Opulence

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Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Chapter 1

Mrs Jung has never thought the smell of detergent and rich cologne could mix together. But now that she is sitting in a cold hospital room at one in the morning, she realizes how bad it smells. The woman racks perfectly manicured fingers through her short black hair and a sigh resonates over the beeping machines. The man she calls her husband is now a living corpse waiting for his final hours.

She would lie if she says she felt nothing. Love is too strong a word to describe what they used to have. She likes him, she respects his value and she has esteem for his way of being human. But in the Jungs universe, everything is a matter of interest and success. Mr Jung is the best asshole she could have met and he was the best choice out of all her suitors. When she was presented to a bunch of dirty politicians and corrupted men, she told herself that her husband was the little sunshine in that dark world.

They didn’t fight much, they were friends, good friends as much as business partners. And now, at sixty years old, he is nothing more than a lifeless body in a white hospital gown, looking pathetic and tired. It doesn’t lessen the respect she has built over the years and seeing him this way stirred some pity in her. He has been one of the rare person she considered as a family.

I’m on the way.

Her phone screen displays as she sits in a corner of the room, a burning cup of tea between her cold fingers. It makes her smile a little. Jaehyun is the other one who has managed to define the word family to her. She will remember this night. In fact she remembers every little moment of her life when prestige and luxe didn’t matter, when it was only a question of care and sticking together.

For another hour she just stares at the man on the hospital bed. To think that he has been there for months now pulls at her heart strings. He is going to leave behind the empire he has built. In moment like this, nothing matters anymore, nor the stocks, nor the zeroes figuring on one’s bank account, everything one has done and gathered can be compared to a feather blown by the wind when confronted to the only unyielding force in this universe, death.

“-Hanging up now.” She hears as the door clicks to inform of someone’s arrival. Despite being a little dry and cold, the voice can bring some warmth in the room.

The man just has the time to put his phone back in the pocket of his slack pants, glances at the man on the bed and finally notices her in a corner. He barely smiles. No matter how she looks at it, he has never smiled much before. It saddens her to know he does only when he needs a signature on some important papers.
“You’ve been in the office ?” Tiredness is more than obvious in her voice. “When are you going to stop working past midnight, Jaehyun ?”

Said man racks his brown hair with a frustrated sigh and it reminds her of what she has just done an hour ago. Jung Jaehyun always looks serious, whether the moment calls for it or when he chooses which pair of shoes to wear. He has grown taller with muscles in the right places and a face that deserves the media's recognition.

“Have you been in here all night long ?” The twenty seven years old man fires back. If she is going to reprimand him, he might as well do the same. “When are you going to stop spending your nights here ? Just go home, Soobin.”

The name makes her chuckle. She knows they made the right choice when they brought Jaehyun back from a street corner seventeen years ago. The poor boy was shivering under the heavy rain, beaten up to the bones. She needed a family, she needed comfort and just a little bit of safety. Mr Jung needed a heir so he didn’t complain when she asked him to stop the car that day. Even if Jaehyun has grown up with a great lack of empathy, he is here, attending to her miserable life. When he was old and adapted enough, fifteen, they confronted him with the idea of adoption. With a surprising determination and integrity he refused. I don’t want to be your son , he said, take me as an intern.

It still makes her shiver to the bones today. How bad of a life a child must go through to develop such a mature and strict mind at such a young age…

“I don’t know…” Her voice lacks conviction. “It oddly feels like home in here, don’t you agree ?”

“You heard the news.” Soobin detects insecurity and worry in his eyes. Jaehyun doesn’t bother sitting down, he won’t be long. It seems as if he never have the time. Maybe he doesn’t since he is now bearing the weight of thousands of employees on his shoulders.

“I did.” She doesn’t expect her fortress of a heart to tremble for a second. “But you know it won’t change how we see you.”

The young man can’t answer. Things change, he has changed. Fear, a stranger to Jaehyun, is going to be inevitable. How is he supposed to stay calm when his place is threatened. It is not about the empire, about the shares he hold in the company, it is not about the throne he owns in the Jung’s heart. It is the fear of not mattering once again, the fear of being insignificant again, the fear of just
being a mere supporting character again. But he says nothing. Soobin’s happiness is way more important than his unjustified insecurities.

“I know.” He doesn’t. “How are you going to find him ?”

An engine roars in the night sky of Seoul, awakening some stray dogs and light sleepers. Johnny’s motorbike stops in front a shabby little door, stuck between trash cans and yellowed bricks. His passenger gets off in an ungraceful manner, stumbling a little in the dark. Johnny takes off his helmet before helping his friend and he stares for a long moment at the beautiful grey hair and the softness of his face. Taeyong is beautiful even when he reeks of alcohol and slurs his words. Johnny has to hide his burning face in his scarf, afraid Taeyong would make fun of him.

“Thanks for taking me home.” His twenty two years old friend thanks, eyes droopy and smile barely visible due the poor lightning of the street.

“No problem. I don’t see how else you can get home at two in the morning.”

Dressed the way he is, with a very light black shirt and white skinny jeans that leave nothing to the imagination, he wouldn’t have make it alive. Johnny hears himself sigh when he sees the Armani peeking from the back of the shirt. He knows where his friend, obvious crush, has been again. It is probably another gift sent by his customer of the night.

Taeyong is smart, the other knows. He is kind hearted, physically ethereal and a good human being in general but he is unfortunately less blessed when it comes to fate.

“Stop this. My dad can give you a rise you know.” He doesn’t appreciate the mocking laugh Taeyong offers but he blames it on the sleepiness and alcohol.

“You know I can’t.” Of course, he does. Taeyong leaves a soft peck that smells like liquor on the side of his lips and it kills Johnny to know that he does it out of habit and platonic affection. It kills him even more when he knows Taeyong acts blind to his feelings. “Good night, John John.”

“Good night.”
Taeyong disappears behind the door and stumbles through the dark entrance of his little apartment. He is dying to change into more comfy clothes and lay his tired body on his way too thin futon. In fact, the chilly air of the city has him sober up a little and he manages to walk decently to the main room. It is tiny, with a little kitchen, a table, four chairs and a TV, which is still lit when he passes by.

Taehyun is still up, an ashtray in front of him as he stares at the screen in the dark. The young man scrunches at the smell of smoke coming from his older brother and he can only imagine how much he has made it worse with his own odor.

“What’s going on ?” Taeyong takes the sit in front of him and looks towards the animated screen. The late news.

The Jungs finally break the silence concerning the kidnapping incident. On the 18th of October the trial of Go Jusung revealed the names of his victims and it has been proved that most of the children he has kidnapped were all found dead. It appears that among the surviving victims, the Jungs’ long lost child has escaped years ago. Jung Soobin’s lawyer had revealed through a press conference that they are doing what is possible to find him-

Taeyong gets ahold of the remote and presses the power button quite harshly, making Taehyun glare at him. There is a long silence and the younger one tries not to upset him more. With a swift movement, the younger one fishes out bills out of his back pocket, about half of what he has gained tonight and puts it on the table.

“That’s all ?” The cigarette finds itself crushed in the ashtray. “You’ve had more productive nights.”

The hidden message behind that sentence is clear to both of them. Taeyong doesn’t comment on it because he has stopped sleeping with customers a long ago. It is a dark part of his life he doesn’t want to remember. It was that or losing their mother.

“He had another schedule.” Taeyong makes it looks like it is not his fault.

No goodnight is said or even murmured as he makes his way to one of the two bedrooms they have. Taehyun and him are not the best of friends and brother is just a status they tolerate. Taeyong used to think the other was a hero, until capitalism transformed him into a greedy human being. It was in high school when he asked his sibling to quit and forged him a fake ID. From then, Lee Taeyong has seen a lot of older men coming and going in his life, some looking for a fake partner for a charity gala, some avoiding the loneliness of a way too expensive dinner.
The lie lingers behind as Taeyong closes the door softly behind him. His mom is already deep asleep. What he doesn’t tell to Taehyun is the way the man almost took off his shirt in the car, the way he was almost too drunk to fight him, the bruises on his arm and the disgusting feeling clawing at his guts. It took him a great amount of strength to punch the man before running away and calling Johnny. Thank god he has been paid in advance.

His expensive shirt gets thrown in the basket of dirty laundry and he changes in his pajamas. With rushed and precise movements, he brushes his teeth and takes care of his disheveled appearance. Waking up his mother with the degrading smell of alcohol is the last thing he wants. He hides the rest of the bills in a drawer, the woman is going to need some more medicine in the morning.

Taeyong lays next to her in the confined little place they own and draps a protective arm around her shoulders. He has learnt to not feel sad every step of the way. At least, she is not in hospital anymore. Despite the fact that she is doing better now, it is difficult for him to not worry. And since Taehyun makes it look like he doesn’t care, he has made it his responsibility to provide for his mother. Finding another job is most likely impossible. Johnny’s dad has been kind enough to give him a full time job at his restaurant and the escort agency sometimes give him odd hour shifts. His body has proved to have limits more than once.

“**You’re not going to let that happen, are you ?**”

Jaehyun can’t focus on the voice coming from the interphone on his desk. He has a long day ahead and Seulgi’s selfishness and greed makes it heavier on his shoulders. It surprises him that he actually took the call because dealing with Seulgi is one of the things he would rather avoid. The ring of his interphone has been insistent and he couldn’t bear the blinking red button begging him to answer.

“**Answer, Jaehyun. Do you realize how much of a hassle that will be for our shares and places ? What if the kid is dumb and uneducated ? You and I are the heirs here, Jaehyun. We can’t let some long lost stranger or whatever bring this company down.”**

His sigh is loud and clear this time. Being blinded by the red button is now a better option than putting up with his moody CFO. It seems the news have created a storm of insecurity and excitement among the shareholders and the employees. Even the receptionists were gossiping about it. Jaehyun won’t go as far as saying he doesn’t care. It might sounds selfish and cold to say that whatever the outcome, nothing will change for him. He has been trained and educated to take over, and his shares are something he barely worries about.
Honestly, he fears more about the changes it will bring to his family. Jung Jaehyun who has been a street runner, a nobody, a child brought up by luck and opportunity, will have to step back and remember to stay in his lane. It has kept him awake for nights recently. He is just a child programmed to be a replacement, the Jungs real son is somewhere out there and Jaehyun is just sitting in a place that is not his. Even with Soobin’s comfort and promises, he can’t get that out of his head.

“Your shares are not my priority now.” He emphasizes on the first word. “That stranger, as you say, holds the Jungs blood in his vein, Seulgi. You’ll have to put up with the fact that it will always be more important than what your smart brain can bring to this company.”

“If you could hear yourself talking... I am not going to sit still-” The mahogany door in front of him opens heavily, revealing his guest and Jaehyun motions for him to take a seat. “and watch Mrs Jung fuck up a billion dollars company. I am doing this for the image of our respective family Jae-”

When he has decided that he heard enough, the young COO presses the button and a loud beep fills the room. His friend raises a perfectly trimmed eyebrow at him. Jaehyun has always despised the way Ten is sitting. Cross legged in his tight leather pant, chin held high and shoulders never slumped as if he owned the office.

Ten is a very peculiar specimen and it still surprises the young tycoon they managed to keep their friendship going for years. When Jaehyun is the cold and calm winter sea, Ten is the coming raging storm. When Jaehyun is the steady waves, Ten is the seashore rocks provoking him. In other words, when Jaehyun spends his time signing deals and trading from account to account, Ten spends his being extravagant in front of cameras and seducing the youth of South Korea.

“Are we talking about the elephant in the room first or the fact you have no date for tonight ?” The singer asks, fingers interlaced on his knee. “Don’t answer, I’ll decide. What is happening with Soobin ?”

“She has started the research.” Jaehyun closes the file in front of him, not finding the will to focus anymore. “They are now sorting every family that has registered a child who is not theirs biologically.”

“I see they are not wasting time.” Ten knows how much this situation is affecting his friend. But just like him, he respects Soobin and agrees with the fact that she deserves happiness. She needs something that is not glitter, interest and fame. “There’s like million of persons in this country and it’s been -what- twenty years ?”
“They already have leads.” Jaehyun shrugs. He has understood over the years that what the Jungs want, they get. “Male, around twenty, brought up by a family who has lived around Itaewon during the kidnapping. If the child survived he needed a family, I can’t see a two years old baby surviving around that area.”

Needless to say, Ten is impressed. He only nods, noticing how Jaehyun talks about it with a heavy heart.

“What do you think about it?” He only receives a blank look.

“What do I think about it?” Jaehyun shrugs. “Nothing, it’s Soobin’s choice and it doesn’t change a thing for me. I would have done the same, it’s her son.”

It is easy for the other to see through the practiced lie. Commenting on it won’t bring any good, Jaehyun will come around eventually and as they say the more the merrier. For now, something else is occupying his mind and it is the sole reason why he came in here.

“So, do you have a date for the charity party?”

Another blank stare welcomes his question. For all the years he has known Jaehyun, he has always appeared like a cold and indifferent douchebag. Will it sound too cliché if he said Jaehyun is married to his work and has dedicated his life to the power the corporation has granted him? Probably yes, but even Jaehyun’s face is worth of a cliché novel.

“I don’t do parties.” That much is expected.

“Do you have a choice? Take care of your reputation.”

Ten is right, he is always right when it comes to Jaehyun. They are not college kids anymore. Fate has forced them both in a world where image counts and Jaehyun has to play the game he has signed up for.

“Come with me, then.” Jaehyun re-opens the file, assuming the matter is dealt with.
A melodic laugh resonates in the office.

“Again ?” Ten comes down from his high. His agency will have his head on a silver plate if he shows up clinging to his friend’s arm again. “No, I am scheduled to attend with a rising actress, can’t even remember her name.”

Jaehyun honestly thinks the agency is being delusional. Ten has had enough dating scandals for the whole country to guess his sexuality. No model or boobs can cover up for him.

“A friend of mine has suggested an escort service to me and I have to say I visited their website an-”

“No.”

Jaehyun is strict on that matter. He couldn’t deal with the repercussions. Bringing an escort means he will have to invent a story to keep his image clean, he will have to play pretend, he will have to clear it up with the media later and his head is already full of other craps. He can’t even remember the last time he took a day off.

“Well, I think it’s too late to refuse.” A sheepish smile graces Ten’s soft features.

“What have you done ?” In fact, Jaehyun prefers dealing with Seulgi than dealing with his impulsive friend.

Ten doesn’t give him a coherent answer. He just stands up and walks towards the door with all the sass he has inside. To say they are setting him up with an actress, she better be good in her field for it to work. He murmurs about getting a starbuck before recording and speaks loudly only when he reaches the door.

“Your date is scheduled to be at your place at nine tonight, be prepared.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

It seems like a normal routine for Taeyong, the way he combs his hair, the natural blush on his cheeks, the eyeliner, but it is odd for Johnny. He has seen him doing that many times before but it always amazes him how much more beautiful his friend can get. At around eight in the evening, the room smells like expensive cologne and Mrs Lee appears at the door, looking at her son up and down.

“How come you are not dressed yet honey ?” She asks with a proud smile, seeing how beautiful her son is.

“I’m almost done, and we’re out of here.”

Most of the time, Taeyong lies about having late night shift at the restaurant. This time he has told her he will attend a party with Johnny and when she congratulates him on being social, his heart breaks a little. He tells himself it is for the best. Mrs Lee let the boys be and Taeyong tiptoes in front of the closet to reach a black box wrapped with a golden ribbon.

“Another gift, again ?” Johnny doesn’t even know why he bothers asking.

“It was sent by the client this afternoon.” It seems like a normal thing to say now.

Taeyong lets his frail fingers caress the surface and he opens the box with delicate hands. He can never identify the brand, he has no knowledge in this field. As the agency asks him, he only wears what is given to him. Sometimes Taeyong tries to analyze his client before meeting them, he is never given personal information, not even their name before meeting them in person.

The suit is slim, it fits his body perfectly but he is not surprised. His measurements are clear on the website. The velvet black blazer contrast against his white paper skin and the glittery collar of the white shirt screams money. Taeyong feels bad for wearing something worth more than his monthly
rent. He is sure, by far, that this suit is the most expensive one he has ever worn.

“Wow that’s one hell of an outfit.” His friend stands behind him, eyes wide. “I bet he’s like an old man, billions in his pocket with a wife he hates and two kids who has forgotten about him.”

Johnny always has the right words to make him laugh. It relaxes him a little bit. Usually, such a suit means an important event and Taeyong believes he doesn’t belong to that kind of thing. It is just for one night, he tells himself. The young man soothes the fabric one last time and tells Johnny he is ready.

When Taeyong leaves the room, it smells great in the kitchen. Mrs Lee’s back welcomes them as she busies herself making dinner. Taehyun is nowhere to be seen and none of them want to know where he is. Just thinking about him collecting more debts or gambling the money away makes Taeyong sweaty in his expensive suit.

“Wow, Tae.” Mrs Lee cups his cheeks and he almost chokes at how beautiful her eyes are. “Have fun, honey. You’ll have some soup when you come back.”

Of course, he will. He will make place for her delicious and homy cooking. They leave with a kiss on her cheek and step in the cold autumn night of Seoul. The scratching breeze ruffles their body as the motorbike drift from street to street.

By twenty minutes they stop in the suburb part of the city where they have never been. Streets gets larger, emptier and a feeling of safety settles in them. The house they stop in front of is probably the whitest, largest and ostentatious one they have ever seen. It stands like a shining, golden giant in the middle of the town. Taeyong gulps down his nervousness as he takes off his helmet. Who is his client? Certainly not the basic one.

“Damn, you got a big fish there…” Johnny breathes out.

Taeyong feels dizzy and giddy in his shoes. A certain nervousness settles in his guts and he feels like hoping back on the bike and run away. But he can’t escape this and he needs the money so he breathes in. Whoever it will be, it is just an act. He just has to be smiley, kind and well mannered. It will be over before he realizes it.

“Ok, I’ll see you in the morning.” He gets a pat on the back and he hands back his helmet. “Thanks, John John.”
“Anything for you.” His friend answers. Johnny means it but his sincerity gets overshadowed by the modern castle in front of them.

Taeyong walks to the gigantic black and massive gate. He hopes it is not a representation of his client. Taeyong doesn’t expect his rich client to be gentle with him but he could use some warmth sometimes. He presses the interphone and announces himself. To his surprise, the gate clicks and as he pushes it open, he finds himself in a white sterile corridor.

