho had to snort.

0117 had been keeping him company and explaining how everything in the Three Towers worked, and also how the news of his arrival had impacted the people in the dome. That was the closest to
a friend Wonho could have so far, and he appreciated the boy.

“Sure.” His mouth curved into a smile. “So… what’s on your mind?”

“Hmm…” His friend brought a hand to his chin, scratching his neck for a while. 0117 had long triangular claws, but it never made Wonho afraid of him. “Should I go for a human name? Or a Xichung name? My species rarely named slaves like me, so…”

“Your pick, buddy.”

“Couldn’t you suggest something?” 0117 said in a tiny voice, patting his arm twice. “What name comes to your mind when you look at me?”

Wonho was about to doze off again when he felt 0117 patting his arm again, and he opened his eyes in a hurry to look up at the green-skinned one.

“What?”

“Your suggestion.”

“Ah… Uh…” Before continuing, the blond rubbed his eyes. “There was this kid… Hum… you remind me of him. I went to summer camps when I was a child and there was this… this little kid, way younger than me. He was kind and eager to interact… His name was Chani. Everyone liked him, so I envied him a little bit. I was kinda closed-off as a child, didn’t have many friends.”

“I like it.” The other man blurted right after, and Wonho gazed up at him. “Chani. ‘Hi, my name is Chani.’ ‘Hello, I’m Chani.’ Chani. Chan-i. Sounds good, right?”

“You don’t have to… uh… you know you can choose, right? I’m not forcing…”

It was when they had reached Wonho’s quarters that his friend replied, but only after making sure Wonho had entered and lied down on his bed.

“I know, hyung. You have been telling me about free will for the past 3 days.”

“Yah.” Wonho pointed a finger at him, playfully. “I just hate that there’s still slavery out here. I’ll make sure Hyungwon puts an end to it when he comes back. We’re going to Naon Prime together and free your people.”

Chani hummed and went to bring the tray of food Wonho usually ate after the harnessing sessions.

Wonho was half-way through shoving a spoon in his mouth when his friend spoke again.

“So, what did you do to convince the Xiezhi to let you be his partner?”

“What?”

“What did you do…” Chani repeated, carrying a chair to sit next to Wonho. “to become the Xiezhi’s partner? Like… have you killed a Titan? Offered him 20 universes? Defeated an old demon in battle?”

“No…” The frown on his face made it clear of how confused he was. Putting his spoon down, Wonho stirred on the bed. “I told him I liked him, and took him out for dinner and bowling. It’s a sport where you throw a ball and try to take down all the pins.

Chani’s face fell in disappointment.
“That was it? You didn’t do anything memorable and yet got to be the Xiezhi’s partner?”

“Hey, kid.” His glare was nothing close to an angry one, more like he was embarrassed. “Wait. How did you know Hyungwon and I are dating?”

“It was pretty obvious from the way you two looked at each other.”

“Uh…” Taken aback, Wonho scratched the back of his neck. “Just don’t tell my friends yet if you see them around.”

“They are with the Priestess, hyung.” Chani reminded him. That was 3 days ago, though. “I doubt they will come back for at least five days.”

Turning his attention back to his food tray, Wonho began eating its contents while still chatting with his friend.

“What exactly does this Priestess do?” The blond questioned, emptying another bowl.

“She calls herself a Lady of Guidance. She is always in the right time at the right moment, or so she claims. She used to teach the Xiezhi when he lived here, but the Xiezhi didn’t like her method, apparently. That was ages ago, way before my time.”

“I just hope Shownu and Minhyuk are okay.”

“You can trust her.” Chani vouched for her, taking the tray off of Wonho’s lap as he finished his meal. “The Priestess is many things, but she isn’t one to cause harm. If anything, she’s an enabler. No one can tell which race she comes from, even though she looks like a common human.”

“I don’t trust her.” Wonho affirmed, feeling better now that he had eaten and rested a little. “But Shownu told me it was okay… because he does that—” He tried to gesture something to convey his point, but only made weird motions to his friend. “His psychic thing, he does that. He was never wrong so… I hope he continues to be right.”

He could only hope.

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**UNKNOWN LOCATION, CURRENT TIME**

Minhyuk didn’t remember going to sleep.

Nor did he remember the meaning of it, for all it’s worth. The red-haired found himself at the same place he had “woken up” in a dream before: in the vastness of a bright green field under a lilac sky.

Panic rapidly spread through his chest when he noticed that Shownu wasn’t by his side and the man wasted no time in getting up and looking around for his friend. It didn’t take too long for him to find Shownu, standing at the edge of the cliff with a woman beside him.

The Priestess, right. They had followed her into a grand salon inside the Third Tower, which led to a dusty room on the right side of it.

That’s all Minhyuk remembers.
“HYUNG!” He yelled, darting towards the cliff.

But it was the Priestess who turned around first.

“Oh, finally!” She raised her arms in celebration. “We have been waiting for you, Minhyuk.”

Although it was unmannered, Minhyuk didn’t regret his gesture was of passing by the woman to directly speak to his friend.

“Hyung.” He said, grabbing one of Shownu’s biceps. “Why are we here again? We were at the—”

“We are still there.” Shownu softly spoke, shooting him a soothing smile. “Our bodies are there, but our souls are here.”

“Welcome!” He heard the Priestess say, and both turned her head to her. “You two are in 5th dimension!” At the lack of response, she kept talking with a singsong voice. “This is the dimension of consciousness, of dreams!”

“This is where we come when we have our visions.” His friend explained better, putting a protective arm around Minhyuk. “There are infinite pocket dimensions around here that Time opens when it needs us to see something important.”

Minhyuk lifted his head to stare at Shownu.

“How long have you been awake? How long have I—”

“A few days.” Shownu replied, with nonchalant expression on his face as if it wasn’t something to be worried about. “She told me you’d be a late bloomer, but that you would always come with me.”

“And I was right!” She excitedly agreed, and suddenly popped up right in front of them. “Now! Should we start?”

Before meeting her, Minhyuk was sure that fate had guided them there — God, he even quarreled with Hyungwon because of it, but he was about to question that entire thing when they suddenly teleported deep into the forest and showed up in front of a mammoth tree surrounded by colorless fog that enveloped it from the bottom to the unseen end of it, lost way beyond the clouds.

“This is the Onirico.” The Priestess took a step towards it, gesturing at the tree. “The consciousness of every living thing in the multiverse flows through here, including their dreams. Like us, she’s governed by Time, so sometimes a few dreams get entangled or things of the sort.”

“So…” Minhyuk cleared his throat, fidgeting next to Shownu. “What are we meant to do here, Priestess?”

“Ah…” She threw a dismissive hand wave at him, with a grin on her face. “Please, call me CL. Hyungwon is too petty for calling me like this.”

“Did he come here?” His friend inquired, crossing his arms over his chest. “Before us.”

“Yes.” CL nodded, with a sorrowful expression. “Not in the right moment, I guess. I made mistakes. I’m glad he turned out to be a great man.”

“What mistakes?” Minhyuk questioned her.