He can’t even tell where the light come from as he walks on the shining marble, between potted plants and paintings. The house feels impersonal, as if he is entering a hotel room. At the end of the hallway, he meets with a vast living room where brown leather spreads on every furniture. The furry carpet looks warmer than is bed and he isn’t sure if he can step on it.

This is a new level of luxe for him. And the dread intensifies when he wonders who the mysterious person is. How should he behave or even talk? Perhaps he isn’t in Korea anymore…

“Good evening.” He jumps in his skin as he turns around.

The woman is quite short and wears a pastel pink dress covered by a white cardigan. Fortunately it is warm in there or she would never survive the chilly night outside in her outfit. Her face is gentle and she is probably the same age as his mother.

“Hello.” The young man greets awkwardly.

“He will meet you in a minute. Please make yourself comfortable.” He has never noticed the glasses and bottle of whisky she is pointing to.

He doesn’t even have the time to answer and she disappears behind another door. Taeyong avoids drinking before the event. He only does when his client gives him the permission. So he sits silently on one of the leathered couch. His fingers caress the comfortable fabric and it impresses him. He can’t even imagine what else is waiting for him.

There is no family photos or anything that can give him a hint about the person he is about to meet. Despite the attempt of covering every inch of floor with carpet, Taeyong feels the house is cold and almost uninhabited. Or maybe the woman in a pink dress does her best to keep it clean.
Light footsteps echoes against the white plaster and marble and with a brusque movement Taeyong stands up and turns around. To say his breath stops and his heart thumps would be insufficient. He has been waiting for an old man, probably a self made billionaire with a big ego, grey hair and overweight. There is none of that. All he sees is a slim and tall body wrapped in a suit almost similar to his, pearly white skin, gelled back hair and a beautiful face. It is the first time Taeyong has been booked by such a young person. It makes him even more nervous. He feels like trash, he feels cheap and not fancy enough, he feels like a second hand H&M next to a brand new Gucci.

“Lee Taeyong, I presume.” The voice is even chillier than the house. There is nothing happy in it, not a hint of joy.

Maybe his presence is unwanted, but if it is the case why is he here?

“Yes. Good evening sir.” He says shyly and almost mechanically as if he is asking for his order.

The man nods and Taeyong freezes. Even the way he moves with such graceful gestures and authority makes the young man shiver.

“Jaehyun is enough.”

Jaehyun is perfectly fine, Taeyong murmurs to himself. The torturing scent of spice and musk invades his personal space when the man stands barely a meter away from him. The almond eyes scan him up and down with a divine judgement and Taeyong secretly prays nothing is out of place.

“It suits you just fine.” Even if the words are distant and practiced, it feels sincere as he is given a nod of acknowledgement.

“Thank you.” That earns him the first little smile of the night.

It is not like Jaehyun to be nervous or have his palms sweaty. When he puts on his best suit, he usually drapes his body in confidence too. He has expected Ten to book a young voluptuous and superficial lady he will forget in the morning. Or even a man with nothing good but his body. Instead
he meets the deepest pair of eyes he has never seen, the softest face he has ever met and the most relaxing voice he has ever heard. Taeyong owns a beauty words can’t explain. Even when he is standing just right there, Jaehyun can’t pinpoint it. His mere existence is just unreal.

Jaehyun will lie if he says it’s easy to look elsewhere. But Taeyong is standing like an art piece in the middle of his living room and even the paintings around can’t compete. He says nothing about it, the man is just another escort and to him this is work. Jaehyun knows what people are into just for money, and it is certainly no different for Taeyong. Still he wants to put him at ease, that is just the vibes the man gives off.

“Relax first.” Jaehyun lets his fingers settle on the other’s shoulder and he sees the angel breathing out his stress.

“Excuse me. I am not used to all of this.” By all of this, he gestures to everything that surrounds him. He realizes how unprofessional he must sounds but it is the least of his worry.

Jaehyun wonders if it’s his first time or not, because the man certainly looks like a seducer. But then he knows Ten would have chosen someone experimented and worth the price. He finds it endearing and it makes him upset. Jaehyun doesn’t do endearing, but he doesn’t do party either so for tonight, the joke’s on him.

They act it as natural when the young tycoon puts his hand on the small of the other’s back and guides them both outside. Taeyong realizes there is so much more he hasn’t seen when they pass by an interior pool covered by glass walls. What kind of person did he just get involved with…

Jaehyun holds the door to his car open for him and Taeyong shrugs it off as courtesy. He sits comfortably inside and they find themselves on the way. Jaehyun is silent for the first minutes and the younger can’t uncrisp his fingers. This is already too much to bear. Even the car smells like musk and sage and he bets it costs more than his lifetime expense.

“How old are you ?” Jaehyun doesn’t sound that much curious or even interested. Probably courtesy again.

“Twenty two.” Taeyong barely whispers but he catches it clearly.

His eyes leave the deserted suburban road for a second. It is fascinating how the city lights blink against the white porcelain skin and Jaehyun curses Ten in his head. Taeyong is the worst choice, the
moment Jaehyun laid eyes on him, he knew the face was going to haunt him for days. Yet, here he is, looking at it like it is a masterpiece. Taeyong may be…

“You’re young.” The sentence is irrelevant to the situation but Jaehyun can’t help himself. He isn’t one to make conversation, but conversation seems to flow effortlessly in the moment.

“I hear that a lot. Too young to be here, right?” It sounds like a blame, against life or fate, Jaehyun can’t say but it sounds sincere and raw. It sounds like regret.

He can clearly hear the unsaid questions running through the younger’s mind. Who is he? What does he do for a living? Maybe Jaehyun will keep those informations secret because Taeyong is here for work and for a night.

“Where are we going?” The escort asks instead.

“Jung corp. charity party.” Jaehyun answers. Maybe he forgets to precise he is the master of said party, maybe he just doesn’t want to.

Something about Taeyong makes him want to be someone else. Something about the greyish soft hair and soft features makes him want to be something else. It makes him mad because they barely met but he wants to lie. In front of such a pure and sincere painting, he wants to lie. He has never been ashamed of the Jungs, never, but there are certain people around whom he would rather stay modest, and Taeyong just became one of them.

He sees Taeyong biting on his lips and a frown on his face. This man has definitely a problem with hiding emotions, and that scares Jaehyun.

“What is it?” Jaehyun asks.

“They are -like- those rich and powerful assholes, right?” That surprises Jaehyun, coming from such a soft voice…

For the first time he lets out a little and amused laugh and the naive escort puts a hand over his mouth before sharing an apologetic look. Jaehyun wouldn’t go as far as saying the people who raised him are assholes. But he agrees that the world they live in is not always black or white. It is a spread of grey stained by ink most of the time and he isn’t proud of it.
“Where does that opinion come from?”

“I’m sorry.” Taeyong finally says when he is relaxed again. “It’s just that… I’m not fond of aristocratic brats ruining lives and putting a bandage over it calling it charity.”

A mask of gentleness hiding a bold mind, Jaehyun fancies it. It has been long he hasn’t heard such an honest opinion. It speaks truth to the child and rebel he has kept hidden inside. They arrive in the crowded city and they both know the ride is getting uncomfortably short.

“Capitalist much, huh?” The sarcasm is obvious in Jaehyun’s voice but it is not meant to offend his guest.

“Capitalism has put me in the passenger seat of your car.” And too mature for his age. “They are lucky I like shrimps and wine.”

Jaehyun doesn’t believe he has been amused this much in his life.

“I am sorry to disappoint you but we’ll only have caviar and champagne.” The little laugh Taeyong offers sends an electric spark running down his spine and Jaehyun decides that maybe this isn’t such a bad decision.

Taeyong feels at ease too, maybe because Jaehyun is young and without filter, just like him. And maybe for the first time in his awful life he is going to enjoy his job.

Needless to say the younger is surprised and shocked when he sees the row of flashing cameras and the red carpet. He reminds himself Jaehyun said charity party and not music awards. The car stops right in front of it all and all eyes turn to them. Taeyong shrinks in his seat, attention is not something he can deal with.

“What should I do, I’ve never been in front of journalists before…” His little voice shrinks at the end.

“Just smile and never -never- leave my side.” The message is clear and Taeyong exercises his breathe one last time.
A man with an unnoticed face and presence opens his door and Taeyong steps out, leaving his confidence in the car. Jaehyun rapidly occupies the empty space beside him. The cameras flash in their direction and Taeyong has to blink a hundred times to avoid blindness. He barely hears his beating heart above all the noises.

Jaehyun notices his discomfort and without a warning he puts his hand on the small of his back again. They take long strides to the entrance and Taeyong has to fight his nervousness to not stumble and crash down face first. How does Jaehyun manage to ignore all of it…

“Don’t worry, just smile, I’ll do the talking.” The taller whispers in his ear, making him all shade of red.

There is no more camera inside. Taeyong is still unsure of where he is, yet. This is probably the biggest event he will ever attend. The scale just seems too big for his little heart and professional skills. He even recognizes some important politicians as they walk towards the most crowded place. Chandeliers are blazing and fancy gowns catches his curious and wide eyes. This is certainly a world he would have never dreamt of.

Jaehyun never takes his hand back except when he shakes some hands on the way. Taeyong has learnt, five minutes in the party, that he is a man of few words. He never goes further than “hello” or “nice seeing you here”. And he never introduces Taeyong. The escort is not blind, he has felt eyes on him and he sees the questioning gaze they receive. But Jaehyun never speaks about him, which he is thankful for. He doesn’t even know how he should introduce himself to the Minister of Economic Affairs. Every smile he tries to make probably comes off as odd grimaces.

By the number of hands Jaehyun has shaken, the amount of acknowledgement they are given, Taeyong easily guesses the man is important. And that makes him genuinely curious about his host identity.

“Jaehyun.” A young lady approaches them.

Her beauty is something Taeyong can be jealous of. She is tall too, curved in the right places and her red dress gives her a glamour only seen in magazines. But the young man doesn’t like the way she scans him. Jaehyun did the same thing, with objectivity. She does it with bitterness and it puts him in a new level of discomfort.

“Seulgi.” His partner greets back.
She grips quiet harshly at her champagne glass, the same Taeyong just received from a waiter.

“So you found a date.” It rolls off her tongue like an insult. Jaehyun notices the way his date shrinks a little and he wonders where the rebel went. “I’ve been waiting for your invitation, actually.”

The hands on Taeyong’s back presses a little harder and he is weirdly comforted.

“You didn’t receive one, did you?” Jaehyun is calm but almost cruel with his words and Taeyong can’t help himself but snort in his glass. The rebel is probably back.

“I see you brought your chivalry with you.” The escort decides he doesn’t like her. Her entire persona looks like all the anger in the world has been put in one little body. “And you are?”

The concerned one lifts his gaze up to his host. It is a routine for him to ask permission for everything. Jaehyun finds it odd and a little bit upsetting but he nods and Taeyong finds the confidence to speak for the first time.

“Lee Taeyong.” People like Seulgi makes his pride crumble, but Jaehyun’s touch acts as a pillar and he is not that scared anymore. “The one with the invitation.”

Speechless. Jaehyun is speechless. His date keeps on surprising him with new sides every minute. The man can’t even decide what he likes the most anymore, the fake timidity, the bold mouth or the wit. Maybe all of them.

Seulgi leaves with a scoff and if Taeyong can associate a word to what he has seen of her, it would be bitterness.

“Congrats on making yourself an enemy.” The younger is not sure if Jaehyun is joking or not. The first option doesn’t sound like the right one, Jaehyun doesn’t look like he jokes around.

“Thanks for helping me making one.” Taeyong raises his glass in a playful manner.
The night goes on without trouble but Taeyong despises the way he sees the Jungs golden emblem on everything, from the towels in the bathrooms to the porcelain plates. How rich can someone be that they need to mark everything as their property? He is not even doubting the fact that most of the corrupted people here are already marked as well but maybe he is judging too fast. He looks up as Jaehyun speaks to someone he doesn’t care about.

What about him? He is so natural in here Taeyong can’t help but think he is one of them. But he makes it seems like he is above it all, as if all the fake flatterings don’t touch him anymore. It is surprising how much conversation he tries to make with the escort, and how little he makes with other guests. Taeyong is probably being delusional but he appreciates how special his treatment is.

After an hour in, Jaehyun restrains himself from driving off the nearest cliff. He never minds boring, actually boring is great to him. But this right here is tiring. If it was up to him, he would have signed a check and sent it to any people in need without having to do this. Unfortunately, he can’t, leaving would make him feel guilty, especially when he finally catches a glance of Ten and Soobin conversing in a corner.

Taeyong doesn’t look tired beside him. The young man does what he is told to in a professional manner that scares Jaehyun. He has been smiling politely for an hour, even when they are alone, speaking about anything. And once again, it reminds Jaehyun that this is his job.

“Follow me.” Taeyong complies as they make their way through the crowd.

Soobin is just as classy as she always is. It is not unusual to see her in a new dress at every social event. The dark green and satin fabric intensifies her position here and the fur she attaches around her shoulder would probably make any vegan faint. Ten is gorgeous too, the actress he is supposed to be with is nowhere to be seen and when Jaehyun notices his smirk, he understood he has been played with. There was never an actress to begin with. He will skin him alive later.

“Taeyong, meet Jung Soobin.” When Jaehyun looks at him, the escort immediately notices the teasing.

It is not cruel or rude, it is challenging. As if daring him to repeat what has been said in the car, as if daring him to change the world with his opinion. But none of them expect the way Soobin stutters on her words, the way she goes silent.
Taeyong doesn’t know what to say when the most powerful woman in the continent stares at him like he is a thousand dollar bill. He mutters a shy hello and they all hear Jaehyun snorts beside him. There goes the rebel again.

Jaehyun is important, that much Taeyong has guessed. But he would have never guessed he knows the Jungs personally. He can see obvious familiarity between them and suddenly he hates Jaehyun a little, just a little.

“T-the scar under your eye…” Soobin says out of the blue, surprising them all.

Jaehyun stares at her, mouthing “What?” but she ignores him. Her eyes were solely focused on the man attached to his arm. Taeyong, a little bit taken aback, brings a hand under his right eye. He feels the little scar there, nobody has ever asked him about it. It makes him upset, if she is judging him because of it, he is out of here.

“How did you get it ?” Soobin’s constant strict face makes it sound like an examination.

“I guess it has always been there…” He finds himself answering unintentionally.

“U-uh Soobin, is everything okay ?” It is Ten who breaks her transe.

The woman shakes her head a little as three concerned eyes are still on her. With a lot of awkwardness, one she has never displayed before, she offers an apologetic and fake laugh that makes Taeyong a little sicker to the guts.

“I’m sorry, forgive me.” She pats the young man on the arm and Jaehyun notices his obvious attempt at avoiding the touch. “You’re a beautiful young man, lucky Jaehyun.”

“Yeah, lucky Jaehyun.” Ten wriggles his eyebrow and Jaehyun reminds himself to shave them off in his sleep.

“How did you meet ?” The woman asks again and Taeyong realizes her obsession with his scar is nothing, this, right here, is the real examination.
Those kind of questions are something Jaehyun has expected. He rarely lies to her, if anything never, but this time the topic is way too delicate. He can’t tell her the other is just an escort, he will never hear the end of it.

“At one of Ten’s concert.” To make his point clear he glares at his friend.

“What a match maker I am.” Taeyong decides he likes Ten. The radio has proved him many times that his songs are shit but the man himself looks approachable and easy going.

“I was talking to my guest, Jaehyun.” Soobin has always been strict with her business and work and Jaehyun is surprised she uses the same tone here. “How old are you, sweetie ?”

Anyone around could feel Taeyong discomfort. Even the hand on his back begins to feel heavy. All the reasons why he hates those people so much are in front of him. The luxe, the prestige, the irrelevant opulence, she embodies it all. It takes him a lot of self control to not run away and makes a fool of himself.

“Twenty two.” There is no distinct respect in the way he answers. There is no esteem he has to give, anyway.

The tension is palpable and Jaehyun expects the younger to faint at any time.

“Actually we came to say goodnight.” He rushes.

Soobin stares for a second. This time it doesn’t work on him, she maybe had too much to drink and he wants to leave, anyway. Most importantly, he wants to get Taeyong out of here. Maybe it has been a mistake, the younger doesn’t belong here. Seeing him among the glitters and spotlight is insulting, Jaehyun decides. Bringing the other here is like drawing high school doodles on a Davinci and that is a criminal move. In this case, Taeyong is the Davinci.

Without waiting for an answer, Taeyong is dragged away to the parking lot. Jaehyun’s grip hurts a little but he let himself being treated this way. This is a routine too, as long as he doesn’t hit him, Taeyong can bear it all. There is an heavy silence when they are back in the car. Jaehyun is upset or embarrassed, he can’t tell, maybe both.

“Did I do something wrong ?” The escort asks.
It pisses Jaehyun off. Taeyong acts like he is doing some after-sale service. The tycoon can’t put his finger on what he is mad about. Taeyong seems so different, so natural, so raw and Jaehyun is just a facade. He feels like he had just stained him and Soobin has been even more insulting.

“No, you didn’t.” He turns on the engine and leaves the cursed place. “Where do you live ?”

“My shift is not over yet.” After-sale service, indeed.

The clock hasn’t even stricken midnight yet. Taeyong would like to be in his bed and sleep the awful night away. But Jaehyun is something he doesn’t want to part from yet. It is the first time he feels sympathy and friendship for a client, even if it is one sided. And since he has been booked until morning, he wants to earn every cents of his pay.

Jaehyun doesn’t have the will to insist. Having Taeyong there is entertaining and consoling at the same time. It is just a job, Jaehyun once again remembers, but he is paying anyway and he for once in his life, he genuinely appreciates the company.

“I’m taking you home then.”

The house still looks amazing when they walk in and Taeyong is finally convinced he wasn’t dreaming. Jaehyun walks ahead while untying his bowtie and throwing it somewhere. As he is instructed to, Taeyong takes a seat on the couch at the exact same spot he has been sitting on some hours ago.

His host looks restless as he walks to a cabinet and takes out two crystal glasses and a bottle of scotch. The night is going to be long. When he is handed a filled glass, Taeyong hesitates. The crystal probably worths so much more than his life and being delicate becomes an obsession. The liquid tastes bitter against his tongue but it is nothing he is not used to.

“Why do you hate the Jungs so much ?” Jaehyun crosses his long legs as he sits barely a meter away. He looks in the distance, avoiding looking at the beautiful face next to him.

“I believe that is my business.” Jaehyun suddenly reminds him of Jung Soobin and her unusual questions.
“I am paying the time I spend with you so I believe I can use it as I please.” The man shrugs and Taeyong sends him a questioning look.

“What? Is this Pretty Woman?” He doesn’t bother hiding the annoyance in his voice.

It scares him when people like Jaehyun care. It scares him when he starts to believe someone actually cares. But the authority again, radiating from the man’s posture, the strong cologne, the piercing eyes makes him give in.

“It might be.” Jaehyun takes a sip and Taeyong wonders how much it would cost him to have a taste of those lips. What an impossible thing to wish for…

“Well, even if I don’t look like it, I was an high schooler once and a happy son.” The escort leans back in the comfy furniture. Jaehyun listens to the almost soothing voice, Taeyong may be the salvation he has been waiting for. “My family was okay, I guess. My dad used to work for Jung construction. I didn’t care about anything before, until we got a call saying he collapsed under a falling brick wall. The Jungs never came to visit, they never paid, not even a letter, to them he was just another number… Another statistic. So here I am, making sure the fridge is always full and the rent is paid because they can’t give him work in heaven.”

It will forever stay a mystery for Jaehyun, how Taeyong manages to tell such a dramatic thing with such grace in his tone. It feels like talking about the weather, as if the voice asks him to not worry. But Jaehyun worries a little and he blames it on the alcohol.

“Sorry for the loss.” Is the only thing he can say. Jaehyun barely feels sorry, he never feels sorry. Pity, sometimes, empathy, merely.

“It is nothing to feel sorry for.” Taeyong looks down in his glass. “I already knew society was fucked up the moment they started to make us pay for water.”

Jaehyun can’t agree more. The other knows how to put his worries in words and that seduces him. To be honest, he has been seduced the moment he saw Taeyong and he is certainly not the first. He isn’t going to deny the attraction, he is not that pathetic, yet. Funny how he still stares, he still can’t get over the beauty, both the face and the mind.

He surprises them both when he slams the glass on the coffee table and reaches out to touch the soft skin he has been longing for. It is just like he imagined when he cups the face gently and wide glassy
eyes stares up at him. Taeyong is something he can’t hesitate about. What a Jung wants, he gets.

Lips meet with the sour taste of a thirty years old scotch which name they can’t even pronounce. None of them pulls back, to be honest they both want this. The younger is reminded he doesn’t sleep with his client anymore but he can make an exception for the other. They nibble at each others lips, just testing first, to check if it is okay. And when Taeyong’s hand gets lost in Jaehyun’s brown locks, they know it is more than fine.

Tongues fight and saliva mixes in a dirty dance. Jaehyun’s hand lowers from the cheeks to the waist and all his self control drains out of his body. Taeyong still tastes like champagne and he doesn’t mind getting drunk from this.

“Do you often fuck your employers?” He whispers against the warm lips when they pull back.

“This is not Pretty Woman.” Is the reply and it is enough to turn him on again.

Jaehyun kisses him again and his hands roam around the thin body as if they know the way. He discards the blazer on the floor, not caring about how much he paid for it. He would gladly pay the double a thousand times if it means he can live this over and over again. When he thinks he is done with the enticing lips, he attacks the delicate expanse of Taeyong’s neck and god it tastes even better.

“Oh gosh, Jaehyun…” The younger pants underneath him.

It is rushed, almost animalistic, the way his shirt gets unbuttoned. Taeyong lets the nudity settle when he is left in nothing but his underwear. He bets his bulge is obvious by now but he couldn’t care less. Jaehyun works magic with his lips, he feels every suction on his neck and it will certainly leave visible bruises in the morning. The cold hands touches everywhere on his chest to his forming abs and he ushers the other to do more.

The rosy buds begs Jaehyun to suck on them and he complies. A beauty like this is rare. Taeyong’s snow like hair adorn his leather couch so well and he feels himself grow in his pants. How to resist to the parted lips, the frail body, the wonderful scent… Jaehyun is a sinner and he is proud of it.

He is eager to feel the other skin to skin, with rapid gestures, he throws his clothes around too. It feels like electricity when their skin touch and none of them can restrain their panting. Jaehyun’s lips travel from the nipple to the belly button. Taeyong’s body is like an altar he wants to decorate with his marks, this can be his religion he doesn’t mind.
“Fuck, Jaehyun, hurry…” It is almost unbelievable to hear those words when ten minutes ago he was talking about his dead father.

The older pulls off the underwear blocking his way and he is welcomed by a throbbing member, ready to be taken. Taeyong moans a little louder as his fragile fingers pushes at the other’s shoulder. Jaehyun wants to make this last. Feathery kisses on his inner thighs arouse Taeyong’s even more.

And when he less expects it, his cock gets covered by a warm mouth. Bliss is not enough to describe his feelings. Jaehyun’s eyes stare up at him as his luscious lips pumps the arousal up and down in a slow and steady pace. It lasts for long and torturous second, Taeyong almost cries when he is released.

“Lick.” Jaehyun orders as he puts three fingers in front of his lips.

Who is he to refuse. Just like what has been done with his dick, he licks the finger, never breaking the gaze. Jaehyun is handsome and just tonight he is his. He coats the fingers sensually, making sure Jaehyun knows how much he wants this.

“Touch me…” He whispers when he decides he is ready.

Wet fingers circle his entrance and Jaehyun smirks at the way he squirms. He loves the way Taeyong’s lips part in a silent moan when a finger is inside, roaming against the wall of his entrance. A finger quickly joins and a third. Taeyong sits up, clinging to the broad shoulders, face hidden in the crook of his employer’s neck.

Jaehyun feels the vibration of his moan against his hot skin and a satisfied grin crosses his features. Taeyong is a moaning mess as their members rub together between their burning bodies.

The fingers are pulled out and Taeyong whine at the loss making Jaehyun chuckle.

“I’m going to fuck the sanity out of you…” Jaehyun murmurs against his cheek, kissing the silk skin.

Taeyong nods frantically, heads still buried in his neck. But it doesn’t last long. His head is thrown back in pleasure and lust when the thickness of Jaehyun’s manwood penetrates him like a stabbing
knife. It is thick and hot, it is like nothing he has ever tasted before.

“Damn damn damn…” Taeyong repeats like a mantra as he waits for the little pain to fade away.

He nods once and Jaehyun slams in once. Taeyong cries and he cups the face, looking dead into the cold eyes, as if to say “look what you’re doing to me.” Taeyong’s bounces on his lap joins his thrust in a lewd dance they both adore. Jaehyun swears this is the most beautiful sigh he has ever seen. And the pumping warmth against his cock just makes it even more majestic.

He is ready to worship this body, without a doubt. He thrust harder, hitting the right spot every time and when Taeyong cries out in pleasure, he can see the universe in his eyes. As odd as it may sound, being inside Taeyong is like finding a safe shelter and he will enjoy every second of it.

Taeyong milks him out of his cum as Jaehyun thrust more before the other empties himself on their torso. Instantly, they both collapse from their high but Jaehyun can’t let go as he gathers the other in his arms. When he is not being an anti capitalist, or a visionary, Taeyong is vulnerable and sensual at the same time. Jaehyun can’t believe how whipped he has gotten in the span of a night.

He doesn’t want to think about it either, what Taeyong does to his heart and mind is not human. It scares him a lot but he stays calm. He picks up the tired but still awake beauty bridal style and takes them both to the other end of the house. He manages to open the door to his room and drops the boy on his king sized bed, he is already half asleep.

Jaehyun lies just beside him, watching the sleeping man with a little bit of regret but a lot of satisfaction. He can’t balance the emotions, it is too much for a heart that has just been awaken…
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Buzz

Jaehyun doesn’t remember his room being so cold in the morning. He has some difficulty chasing away the haze of the night. But when he does, he expects the sight that greets him. There is an empty space next to him. What used to be a warm body is nothing more than the wrinkles of his navy silk sheet. For some odd reasons, it doesn't break his heart, it bruises his ego more.

Buzz

It is barely eight in the morning when he gets dressed and showers for work. Taeyong’s addicting scent fades away down the drain. There is no letter, no number left in his room and he wonders when the younger found the time to run away. Jaehyun is just another client, it seems. There is no rush in his step when he meets his housekeeper in the dining room. Mrs Park doesn’t judge him about the young man who visited and he thanks her interiorly for that.

Buzz

“Good morning, Jaehyun.” As usual her voice is mechanical.

“Mrs Park.” He acknowledges her presence.

None of them are great talker but she is one of the rare human being he can tolerate. She has the odd tendency to do everything without waiting for his orders, which has resulted into a lot of misunderstanding before, but he is used to it by now. So there is no question asked when he sees breakfast ready on the table.

“The young master left around seven this morning, he refused breakfast.” What a mistake, Mrs Park
takes offense in refused meals.

Jaehyun just hums in response, not sure of what to do with the information. Ten has really wrecked his mind, but there is no use being delusional. Taeyong will certainly have another client tonight and Jaehyun is going to be another name on his list. Not like he cares, or maybe he does a little bit.

*Buzz*

Seven unread messages. All from Soobin. Jaehyun sighs in mere annoyance, this is surely about last night. For a moment he thinks about all the lies he can tell. Who is he to fool her, anyway. She can find everything about his last night date in an hour if she puts her mind to it. The line doesn’t even have the time to ring and Jaehyun almost spits out his coffee when a harsh “Jaehyun!” greets him.

“What is it? I’m still hungover from last night.” The scoff is dry on the other side.

“You didn’t drink that much.” There are times she acts like a real mother and even if he denies it, it makes him smile a little. “You have to tell me where you met Taeyong.”

Of course, she knows. It reminds him of college years when he had to lie about his whereabouts when she already knew the truth. He doesn’t expect less from her, and she doesn’t expect him to lie. The only thing Jaehyun can do in exchange of her kindness is to maintain the trust.

“He’s an escort.” He is about to blame Ten, but he is the only one to be blamed.

“I know…” There is hesitation for a moment. Mrs Park leaves the room, it is not like her to eavesdrop. Jaehyun immediately sense the tension and trouble. Her breathing is different when she faces stress, even her tone wavers as if her authority has been drained out of her. “It’s him.”

Uncertainty resonates in his ear. Jaehyun has his doubt but he can’t seem to accept it. Maybe he is wrong, maybe she is talking about something else, but not that. The trembling of his hand against the hot cup of coffee can’t be controlled.

“What do you mean ?” There is no use in asking, Jaehyun is not dumb. Soobin almost chokes on her words and that awakes a bitter feeling in him.
“It's him, Jaehyun... My little boy...”

Unintentionally, a crisp appears on his face and Jaehyun rubs his forehead. The cup is forgotten on the glass table. The young man walks right and left. To be honest, he has expected the kid to be long dead. But here he is, pondering over his mistakes.

“Calm down, you can’t be sure about that.” He is afraid, terrified even. Everyone but him, Jaehyun doesn’t care. It can be anyone but not Taeyong.

“I couldn’t sleep, Jaehyun.” He doesn’t know if it is tears that makes her breathing short, or if it’s the anxiety. But he can imagine her sitting at her desk, having the same expression as him. “I asked someone to check on his identity. He has lived in Itaewon for twenty years, he isn’t registered in any hospital and that scar Jaehyun...”

“Listen to me, Soobin” He undeniably knows how coherent the signs are. This story has been obsessing her for years and Jaehyun doubt she would make a harsh conclusion, but he can’t accept it. “It has been twenty years, you may be mista-”

“No, no. I’ve never forgotten his face.” The conviction in her voice is too strong for him to change her mind. “When I saw him yesterday... Jaehyun I was there when he made that scar and I know its form by heart. I know his face by heart...”

His legs barely hold him when he falls back on a dining chair. No matter how he prays, he can’t doubt her words, she knows better. Despite her chokes, her ragged breathe, he knows how happy she is and happiness is something he can’t deny her, never. But Taeyong... Jaehyun is definitely a sinner, because the person he dreaded the most has been in his bed, is still in his head and will probably be in his life from now on.

“I’ll be there soon.”

“How was last night ?”

Taeyong has purposely avoided the subject since morning, busying himself with orders and gathering dirty dishes but it seems like Johnny thinks otherwise. Unfortunately, there is no customer
Johnny looks comfy in his big blue hoodie, leaning over the counter and Taeyong is standing next to him, hoping someone will walk through the door.

“The usual…” It sounds too insincere and Johnny knows his best friend too well. Something is different this time.

Taeyong has been too spiritless this morning. For the first time in years, he doesn’t smile while working and he looks tired and concerned. Johnny hopes the younger hasn’t been beaten up or abused, that would make him mad. He has waited for a long time for him to quit and this time Johnny won’t take no for an answer.

“Something happened, tell me.”

Attachment is something Taeyong hates, especially in his work. It is rare for him to meet the same client twice, but Jaehyun has been occupying his mind the moment he left him. He is scared. That face, that body, it is all too much for him. The idea that someone like Jaehyun cares for him or even considers him as more than an escort makes his brain numb. Jaehyun should be everything he hates, the waiter is sure he is nothing more than a quick fuck, a face that the tycoon will forget. And it kills him inside.

“I… I was at the Jungs charity party.”

“Oh no…” Johnny knows how much the younger hates that name.

“His name is Jaehyun.” Taeyong won’t cry, he has known worst situation and going through life has taught him how to stay strong and proud. “I… I don’t know, he was kind and young and… And… I slept with him.”

Anyone around could have noticed how Johnny’s face falls, how loud his heart breaks but he stays silent. This is nothing new. But the way Taeyong speaks about his client like he is different makes him mad.

“Forget about him, Tae.” Said man doesn’t look up from the counter and they both know it is too late. “He is one of those assholes who uses innocent guys like you for image, don’t fall for it.”
Johnny speaks the truth, that Taeyong knows. And he is trying to get over it but it has been so long someone showed him some concern, it has been so long someone cared how he feels. And that is the problem, Taeyong knows that life has made him vulnerable enough to fall for the first person who smiles in his direction.

“Don’t worry, I will never see him again.” Even with hair covering his eyes, Johnny sees the remorse in them.

There is nothing he can do to comfort Taeyong, he digs his own grave in a slow and torturous manner. The only thing he can hope for is for that promise to be kept. Whatever the outcome, he will be there to catch his friend if he falls, Johnny will always, and silently, be there, loving him…

The restaurant is emptier than usual and the first hours are filled with random conversations. None of them bring back the subject of Jaehyun anymore. It should be easy to do, Taeyong tells himself. This has been his life for more than five years, now. The restaurant during the day, the riches in the evening. This is how he keeps afloat.

Mrs Seo comes out of the kitchen before noon, his greasy apron still on. Taeyong rarely talks to him but he is a good man. He looks just like Johnny, an older version. The man looks around for a second before his eyes settle on his young employee.

“Taeyong, there is someone for you at the back.”

Who would come for him… Taeyong wipes his hand on his uniform and thanks his boss for calling him. Mrs Lee is probably cleaning the house by now and Johnny is here with him. He passes through the kitchen, and the back door. The backstreet is deserted when he steps out. The air around is still chilly and Taeyong’s breath dissipates into white smoke.

The man is waiting for him, leaning against the restaurant wall, a cigarette between his fingers. Taeyong restrains himself from running back inside at the sight of his brother. Standing up, Taehyun is way taller and muscular. He is contrasting so much next to his skinny sibling, and he likes to use that aspect for his benefit.

Taehyun has piercing eyes, hazy in a threatening manner and he moves like a predator towards the other. They are both aware of why he is there but the younger plays dumb. Taehyun crushes the cigarette on the concrete ground and with a harsh and uncalculated movement he slams the other against the wall, knocking the air out of him.
The hands crushing his neck like it is nothing makes Taeyong squirm. There is nothing he can do, Taehyun will always be stronger and he has proved that many times before. The shock of his back against the bricks bring a single tear down his cheeks but he doesn’t shiver anymore.

“Do you think I don’t know where you’ve been last night?” His voice is menacing and Taeyong begs to be released. “I saw it all over the tabloids, little fucker… Where’s the money?”

It’s a mystery how Taeyong can answer with a hold so tight around his neck.

“I… I left the money on your bed.” Just saying those words have him suffocating for air but there is no trace of pity coming from his brother.

“You didn’t come home last night, I know it’s not even half of it.” The grips tighten and his weak fingers scratch at the other’s wrist. He needs to breathe.

“M-mom… needs… the money.” The hold disappears and he finds himself falling on his knees, trying to fill his lungs with oxygen.

He can barely succeed before a kick comes colliding with his stomach, violently hurting him. A silent cry leaves his lips as he clutches the pain away, doing his best to keep his tears inside. He has always been certain that Taehyun will be the one to kill him, he is just waiting for the day to come. Sometimes, when the abuse is too strong, he just hopes for it to be the moment.

“Like I fucking care.” Taehyun grabs him by the arm and forces him up, smirking at his state. “I have debt to pay so you’re going to put it on my bed before five, you understand…”

“I’m your family, Taehyun…” He doesn’t even know why he is trying. Next thing he knows his spine collides against the cold bricks again.

“Don’t make me laugh.” A slap and another kick. “If you don’t do what I say, I’ll make sure you don’t stand up anymore.”

Taehyun leaves him, walking away in the distance as his eyes blur. He can hear the sirens in the distance, but he knows they won’t come for him so he just sit there, drying himself off his tears. He is not weak, he convinces himself, he is stronger than that… But there are just times when prayers are useless and he has stopped being a believer a long ago.
Jaehyun is perplexed by the way Soobin’s secretary looks at him. It is rare he comes up to this part of the office. She walks ahead, making sure that even the way she moves is perfect, she doesn’t say more than what is necessary in fear of upsetting him. He is perfectly aware of the power he holds over every soul in here. The stainless glasses, the marble floor, the golden emblem at the entrance, everything represents him. They see him in every little details of every furnitures as if he is constantly controlling them and he has never made any effort to reassure them about it. This is how it works anyway…

The regular sound of her high heels against the floor stops when they are in front of Soobin’s office. It used to be Mr Jung’s and just the memory of him makes Jaehyun shiver in respect. The woman bows, gesturing towards the massive mahogany door with shiny handles and Jaehyun dismisses her, tired of the pathetic act she is putting on.

The rhythm of her heels echoes again and Jaehyun makes a note to change the dress code. With a swift motion, he opens the gate to the place that holds the economical fate of this country. There is no need to announce himself, she knows he is there.