“That’s a story for another dimension.” The woman smiled brightly, hopping in their direction.
“Now! We don’t have much time, even though we are in the presence of a branch of Time itself.” Still grinning at them, CL settled an arm on their shoulders. “You both have a lot to learn if you want to save your friends.”

“What?” Minhyuk was taken aback. This wasn’t going how he imagined he it would. But you know what? Screw it. “What do you mean?”

CL raised a brow at him.

“You really don’t believe that all you can do is have visions, right?”

“We do.” Shownu spoke on their behalf. “So…”

In the nicest way possible, the Priestess covered her chuckle.

“Darling…” CL tilted her head, giving both of them a kind look. “You’re going to save the world.”

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3 MINUTES BEFORE THE LAST WARP DRIVE TO THE ALMEDA SYSTEM

“This is suicide, hyung.”

Hyungwon shrugged from his seat, opposite to where his friends were seating and buckling themselves with straps that crossed their chests, making a X to keep them fully safe.

“I thought you trusted me, Jooheon.” The time traveler spoke, watching B1 and B2 checking the system in the cockpit, right beside them.

“I do, I swear I do, but… I thought you’d come up with a plan that didn’t involve us openly surrendering. What if they actually kill us?”

“You knew the odds, Lee Jooheon.” Hyungwon rested his hands over his lap. “It’s just us against a race known for raising warriors since birth, basically invincible.”

This time, his shorter friend was the one to meddle in.

“You’re not helping, Hyungwon.” Kihyun raised an eyebrow.

“What are you so afraid of?” The time traveler retorted. “You have me. Moreover, they’re expecting me. They knew, the moment they took our Changkyun, that I’d be coming for them. There’s no use in pretending.”

His friends went silent after that, for the spaceship began to tremble as a signal for the beginning of the warp drive. Hyungwon held tight to the straps of his chest belt, sighing deeply with a silent prayer that what he had in mind worked.

Colorless rays beamed in the space between them and, just like that, it was done.

As quickly as possible, Hyungwon broke free from the safety belts and dashed towards the cockpit.

“B1, report.” The pink-haired asked the android sitting in the pilot chair, in-between theirs and the co-pilot seat.
“Status of the ship: functional, but running low on fuel. Current location: Almeda system. The Almeda system is powered by two medium-sized stars, with 5 planets in total. No sign of any type of life in 4 planets. The only active planet in the Almeda system, Xenxeon, apparently occupied by the Hundun forces and their allies, which seems to be of 418 ally armies.”

“418?” Jooheon yelled, crashing against Hyungwon’s back to peek at the panel of the ship. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“No, Lee Jooheon.” B2 said, turning her head to Hyungwon’s friend. “We are not fucking kidding you.”

The time traveler couldn’t hold back a snort.

“Hyung!” His friend turned his head to him. “Are you crazy? Did you hear what they said? There’s 418 fucking armies siding with them! We can’t fucking win!”

“Xiezhi.” B1 called. “Would you like to know the odds?”

“Oh.” Hyungwon chuckled, more nervous than he let show. “Never tell me the odds.”

“Are you quoting Han Solo in the middle of this madness?” Jooheon sounded outraged. He didn’t blame the boy. “Hyung!”

“Hyungwon.” A voice behind him called, and he turned around to face Kihyun already on his feet. “How sure are you that we can win? Because it doesn’t sound good right now.”

The taller man rested his hands on his friend’s shoulder.

“Kihyun, I need your faith right now.” Hyungwon turned his head to Jooheon. “Yours too. It will be tested today. Don’t forget for a single second that I would do anything to keep you safe. Don’t doubt me for even a single second. Can you do this?”

A couple of seconds later, Kihyun was the first to nod.

“Jooheon?”

With a sigh, his friend responded.

“Fine, fine.” The man rubbed his face to accept his reality. “What do we do now?”

“Xiezhi.” B2 called, with the same modulated voice of always. “We are receiving coordinates from a source in Xenxeon.”

The time traveler grinned with excitement, hoping to forget how much was at risk at that moment.

“As expected.” Hyungwon clapped his hands, turning around to speak to the androids in the cockpit. “Can we get there with the fuel we have?”

“Not quite.” B1 spoke. “But if we use the gravity of a nearby planet, Enuorn, as a propeller to send us within the Roche radius of Xenxeon, we might achieve the Xiezhi’s goal.”

“Great job, B1.” He patted the female android’s back, receiving no response. It didn’t matter, though. “Let’s do it.”
Wonho didn’t know when he had fallen asleep after Chani left his room. He was thinking about his friends and the insanity that was his life he was when his thoughts deviated to his boyfriend. How could they not? They shouldn’t have parted ways like that — full of resentment from both sides over his decision, just when they needed to support each other the most.

He regretted not going to send his friends and his boyfriend off to an extremely dangerous environment with no way to contact Buzhou whatsoever. God, Wonho regretted a lot of things of how he dealt with Hyungwon, but he also couldn’t get over how the time traveler belittled his feelings and doubted his intentions.

What could he do, though? He loved that beautiful, stubborn man and couldn’t stay mad at him for too long.

With the memories of when he had Hyungwon by his side as they slept, Wonho plunged into dreamland.

Suddenly, the blast of an explosion was what woke Wonho up. A not so sweet wake up call, he thought as he felt the ground quake violently.

The blond wasted no time putting on his boots and darting across the accommodation deck of the Second Tower to meet Chani as he turned a corner.

“HYUNG!” The boy was panting, clinging to his chest as another explosion boomed in the background. “WE NEED TO GO!”

With no time to waste, Wonho grabbed Chani’s hand and started running towards the higher floors or more exactly, the military chamber where the Council member certainly was meeting with his people.

Two floors up and Wonho heard a cry arise on his left; a large part of the corridor had been destroyed, but someone still cried — fought — for their life.

It was no surprise that he let go of Chani and started running towards the wreckage; there he found a humanoid red-skinned child clinging to a piece of iron by their tail, almost falling into the cruel nothingness beyond the clouds.

“HEY!” Wonho yelled to the kid, gaining their attention. They looked like a 5-year-old child, at best. “HOLD MY HAND!”

The kid continued to cry, and that’s when it dawned on Wonho that they couldn’t understand him.

“HYUNG!” Chani had followed his steps, taking a look at the situation of the child. “He’s a Degaari! He’s asking for help!”

With seconds keeping that child from having a gruesome death, Wonho had to think quickly.

“Chani, hold my hand. You said your species is a very strong one, right? I’m going to get the kid. Tell him to hold onto me when I say ‘jump’.”

“I’ll go!” The green-haired boy affirmed, trying to move towards the child. “You are a Constant, you can’t—”
“CHANI!” He grabbed his friend by the shoulders. “DO WHAT I’M TELLING YOU! I’M GOING!”

Mustering all the courage he had in his body, Wonho sat on the floor to slide down the unstable block of whatever that was made of slowly, to not cause it to crumble completely. It was a good thing that he remembered to take his anti-acrophobia pill that morning.

The kid wailed like crazy, which was understandable for someone in his situation, and to be completely honest, after facing what was on the way down, he thought about crying a little bit too.

Reaching the furthest point he could get to without falling, Wonho stretched his arm to the boy.

“Come here!” He told him, waving his arm at the Degaari. The kid didn’t budge, so he turned around to speak with his green-skinned friend. “CHANI! TELL HIM TO TRUST ME!”

And Chani did, so all that was left to do was to get a hold of the kid.

“JUMP!” Wonho shouted at the boy, whom now was dangling on the piece of what seemed to be iron. “JUMP!”

Like a little monkey, the little alien jumped into his arms and clung to his chest as if his life depended on it — because it did — and Wonho had to find balance with the additional weight over him before both of them wind up falling.

“CHANI!” Wonho’s arm was growing tired from holding both of them, so he called for his friend. “PULL US UP! SLOWLY!”

Chani’s hands completely covered his wrist as he tried to pull both of them to a safer part of the hallway, but the unstable block they were in was falling apart quicker than they could, so Wonho pushed the kid away from him and threw him over to the safe part of the corridor alongside Chani, almost having a heart attack when the block began to fall apart even more.

His only chance to escape alive was counting with the help of Chani, who now had an arm stretched towards him, but it was still too far for Wonho to get a hold of it.

Instead of allowing Wonho to think of a back-up plan, Chani slid towards the edge of the block and got a hold of Wonho’s wrists, throwing the man towards the stable part in the hallway and crawling his way back before it all fell towards the sacred land.

There was no time to catch up with his breath; other explosions could be heard across the Three Towers and Wonho got on his feet as soon as possible, taking the kid on his arms while Chani stood up and began to run alongside the blond Constant.

They arrived at the military chamber a few minutes later and the place was already fully packed with dozens of people in charge of the most important decisions around there.

By the time Wonho, Chani and the kid entered the place, the Council member was already in a heated discussion with a part of their military personnel and was taken aback by Wonho’s presence.

“What’s going on?” Wonho moved forward, in the black man’s direction.

A red-skinned officer jumped in his direction before anyone could open their mouths, taking the child away from Wonho’s arms.
As expected, they spoke in a language the blond had no idea what it was, but they seemed relieved to have found each other.

“That’s his child.” Chani translated to him, tugging on Wonho’s sleeve. “He’s thanking you for saving him.”

Instead of saying anything, the blond Constant simply bowed to the officer.

“The shields are still holding up.” The Council member told him. “But a large part of the Second Tower was affected, the part right under the dome. I don’t know how many attacks we still can stand against.”

Another member of the military now spoke up, and Wonho was thankful that he could understand the English coming out of their mouth.

“They know there’s a Constant in here. They know it’s an advantage to us, that’s why the Hundun and their followers are coming with full force.”

“Worse.” Another black guy, human, spoke up. “Their ally armies have been concentrating around Buzhou since yesterday. Millions of them are touching the sacred ground of Buzhou right now.”

“We should do the same.” Wonho barged in, talking directly to the Council member.

“We can’t.” The black Council member seemed livid about him mentioning the idea only. “The land of Buzhou is sacred. What they’re doing is a monstrosity, and it shouldn’t mean we need to break our beliefs too.”

“Don’t you understand?” Wonho frowned. “Human lives, no, lives, matter more than your beliefs right now. If we want to have a chance to win, we gotta keep them away from the dome.”

The red-skinned alien spoke again, and Chani translated that they agreed with Wonho. Apparently, they all could understand him, but it wasn’t totally reciprocal.

“Should we hold a voting?” The Council member announced.

Almost everyone in the room agreed.

Out of the 12 leaders of the people in the room, 8 agreed with Wonho’s suggestion to move their troops to the ground, where they could hold a fair fight against the Hundun and their allies.

“Generals.” The Council member turned to talk to the rest of the military in the room. “Prepare your soldiers to touch the sacred land. May the Gods understand our struggle and forgive us for this.”

Meanwhile, Wonho nudged Chani.

“Come with me.”

His friend nodded. They were about to leave the chamber when the Council member’s voice arose in the ambience.

“Mr. Shin.” He said, in his usual bland tone. “I hope you are not thinking about going down with our troops. CH… Hyungwon wouldn’t approve of it.”

“I am the one who suggested it.” Wonho replied, in a heartbeat. “It would be shameless of me not to stand with them in battle.”
“You know nothing of war, son.”

Wonho chuckled.

“Hyungwon said the same thing to me. It’s no wonder you two are so alike in these matters. So let me be clear: I am going down there. I will drain more energy to strengthen the shields around the dome, so they will be safe while… whatever happens.”

With a defeated sigh, the Council member nodded.

The blond quickly grabbed Chani by the wrist and scurried away from the chamber towards the interdimensional garage that Hyungwon’s time machine was being kept on.

“Monbebe, Chani.” Wonho motioned between the A.I. and his friend. “Chani, Monbebe. She’s the boss.”

“Oh.” The lights above their heads flickered in a wave pattern as Wonho already crossed the main wagon. “Flattery. Won’t work but I appreciate the effort.”

“I need your help.” He cut to the chase, making his way through the fourth wagon with Chani trailing behind. “Please.”

“What’s up with the Xichung kid?” She asked instead, which was totally not the point. “Don’t tell me you adopted him.”

“Hello, Ms. Monbebe!” Wonho chuckled at Chani’s euphoric greeting as they crossed the eighth wagon, entering the heart of the machine. “I’ve heard a lot about you. I think you’re the best A.I. in the multiverse!”

Wonho was endeared by the kid’s introduction, but focused on searching for what he came for as soon as Monbebe twinkled the lights above their heads.


“That holographic exoskeleton that I used in Germany. Where is it?”

“It’s broken. Hyungwon took two parts of it to incorporate in the wrinkle destroyer device.”

“Fuck.” The Constant said, under his breath as he began to walk back and forth. “Is there something similar around here?”

“Not really. Hyungwon doesn’t need any kind of armor. He only used one, once.”

Tilting his head with curiosity, Wonho raised a brow.

“When?”

“In this universe. 200 years ago, the Council sent him to Shixeon VIII to free the Bomalians from the tyranny of the Kraites. Hyungwon, all by himself. All they gave him was an armor and the instruction to not come back until he finished his task.”

No wonder his boyfriend hated those people.

“You’re shitting me.” Swiftly escaped Wonho’s mouth.

“It’s real.” Chani confirmed, and the blond turned around to face his friend. “That’s why he’s
known as the Xiezhi. He won over a race with a population of four trillion all by himself. He’s a symbol of justice and bravery.”

“He left this universe right after that.” Monbebe continued. “He also doesn’t talk about it. If you want an armor, try asking those in command. I can’t help you.”

“What about a weapon?” Wonho tried a new approach. “Come on, Monbebe. You can make one for me. Anything that resembles a sword, preferably?”

As expected, he got a negative answer.

“Hyungwon will set my mainframe afire if he finds out about it.”

“So you won’t do it?” He asked, for the last time.

“Of course I will. 10 minutes.”

OUTSKIRTS OF XENXEON

“I can’t believe your plan is based on a Star Wars movie.” Kihyun chided him, crossing his arms over his chest.

Hyungwon shrugged.

“The point is…” The pink-haired peeked at the controls on his left side before continuing, checking that their spaceship was being drawn by the gravitational field of the gigantic space station that orbited around Xenxeon. “Just like the Millennium Falcon, we are going to board the space station, but be much more open about who we are.”