It always smells clean and pure in here, when his own office is perfumed according to his mood. It is vast and minimalist, white leather sofas, rosewood tables and unnecessary gigantic book shelves. The woman he is supposed to meet sits at her desk, and he is amazed by the way she can keep focus in such a situation. She is less sophisticated today and it proves her words, she didn’t sleep.

“How are you holding?” She doesn’t need to answer for him to guess. Her husband is left between the hands of unpowerful surgeons, waiting for an inevitable death. Her son is somewhere out there, parading from men to men and the people surrounding her are waiting for her fall. It leaves a bitter-sweet taste on her tongue, or is it the whisky…

Soobin looks up towards her guest and she tries an unconvincing smile. It annoys her how Jaehyun never bothers to sit down but she doesn’t insist anymore, he will take a break from constantly standing up one of those days.

“How good can I be…” Jaehyun serves himself a glass of icy water and stands by the bay window looking over the city. “I have to see him again, I want him back where he belongs.”

The young man scoffs to himself. If there is a place Taeyong belongs to, it is not between the sharks,
that he is certain of.

“You’ll be pleased to know he hates our guts.” The ice cubes clink against the crystal glasses when he takes a sip.

Her protégé has never been soft with his words. But she prefers his honesty to his silences. She pushes her chair back and turns to look at the tall man standing meters away from her, looking at Seoul’s skyline like a king watching over his people. She is proud of what he has become. Never has she regretted her decision of taking him in, nobody else in this world could have brought the Jungs further than where they are, except Jung Jaehyun. But it will never be enough.

She was young when they took Taeyong away, and he is the only thing that she wanted. A son, a little child, innocent and naive, unstained by their avidity, was the only thing that was really hers. Her world crumbled and to know that he is alive, to know that she can look into his eyes again and have him in her arms is the only thing that can make her happy. And there is no obstacle she won’t tackle to have him back.

“He is mine and I need him.” She isn’t aware of how much those words shakes Jaehyun. But the man hides it well. He has never been anyone’s except the Jungs, and now that the rightful owner of that place is back, he realizes he is nothing but a puppet, a profit machine void of emotions and love.

“He is nobody’s Soobin.” Jaehyun sighs. Yes, Taeyong is nobody’s and certainly not his. “He despises us and I don’t think he will come back.”

“Do you know how many sleepless nights I spent feeling guilty.” She stands up and the sound of her footsteps reminds Jaehyun of the secretary. “I can’t bear having him away from me one more day.”

Jaehyun finally notices the clear trace of tears left by her makeup when she is standing in front of him. She is desperate and it shows. Soobin might be his only weakness. He was nothing but a rogue child, fighting to survive before her. And she saved him from the street, she gave him the world.

“I’ll help you, but I want to know something.” He is aware of how unfair he is about to sound, but she is being unfair to him too, now. Jaehyun looks towards the skyline, tip of his finger touching the cold glass as he points to the horizon. “If I was still out there, today, bleeding myself out like a stray
dog… would you still stop for me?”

The trembling of her lips distracts him from the moist tears threatening to fall but his face is still, almost cruel. Jaehyun’s hands are jailed between the cold glass of water and her warm ones, melting the ice away. He wishes she could wrap them around his heart or what is left of it.

“A thousand times yes, Jaehyun.” She sounds sincere but he knows better with a woman like her. “I’ve never regretted you, not even once, you belong here too. You are the best heir we could have asked for.”

Yes, the best heir… No matter how much he wants it to be otherwise, he can’t deny the circumstances were in his favor seventeen years ago. He knows that if Taeyong had been here from the beginning, he would be nobody but another face in the crowd. Jaehyun isn’t asking for parents, that he never had, he is not asking for love or recognition. Belonging somewhere is the only thing he wants. Being a Jung is probably the best option for him in this life, but something in him keeps on awakening doubts.

“I’ll make sure he never does what he did last night again.” He means it but deep inside he is not sure who is he doing it for, Soobin or himself.

The sun is starting to set when Taeyong runs home after work. After Taehyun’s visit, he has managed to keep his head up so his best friend can’t notice the pain. Pity or compassion are not what he is waiting for, far from that. He would have loved the care and the help, but most of all he needs the money and taking a day off is not an option.

The house is unusually silent. The orange glow of the evening sun filters through the kitchen’s window to the entrance. Taeyong feels the fear settling in when he sees his mother’s shoes at the door but no sign of life inside. He should spot her graceful shadow adorning the kitchen floor, or hear her delicate singing voice. But the silence is louder.

With careful step, as if he is scared of breaking the absence of sound, he makes his way to the room. His left hand clutches at his still hurting chest while the other one pushes the door open. He doesn’t need it to be ajar to see the weak body suffocating on the floor. Without thinking twice, with fear clawing at his gut, Taeyong rushes to his mother as if his own pain has faded.

“Mom! Breathe!” Crouching down, he cups her burning cheeks and tries to clear her face of the
“Tae…” A loud cry cuts her short and she feels her chest tightening.

This isn’t the first time but it has never been this bad. Taeyong’s head feels numb and panic makes his body tremble. He probably looks like a fool not knowing where to touch to chase the pain away.

“Focus! Stay with me!” He fishes his phone out of his back pocket. Even the numbers don’t seem to cooperate as he tries to call for help. “Fuck… Fuck…”

Breathing seems like a monstrous task to her and he feels guilty. He murmurs to her ear, asking her to stay awake as he composes the number he is most familiar with. The beeps on the other line lasts for hours to him and probably years to her.

“Please… Please…” He prays, nothing else matters than getting her to the emergency right now.

It finally stops and a woman answers, but her greetings loses against Taeyong’s pleas of help…

Johnny thought his friend got home safe, but instead he sees him sat in the waiting room of the hospital, head hanging low. The young man runs to his friend, feeling anxious. When he sees Taeyong like this, beautiful despite the tears and tired eyes, he thinks that maybe he is the angel dying people see before passing away. His place is definitely not in a hospital, but he looks ethereal with his greyish strands under the sterile lights.

“Tae, what happened ?” He struggles to catch his breathing when the other looks up at him.

The tired look makes it so clear how fed up Taeyong is with life. Johnny takes the seat by his side and rubs soothing circles on his back. It doesn’t help, that they both know, but at least it offers compassion.

“The aneurism got worse.” After so many years going through the same thing, Johnny is not surprised when it is calmly said. “She is alright, they got her a room.”
The information is relieving but it carries a despair only hopeless people sitting in hospitals know. Johnny knows what is going on in his little head, the bills, the medicines, the unfairness… The more you are good, the more life treats you badly.

“Hey…” Taeyong is thankful when the other takes him a warm hug and he almost forgets about the beeping machines, the doctors running around and the painful chemical smell of the corridor. “Let me take you home first, we’ll think about all of that tomorrow.”

The twenty two years old likes how Johnny always says “we” when it comes to him. But he knows he is alone in this… He doesn’t want to leave, knowing his mother is here, feeling alone and sick. But Johnny forces him up, ignoring the stares they get as they walk slowly towards the door.

The older has been here before, and he is not leaving today. He hugs his friend tighter when they meet with the cold. He helps Taeyong puts on his helmet and make sure he is strong enough to not fall. It takes them less than ten minutes to be at the Seos. Taeyong doesn’t say a word when they get to his room. He only nods when Johnny lends him clothes and tells him to shower.

It is when they are lying side by side in bed that Taeyong wraps an arm around him and buries his face in the broad chest. Johnny can’t do anything but let him cry his heart out. The tears stain his shirt but it feels as if they burn through his skin to wet his heart. He wants to be strong for both of them, and maybe one day Taeyong will see how much he is loved.

“Let it out…”

“I-I… don’t even know how I’m supposed to pay the fees.” The arm around him disappear when Taeyong tries to wipe his tears away. “I’m so fucked up, Johnny.”

“We’ll find something, don’t worry.” Words means nothing to Taeyong by now. He has heard the same things so much, he has repeated the same things to himself on sleepless nights… “Please, just sleep first.”

It takes an hour for the sobs to dissipate into little snores. Johnny sighs in relief when he knows the man is sleeping in his arms, the only place he deems safe for him. He can’t see the face he loves the most in the darkness of the room but he prays to see a smile on it soon. He sometimes feels hypocritical, he reassures so much with nothing to give.
Johnny makes sure the breathing is steady before he gently kisses the top of his friend’s head, hoping it is enough to convey his feelings in silence.

“I’ll keep you safe…” he murmurs half heartedly when the three words he truly wants to say gets stuck in his throat.

The next day seems similar to the one before. The boys are busying themselves serving orders and washing dishes. The restaurant is quiet but Taeyong’s worries are loud enough for everyone to notice. He doesn’t stop cleaning and doing imaginary tasks when Mrs Seo tells him to take a break. The man is working himself to exhaustion before noon and they give up on stopping him.

Taeyong can almost see his reflection in the wooden table he is wiping but his mind is elsewhere and his hands can’t seem to stop. Working is the only thing that keeps him from breaking down in a corner right now. He left a voice message to his brother in the morning but no answer. There is no family members he can turn to and Johnny has already done so much for him he feels bad.

When he is satisfied with the table, he moves to another one with the same mindset. If only he could die of exhaustion, but he can’t. Mrs Lee needs him, he needs the salvation tiredness gives. Taeyong only stops when the bell above the door signals the arrival of a customer. The young man puts the cloth back in the pocket of his apron and rubs the lassitude away from his face.

He travels between the tables to the front door and bows mechanically to the man. Taeyong sees fancy shoes, long legs covered by slack pants and once he stands up properly, he sees the face he has tried to forget for the past days. The man still looks the same, if not more beautiful. Today his hair are gelled back and his attire screams professional. Maybe he is too overdressed for such a small place but the waiter only sees the almond eyes and sharp gaze directed towards him.

Johnny rushes to his side, as impressed, when he sees his friend can’t talk.

“Welcome, sir.” He bows a little too. “Follow me, please.”

“I am not here for that.” The baritone voice still makes Taeyong shiver and memories of that night come back haunting him.

Johnny is surprised by the rude tone and he is about to answer but what Taeyong says next has him speechless.
“Jaehyun…”

“What?” Johnny officially hates the man. Jealousy and anger spread in his body and if not for his parent’s reputation he would have thrown him out. “Sir, Taeyong is off duty.”

“I am not here for that either.” He understands it is not his place to talk back when Jaehyun throws him a condescending look. “I am here to talk to Taeyong.”

His gaze comes back on the man he has came to see. Still the same gorgeous face, the same sensual body… If Jaehyun didn’t feel remorse for fucking Sonin’s son, he would have taken the man right here right now against a table. But he likes to believe he is a decent man and Taeyong deserves better than a quick fuck.

Taeyong’s palms get sweaty because Jaehyun still has the same effect on him. He stops Johnny from saying anything else.

“We can talk outside.” The young man invites, not even sure of what they are supposed to talk about.

He stands awkwardly in front of Jaehyun and fortunately for him, the restaurant is not in the middle of a busy street. Jaehyun looks at ease, as if any place in the world is his to own. It is the first time one of Taeyong’s client comes to find him personally. He hopes it is not for a refund because he can’t afford that now.

“It is rude to leave without notice.” The only rude thing Taeyong notices is the way the man is staring him down.

“I owe you nothing.” He shrugs and Jaehyun scoffs.

Taeyong notices the deep dimples. Have they always been there before? He realizes it is the first time Jaehyun smiles at him under broad daylight, where he can see him clearly. As for Jaehyun, he knows Taeyong is right. To the young man he is one of those inconsiderate magnates he entertains for money. But Jaehyun is none of that. He knows he did something to the young man, and he himself is a victim of the flawless escort.
“That’s right.” He admits. “I am here for business.”

Of course, Taeyong tells himself, Jaehyun is a businessman and not his equal.

“Quit being an escort and work for me.”
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

“Quit being an escort and work for me.”

Taeyong can’t tell if it’s the sudden breeze that made him freeze or what he just heard. The man in front of him doesn’t look like he is joking, instead seriousness radiates through his sharp gaze and Taeyong realizes that he hates him a little bit more. There’s a thin line between hate and attraction and he might stumble on it. He despises the way Jaehyun always talk with a hand in his pocket, he despises how he doesn’t bother to hide the expensive watch on his wrist, the way he speaks with so much confidence and self-esteem… But all of that is what creates the attraction too.

“I don’t believe you’re in your right mind.” Needless to say, nobody has ever talked to the older this way and it excites him.

“I’ll pay you double.”

“Thanks for the offer but no.” Taeyong has his pride, which is ironic when you work as an escort.

Jaehyun is not good, and Taeyong knows that the little spark he feels whenever he looks at the man is a sign for him to get away. He has already sold his soul and dignity by entertaining people like Jaehyun, he is not going to do it a second time by literally being a puppet to the world he hates so much.

The man turns around, ready to put his apron back on and wipes some more tables but a hand comes meeting his wrist. The other doesn’t look like he is ready to give up and Taeyong either.

“Don’t tell me you prefer being a slut and getting your ass fucked by-”

A loud slap resonates in the almost empty street, the audacious sound of a palm meeting soft flesh.
Right here, right now, with Jaehyun heads hanging low and the shocked look on his face, there is no social rank, no hierarchy, just a man defending his pride. More than what he said, Taeyong hates the tone he said it with as if it was the truth…

With roughness, the white haired man slips his wrist away from the hold. He guesses Jaehyun would never know how it is like to be him, how it is like to crawl at society’s feet to survive. But he doesn’t blame him because he has made his decision, Jaehyun is an asshole, and to make it worse, an asshole with money.

“I am going to act like you’ve never said that.” He spits with the conviction that the man will never appear before him again. “You showing up in front of me is insulting, don’t ever do that again.”

A sigh ripples through the speakers and comes crashing against the red foam walls of the studio. Another failure, another voice crack and some very exhausted workers look towards the man in the recording booth. Ten makes an outraged sound with his throat and throws his headphones against one of the hanger. It lands perfectly without breaking and a feeling of relief washes over the crew, they are not going to buy new ones again.

The singer turns towards his producer, pointing to his throat and making gestures to say that he can’t continue. In years of career, he has never met someone so hard to work with and tells himself he is doing this for his lovely wife and dogs or else the so called idol would have already been found dead in a ditch.

“Ok, we’re taking another five minutes break… Again.” He announces through an interphone. Instead of receiving a thankful glance he gets a look telling him he should have said that a long ago.

Ten turns to the sheets in front of him, reading the lyrics again in his head and thinks about how stupid they sound. He has yet to make a comeback, medias are waiting for him, hundreds of no-life girls are waiting for him and here he is rethinking his life choices. Twenty five years old life has been paved, great college, great degree, great family, and he was the one who threw it all away to end up here. But those days, all he feels is a void, no inspiration, no will to work, and slump might be too little a word to describe his situation.

Ten hunches to get his water bottle and a gracious smile appears on his face when he stands back up and sees his salvation behind the glass wall of the studio. Jaehyun raises a hand without waving it to greet him and Ten answers back with the same gesture. He presses the button that allows him to talk to other side.
“Forget about the five minutes break, I’m out to have lunch.” A collective groan follows his announcement but he doesn’t care. Ten makes the rules as he goes.

With new found delight he leaves the secluded and tiny booth and waves a goodbye at everyone. Nobody answers back.

“You’re not dating someone behind my back, are you ?” His manager says before he can reach the door.

The singer is convinced that Taeil is going to die younger than expected if he doesn’t stop stressing out so much. With his manager, there is no freedom, he is always there, watching his every move, and lately his love life seems to be a great concern for the thirty years old man.

“It’s just Jaehyun.” Ten shrugs, hand already on the doorknob.

“What ? You’re dating Jaehyun behind my back ?” Note to himself, keep the tycoon away from Ten.

“Don’t be silly.” The other shakes his head. Everyone knows how their friendship is and it isn’t going to change, never. Ten likes his men gentle and clingy. “The man is as lovely as a tasteless cold cup of coffee on a winter day.”

“You better not lie, you know your career—”

“Can’t be stained by useless dating scandals again or I’m going to lose my fans, thank you.”

“How is your album going ?” Jaehyun asks as he cuts his food in little pieces.

Ten rolls his eyes, the man always pretends like he cares but anyone can see everything he says is always out of courtesy. They are sitting at their usual table in their usual restaurant and none of them mind the fact that some cameras are flashing outside. The reporters are almost discrete, hidden behind the black glass of their cars but by now the two men are professionals in spotting them. At some
point they even made it a game to guess whom are they here for. Most the time, the idol wins.

“Like shit.” Ten says nonchalantly. “Taeil thinks I’m dating you.”

Jaehyun stops what he is doing to give his friend a cold glare. It doesn’t bother him that much, he is not into gossip and thinking he would even lay a finger on the other is a punch to his pride.

“What’s with the look ?” He resumes eating as his friend makes an offended face. “I am quite good looking you know. Plus you don’t even know the amount of fans that ship us, I’ve read some things on the internet and I can tell you some nasty things are going on there. Anyway, why am I honored to see you ?”

The older won’t even bother asking what a ship is. And he doesn’t know either how to start what he is about to say. Ten is probably the only person on earth he can talk to, and Jaehyun isn’t the biggest talker. Since college years they have shared too many secrets to understand that the other is the only safe shelter they can rely on. His past, his insecurities, his weakness, Ten knows all of it, but speaking about Taeyong is something that still worries him.

“Oh no, don’t tell me it’s about that gorgeous escort I booked for you.” Obviously he would guess.

“He is Soobin’s son.” Jaehyun tries to not feel disgusted at the way he spits out his drink and chokes.

That is as direct as his friend can be and Ten looks around for a second, hoping that there is no recorder hidden under the table or in the flower pot next to them. Who would have known it is possible, certainly not him. It’s terrifying how cruel fate can be. The singer wipes away the remain of his lemonade from his mouth and processes what has just been said. He is tempted to doubt it, but the Jungs never leave place for mistakes.

“That’s great, we found him.” Nothing positive can be added to the situation, Ten knows but he tries anyway.

Soobin’s son is an escort who has probably been paid by half of her business partners, considering the amount of positive feedbacks he has on the agency’s website. To top that, Jaehyun has slept with him. Ten might get a stroke if he hears something worse than that.

“He’s father died under the supervision of our construction branch.” A stroke it is.
“Are we filming a low budget drama here?” Jaehyun makes no comment and keeps on his emotionless expression. “Does he know who you are?”