“Hyungwon-ah…” Worried, Kihyun looked down at the small rectangular object on his hand. “I don’t know if I can do it. I’m not an action guy…”

“Just so you know…” Hyungwon started, drawing his hands behind his back. “I once saw a double of yours defeating an entire cartel that resided in an 8-story building with nothing but a pen.”

His eyes went wide and Kihyun opened his mouth to say something, but preferred to hold back.

“I think we are all going to die.” Jooheon spoke in a very disturbed manner, which was expected of him. “I can’t believe I’m going to die. Hyung, this is insanity. We can’t pull this off. We’re just random ass ordinary people, not the protagonists of a Michael Bay movie!”

As his friend babbled, Hyungwon crouched down to tie the laces of the sneakers Jooheon gave him for Christmas, quickly straightening up.

“Remember who you are.” An attempt of solace, but that didn’t go too well. He tried again. “You are a Constant — one of the most powerful human entities alive. Just do as I tell you with confidence. I will prove I’m worthy of your trust.”

Gazing towards the floor and away from it, Jooheon nodded and took a deep breath; Kihyun slowly moved towards the man’s side, holding his hand tight.
With a last look at his friends, Hyungwon stood by the entrance of their spaceship as it hovered under what it seemed to be a military deck. He was confident of his plan succeeding, of course, as someone who had faced more battles than he would’ve liked to — but still, crumbs of fear littered his chest when he looked at the big picture of it all: Changkyun, Wonho back in Buzhou, Shownu and Minhyuk under the influence of the Priestess… so many things far from his control, impossible to be handled all at once.

Gradually, then faster, Hyungwon simply knew he was going to win because he couldn’t afford to lose. Not this time. Not when the people he cared the most in the multiverse were in peril.

So he remembered who he was.

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5TH DIMENSION, CURRENT TIME

“Jump.”

Shownu stared at CL with bafflement as if she had just told them to jump off a cliff, because that was exactly what she did.

They were back to standing by the cliff’s edge, gazing at the purple sky that shined above their heads, showing off its two moons that orbited around each other.

“Fuck, no.” Minhyuk took a couple of steps backwards. “I can’t die in another dimension. I have a boyfriend to go back to.”

The Priestess shook her head.

“You won’t die, silly. That’s how we become one with Consciousness. That’s where the answers to the questions you don’t even know yet are. Now, jump.”

“Minhyuk-ah.” Tenderly, he patted his friend’s shoulder blades. “We’ve come this far. Our duty brought us to this.”

“This feels too real.” Minhyuk retorted, with his remarkable puppy eyes. “What if we die? What if something goes wrong? I’m not so certain anymore…”

“Trust your heart.” CL advised, tilting her head a tiny bit. “Dare to see.”

Before she could be stopped, the Priestess began to walk backwards, on the way to the edge of the cliff and fully opened her arms before throwing herself into the unknown.

Minhyuk screamed out of instinct, bringing a trembling hand to cover his mouth and that’s when it dawned on Shownu that he was the one that needed to make the choice.

Was the irking sensation creeping up from the bottom to the top of every centimeter of his skin a calling or a warning signal? It was impossible to discern in the seconds that followed his tight grip around his friend’s waist, barely noticed by the latter. If none of this was worth it, at least Shownu believed, deep down, that it was a leap driven by hope.

A literal leap.
“I’m sorry.” Shownu told to Minhyuk, lifting the red-haired off of the ground and zipping towards the edge of the cliff.

Shownu wasn’t really sorry, though.

His friend’s strident wail cut through his ears in an echo as the fall knocked the wind out of Shownu’s body. What he didn’t expect, though, was to feel embraced by the air around him like the soft sheets of a dazzling, warm morning — his worries faded away to give place to something that flowed through him over and over again, making his back arch as they dived deeper into a now lilac atmosphere that shone like fireflies smeared across the entire place, tiny points drizzling around everything.

No words written down by humanity could explain how incredibly sure he was that nothing was ever going to be the same again. Shownu had never felt so overwhelmed by the fact he was alive, that he mattered.

“Fun, uh?”

Shownu’s head darted towards the sound of CL’s voice, who now floated beside both of them.

“OH. MY. GOD.” The red-haired squirmed against the nothing, as if to make sure he wasn’t going to keep on falling. “OH MY GOD! DEAD! WHY ARE WE FLOATING? WHY WE—”

“Try straightening up your body.” The Priestess advised, to be just like she was floating around.

Much like moving around in a pool, Shownu’s body moved around easily as soon as he got the hang of it, helping Minhyuk shift to a better position than floating horizontally; his friend was still very much mad at him for what he did, but Shownu was at peace with it.

Despite the panic, Minhyuk somehow managed to adapt to this new environment.

“This is what we call The Connect.” CL announced, twirling around them like a ballerina. “There’s tons of these around here. Elders help younglings to unlock their abilities through these pits.”

“Wait, wait.” Minhyuk gestured in her direction. “Who is ‘we’?”

“Phew.” Clicking her tongue, the Priestess rolled her eyes. “That’s a story for later. Now, time to be who you two are meant to be.”

Shownu could only open his mouth before CL sprinkled something from the palm of her hand directly into his face.

At first, it felt like Shownu was choking — particles of whatever that was went down his throat like merciless thorns breaking through his insides, which, you might understand, is why his hands immediately moved to hold his neck.

It didn’t last long, though. When Shownu finally managed to breathe again, he felt his entire body was in a ruckus that he didn’t know how to put into words. Maybe something could convey an enormous self-awareness that knocked everything that didn’t belong within him out of his body, and only the truth within Shownu remained.

Was that who he truly was? At first, a simple man with the desire to be a part of something important, painfully drawn to help others. Now, Shownu understood everything. About him, about why he was where he was, about Changkyun — he was alive, thank God — about every single thing in the multiverse. His life, before that moment, felt so unreal that he wondered how he didn’t
notice how much of him was missing, and still was, somehow.

“Holy fuck.” Minhyuk sputtered, inhaling sharply. “Everything is in my head and I…”

CL nodded.

“You are so much more than you think.” She said, opening her arms and twirling in the air; her blonde locks took its time in waltzing as she moved to stand between them. “People like us are not bound by the limitations of a physical body. Through this dimension, we can go anywhere, discover anything… see everything. Your gift are not just random visions. You can control it… and I will show you how.”

“What…” The red-haired was still stunned by everything, and Shownu could relate. “What does this have to do with Kyun? You said we could help him here…”

With a swift movement of hands, the Priestess pushed them down to a horizontal position and once again they were facing the lilac sky, which now was adorned by the two moons.

“Up there…” Shownu wasn’t looking at her, but he could tell she was pointing at the two moons. “There are two kinds of bonds between individuals. The soulbinded and the soulmated. Like these moons, they are meant to orbit around each other. Minhyuk, Shownu… you are soulbinded. Once two becomes one and one becomes two, you will find your friend.”