There is too many things on the line. The daily newspaper only concern is to find out who is going to hold the shares of the company after Mr Jung’s death, and another name on the list is not what they need. Who knows, maybe Jaehyun’s sanity is on the line too.

“We have to keep it on the low.”

“And what’s the plan?” The singer can’t find any rational plan to make things alright. The Jungs are not the most rational persons he knows, and this story worries him more than his inexistent motivation to work.

“He refused to quit his job.” Jaehyun informs and Ten sees the clear frown on his face.

This is more than what he wants to show. The younger leans back in his chair, perplexed. Jaehyun makes it look like it is all about Soobin but he knows better. His distant friend who usually keeps to himself is actually worrying about someone else, and that may be the start of a revolution.

“And that’s all?” Jaehyun raises an eyebrow. “I mean, you can even have the escort agency closed if you want to.”

The apartment is empty again when Taeyong gets home from work. Frustration and fatigue is etched on his face, all caused by an uninvited man wrecking his mind. The man discharges his shoes at the door and makes his way towards the shower. His dirty clothes stay on the floor as he steps under the water. Taeyong has given up on hot water a long ago, call him frugal or tight, he would rather say he is selfless.

The long dullness of the day can’t seem to leave his muscles even if he tries to scrub it away. He rethinks about the slap and regret his harshness somehow. But just the thought of being disrespected makes him sad and tortures his mind. He has never thought that Jaehyun saw him like that, just a slut. To be honest, most of the men he met probably thought the same thing. What a fool he has been to believe that Jaehyun is different. What difference is there? All of them are vain and arrogant, thinking that people like Taeyong are just dirt under their shoes.
It’s barely six when the young man is dressed. Towel in his hand, drying his wet sticking hair, he stumbles a little to the kitchen. What did he expect, even a cup of noodle seems like a luxe now. He slams every cupboard open and close and realizes they only have rice and some kimchi left, what a relief his mom gets to have the hospital food. Taeyong lets the towel fall on a stool and pours some rice for himself. He has stopped minding collectively for Taehyun by now, he is probably out there living his best life…

Lately Johnny has been nagging him about his weight a lot. He knows he will probably be as light as a feather by the end of the year and to prevent it, his friend forces him to take some tupperwares home. Taeyong only takes them when he has a mother to feed, but now his pride is too strong. Guess they are right, pride doesn’t put food in your plate. But it is the only thing that helps him keeping his chin up. After a warm bowl of rice and some broth, the young man leans back in his chair, head thrown back in a graceful but tired manner.

He closes his eyes, for an instant, listening to the silence of his home… High school and carelessness seems so far now, how did he get here? Opening his eyes, he notices the upside down image of the bedroom door open. He squints his eyes to get a better view between the gap and anxiety comes running in when the sight of his open drawer reaches his brain. He almost falls face first when he violently stands up from the chair and runs like a madman to the drawer.

Unfair things always happen to good people. He crouches down in front of their worn out wooden drawer and nothing. Every bill he has worked for, every cents, there is nothing left of it. With a frustrated sigh, Taeyong slams it closed and slides down against the wall next to it, teary eyes hid in his palms.

“Fuck…” He knew Taehyun would do that one day, but not during such a crisis.

Taeyong wants to scream, curse at him, skin him alive until there is nothing left of him. He tries to be kind, to be good, but there are times when he just has enough of it all and it fires up the desperate monster in him. The white haired man fishes out his phone, aggressively wiping away his tears with the sleeves of his shirt. Stay calm, don’t panic, you’ll get through it, he repeats over and over again in his head.

The familiar interface of his agency’s website forms underneath his thumb. With a ragged breathing he types in his identification, praying for a client tonight. How funny he prays for something he hates with all his being. Life has taught him he can’t always get what he wants.

*Error. User not found.*
With a perplexed look and trace of tears drying on his cheek, he tries again, same result. The black on white message rings against his skull and Taeyong has to restrain himself from throwing the device across the room. He has never believed in God and if he exists, he is certainly punishing him for the blasphemy.

He dials a hundred times, losing hope at every number and all he hears is the answering machine, telling him to fuck off in a polite manner. Life had never bothered to be polite with him so why now… Maybe he has been too rude to one customer, or was his acting not good enough, was his ass not good enough… cause after all that is all he is reduced to, a worthless slut falling in a never ending ditch.

“I’ll pay you double.” The distant voice in his mind calls, tempting him in the most decadent way.

He will regret this, that he is perfectly aware but the cupboards are empty and the hospital bills are accumulating in a corner of his miserable existence. His brother is a prick and there is nothing he can do to change that, but a door is opening in front of him, if he hasn’t closed it with his unnecessary dignity yet…

Taeyong stands up on his feet, getting a little dizzy, an empty stomach is hard to satisfy with the so called dinner he just had. It seems that his strength is not in his favor either. There is no time to cry anymore, tears are precious and he has lost enough. The young man pulls on a warm hoodie and a pair of fit jeans he is confident in. He dries his hair to make them fluffy and soft and dries his big eyes with charcoal and beauty.

The bus ride to the hospital is long and painful. Why is he always out, looking for troubles when the street are emptying as fast as his heart… his steps are confident in a fake way that fools the crowd but his hands are cold and trembling.

“Taeyong, you are late tonight.” The receptionist says when he is pretending a smile in front of her.

“I am sorry, can I see her ?”

She replies with a nod and without waiting for further information he takes the white sterile path he has seen so much those last days. The plastic bag in his hand rustles with every step he takes, he has used the last dollars he had on some convenience store food but this is all he can afford. Mrs Lee deserves better but better is a word he hasn’t heard for a long time.
The room is silent, she shares it with other patient and Taeyong feels sorry when his careful steps wake some of them up. Her bed is hidden behind a curtain at the far end and Taeyong pulls it slowly, revealing her warm welcoming smile. People often say they look nothing alike but they share the same warmth. She has taught him how to smile, how to take care of loved ones yet she has disappointed him when she fell sick, incapable of feeding her family.

“Honey ? Why are you here ?” Her son pulls a chair next to the bed and opens the plastic bag.

“Am I not allowed to see my mom ?” There is delight in his voice and it overshadows his worries. “Here, I brought you some food.”

She thanks him with a look as bright as the moon outside and interiorly, he apologizes for selling his pride and soul. With care and slow movement, he unwraps a bag of kimbap for her to eat and pours her some cold red tea.

“I wish you stop worrying, honey.” She says the same words she kept on saying since she got in here. “You should be studying like kids your age, I’m sorry…”

“Stop saying nonsense.” He argues with a little laugh. “I’m fine, you just worry about getting better.”

She pats his thin hands as they curl in her blanket. He is beautiful inside and out, but she knows he is broken. She wishes she could fix him, give him back the youth he has lost but here she is, stuck in a cold room with medicines to help her survive.

“What if I just don’t so you can stop suffering once I’m gone ?” Her face falls in an unpleasant frown.

A bullet has just been fired to his heart and Taeyong sighs. At least she gives a sense to his life, a reason to keep on, he might as well just go too if she does…

“Don’t ever say that again.” He scolds playfully but meaningfully.

Of course this is not what he wants. He would lie if he said that he is okay, he is not. He wishes his mother was a healthy one, he wishes his dad was still alive, he wishes they were rich as fuck so they
could laugh at people’s face with shoulders held high, but he is here and he must live with it.

They talk for another hour and he never mentions the bills, Taehyun or his secret job he has just been fired from. He just listens to her rambling about how bad the hospital food is, how happy she is to hear the birds in the morning, how much she is proud of him…

“I’m so happy you made your way in my life…”

Taeyong smiles, and gives her a kiss on her forehead. He is happy she is his mother, he wouldn’t have it any other way… Even if years had made her weaker and wrinkles has stained her beautiful face, she is still the best human being on this loveless land they call Earth.

“Ok, go home now, rest.” She murmurs, sleep taking over.

“Yeah, will do…” he replies, but home is not his destination.

Cold and rough. The pavement is cold and rough under his shivering body. The ten years old curls up against a wall, letting the rain drap him in a tender blanket of agony. The wind is biting hard on his bruised skin as he tries to get some sleep. This is better than the orphanage, better than those women in blue blouses belittling him every occasion they get. This is better than the other kids stare, than the shame of being hurt and beaten.

The child has been running through the city for months now, hoping to find a warm place to sleep in every night. The warm air vent he usually sleeps on is not an option today. The adults from the pharmacy across from it didn’t have enough compassion for the kid he is, chasing him away with insults and disgrace. He is hungry, worn out, broken, but he has a vision of the word that keeps him alive. He is smart, smart enough to scare the orphanage teachers, one of the reason why he ended up here. An intelligent mind and a lack of care have turned him into a misanthrope, too early for a child.

He will make it one day, he knows. The world and its injustice is going to kneel before him, he will find a place where he belongs and then he won’t need to run away anymore. The little form under the rain let that thought lull him to sleep. He never knows what he is going to do the next day, nor where he is going to go and that is the only thing that scares him.
His eyes fly open when he hears the honks and sirens in the distance. He will not find peace tonight, but he can rest here just a little longer. His limbs are too weak to take him further now. The wheels of the passing by cars parade in front of his eyes. Some are powerful enough to send drops of dirty mud towards him but under the pouring rain, there is no difference on his freezing skin.

He reaches a finger out, keeping the other arm under his body and he traces meaningless patterns on the concrete. Numbers, words, anything to keep his mind off the cold. He repeats lessons in his head, the dates he has learnt in history classes with their respective events. Then he racks his memory for some poetry he has read before. Some passersby might think he has lost his mind, that they will find a lifeless body there in the morning but he just wants to keep his brain undamaged. Some complicated arithmetics invade his thoughts when he sees wheels shadowing his vision.

He sees thin ankles above red high heels, someone is coming. He is ready to beg for another ten minutes, if he is being chased away again. Instead they stop in front of him. It is a woman, clad in a very pretty orange dress, contrasting with the dull gray of the city. She crouches down as to see those lifeless eyes. The rain doesn’t stop but the drops on his skin fades. With the strength he has left, he glances up to see that she has sheltered him with an umbrella.

For the first time in his life, someone looks at him as if he is worth something. It is when he meets her eyes that he knows. Those clever orbs looking for light and colors, the thirst of control and acceptance in her tone, he knows. They are similar, as if he is looking through a mirror. And she has noticed it too as her red lips offers him the key to his goal.

“Hello there, little one.”

The doorbell sends Jaehyun’s eyes flying open, filling his vision with the white ceiling of his home office. The torn and dirty clothes in his memories has been replaced by his silky white shirt pajama and slack pants. There is no cold pavement, just a brown carpet under his shoes. He straightens his back and notices the glass of scotch in his hand. He has promised himself to not fall back into the past again but it seems he has done countless things that are not like him recently.

The doorbell rings again and he puts the glass on his gigantic, tidy desk. He doesn’t even remember what he has been working on but his computer has snoozed by now. Mrs Park appears at the door, her usual indifferent mask on. Jaehyun knows she has seen brighter days, he guesses working around him just makes people dull, and he doesn’t feel sorry about it. She is still warm in her own way.

“The young master, Taeyong is at the door.” She informs, hands playing with the string of her pastel pink apron. Jaehyun doesn’t even know why she has chosen this one but it adds more color to their bichromatic white and brown environment. “I made sure everything with your name on it has been
replaced, the rooms are ready and I made dinner.”

He has expected the visit. A smirk plays on his lips, his plans rarely fail. With a humble gesture, he dismisses the woman, advising her to call it a night. Jaehyun stands up and makes his way through the endless hallways of white walls and unnamed contemporary paintings until he is standing in the main hall.

The glitching, black and white image of the entrance camera shows the ex escort jumping on one leg to the other, waiting for someone to open. Jaehyun feels satisfaction invading his being and all he thinks about is to lay his eyes on the other’s ethereal face. Taeyong has proved to have a difficult yet interesting personality which interests Jaehyun more than his physical attire. But on top of it all, he reminds himself that protecting Taeyong, getting him back is the priority for now… And he is not doing it for his own pleasure, he is paying Soobin back for her kindness.

The house is as big as Taeyong remembers, the black gate as menacing as last time. It seems that no one is in when he has to ring a second time. Still the familiar golden lights are on and the modern architectural structure stands like a diamond under the moonlight. He is nervous, a little bit upset but determinate. Whatever the outcome, if he has to sleep with Jaehyun or clean his toilets, he will keep his head high without crumbling. He jumps a little on his leg to keep himself warm and repeats what he has prepared on the bus.

“I am sincerely sorry for slapping your priceless face…” he facepalms and starts again. “I have been stupid for not acknowledging your selflessness…”

Well, he doesn’t really want to call himself stupid. For his defense, he has been disrespected in the most horrible way he can think of. What a twist of fate, now he is here, willing to beg for forgiveness. He doesn’t have the time to practice more as the gate clicks and opens in a painfully humiliating way for him.

Jaehyun still looks handsome, what a shame, it makes Taeyong even more nervous. The man is standing in front of the main hallway he has used before to get inside, with the light shining behind him as if he is an angel when he is just Taeyong’s executioner. The young man’s palm is itching to slap him again when he sees the smirk and those profound dimples…

“I assume you want to feel insulted ?” The host speaks first.

Taeyong curses under his breath, not daring to look him in the eyes. If he does, he will either
embarrass himself by kneeling at his feet or strike him across the face again, which means no second chance.

“I-I… I didn’t mean to be rude this morning, I have been stupid.” The message is delivered almost incoherently and inaudibly but Jaehyun understands it by the way the younger’s fingers curl into fists and his eyes look downwards.

He also notices the younger has made himself look prettier and that starts an unwanted fire in him. Jaehyun is already having difficulties keeping his thoughts straight, in every sense of the word, it is a mystery how he is going to survive from now on. But he keeps his facade cool.

“As long as you know it.” It makes him content, the way the other looks offended. Jaehyun almost apologizes for the way he spoke too, but to be honest, it will obviously be a battle of pride between them. “Follow me.”

Taeyong does, remembering the last time he has been here and he hides his blush by looking down. Even Jaehyun’s way of walking looks fancy and he wonders how he looks next to him when he is not dressed in some classy brand he can’t remember. They walk passed the same living room Taeyong recognizes and he knows it is not even half of the entire estate. Jaehyun opens a beautifully sculpted wooden double door and Taeyong’s breath stops in his throat.

He assumes they just entered the dining room. He wonders if the man receives guests often because there is no way a man alone could fill all that space. An emerald marble table stands at the center, surrounded by chairs that certainly belong to a museum. Taeyong stares a moment at the light pieces hanging from the ceiling, he is surprised there is no chandelier around. The entire room is an odd paradox between sober and fancy.

Taeyong can’t say what is more intimidating, Jaehyun or his obnoxious wealth. The combination of the two sounds definitely menacing. Jaehyun stops in the middle of the room and faces him. The younger notices his dimples are sometimes visible even if he does nothing, and that’s bad for his eyes and heart. Behind the man, Taeyong could see two plates surrounded by deliciously smelling food. Jaehyun is probably waiting for some important guests…

“Ok so what’s the job about?” He asks directly, wanting to be out of here as soon as possible.

“I see you like getting straight to the point.” Jaehyun steps closer, making him shrink pathetically. The other man’s presence is just too much to bear when they are alone. “I am a businessman and a busy man, I like that. Just be my personal escort-”
Of course, some people are just too vain to tolerate. Taeyong scoffs, making sure Jaehyun notices the
disdain and turns on his heels, ready to leave.

“Ok Mr. Businessman, I’m outta here.”

“Hospital fees are expensive lately…” That sure makes him stop neatly.

“The fuck ? You’ve been checking on me ?” Don’t throw another punch, he repeats like a mantra in
his head.

He should have expected it, rich people are just above the law, above any morality and respect
apparently. This is just a proof of what he thought, Jaehyun is no different from those he hates. To
think he can just manipulate him and snoop around just makes him angry beyond possible.

“I’m just making sure this is an opportunity you won’t miss.” One step closer and all Taeyong can
see and smell is the vanity seeping out of his host’s body. What terrifies him the most is the hitching
of his hand to touch it.

“You can stick your damn opportunity up your ass, I’m not doing this.” Taeyong is ready to push
him back with all the energy he has left from the day.

Unfortunately Jaehyun gets a hold of both his wrists in the process and inches even closer, their faces
too close for their liking.

“You’re not an angel, Taeyong.” The hot and minty breath fans over his cheek and the younger
closes his eyes for a second, afraid the proximity will make him insane. “Money is just the seeds to
the tree that society is. Don’t think the world is being unfair just because you can’t climb it.”

“You sure can be talkative when you decide to be an asshole.” This time he manages to escape the
grip and steps backwards.

Humiliation and defeat loom over his face and he looks down. Why does Jaehyun always sound so
cruel, and why does he always sound so right… He has understood long ago that capitalism is a
great game everybody sign up for as soon as they exist. Some win and some just lose. Most of them
lose, Taeyong loses.

Jaehyun has a way with words, an enticing magic that hammers against the younger’s skull. He thinks about his mother, about the fact that sacrificing his dignity and life is worth the pain… He has nowhere to run to now. His job as a waiter will never be enough, a lifetime seems to never be enough to climb back that tree…

“Where do I begin ?” He finally sighs as a sign of giving up and Jaehyun smirks that unnerving look of his.

Jaehyun turns around and pulls out a chair, gesturing for him to sit on it.

“Have dinner.” And here he goes again acting like a gentleman, but Taeyong knows the next second he will be back to being Mr. Businessman again. He can’t be fooled anymore.

He has witnessed the professionalism of the other’s smiles and words during the charity party and he is convinced that it was the real Jaehyun. The one who has made him laugh, shiver and fall is probably hidden in a dark dungeon. And given the immensity of this house, Taeyong doesn’t doubt there is one.

Who is he to refuse now anyway ? The tycoon has proved him that he is nobody and all he can do is to take a seat. He may be fierce and stubborn but his body won’t take the exhaustion and hunger any longer. Just this time he is thinking about his comfort first. Jaehyun pushes the chair back gently as the younger seats and the sight just makes his mouth water.

It has been long, the last time he had a proper Korean meal with so much meat and vegetables. His usual cup of noodles, seaweed and rice are miserable compared to what is offered to him right now. He sees Jaehyun has already taken a seat in front of him and instead of looking at his meal, he eyes Taeyong with interest.