“What do you mean?” Shownu questioned, lifting his head a little to the side. “Two becomes one…”

“Hold hands.” CL demanded, right behind them. Shownu could clearly feel her strong aura. “There will be no limit where one of you begins and the other ends. Once you are at your full power, you will be able to grasp how tangled your souls are, and how they’re so important. Now, lift your other hand towards the sky.”

They did as requested, sharing a puzzled look that certainly had a certain amount of fear in it.

“Get a hold of it. Of the moons. Look deep down into yourself and know it belongs to you.”

Their first try was already successful and Shownu had never felt weirder and more at ease at the same time — it was like every moment before led to the one he lived now, floating in a dark pit while taking control of a couple of moons.

But there was more to it than the surge of power that ran across his body. Shownu felt his soul ache and tightened his hold on Minhyuk’s hand, the only person who could ever understand what he was going through. There was simply too much of everything — of feelings, of a quietness that felt as deafening as the result of the explosion of a bomb, of how naïve he had been that whole time.

He knew that Minhyuk knew exactly the same thing as him. So when the time came, and Shownu felt himself being lifted upwards in the air, he already knew what CL meant by the power that bonded him and Minhyuk together, and how they could help what Changkyun was meant to become.

And not only him.

They were all counting on them.
“You must have really missed me, K’itan.”

Hyungwon was cuffed with osmium shackles that he was sure that had been mad especially for him, a result of information that, somehow, his own people were the ones who spread across the multiverse.

_Suckers_, as Wonho would say.

The Hundun were a 4-eyed, 3-meter humanoid species originated from Bespia, an icy planet that, before it was swallowed by its dying star, was nothing but a gigantic factory that brewed warriors the same way humans cultivated food. Their skin and hair, whiter than snow, wasn’t highlighted by their white armory, but Hyungwon remembered well how the blood they shed was easily splattered over their uniforms like red ink against a clean canvas.

Behind the time traveler, he could feel Jooheon tugging on the back of his blazer, but he barely looked over his shoulder when he pushed his friend away.

“Seems like the rumors around the multiverse are true.” K’itan, the Hundun leader that Hyungwon met before in a battlefield, said in Korean as he calmly walked towards Hyungwon only to grab the latter by the neck and throw him across the deck. Ouch. “The mighty Xiezhi has a weakness.” Blinking his four eyes, he turned to glance at Kihyun and Jooheon, who were rightfully terrified. “Now you’ve got something to lose.”

The pink-haired male took a deep breath before dragging his body up so that he’d be in a sitting position.

“Guess so.” Hyungwon concluded, with playful smirk. “You knew I’d come. What you got for me? Judging by these…” He lifted his arms, highlighting the cuffs around his wrist. “you got a call from my people, huh?”

“It’s astonishing to see weakness in you.”

Tilting his head, Hyungwon laughed.

“If you aren’t going to kill me, let’s talk.”

Leaning forward, K’itan bent his head down a bit.

“About the Deadly One? Whatever he is, he’s probably gone by now.”

“What does that mean?” Kihyun’s voice seemed almost out of place, but the time traveler quickly concluded a multiversal translator was turned on in that space station. “Changkyun is dead? You said—”

“Shut up, Kihyun.” Hyungwon sputtered in a heartbeat, bringing his tied hands to the side to get on his feet. “I want a deal, K’itan. You knew I’d come for him.”

The Hundun didn’t laugh, but if they did, the wheezy sound that came out of K’itan’s mouth was the closest they ever got to it.

“Come with me.”
As rough as Hyungwon expected, the Hundun guards ushered them across the flight deck and inside a large hallway decorated with electronic panels from the bottom to the top, including the floor.

Soon enough, they were thrown into a room that seemed to be a bridge of the space station, populated by a few Hunduns in charge of running that section.

Such space also provided a privileged view from Xenxeon as the station hovered above the planet.

“You know what’s down there, Xiezhi?”

Freeing himself from the hold of a guard, Hyungwon huffed.


With his hands drawn behind his back, K’itan bent his head forward.

“Don’t play games. All you want is down there, but also up here.”

“What do you mean?”

“Down there…” His head gestured towards the planet. “There is what I can roughly assume to be 14 million doubles of your charming friend with a nanocard in their heads ready be summoned to wreak havoc over the planet you want to protect. Can you imagine the damage these little humans could cause by… let’s say, attacking trillions of human refugees? They’re Constants, after all…”

A shiver went down Hyungwon’s spine.

“They would know.” He retorted. “The multiverse would know it was you.”

“Would they? Wouldn’t be hard for those universes in very high positions to begin perceiving humanity as the treat they are. Your kind is nothing but filthy mammals that, for some reason, were given the most precious gift in the multiverse. Meanwhile, the rest of us have to take a seat and be thankful for all of these Constants do. The multiverse needs to be freed from this domain.”

“That just makes you look really bitter, dude.” Jooheon said, with a shrug.

“We didn’t choose to be Constants.” Kihyun sputtered, crossing his arms over his chest.

Before K’itan could give a response, Hyungwon barged in.

“Where is the Changkyun I came for?” He asked. “Still alive?”

“Alive.” K’itan nodded. “He’s the only double up in here with us. He is special, isn’t he? That’s why I chose him to lead the others. Now, tell me about this deal of yours, Xiezhi.”

Looking down and away for a second, the time traveler held his breath.

“Take them.” He told K’itan, gesturing towards Kihyun and Jooheon stood. “Take them and give me my Changkyun.”

“WHAT?” Kihyun shouted, staring wide-eyed at his taller friend.

“You’re turning your back on us?” The disappointment in Jooheon’s voice was clear as day. “Are you for fucking real?”
Hyungwon turned around, facing his friends.

“Your world needs Changkyun.” Hyungwon argued back, swallowing slowly. “There is no one like him. You two are replaceable.”

A completely new expression dawned on Kihyun’s face; something between wrath and disappointment, Hyungwon thought, taken aback by the way that the shorter man marched in his direction with all mighty energy in his body only to push Hyungwon with all the strength the other seemed to have in his body.

The Hundun guards in the room immediately got a hold of Kihyun, but the man fought back and managed to break free. This time, Hyungwon wasn’t left unharmed from the way Kihyun was merciless in smashing the rectangular object Hyungwon gave him against the osmium shackles, blowing them up.

Between his wail of pain and the guards tackling Kihyun on the floor, Hyungwon slowed his perception of time to rapidly calculate how much it would take him to break his other hand free.

As planned.

“DOWN!”

That small explosion had worked better than he had though, although his wrists bleed a little. They had trained in the spaceship to find the fastest and cleanest way to smack the rectangular device against Hyungwon’s handcuffs, which the time traveler concluded could only be done by Kihyun, since Jooheon had proven to be too much of a scaredy-cat to do it when needed.

The energy in his hands burned brighter than ever when Hyungwon used them to tackle the Hunduns at the bridge by simply smacking his hands together; the power of that wave was enough to knock down most of the crew around, but not K’itan and a few guards.

Hyungwon was ready to fight back when K’itan pulled a laser gun and started firing in his direction; at first, he lifted an energy shield in front of him for self-protection as he confidently walked towards the Hundun and sent him to the floor by throwing his shield at K’itan, who was thrown back against the wall of the bridge.

Still on the floor, Kihyun and Jooheon yelled for their lives while Hyungwon took down the rest of the guards with a few energy spheres.

“THIS IS INSANE!” Jooheon screamed at the top of his lungs, in a fetal position on the floor. “WE ARE GOING TO DIE!”

“Come on.” Hyungwon urged, stepping over some inert guards to reach Jooheon and offer him his hand. “We have to find Changkyun.”

“Did you mean it?” A voice behind him whispered, and he turned around to see Kihyun already on his feet. “Are we… replaceable?”

As Wonho would say, Jesus fucking Christ.

“Are you seriously on this right now?” The time traveler rolled his eyes, grabbing the shorter man by the wrist. “We have to be quick. I have a bad feeling about Buzhou.”

“Do you think they made it?” Jooheon questioned, and nothing but doubts crossed Hyungwon’s mind.
On his way to the door, with the two Constants behind him, Hyungwon replied.

“Let’s find out.”

Tapping on the button next to the door, they exited the bridge with necessary caution and ingrained fear that would certainly save their lives. Although Hyungwon’s plan seemed good enough, everything could happen to contrary his plans.

At the sight of B2 shoving a Hundun across the corridor and said being crashing against the opposite wall, Hyungwon smiled at the black androids like a kid after being pampered.

“For how long they bought it?” Kihyun was the one to ask B1, contorting his neck to stare at the female android’s face. “That you weren’t just driver bots?”

“2 minutes and 55 seconds.” B1 replied, with her unending stoic mien. “We cleared the path on our way.”

“Changkyun?” Hyungwon cut to the chase.

“Clean hacking.” B1 assured him, raising her hand to show him the blueprint of the space station with two dots on it, one red and one white. “The red dot is our localization. The white one is where the Constant Im Changkyun is.”

Two floors upside down.

Hyungwon hated upside down floors. It always made him nauseous no matter how many times he had been in places like that.

There was also the issue of reassuring his friends that yes, they were going to “climb to the ceiling” to find their friend, something that the physics of their home world didn’t allow. He quickly reassured that they’d be alright and shoved them upwards, using his energy field to support their bodies before they could find the courage to walk on the walls like the androids were doing, on the opposite side.

Hundun warriors appeared a few times along their way, but were rapidly dealt with by Hyungwon, who was clearly trying so hard not to lose his cool image that it almost made it hard for him to breathe. Time, a beacon of peace to Hyungwon, now felt like an undying itch under his skin, whispering in dead languages that he didn’t have much longer, that he needed to be even faster.

Faster to who, he questioned himself. Changkyun? Shownu and Minhyuk, with the Priestess? Wonho and the trillions of humans in Buzhou? Pressing matters clouded his mind in ways too similar to be picked apart.

A few minutes later, after some rough encounters and excessive overthinking, they arrived at a large room that was being guarded by two Hundun who Hyungwon knocked out pretty fast, using the fingerprint of one of them to unlock the door system.

Nothing but a single white bed stood in the center of the room, with Changkyun wearing a white coverall lying on it.

Kihyun and Jooheon darted towards him as soon as they stepped in.

“Changkyun!” Kihyun called him, bringing his hands to Changkyun’s face, but their youngest showed no response. “Changkyun!”
Jooheon was more practical and checked if their friend was still breathing by bringing his fingers to Changkyun’s nose, and was relieved, looking back at Hyungwon and nodding.

*Thank you, multiverse. Thank you.*

“Move.” Hyungwon nudged Kihyun to stand beside unconscious friend. “He will wake up faster like this.”

With one hand on their maknae’s forehead, the time traveler summoned his inner energy until he felt his eyes burning to take a look at where his friend’s consciousness was, but all he saw was darkness, only a lack of everything that Changkyun was made of.

“I can’t find him.” Hyungwon told them, still trying to look for Changkyun’s presence. “I don’t know what’s happening.”

“His brain is dead?” Kihyun asked.

“No, not like that. It’s weird.”

“We have to get out of here.” Jooheon reminded them, already signaling for them to pick up Changkyun. “He’s alive, that’s what matters.”

“You’re right.” Hyungwon nodded. “I’ll carry him.”

“Nah.” The golden-haired man dismissed him. “Your wrists are wounded, and I’m used to carry him on my back. Cover for us, aight?”

And so he did, looking over his shoulder the entire time till they got back to the flight deck and snuck into one of the Hundun ships, way better than the one they had been on before.

“B1.” Hyungwon called for the android as he watched Jooheon carry Changkyun inside the spaceship, dropping the younger on one of the benches ahead. “Can we do a jump directly to Buzhou?”

“With this spacecraft, yes.”

“Then do it. I have a bad feeling about this.”

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**BUZHOU**

“They still haven’t come back?” Wonho inquired, drying his blond hair with a towel after taking a life-saving shower.

Chani, who sat on the bed of the ridiculously luxurious room Wonho was assigned just because he was a Constant, shook his head.

“Not yet.” The boy said. “I asked around if they had left the room, but a guard told me they were still sleeping when he last checked on them a couple of hours ago.”

Tossing the towel over the mattress, Wonho nodded and grabbed the black jacket that Hyungwon gave all of them when they were still in the time machine.
“What can the Priestess actually do?”

“No one knows, to be honest.” Chani looked up. “But we do know she’s powerful enough to not be restrained by any race in the multiverse.”

“Like a God? A deity?”

Chani chuckled.

“I don’t know, hyung. My people didn’t dabble with religion like humans and other races do.”

“I see.” Gazing down, Wonho let out a worried sigh. “I wish I could do something about it before going down there. Chani, keep an eye on them for me, uh?”

The other frowned.

“But I’m going with you, hyung. The Xiezhí told me to take care of you.”

Considering how they parted ways on bad terms, Wonho wondered if his boyfriend was even concerned about him at all.

“No, Chani. Hyungwon would agree that you shouldn’t be down there. It’s too dangerous, and you don’t strike me as the fighter type.”

Blinking rapidly, the boy’s eyes shut down as he laughed at the blond.

“What?” Wonho asked, with jittering hands placed on his hips.

“Hyung, with all due respect… Do you think I freed the humans from the planet I was on by being a pacifist?”

“I… Uh…”

“I just want you to know I will be alright.” Something in Chani’s voice sounded almost apologetic. “I got… how do you say it in Korean? Your back is mine.”

It was Wonho’s time to laugh.

“I got your back. That’s how we say. You got my back, I got yours.”

A strong knock on the door put their little chat on pause.

When faced with the person on his doorstep, Wonho squinted at such figure.

“Can we talk, Mr. Shin?” With his hands behind his back, the Council man now wore a dark red robe along with an unreadable mien.

“Sure…” Wonho didn’t hide the doubt in his tone, but moved out of the way for the man to get in.

“Hello, sir.” He heard Chani say, closing the door behind him. “I’ll leave you two alone.”

Wonho shook his head.

“You can stay, Chani.”

“Chani?” The elder asked, out of genuine curiosity.
“That’s his name hereafter.” Wonho explained. “How can I help you… what’s your name, by the way?”

The guy, slightly taller than him, looked at Wonho as if the latter had asked a preposterous question and raised a brow.