“Dig in.” The man orders more than he invites.

The guest averts his look from the man to his plate and without complaining he takes his chopstick and brings a piece of meat to his mouth. It is melting, making his senses crazy and falls perfectly in his empty stomach. He can’t help the little moan that follows and has no time to get embarrassed by it as he digs in again.
He lifts up his eyes to see that Jaehyun hasn’t budged, not even eating. But he can’t care less, he just wants to enjoy being at in warm house, on a cosy chair, having delicacies.

“What’s the contract?” Taeyong finally asks after a sip of water and a second serving of japchae.

“Just be around, keep company to Mrs Park, she’s lonely these days. And be pretty and by my side when I ask you to.” Jaehyun taps his fingers harmoniously on the glossy surface, eyes never leaving his guest’s mesmerizing beauty.

“You, rich assholes, have pretty weird kinks. Am I a pet or something like that?” The job sounds easy but void of meaning to him. Why would someone pay just to have him around? “I guess you get lonely up there in the sky?”

“And don’t call me an asshole.” Jaehyun adds on the imaginary list of conditions, ignoring Taeyong’s comment on his potential loneliness. “What you see now is just a small part of what you’ll get if you do as I say.”

“So this is Pretty Woman, afterall.” Taeyong almost smiles but he quickly remembers the situation.

Jaehyun feels a tug at his heart. A small part of what you’ll get, right? Or what has always been rightfully yours… He pinches himself mentally, tells himself that he is being unnecessarily insecure again. Taeyong may own it all, but he is the one who worked his mind and body to death for all of it. He is not losing it all, he has never won it in the first place.

“You may stop with the dumb references, too.” The way Taeyong throws him an offended glare makes the corner of his lips curl in an invisible and discrete grin.

“The Prince and I?” The younger tries again. If there is something he takes pride in, it is irrelevant movie knowledges. And that Jaehyun can’t stop. “Do I sleep with you too?”

Jaehyun has tried to forget about it. The rhythmic tapping of his fingers stops and he leans back in his chair, arms crossed and mind racing. There is nothing he wants more than having Taeyong moaning under him, begging to be undone but he is a decent man. He has never told Soobin about the unintended infatuation he has for her son. But it doesn’t mean he can bury it without any trouble.

The white haired, porcelain beauty is the only thing he has been thinking of those last days. Jaehyun
is not stubborn, he is almost instinctive and calculative at the same time. What his heart wants, what
his mind wants, what his body wants, he doesn’t deny it. Or else he wouldn’t have taken such
measures to keep the man close. A snap of his finger and Taeyong would be out of his old
apartment, sent into a castle, a gun pointed at his temple to force him into the family… But Jaehyun
is being considerate as much as he can because whether he likes it or not, Taeyong matters to him
and Soobin.

“Do you want it to be a part of the contract?” Jaehyun teases, eyes crinkling in an evil manner.

It’s almost unbelievable how innocent he looks when he smiles, but manages to come off as rude and
arrogant, Taeyong thinks. He shrugs. Honestly, sex with Jaehyun was the best he had. He won’t
deny doing it again, but he won’t fall into it either.

“I have my conditions, too.” Jaehyun raises an eyebrow, telling him to speak. For a man who has
nowhere to go, he sure won’t give up without a battle, and that’s the most appealing thing about him.
“Can I keep working at the restaurant?”

Jaehyun is convinced that his humility and purity doesn’t belong to the Jungs world, but it could
bring in the color that has faded a long time ago. The older nods, Taeyong can do whatever he wants
to as long as he keeps himself away from dirty old men who needs an entertainment.

“Move your stuff in my guest bedrooms starting tomorrow, I’m putting your apartment up for sale.”

“No what the fuck ?” Taeyong gives him a hard glare. “That’s another condition, let me go home
sometimes.”

He grew up in that apartment, he is not selling this part of him and where would Taehyun go… He
can’t believe he still thinks about that man when he is in such a situation. Taeyong still has a heart
and as much as he hates his sibling, his mother doesn’t. She still has that little hope that he may
change someday.

Jaehyun gives another nod. This time it is not heartfelt but jailing the other is not an option. If
Jaehyun could, he would throw all of this away sometimes, be somewhere he is not touched by all of
this but there is no such a place. If having an escape from the disgusting smell of hypocrisy and fake
plenitude is what Taeyong wants then he shall grant it.

“Why would you do all if this ?” The guest puts down the chopsticks, deciding he has had enough.
Jaehyun hasn’t touched his food and Taeyong makes a note to himself to control his eating because he probably looked like a hungered child.

Jaehyun leans in, chin resting on one hand and it sends his soul into a whirlwind of emotions. Taeyong hates the way he grins and the way his eyes glint like gems under the sun.

“Because as you say, I am vain and kinky.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

It’s Saturday morning, with a box in his arms, Taeyong rings the doorbell of Jaehyun’s house again. It feels different in broad daylight, less intimidating. It reminds him of a block of granite, rough and geometrical but not ready to be sculpted anymore. The brown paper box is not as heavy as he expected. It is not like he has gathered that much goods in his life. His only possessions are some books, toiletries and some clothes. Truth be told, the less he has, the less he feels attached. Still the apartment is the place that has forged his life and he will miss it even if he will come back… He hopes he will come back.

The door clicks open and now he knows the way around, around the places he has seen at least. It is quiet inside, the windows are open but the city sounds are so far. He realizes how appeasing it is inside when there is no one around. He has to admit Jaehyun has good tastes, he won’t say it feels homy and cosy but it isn’t as glacial as he expected.

“Welcome, Sir.” He almost drops the box when Mrs Park appears from what he assumes is the kitchen. She has that odd habit of appearing out of thin air.

“Hello.” He can’t wave, his hands are busy but he gives her a sheepish smile and she reciprocates a warm one. At least she isn’t as scary as she was the first time he saw her. “Taeyong is fine, I presume we are the same now that I am working for Jaehyun too…”

She chuckles with a strange glint in her wrinkled eyes, and he likes it. Mrs Park is probably not the usual grandmother, she is not that old to begin with, she reminds him more of a strict high school teacher.

“I’ll show you to your room, Taeyong.”

They walk the same hallway he saw when he and Jaehyun were walking to the car. They meet the same interior pool he caught a glimpse of and he stops for a second. That night, it was bathed in a calm shade of blue light and with the sun shining through the windows, he can easily imagine swans adorn it like in a fairytale. He rushes to catch the fast woman as they pass doors after doors and
Taeyong is as amazed as always. He prefers the reserved white walls and will never understand why someone would afford so much paintings. Paintings are made of people’s thought and he isn’t fond of living surrounded by it.

Through a slightly ajar door he can discern an office and guesses it is Jaehyun’s territory. As for the man, he is nowhere to be seen, probably absent for the day. They stop in front of a simple door. Mrs Park informs him one of the bathrooms is just across. She gets a key out of the pocket of her apron and opens the door for him.

“I’ll let you unpack, you can visit after and if you need anything, just come find me.” She bows and leaves him in front of his new room.

Taeyong looks at her retreating back. She speaks in an overwhelming polite manner that makes him shiver a little, as if she is always trying to be correct. She surely has better things to do than babysitting him, anyway. Such an estate won’t clean itself, and he respects her for doing all of that by herself.

The room isn’t as extravagant as he thought it would be. It is simple but is a great representation of the rest of the house. A king sized bed stands before him on a chocolate colored carpet. Diverse pillows cover the bed, creating a comfortable illusion that makes him want to jump him but he restrains himself. He lets the box fall on a desk and proceeds to open the only window of the room. It gives a view on a garden he didn’t know existed. Taeyong discovers a closet bigger than his kitchen behind a door next to the bed. He doesn’t even have enough clothes to fill a quarter of it, maybe two shelves. Jaehyun sure knows how to live his best life.

He walks down the same hallway he came from. Except from the three doors he now knows, his room, the bathroom and his host’s office, there is two others. He opens the closest one and scoffs at himself, discovering it is the garage, he has been here before. He was waiting to see a collection of cars, because stereotypically speaking, it is the dream of every little boys who have got millions to play with. But once again, Jaehyun probably isn’t that boy and he certainly doesn’t play, the garage is empty.

The second one is a double door, unique compared to the others. He realizes he probably shouldn’t have opened it when he sees the inside. How can he not remember, he was probably blurred by the alcohol and sex drive, he has slept in here with Jaehyun by his side. When he sees the shade of blue and grey, he remembers how he sneaked out that morning, hoping to never see the other again but here he is, staring at those same sheets… He unconsciously wanders in the masculine scent of the bedroom, admiring every intimate details that can’t be found in any other part of the place.

The organization strikes him but he is not surprised. Nothing is out of place, just like what he has seen of Jaehyun. Every book, every piece of decoration look like they are meant to be where they
are. Taeyong almost giggles when he leans in to look at some photos on the book shelves and recognize a younger Jaehyun holding his degree with Ten by his side. The look on his face is obviously forced and Taeyong has to stifle a laugh.

He leaves the room before he breaks something. He has already seen the main part of the house and the discrete stairs across the living room just calls for him. Another living room welcomes him, but this one has a magnificent fireplace and a TV. Here he thought Jaehyun was too uptight to even know what a screen is. The sofas look comfier here and the gigantic bay window giving a view of the city even makes it better. Maybe he will like it here, as long as the owner is not around to piss him off.

The house has three bedrooms in total and Taeyong wonders if it gets lonely in here sometimes… There is so much space with so little life to fill it. He chases the thought away, feeling empathy for Jaehyun is the last thing he wants. Mrs Park is busying herself in the kitchen when Taeyong gets a grip of her. Lunch time is coming and since his new boss is nowhere to be found, he has plan to drop at the restaurant.

“You made an amazing job, keeping this house beautiful.” Taeyong compliments as he sits at the counter, watching her move left and right, never taking a break.

“Jaehyun is sensitive to mess.” She simply answers.

“And where is he ?” Taeyong puts his chin on the back of his hand, the other one drawing little circles on the stainless counter.

She stops her work and fetches for a glass. Without asking for permission, she fills it with a refreshing beverage she puts in front of him. Taeyong is surprised for a second but thanks her with a little smile. The woman wipes her wet hands on her apron and finally looks at him, any form of hostility and military behavior gone from her face.

“He works on weekends.” She informs and serves herself a drink too. “You are free to do what you want, he won’t be home before seven.”

Great because he is not spending another second in this intimidating maze. But then he remembers that a part of the contract is keeping Mrs Park company. Despite being direct and quiet, she is actually warm and jovial. So Taeyong don’t mind staying for her. What an idea to keep an elderly woman in here on such a beautiful and sunny day.
“Have you known him for long?” She gives him a little chortle and her eyes wrinkle with amusement.

“Since he was ten.” Taeyong is taken aback. Of course, it would take this long to actually appreciate him apparently. And Mrs Park had done a good job, restraining herself from murdering him, another trait Taeyong respects.

“How was he? As a child?” It seems she gets more joy talking about the man than working.

“Smart, I can say.” She stops for a moment to think but the tenderness never leaves her features. “He has a good heart, hidden but there. He is not always, you know, an asshole.”

Taeyong blushes, hiding behind his glass. The house may be luxurious but it sure has thin walls. He wonders if there are many unknown sides she has seen of her employer. He wonders what one must see to bear such an expression talking about him… It is not like he hopes to see them, those hidden facets, for him Jaehyun will always be that cold douchebag who needs a lot of slaps to get his head together. Seeing the little knowing smile on her face, Taeyong decides to change the subject.

“Have you ever made cupcakes?” He asks, a little bit too excited about the great idea he just had.

Mrs Park, fully aware of the situation, can’t possibly refuse the guest anything, she would be damned before it happens. Taeyong might be the change Jaehyun needs, the push he deserves to open his eyes, and maybe his heart. The woman shakes her head, a lie she has to tell to please the ball of sunshine she already loves.

“Do you want to make some?” She offers and Taeyong nods furiously.

“I am going grocery shopping, ok?” He volunteers and she makes no comment about his excitement. This is as new to her as it is to her employer, but it is pleasant, very pleasant.

Before he can jump out of the house, she stops him, handing him a credit card. The little object shines golden and Taeyong has always believed those to be a legend.

“What is this?” He takes the thing in his hand, and mouths the name written on it. Park Mirae.
“Jaehyun has given it to me, you may use it freely as long as it concerns the house.”

A little devilish smirk plays on his lips. This is a great opportunity to get back at the man for disrespecting him. A little grocery shopping can’t possibly send him into bankruptcy but Taeyong can do a little harm from time to time.

The machines are still beeping loud when Jaehyun enters the hospital room. It has become a background necessity they don’t mind anymore. It was hard the first time, seeing the seemingly invincible Mr Jung in such a vulnerable state but after months they have learnt to accept it. Soobin sits in her usual armchair, in a corner, just looking at the man, having a cup of tea from time to time, talking to herself from time to time hoping he will hear.

“He is in my house.” The young man informs and she shines a satisfied look he knows too well. But this time it is not a deal gone great, he hopes she treats this matter with more care.

“How is he doing?” Her voice is soft and gentle. “Tell me he is okay.”

Jaehyun clearly see the happiness in her eyes, the curves of her lips. Her display of sincerity is rare and since the news about Taeyong, she is not like her anymore. The raw emotion in her tone makes Jaehyun want to reassure her but one of them has to stay pragmatic.

“He is not pleased about the idea. I had to force fate a little.” Like the good puppet I am, he forgets to say.

Soobin looks back at the lifeless body, sipping on the hot beverage. As long as he is not injured or dead it is all that matters. She will take any measure to puts Taeyong back where he belongs and she needs to feel safe, they need to feel safe. The cup is carelessly puts back on the table and she averts her gaze to her heir. She is fully aware of the hate Taeyong bears for them, of the faceless woman lying on an hospital bed getting the love that is hers, but if Jaehyun is the only weapon that can fight all of that then so be it.

“I am expecting you at the Kangs dinner.” The man scoffs.
If there is something he hates more than mundane parties, then it must be that family. He hasn’t answered to the invitation, hoping he could avoid the event, but now that Taeyong’s in the picture… What she means by expecting him is that she is hoping to see her son by his side.

“I don’t think you should get in contact with him yet.” He reasons.

The dread spreads in him when Soobin stands up with undeniable grace and authority. The sounds of her heels against the ground awake the fear in him little by little but he manages to stay cool. He has learnt a long ago to not fall into her little game of power and control.

Soobin stops by the bed and her wrinkled manicured fingers slips between her husband’s cold ones. Jaehyun barely flinches when her gaze settles on him and he remembers that night seventeen years ago when a simple look from her made him shiver.

“Look at him.” Pale face, respiratory equipments, barely the shadow of a man. “Soon it will be you and me, Jaehyun, all by ourselves.”

He scoffs, will it change anything? As far as he knows they have always been by themselves. The world is nothing but a playground where they seem untouchable, playing alone like forgotten kids.

“I don’t want to be by myself.” Her eyes oscillate as if searching for a sign of comfort. What does she expect, Jaehyun has never been one to give give comfort.

“You won’t.” Is all he can say. He doesn’t even wish to do more for her, he knows perfectly where this absurd game will lead her, will lead him. He has been smarter than that before, but this time it is not his brain that controls his actions…

Without sparing one last glance, Jaehyun leaves her to her thoughts, closing the door slowly behind him. The hospital is bursting with life today, the perks of coming on a Saturday morning. As he walks through the busy place, he tries to think about works only. For the past years, through good and bad, it is the only thing that kept him afloat. He knows what he signed up for when his life changed, and he will make sure nothing gets out of hand, after all that is what he is programmed for…

He is not totally surprised when he meets a very familiar face in the lobby, somewhere it reassures him. As much as he is not fond of the woman, she is the only one who is out of all this, the only sane brain around. Seulgi flashes him an expert smile, her red lipstick contrasting with her white skin,
wavy chestnut hair framing her sharp features. She is always dressed too much for any place, but she has never made effort to blend in, anyway.

Jaehyun notices the flower bouquet in her hand, carnations and stocks, admiration and life. He will always be amazed at how calculative she is, how details matter to her. He should not be fooled, control can be easily mistaken for care and affection, the most expensive goods they can give.

“Jaehyun, fancy meeting you here. I am here to see uncle Jung.” Jaehyun racks a delicate hand through his locks, a sigh escaping his lips. She refers to everyone with a familiarity that annoys him.

Honestly, he was thinking about ignoring her, act as if she doesn’t exist. Unfortunately, his own existence seems to matter a lot to her.

“Good.” He praises without much conviction.

Hate is maybe too strong a word to define what he feels for her. Maybe indifference is the perfect term. They have known each other since childhood and during those golden times, he could call her a friend, barely, an acquaintance perhaps. But the bond between their family has made her a worthy rival and a good entertainment for him. Came the time they grew up and the darkest side of their soul took over. She seeks for his attention, he refuses to give it. A strange game of push and pull they keep on until today.

“My father is expecting you at the dinner tomorrow.” He is, Jaehyun is fully aware. “I am expecting you too.”

He has offered enough polite smile to Mr Kang, in hope he forgets the idea of merging the companies. Jaehyun is not the type to be jailed by a silver ring around his finger and certainly not with Seulgi. They wouldn’t want their daughter to end in a puddle of blood and his face on a mug shot.

“Have a good day.” He courteously says.

Before he can walk further, she stops him, thin fingers lacing around his arm. That is another trait he despises, her meticulous way of invading personal space when she knows it is inappropriate.

“Come alone, this time. I wouldn’t want that worthless, little call boy of yours to stain our name.”
As they stroll down the rows of colorful products and fresh vegetables, Johnny still has some difficulties grasping the situation. Maybe he heard wrong, the overrated k-pop song on the speakers is not helping either. He looks around as if the supermarket staffs can give him an answer. Taeyong walks casually in front of him, a basket in hand, as if he didn’t just say the most absurd thing ever.

His friend reads the back of a red pepper package carefully, an habit of is, and when Johnny sees his unbothered expression, he knows nothing he will say can change the other’s mind.

“What do you mean you work for him ?” He repeats as if the information wasn’t clear enough.

Of course, he is beyond happy that Taeyong is not an escort anymore. Technically speaking he still is but Jaehyun shouldn’t even be in the picture. Johnny knows the consequences of getting involved with that kind of crowd, manipulation, control, greed… He trusts his friend won’t change, Taeyong is stronger than that, but selling his body and dignity to such a man shouldn’t even be an option.