“You may call me Council Leader as everybody else does. I came to you to talk about your idea of following our soldiers.”

“I’m not changing my mind.”

“I know.” The Council Leader nodded. “I came to give you this.”

On the man’s hand was a thick round object that reminded Wonho of a neck shackle used in the dreadful days when slavery was legal.

Once he was holding the object that was way lighter than he imagined, Wonho questioned its purpose.

“It’s an armor.” The man told him. “Put it around your neck and it will be activated.”

As expected, said armor was relatively similar to the one Hyungwon gave him when they were to Germany, except this time he was dealing with something that he could touch, not a hologram.

It felt like a second skin, from the top of his head to his feet, covering his entire face to the point where he felt suffocated for a few seconds, but suddenly it became natural — as if it had always been there. Once Wonho looked down at his arms, he examined the exquisite pine green armor with utmost astonishment.

“It was CH… Hyungwon’s… it belonged to him. I don’t know if he told you, but he used to—”

“He did.” Wonho cut him off, taking the shackle armor off of his neck. “He told me how you and your people made him feel like shit for something he was never at fault for. He told me that he fought wars for you and your people that scarred him for life. You never thought about how he felt when he heard that you were keeping him close just to make sure he wasn’t a monster? You never thought how lonely it must’ve been to him to swallow his survivor’s guilt and continue to live even though his universe was gone? There wouldn’t be a multiverse anymore without him, and you know it.”

“Indeed.” After a dry sigh, the man stared at Wonho with such exhaustion that the blond could almost grasp it. “I made mistakes with him. He proved himself to the multiverse without my help.”

“Then why don’t you tell him?”

The man’s mouth opened to say something, but nothing came out of it. Instead, it was Chani that filled the silence between them.

“Hyung.” He called, and Wonho passed by the Council Leader to move closer to his friend. Chani quickly turned off the white bracelet he had on his arm. “We must leave. The troops are ready to descend to the sacred land.”
“How much longer?” Kihyun inquired, softly running his fingers through Changkyun’s hair as the latter laid down on one of the cushioned benches of the common area of the ship.

It was Hyungwon’s 16th attempt to obtain any sign of life inside Changkyun’s mind, and he had failed once again. He didn’t know why, but such powerlessness made him feel like he was about to throw up.

“A few more minutes.” The time traveler responded, gaze still fixated on Changkyun’s sleeping face. Suddenly it hit him that his friends were probably way more terrified than he was. “Kihyun. Jooheon. There’s great healers in Buzhou. Whatever is wrong with Changkyun, they—”

Hyungwon crouched down as fast as he could when he caught a glimpse of Changkyun’s eyelids moving quickly as he tried to open his eyes.

“Changkyun.” He called him, while Kihyun tried to push Changkyun’s head off of his lap so the boy could sit up. “Are you okay?”

His friend never replied, instead wrapping his fingers around Hyungwon’s neck with a smirk plastered on his face before shoving the time traveler upwards to crash violently against the ceiling of the ship.

Hyungwon felt the air being sucked out of his lungs for a second before hitting the ground at a speed he didn’t imagine was possible, since Changkyun was never that strong. What did he miss? What was going on?

Face against the cold metal of the spaceship floor, Hyungwon could feel one of his ribs aching while he heard his friends’ screams — making a decision about his priorities was not hard.

“Kyun!” Jooheon shouted at the man while he choked Kihyun to death in the middle of the common area. “Stop it!”

Jooheon tried to move to free his older friend from Changkyun’s grip, but the latter effortlessly launched Jooheon across the room.

“Changkyun, stop now.” With a hand over his ribs, Hyungwon ambled in his direction. “This isn’t —”

As Changkyun turned around, the time traveler noticed how his friend’s eyes were entirely blank, a deep shade of white that gave him goosebumps.

Without a single emotion on his face, he lifted Kihyun off of the ground and choked him harder, to the point where Kihyun couldn’t talk anymore — he was about to pass out, Hyungwon could tell, so he needed to do something.

“Isn’t what? Me? Oh, this is 100% me.”

“Let him go, Changkyun. Or—”

“Or what?” The younger asked, scornfully. “Are you going to fight me? Hurt me?”

Unexpectedly, Changkyun dropped his hand and let go of Kihyun’s neck, letting him fall on the floor coughing, gasping for oxygen and massaging his neck with both hands.
“Whatever they did to you, you gotta fight it.” Hyungwon beseeched, taking quiet steps forward. “You are my friend, I don’t—”

“Bullshit.” He snarled, gaze shifting to something above their heads. “All you care about is the stupid Constant crap. Your perfect world with the 6 Constants. But…”

A PA announcement from the cockpit cut through their discussion.

“We are entering Buzhou’s atmosphere. Please, strap up.”

That moment of distraction caused him to miss the moment that Changkyun yanked one of the pipes above their heads and went towards Hyungwon at full speed. The time traveler managed to dodge the hit at the last second, though. A tiny victory, since the ship was losing pressure as the pipe leaked loudly and they made a rough entry through the planet’s atmosphere.

With the ship diving into the planet, they lost their balance and fell on their backs as gravity dragged them to the bottom of the common area. Doing the best he could, Hyungwon was the one who managed to get a hold of something and grabbed Changkyun before he could fall and collide against Jooheon and Kihyun who were already down there.

As soon as the ship was stable again, the youngest pulled away from Hyungwon and nearly hit the pink-haired in the head with the pipe, who apologized mentally to Changkyun for having to kick him in the stomach.

The boy fell on his back and Hyungwon seized this opportunity to move closer to Kihyun and Jooheon at the back of common area.

“What did they do to him?” Next to him, Jooheon trembled in fear. “Changkyun, we are friends!”

Glancing to his sides, Hyungwon told them what to do.

“Go inside. I can deal with him.”

“NO!” Kihyun yelled as they watched Changkyun rip another pipe off the ceiling and the leak became a lot worse. ‘He’s going to get us killed this way! It doesn’t matter!”

“CHANGKYUN!” Hyungwon yelled, now that the leak was too noisy for the youngest to hear otherwise. “YOU’RE GOING TO CRASH THE SHIP!”

“AM I?” He shouted back, cackling just before smashing one window in the blink of an eye, making the ship enter alarm mode — deep red covering every centimeter of that falling spaceship.

The air almost sucked Changkyun out of the ship, if not for Hyungwon’s quick reaction of building a force field around the man who kept laughing maniacally the entire time.

Losing more pressure each passing second, the aircraft began to twirl through the clouds as Hyungwon’s brain tried to decide how to save everyone without getting killed by his own friend — ultimately deciding what he could do for the moment.

“HYUNGWON!” Kihyun screamed as the ship gained speed.

“GET DOWN!” Hyungwon yelled at his friends who stood behind him as he crouched down, and they instinctively clung to the man’s blazer.

Without giving a chance for his self-doubt to take over, the time traveler concentrated his blueish
energy on one of his hands and shaped it in the form of a string that quickly grabbed Changkyun by
the ankle and hauled the boy close.

A second hadn’t passed before another attempt of harm came from the disturbed mind of his
friend. Hyungwon grabbed Changkyun’s wrist before the piece of window glass he was holding in
his bleeding hand could do any damage.