“What ? All I have to do is to look pretty and shake hands, plus he pays me better.” Taeyong shrugs and puts the package in the basket.

When he asked for Johnny to come with him, the latter hasn’t expected to hear this. Even Taeyong can’t believe what he just said for a second. In the end it comes to this, his only skills are to be pretty and please apparently. The young man doesn’t let defeat mingle with his mind. This is probably the only opportunity he will get to make things better for his family, Jaehyun’s words. It doesn’t mean it can define who he is, right ?

“Tae, this is so wrong and I don’t even need to explain why.” His gesture speaks louder than his concerns as he stops his friend, grip tight on his forearm.

“I know, but I’ll leave as soon as mom is out of the hospital.” It doesn’t sound like a promise to Johnny, more like a plan you usually shrug away once the day to accomplish it comes.

When did Taeyong learn to lie this easily ? The little tremor of his orbs begs for Johnny to let go so he does. Johnny will never change his mind, considering the situation, he himself can’t find a better solution. But he wishes it wasn’t Jaehyun, the man who makes Taeyong tense and all shade of red at
the sole mention of his name.

The younger fills the basket with more food, some not even making sense. One second he takes a bag of carrots and the next he preys on candies like they are vital for his meals. Johnny doesn’t question him anymore. He is sure his friend is making a regretful decision, that at some point of this ridiculous adventure, he will come back crying, full of sorrow. And Johnny will be there again, like a faithful puppy, waiting for Taeyong to break his heart and expectations.

“You don’t even know a thing about him. Who knows, maybe he is a serial killer?” He persuades one last time.

Taeyong freezes. That is a detail he never thinks about, he did during the charity party but after knowing Jaehyun better, he has decided that he doesn’t care. Jaehyun could be a pastor or Escobar’s right hand man, Taeyong has no interest in him. The man has proved more than once how much of a scum he can be, he has proved more than once he doesn’t deserve his recognition. Call him stubborn, he would rather say careful. There is no need to add more to the attachment he has for Jaehyun, if he can call it that way. The more he gets involved, the more he will regret.

“As long as mom’s safe, I don’t care.”

If fate hadn’t been so unfair on him, he would have been the perfect son. Now that he has agreed to play the game, there is nothing else he can do than enjoying the situation as best as he can. Johnny would never understand anyway, nobody would so there is no need to insist. And his friend understands it when he walks ahead, stopping the subject from giving birth to a conflict.

Johnny has the slight impression that even the cashier is judging them when they drop every products on the counter. None of the purchases seem to make sense. Candies, red pepper, popcorons, and some more candies… The content smile on Taeyong’s face gets bigger by the time everything is inside a paper bag and he pays for it.

“Will I see you on monday ?” They both walk to the nearest bus station.

His heart skips a beat when the shorter gives him a fond smile, hugging the bag against him. The wind ruffles his hair tenderly and Johnny swears to himself that whoever that Jaehyun is, he better no hurt this perfect human being.

“Of course, dummy.” He reassures. “Jaehyun is just another part time job, nothing more, I swear.”
A bonny hand leaves the rough surface of the shopping bag and comes gently against Johnny’s cheek. Unconsciously, the taller leans in, believing in those words as if hypnotized. The touch feels like home, as much as the eyes shining in his direction. Childhood has proved him how amazing of a friend Taeyong is, teenage years has made him a potential crush and right now, he is everything Johnny dreamt of in a lover. Unfortunately, it is one sided.

“Ok, I trust you.” Taeyong takes back his hand. For a long time, he has been aware of the feelings growing for him and he feels regretful for not reciprocating them. Some may call him a manipulator for using them but Johnny is as precious as his family and he needs him to stop worrying… “But never forget who you are Tae, don’t let those people get to you.”

“Promise.”

“That’s a lot of useless things.” Mrs Park judges, eyeing every items the young man lays on the counter.

Taeyong takes no offense and smiles as he walks around the vast kitchen, looking for a place to store everything. Even the cabinets look like it would hide some priceless gems and he hates the place a little bit more. When she sees his gleeful steps and movements she finally decides to help him. Colorful bags of snacks finds themselves next to the usually dull and dark jars of coffee and sugar her employer fancies. This is definitely a change she appreciates more than she shows.

She would have never dreamt of this in her entire career. There are times when she believed this house will eventually crumble in loneliness and gloom, she believed that when her time comes, Jaehyun would end up alone, swallowed by the marble and crystal. But now that she stores multicolored sweets, a new hope blooms in her.

“I don’t care if he gets angry.” Taeyong gets to the water faucet, washing his hands, ready to make the best cupcakes the world has ever seen. “He needs more fun in his life, he spoils the mood of this gorgeous palace.”

Mrs Park has nothing to add.

“Let’s gets our hands dirty, then.” She announces and proceeds to take out the ingredients they need.
Religieuses, éclairs, macarons, countless of pastries have been made by the best chefs in this same kitchen. From the most original delicacies to the most basic Korean foods, she has seen it all. But it is the first time such a simple recipe is made by an amateur in here, and she has to admit this is what home made cuisine should feel like.

Needless to say, the young man makes a mess of her sacred counters but she doesn’t have the heart to scold him. He spreads flour everywhere, distracted by how funny his jokes are. His laughs resonate to the second floor as the cakes slowly takes form. Mrs Park is impressed by the amount of energy in the skinny body and automatically, her own lips curl into a beam and she laughs when Taeyong spills chocolate on himself.

“Come on, Mrs Park, you are so bad at this.” He teases when they are pouring the batter into molds.

“I believe one of us is more experienced and it is not you.” She argues.

“You remind me so much of my mom.” They insert the molds into the oven and a peaceful silence settles.

There is a bitter mixture of happiness and sorrow when he talks about that woman. Mrs Park has seen it before, when on drunken nights, Jaehyun complains about Mrs Jung. She knows how much that woman must be insignificant to her employers, the blood Taeyong carries in him is the only thing that matters. But she sees the importance Mrs Lee holds in this young man’s heart and Mrs Park is not as heartless as the Jungs.

“Tell me about her.”

Taeyong chuckles and sits himself on the counter. The housekeeper almost pops a vein because the holy altar of cooking is not made for anybody’s bottom but she let it pass, just today.

“She is wonderful, she nags a lot just like you.” He plays with the rim of his sweater and she finds it endearing. The Jungs are going to love him, she just knows it. “I’ve tasted your cooking last night and I can tell you are a little bit better than her at holding a knife.”

“I’d love to meet her one day.” She sounds like a good woman, it shows in the way the young man behaves. Mrs Park wonders how it would have been if Taeyong grew up within the most powerful family of this continent. It would have been a waste, probably.
“You’d get along just fine-”

“I don’t pay you to chat all day.” They both gets startled by the man who just appeared at the door.

Taeyong hops off the counter and Jaehyun eyes them both, eyebrows shaped in an upset frown. He looks severe as always. Taeyong knows the comment is directed at Mrs Park who bows apologetically. She looks like she said something that shouldn’t have been said and he wonders what Jaehyun heard of their discussion.

“I’m sorry I distracted her.” Taeyong puts an encouraging hand on her shoulder as if to say he will stand up to the man.

But Jaehyun stands tall, easy to reach but untouchable. His appearance reveals a stressful day, two buttons undone revealing his milky collar, his velvet navy vest hanging from his forearm like a forgotten towel, his locks ruffled in a disheveled manner… Still Taeyong finds himself appealed to the sight and he doesn’t like it.

It is almost six in the evening he notices, he has stolen the woman’s time for too long. But as far as he is concerned, the house is clean enough, the plants in the garden don’t look like they need to be watered and her break is certainly deserved. Except the kitchen is a mess and Jaehyun doesn’t look pleased by what he sees. Not to mention they are covered in flour from head to toes.

“I’ll clean up.” The older woman bows a second time. “I’ll call for dinner wh-”

“Don’t. I have work to do.” Is all the distant tone offers and Jaehyun leaves them to their innocent mistake like grounded children on a Christmas night.

The defeated sigh Mrs Park delivers almost sound like a murder and Taeyong feels the fire burn in him, like every time he sees the man.

“That was rude of him, he shouldn’t speak to people that way.” He picks a stray cloth and starts cleaning, making sure he does more than her.

“It’s fine, he is right.” Her voice sounds like this has happened more than once.
Taeyong scrubs left and right, pouring all the rage he has in making the counter and floor shine. Mrs Park stops talking and she is back to her disciplinary manners. Jaehyun certainly spoils the mood. When they are done, Mrs Park evacuate to another wing of the house. He finds it sad that a bright woman should bow to a heartless man like Jaehyun.

The house is back to being silent and Taeyong realizes he is going to hate it when Jaehyun is around. It feels more like an ice castle now that the jolly and joyful atmosphere has disappeared. He peaks around the office. Empty. With careful steps he goes up to the second floor and through the glass doors and windows of the second living room, he sees Jaehyun’s back.

The man has a glass of scotch, again, in his hand, gaze turned towards the city, the light breeze of the terrace ruffling his hazelnut locks and Taeyong approaches quietly. The evening turning to darkness is the only thing that can make Jaehyun look so powerless. Taeyong wonders if he had a bad day at work, if money has finally turned his virtue into a pit of self loathing.

A gentle knock on the gossamery glass. Jaehyun gives no reaction but the slight lifting of his head tells Taeyong he heard. The lukewarm breeze hits him too when he steps on the terrace and he understands why the man is here. The sight of the bustling city in the horizon is healing in a way. The lights are starting to appear like candles in the dark as the sun sets like the déjà vu ending of an old-fashioned movie.

“You should apologize, you have been rude.” Taeyong leans against the railing and he sees the tense look painted on his face.

“I don’t recall asking for your opinion.” Jaehyun sips in the liquor and Taeyong frowns.

“That’s why you are rude. You never ask for opinion.” The comment is too raw for Jaehyun to argue.

“Know your place.” How incongruous when he is the one not knowing where he stands...

Taeyong scoffs. He has learnt to ignore Jaehyun’s arrogance, he has been preparing mentally for it.

“Don’t be mistaken.” The white haired man counter attacks. “I am not stepping on boundaries. Just be thankful when someone works for you, you are not the only one working on weekends, she does too.”
Maybe he shouldn’t drink anymore, Jaehyun tells himself. The alcohol supplies sense to what the other is saying. The older finally looks at Taeyong and wonders how life molds such a human being. Out of all the persons out there, he has to put up with this one. How come whenever his eyes fall on the soft features, the elegant traits, he feels like reaching out…

Without warning, on impulse, as if his instinct tells him it is right, Jaehyun traps the petite body between his and the silver railings. He doesn’t have to touch to hear Taeyong’s heart beating. The way his lips part in shock tells Jaehyun the feeling travels both way. The air is hot, almost suffocating between them and distance seems to be an unwanted guest. Funny how bold and harsh Taeyong is towards him but his eyes scream nothing but tenderness and curiosity when they stare into each other’s soul.

“Do you know what it’s like to have thousands of lives on your shoulders, the pressure of ruining them all if you fuck up a single phone call or handshake ?”

Taeyong doesn’t know what terrifies him the most, the fact that Jaehyun’s lips are almost touching his or the smirk on his flawless face. One thing is sure, he gets drunk on the liquor scented breathe fanning his cheeks.

“I maybe have only one life on my shoulders…” Without cowering back, he speaks closer than Jaehyun did, one caress away from touching, hoping he aims for the heart. “But the difference between you and I is how much we care for it.”

Bull’s-eye. The arrow travels from his lips to the fragile arteries of Jaehyun’s ego. Tasting him now sounds like a good rewards to Jaehyun. Every words that has left those luscious lips for the past days have managed to shake him. The voice in his head telling him this is dangerous and blurry fades easily, he has never been a noble or cautious person to begin with.

Jaehyun closes the gap, basking in the pleasure of finally tasting what he has been craving for. It is better than the first time, or is it the sugary scotch ? He doesn’t even mind when Taeyong pushes back against him to take more than he can give and the glass he is holding slips, shattering twelve feet under. All he cares about is the control he is losing when he nibbles harder on the exquisite lips and he turns them around, slamming the precious and smaller body against the glass walls.

Taeyong can’t breathe, but he can’t think either. Jaehyun arouses him, excites him, awakes the magma in him and all he wants is more. For an instant he forgets who they are, what has been said and his fingers fist the soft brown locks. He is here, he is back, the Jaehyun he likes. The one who makes him tremble, shiver…
Jaehyun detaches himself, but not too much. He doesn’t want sanity to talk him out of this. His hands are still attached to the slim waist and Taeyong looks so beautiful under him, so breakable, like a Fabergé. It is hard to resist the red swollen lips or the hooded eyes… Taeyong is the personification of all he is fond of…

“Freaking beautiful…” He murmurs against the other’s neck.

To say that barely ten minutes ago they were throwing cryptical insults at each other. Now they are searching for any touches that can be given, every breathe too short, every surface of skin their tongue can reach. Jaehyun beautify his neck with purple spots and Taeyong can barely stands but it’s alright, strong arms are keeping him in place.

Their panting gets louder and before Taeyong’s first moan can invade the dark sky, Jaehyun covers the profane mouth with his, hands searching for an opening. Taeyong shivers a little when he feels his pants being forced down to his thigh and he grips on Jaehyun’s shirt, begging to be warmed. His lewd lamentation gets muffled as Jaehyun’s tongue swirl around his.

A cold hand comes meeting the cottony flesh of his inner thigh, hoping to pave a way to a more intimate place. Taeyong manages to discard his jeans somewhere on the floor without his hands, mouth still busy. Instantly, as if he has just pushed a red button, Jaehyun palms him through the fabric of his underwear, massaging him lewdly until precum stains the front.

Pleasure isn’t gratifying unless shared. The shorter lets his bold fingers free Jaehyun’s throbbing member and strokes it with passion as they look into each other’s orbs, animalistic groans sounding like a perfect background music.

Taeyong strokes faster, watching Jaehyun crumbling into a hot mess between his hands. The older buries his head in the crook of Taeyong’s neck, leaving butterfly kisses on the pale skin between moans to reward him whenever pleasure strikes too much.

“No…” Jaehyun whispers in his ear when he knows he is close. “I want to taint your inside.”

It is a miracle Taeyong doesn’t come with the obscene words. He feels a shiver down his spine when Jaehyun discards his underwear, his throbbing member meeting the cold air, the flesh of his ass colliding against the freezing glass.
“Fuck me hard.” He pleads like a child begging for sweets.

There is no need to ask twice. Jaehyun licks two fingers and it is raw and filthy when Taeyong feels them entering in a rough motion. Jaehyun lifts one of his leg and he understands immediately. The younger wraps his legs around Jaehyun who holds him up and the access is better. In and out, slowly, torturous and sensual… As much as he wants them both to be fully naked, the cold air doesn’t allow it and Taeyong likes it anyway. An occasion to see Jaehyun aroused and dirty in his work attire. The only moment to see how superficial Jaehyun’s exterior is when he is just a powerless mess when he is inside Taeyong.

“Put it in...Hurry…” Taeyong implores, tears of pleasure pooling at the edge of his eyelashes.

Jaehyun aligns his member and with a groan full of desire he is in. A silent cry rips through Taeyong’s throat as he grips at the strong shoulders, wanting to be as close as possible to the other man. Jaehyun fills him like a precise piece of puzzle, leaving no place for anything else than his own solid flesh. This is their ideal vision of heaven.

It starts with slow thrusts as they both cry out their bliss, the city lights as their witness. They can’t care less about who is hearing, who is seeing, the moment is all about them, about the violence of their needs. And violent it gets when Taeyong asks for more. Jaehyun trails kisses on his cheeks, lips and nose as if he wants to remember his face.

“A-Ah… not enough…” He can’t think coherently as Jaehyun brings him to cloud nine. He is one thrust away from drooling or weeping.

“Fucking tight.”

Taeyong didn’t think confronting Jaehyun would bring him a free pass to ride his cock, but he would do it again and again if the result is the same. He will probably regret in the morning but now he just wants more. His wish is easily granted when Jaehyun rams inside, fucking every ounce of sense out of him.

Taeyong comes first, staining a too expensive shirt but Jaehyun makes no comment, too busy coming undone. When he does, Taeyong doesn’t know if it is an hallucination or if the stars are really out tonight. He feels every drop sliding against his walls, filling him, making him complete. No break, Jaehyun immediately attacks his mouth again, forbidding him of breathing but he can’t complain.
“I am not done with you.” Taeyong can only nod, he is not thinking anymore.

His brain, his entire being is filled with Jaehyun, Jaehyun and Jaehyun only. He wants to be played with, to be soiled and crushed by Jaehyun. He will comprehend the mistake later but for now he lets lust trap him.

Jaehyun lifts him bridal style and it is surprising they don’t stumble down the stairs. Taeyong recognizes the navy silk sheets when he is dropped on it. There is nothing more gorgeous to Jaehyun than having the other on his bed, white hair disheveled, legs parted waiting for him. A fragile doll or an invulnerable diamond, Jaehyun doesn’t know anymore, either way Taeyong is precious.

They spend half of the night defiling every part of his room, getting drunk in euphoria. Taeyong being a real Jung is a detail that disappears somewhere in Jaehyun’s discarded clothes on the floor. When they think it is enough, a single look in the other’s eyes brings back the fire and another round is played until Taeyong collapse from exhaustion under the sheets.

Jaehyun stays awake for a long time, simply staring at the flawless beauty sleeping on his pillow. Unlike last time, he hopes the other won’t disappear in the morning… Jaehyun remembers that night he spent in the street years ago as his fingers caress Taeyong’s arm in a discrete motion. This is the same level of terrifying. The dread that he is losing against himself, that he is crumbling to vulnerability and emotions. And the same way he traced patterns in the cold concrete, fighting for sanity, he traces little wave shaped touches on Taeyong’s skin. Why does he feel ? Why does it suddenly feel like a necessity ? Why Taeyong’s name craves itself little by little in his heart.

Jaehyun gives up on finding sense to something he can’t explain. He throws the sheets off himself and wraps his body in a bathrobe. He makes sure the other is soundlessly and deeply asleep before leaving the confines of his room. The lights are off and he doesn’t bother turning them on. He only does when he steps in the dining room.