The spinning never stopped and Hyungwon had two foes to face, so he created one force field
around them with one hand and kept Changkyun pinned to the ground with the other, straddling the
boy’s chest to keep him from escaping. Whatever the Hundun did to him, it was clear that
Changkyun didn’t care about dying.

But Hyungwon was not going to lose him. None of them, not in this life.

The landing was as rough as expected. It shoved the four of them up and forward, causing them to
hit the wall beside the cockpit door. Kihyun, who collided against a sharp part of the sidewall, took
the brunt of the throw.

All Hyungwon could hear was a strong buzzing in his ears and a blaring sound coming from
somewhere inside the spaceship. His weakened mind wanted him to doze off and embrace how
badly his limbs ached, but the situation wasn’t over — far from it — from what he could tell from
the piece of glass shoved into his clavicle.

His groan of pain woke up Kihyun and Jooheon from the shock of the impact, and both jumped to
stand up, horrified at the amused mien of their youngest friend. Without any option, Hyungwon let
go of his hold on him to pull the glass out, giving Changkyun the leverage he needed to throw him
to the side and get up on his own.

Kihyun and Jooheon tried to reach him, but were yanked by the arms and launched through the
broken window to the outside of wherever they landed.

Without hesitance, and regardless of the blood pouring out of him, Hyungwon followed the men to
stop Changkyun from doing something he would regret for the rest of his life.

So he hobbled through the floor littered with tiny chunks of the spaceship, taking a deep breath
before jumping through the window to find his friends a couple of meters away.

“Don’t do it.” Hyungwon implored, trying not to waver.

Over the sea of sand they had landed on, Kihyun and Jooheon crawled backwards, away from
Changkyun who was holding a piece of sharp metal he yanked from the ship.

“Why do you care?” The boy asked, with his back still turned to Hyungwon.

“Because you are my friends.” He replied, grunting as he put pressure on his wound. “You are my
friend, Changkyun.”

“Am I?” Turning around, he pointed the metal bar at him. “I’m just another Changkyun you deal
with. There’s nothing special about me, or us. Stop using this lie.”

“It’s not a lie.” Hyungwon tried again, moving slowly in his direction. “I love you. I was so—”

“LIES! YOU LIE ALL THE TIME! The only thing you care about is yourself, and power. We’re
just pieces of your eternal game of Constants.”
“I love you, Changkyun.” His voice broke, and tears rolled down his cheek. Still, he tried to get closer. “I love you, drop it. Please.”

“Liar. LIAR!”

It was the opportunity he had been waiting for. Now that Changkyun’s attention was fully turned towards him, when his friend jumped forward to strike him, Hyungwon managed to stop by getting a hold of his wrists to do exactly what he wanted — change positions with his youngest friend and become a shield to Kihyun and Jooheon, still on the sand behind him.

“I love you, Changkyun.” He repeated, which only infuriated the other man. “Come back to us.”

“LIAR!” The man yelled, yanking himself from the hold of the time traveler, and Hyungwon stumbled backwards. “I’m the one who’s always alone. None of you care about me. Jooheon has his disgusting need to be with Minhyuk all the time, Kihyun and Shownu never sparing a glance in my direction unless they need something from me… Even you and Wonho. Now that you two are together, you’ll be the same as them. I’m only around to be a joke, to amuse your day…”

“That’s not true.” He insisted. “I love you. We love you. We wouldn’t be the same without you.”

With a howl, Changkyun jumped in his direction with a fury that was terrifying to see on his face. His white eyes didn’t even blink as he tried to strike Hyungwon in the head again, who caught the metal bar mid-air next to his face, where the sharpest edge was.

“You’re nothing but a liar.” Changkyun’s voice dropped, and Hyungwon almost bursted into tears. “A liar who thinks they hide their loneliness well. A liar that shouldn’t exist. A monster.”

“Maybe I am, Kyun.” His voice came out strained as he put effort to lower the metal bar. “But I love you enough to die for you.”

The cold bar made no sound as it was shoved by Hyungwon into his own stomach, splashing blood all over Changkyun’s white coverall. At first, it hurt so much that it actually didn’t hurt at all. It was the kind of pain that made one dive into a stronger numbness as they attempted to understand what was happening to their body.

Hyungwon knew, of course, what was going on. He looked down at his hands still holding the metal bar that opened a hole in his stomach, full of blood — blood everywhere — and huffed a creepy laugh to himself.

Maybe he was meant to die from the beginning, and all that he had done until now was him trying to run away from such fate.

His knees were the first to give out and Hyungwon was left kneeling on the sand, spitting the sour blood that was coming out of his mouth everywhere; the metallic taste in his mouth made him want to throw up, but he didn’t think he had the time for it.

To think that this was the place he was going to die felt like it was a sick joke, so Hyungwon laughed even if it hurt so much that it led him closer to death.

“Hyung?”

It was him, finally.

Looking up at Changkyun, Hyungwon’s blurred vision could still catch how his eyes were back to normal. As expected, the boy seemed horrified by what was going on in front of him.
“I did it.” The time traveler managed to reply in a faint voice, while he felt the weight of his friend’s hands over his shoulders. “It was not your fault. Remember that.”

“Oh my god, Hyungwon…” Kihyun’s eyes were never bigger like that before, and the time traveler wanted to tell him how caring he was, but he was saving up energy.

“Listen to me.” The weak time traveler spoke, his hands still on the metal bar inserted on his stomach. “At least one of the androids must have survived the crash… They will send…” Another cough, full of blood over the golden sand. “A signal. Someone will come… to get you. Leave this place. Go home.”

Strangely, Hyungwon felt some kind of peace spread through his body, one that only people that had close encounters with death would understand. Letting go of the metal bar, the time traveler fell to his side hearing his friends sobbing for something Hyungwon knew he couldn’t dodge much longer.

The boys hovered over him, but he was too dizzy to discern the expressions on their faces. Hyungwon smiled as if he wasn’t dying in one of the places he hated the most, trying to burn the memory of all of them deep into his heart, knowing that they were going to be fine, knowing that he didn’t regret what he did, knowing that the only other way he could’ve solved it would be willingly hurting Changkyun.

Like all the other times he almost died, Hyungwon let himself follow the pace of his body shutting down, but something in the background suddenly became incredibly loud.

The time traveler couldn’t tell if it was real or not, but he hoped that something greater than him guaranteed the wish of a dying man and kept his friends, the only family he ever had, safe.

Chapter End Notes

rip wonnie??? lmao nah he got shit to do!
anyways thanks again for reading this i’d die for you

i’m gonna keep updating this story but idk a deadline so it will be a surprise attack, but it will certainly take a lot less than this chapter
ANYWAYS love yall mwah

End Notes

hello there, my name is jac and this will have weekly updates (hopefully). remember to drink some water and treat yo self.

i’m most active on twitter (@soloisthyungwon), so if say SIKE to me i give you a spoiler. i’m also on tumblr (@cassianandor). or just discover where i live and come fight me
here's a playlist of songs i listen while writing this story, be why not

once again, i have no idea what i am doing
(peace sign emoji)

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