Guilt… A strange feeling he has ignored for years, comes back in him, claiming a throne. The dinner has been left cold on the table, Mrs Park didn’t get her deserved apology before going home. Between the usual sophisticated plates of meats and vegetables, he finds two colorful little cakes, sitting there like sore thumbs. There are swirls of blue and pink creams and ridiculous rainbow candies sticking in every direction and Jaehyun isn’t sure if cupcakes are supposed to look like diabete weapons.

_Taeyong baked them. You should have them with tea, they are excellent._

Jaehyun snorts at the yellow post it laying next to it. Guilt… A new feeling he can learn to tolerate
with time. Whether he likes it or not, Taeyong is going to stick around. Whether he likes it or not, he is opening his eyes to emotions he has buried long ago. So Jaehyun pours himself a warm cup of tea. The cupcakes taste like glucid overdose and a trip to hell but he eats it to the last crumbs. He is becoming someone he is not and that scares him but he takes a pen and writes on the post it nonetheless.

*Forgive my harshness, good job again this month. Don’t let Taeyong hear about his.*

Jaehyun folds it neatly and let it fall in the pocket of the pink apron that hangs next to the kitchen door.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

For the first time in his life, Taeyong wakes up without the sound of honks and old truck engines bothering his morning. He is too far from the old shabby streets now. With a yawn and arms stretched above his head, he chases sleep away with blinks. The warm sheets and cottony mattress are different from his usual blanket and futon, too. The room is already bright with a scorching ray of sun on his exposed skin and he is alone.

The young man rubs his eyes open and realization conceals his calm morning like a veil. It happened again. He buries his face in the pillow with a groan. It happened again and he liked it. He has officially become Jaehyun’s personal prostitute. Is Jaehyun guilty and ashamed of it too? Probably not, he is certainly in his million dollars skyscraper, worrying more about his finances. If Sundays are made of blessings and prayers, Taeyong’s are made of self loathing and shame.

He looks over the empty space next to him and a chuckle leaves his still swollen lips. So this is the sight Jaehyun had when he left… Taeyong throws the sheets off him and finds his sweater on the floor. He lets the cloth cover his skin to his thigh and walks over to the gigantic window. He has seen this hill a lot of time before, and never had he thought he would be standing here, looking over the city, trying to make out the streets with his fingers…

The shower is a bliss once he finds which faucets to turn on. He rubs off every details Jaehyun has left on his body as if they burn his flesh. It’s around twelve when he is dressed, ready to face another uneventful day. The house is less a maze now but it doesn’t make it less quiet and empty. Mrs Park must have her day off because she is nowhere to be found. Taeyong takes the freedom to open the glass door leading to the pool.

Afraid he might dirty the immaculate purity of the place, he lets his shoes at the entrance and instantly feels the coldness of the cobblestone floor. Out of all he has seen, this part of the house has been the only part screaming his name. The sparkling water can be mistaken as a sunny sky and a sense of calm and peace overwhelms him. He excitedly walks towards the edge and rolls up his pant to his knees.
The water is cold but he relaxes as soon as he sits at the border, legs creating little waves. For a second, he can imagine a shirtless Jaehyun swimming back and forth in the clarity of the blue water. The man is constantly stressed out and Taeyong wonders if the place calms the tycoon the same way it calms him. There is nothing here except the lulling tune of the water under his feet and his thoughts.

“How the fuck did you even get my car keys ?”

The line goes silent as he is busy entering the passcode. A click and he pushes the massive door open. The familiar scent of musk and cleaner invades his sense, it has been long he hasn’t been in here. What a pity he can’t greet Mrs Park today.

“You should lock the door to your garage.” A deep sigh echoes on the other side and the younger can imagine Taeil rolling his eyes. “Anyway, I can’t have cameras following me today so no black vans.”

Ten waltz to the living room, feeling excited about the day to come. Jaehyun’s place just has that effect on him, he is surprised the guy hasn’t leased the place for a music video yet. If it was up to him, this place would be bustling with music and flashes everyday. Maybe he is just a funnier and more entertaining version of Jaehyun.

“That’s housebreaking.” Taeil replies and Ten counts in his head the seconds until he hangs up.

“Technically, no. I just pushed the door open.” He shrugs. “In case you look for me, I’ll be busy so bye.”

“I don’t want to see a scratch-”

“Beep beep beep.” Ten sings as the line stops and he stuffs the phone back in his pocket.

He repeats Jaehyun’s orders in his head, content that his day off is finally used doing something productive. At least he won’t be mopping in his apartment, cursing Taeil all day and then mopping again. First, keep Taeyong off the radar, no pictures; second, don’t spill the beans; third, make sure
he looks presentable. The last one will definitely be the easiest task.

Ten is talkative by nature and from what he knows about the other, he is sure they will get along just fine. Apart from Jaehyun he has never found the opportunity to make friends who are not related to business. Growing up as the only son of a reputable Thai family, he considers himself lucky enough that his inheritance hasn’t been cut when he decided to move in South Korea. Sure, he hasn’t heard of his parents anymore the moment he appeared in a music video; but his flamboyant self has helped him getting over it.

He could only jump on the occasion of meeting Taeyong, the man who has got his best friend so worked out. He is presumptuous enough to know that it is thanks to his impulse. All his friend needs is just a little push, a peck of twist of fate and a bucket of Ten. The singer is sure he is saving his friend from dying of loneliness. And no, work is not a valid excuse to his misanthropy.

He is quick to spot the ex escort. Ten calls it the spa effect, everyone loves the pool. Without a sound he slides the door open and watches as the white haired man bask in the sunlight. Even he, is impressed. The pictures he has seen on the website don’t compare to the reality and he immediately understands what Jaehyun finds in the man. The idol has seen the other at the gala, under the glitters but this is better, bare faced, simple attire and pure beauty.

He may not look like Soobin or her husband that much, but his features radiates the same elegance, the same finesse, and it is hard to believe he is sitting just in front of him. Ten is one of the many who has lost hope, at some point they even shrugged the accident at the back of their mind like a used tool thrown in the trash. But Taeyong is alive, real and sitting there, not aware he is the messiah the Jungs have been waiting for. But for now, he is the boy Ten is going to spend the day with, his new friend, his canvas.

“Hello, darling.” His sudden interruption startles the younger.

Ten has expected the surprise and the little bow that came with it. For years, his reputation has been preceding him, this is another infinite routine, the admiration, the intimidation… He tries a sheepish smile to ease the man and it works.

“I am sorry, I let myself in.” The singer looks over at the water and he understands why the other finds a shield in it.

“Jaehyun is not home.” The white haired angel fiddles with the rim of his sweater and Ten restrains himself from cooing.
He can’t help but notice the blueish little spots adorning the white pale neck and a knowing smirk surfaces on his soft features. Give Jaehyun an opportunity and he will make great use of it.

“I know.” Taeyong stands awkwardly like a sunflower under the snow and all Ten wants to do is to ruffle the delicate locks. “I am here to catch up with you, we have a busy day ahead.”

“M-Me ?” When Jaehyun told him to be careful because apparently the sweetheart bites, he didn’t expect to face a shy and timid boy.

“I know, amazing right ?” Ten laughs, bringing his hands to cover his mouth in glee. “You just won a day with the incredible Ten so come on !”

The poor boy just gapes at him, in wonder or shock, Ten doesn’t mind he has seen it all before. That or his father repeating sensibility is for the weaks. The singer hated it but at least it has immunized him against his greatest enemy, fear of judgement. Without wasting another second, he hushers the boy to get prepared and the latter complies, still mortified at the idea of spending his day with international heartthrob Ten.

After all he has seen before, Taeyong expected a sport car, or at least a sleek black berline with a chauffeur but a pleasant surprise welcomes him in the form of a small convertible car, beaten up by long drives and a little bit suspicious. One of the rear-view mirror looks like it can give up at any time.

“Look at this !” Ten swirls like a seventeenth century noblewoman, hands pointing to the car. Taeyong bits on his nail nervously, glancing at the empty street, hoping nobody saw that. “Doesn’t it scream swag ?”

As far as the younger is concerned, swag was already outdated when he was in middle school but he makes no comment. Ten’s constant smile and happiness is somehow contagious and a smile creeps up his own lips when the older tries to click the door open with the keys but it doesn’t work.

“Wait a minute, she is a tough one.” Taeyong snorts his first laugh of the day and it fires Ten up, exciting him a little more.

After seconds of assaulting the little remote, Ten finally reaches for the little gap he has left in the window and forces it down. He has seen Taeil doing it many times before, he will have to drive with
the wind in his face. Taeyong’s eyes double in size, more confident in taking the bus now. Ten manoeuvres his arm around the door and it opens.

“Get in, princess!” The younger obliges, another laugh ripping his lips open.

“How the heck are you even friend with Jaehyun?” He finally eases up when he is sitting in the comfy space of the passenger seat. “The guy is as shitty and confusing as Inception and you are like… I don’t know”

“Love Actually?” Ten fastens his seatbelt and they both fill the car with laughter.

“I was going to say Burlesque but that works too.”

Ten confirms, the sweetheart bites.

“I love that show, now we’re best friends.” Ten muses and for a second the chortle of the car engine shocks them both but they act like it never happened.

“I am afraid that spot is already taken for both of us but we can be friends, yes.”

Of course, they can. The first minutes of the ride, Taeyong grips at his seatbelt, scared by the car’s odd noises and Ten’s reckless driving. They risk knocking some bikes one too many times but the other seems not to care as he is singing along to some songs Taeyong has never heard before.

Meeting Ten is like a brief hour of sunshine under the storm. Taeyong has caught himself dreaming about this before, being a normal kid, with no trouble. He dreamt being picked up by friends, driving around the city, being careless… Alas life has forced him to skip all of that and grew up too fast. Maybe meeting Jaehyun wasn’t that bad either, at least all he has to worry about is his dignity.

Halfway through the ride, to nowhere, as they stop at a red light, Ten’s stomach grumbles. The older gets embarrassed but at least it reminds them both that feeding themselves is important.

“Let’s get lunch.” The older exclaims, turning the volume of the radio down. Taeyong agrees but Ten seems restless for a second. “But I can’t go to any public places today, you know reporters and
Ten lies, it is not about him, it is about the other. He doesn’t want to meet Jaehyun’s wrath if Taeyong’s face get leaked to the world. His best friend had to make at least twenty phone calls to erase every pictures from the Jung’s charity party. Taeyong nods understandingly. He doesn’t want to get bothered either. The first night with Jaehyun has already traumatized him enough. The blinding camera flashes and the amount of attention he got that night is sufficient for a lifetime.

“I have the perfect place for you.”

The Seo’s restaurant is not usually bustling with clients and life, there are more than twenty other barbecue places in the area. The front is not the most attractive one, Mr Seo has never been one to be extravagant about such things. Only the Seo’s name and the menu is visible. During summertime, the tables outside manage to bring in some high schoolers and it is enough for them.

Today, it is another exceptionally calm day. Johnny taps the tip of his pen against the counter, chins resting on his left hand, round glasses perched above his nose. The Sunday’s rush hour is over and it has left him exhausted and bored. His mother goes back and forth behind him for fifteen minutes now and the sound of her restless footsteps starts to annoy him.

The young man turns around, bothered by the woman, and trying to distract himself from the lack of activity. Mrs Seo raises an eyebrow at him, offended by his glare, daring him to challenge hers. The petite woman, at least one feet shorter than him, holds a white porcelain vase between her hands. Probably another items she bought, she has been addicted to internet banking lately.

“I can’t find a good place to put this.” She shrugs, pacing again.

Johnny rolls his eyes at his mother’s antic. He doesn’t even know why such a fancy prop needs to be here. From nine to midnight, only loud, indifferent people or drunkard men walk in here. The usual rush of tired and starving Seoulites will certainly not mind about the vase.

“Ask dad about it.” Johnny replies, hearing the old man cutting vegetables in the kitchen. It suddenly smells like kimchi broth in the restaurant. “I don’t think he likes it, anyway.”
Mrs Seo mutters something about cutting his meals but she ventures towards the back room anyway. She disappears behind the door and Johnny is back at staring towards a boring Sunday afternoon. The break is not unwelcomed. At twenty two, high school is far behind him and the future is further. University didn’t sound like an option to him. His parents threatened to cut his inheritance but Johnny knows they already spent it to invest in the restaurant. Working here is the only thing that can ease his mind, the Soes are not that young anymore and two employees already blows the budget off.

Johnny likes to think he is a diligent son. Instead of listening to them, he has decided to study online, hoping he is not getting scammed. He doesn’t need a degree to take other the small business, Friday nights spent being nagged by his father about how to cut meat is enough.

The bell above the door chimes and Johnny’s head jerks up, looking towards the entrance. He is relieved to see Taeyong, content to know that the other is still alive. Johnny’s heart beats a little louder now, excited to see his friend. The white haired boy makes his way inside and Johnny meets him halfway, smile reaching his eyes.

They go back to middle school. Johnny’s family just moved from abroad and he felt out of place in the Korean system, like a little dandelion risking to lose against the wind at anytime. But when a lanky, pretty boy approached him with a bottle of Sprite in hand, sharing his notes with him, Johnny knew what the little pinches in his heart meant. Suddenly, a fortress was built around that little dandelion and today Johnny is a sturdy oak, unbothered by the wind thanks to Taeyong.

“Hey, you’re not supposed to work today.” Johnny greets. There have been time Taeyong has insisted on helping more than he should and the answer has always been negative from his employers.

“I know, I’m here to have lunch with a friend.”

Johnny is taken aback for a second. As far as he knows they never had a big group of friends and Taeyong is probably too busy over financial matters to walk around, pretending to be a social butterfly. Who? The question gets stuck in his throat when the door opens again and Taeyong gestures for the newcomer to join them.

The smile on his face is sincere and Johnny believes the person must be important. Taeyong doesn’t smile to anybody. Anybody, what a careless and ironic world. Johnny’s jaws drop lower than the ground when the person is in front of him. He recognizes the feline eyes, soft features, those numerous ear piercings, the jet black hair. He doesn’t recognize it because it is familiar, but because anyone in the continent can.
“Hi, there!” The voice sounds exactly like what he has heard on TV before. “I’m Ten, Taeyong’s friend.”

“What the hell…” Is all the tallest manages to say and amusement is obvious in Ten’s eyes, followed by an emotion that appeared and left too fast for any of them to comprehend.

“You’re right, your dad hates it.” Mrs Seo emerges back from the kitchen, a frown on her face.

A loud shattering echoes when she looks over at the trio. Well, at least they know where to put the damn vase, now, in the trash can, Johnny thinks.

Ten stares around the place, he has seen those in cheap dramas only. It is cleaner than he thought it would be when he saw the storefront. The interior is simple, wooden tables and wooden chairs lined against the wall. He hopes the waiter is in the menu because his breath stops. Ten’s confidence flies out of the window. Johnny, as Taeyong introduces him, towers over them and if Ten looks up, he will probably meet his chin.

He has seen his shares of gorgeous actors, and even dated some, but this man is in a world apart. Ten confirms he has seen better but Johnny is a special type of beauty, especially when he gapes at the singer like he has seen a ghost. Saying it is love at first sight might sound sappy, and it is, but Ten can say it is a crush at first sight.

The atmosphere is hard to explain when the man and the woman behind him stutter their words and Ten feels a little discomfort for the first time, being under a gaze.

“Johnny, son, what are you doing?” The woman ushers as she steps over the pieces of porcelain shattered on the ground.

She smiles brightly as she approaches.

“Give them a table.” The woman bows a little and slaps her son on the arm, waking him up.

“Y-yeah, sorry.” He apologizes and Ten chuckles at his embarrassment. “Follow me.”
Taeyong almost rolls down on the floor, laughing, his friend has never been this surprised and unconfident before. Johnny, who is usually funny and bold is now an awkward mess. He doesn’t miss the “what the fuck” the taller mouths and Taeyong mouths back that he will explain later.

Ten sits where he is instructed to and Johnny watches them, still processing what he is seeing. Johnny usually indulges himself in some American rap songs when the night gets too dark, if he is tested about Ten’s lyrics right now, he won’t know what to answer. But the man is still a celebrity and seeing him sitting in a small, insignificant restaurant is odd.

“Why don’t you sit with your friends, darling?” Mrs Seo says and he is about to argue back but Taeyong is already pulling him and he finds himself in front of the most famous face in the country.

Ten forgets about his task for a moment. His eyes are focused on the man in front of him, the way his nose scrunches in discomfort, his glasses making his eyes look bigger, everything Ten has dreamt about in a man. No branded clothes, no haughtiness in his gestures, no face he has already seen in magazines, just a man, beautiful and humbly embarrassed.

“Ten is Jaehyun’s friend.” Taeyong introduces.

What did he expect. He feels himself being repulsed by the singer. Johnny is not one to judge at first sight, but he can’t seem to dissociate Ten from Jaehyun now, they are probably the same opportunistic bastards and Taeyong just complies to it all. He avoids saying a thing and opt on asking his best friend about his days, his activities, his well being and for a second Ten feels out of place.

The delicious smell of sizzling oil and garlic feels their sense when Mrs Seo turns on the stove in front of them and brings in plates after plates. It would have been a regular and completely normal service if she didn’t stop five seconds between each service to smile awkwardly at the singer. Johnny wishes for his sleeves to catch on fire and burn him down to the last inch of skin he processes.

Ten is not frugal but he has to admit the meal is worth every penny he will have to pay for it. The meat is melting on his tongue and the broth taste like the ocean even if they are in the middle of the city. There is nothing he wants to add when Taeyong and Johnny are exchanging about things that don’t concern him. The time passes by faster then he would have liked and Ten feels something twist in his guts when he takes the last spoon of rice between his lips. It is not about the meal being over, it is about having to say goodbye to the minutes and seconds that offers him a sight of Johnny. It is a crush at first sight.
“Who is he?”

“What is he doing here?”

There’s something uncomfortable and suffocating about the way his bowtie laces around his collar. There is something unusual and terrifying about the whiteness of his perfectly ironed shirt. There is something mind numbing about the way everyone looks at him, with wonder and apprehension. Is it the golden roses buds he has for buttons, the silver laces adorning his dress shoes or just the bigger and warmer hand holding his ten years old ones?

Jaehyun is practically sure it is not his perfectly gelled back hair. The woman who has been introduced to him some weeks ago, Mrs Park, has a certain skill with combs and hair drier. His age does not define his wit, Jaehyun is fully aware of that, and it has always been more of a burden than anything else. So he understands it easily when the woman, clad in a navy blue dress and pearls around her wrist, holding his little hand smiles at a guest. It is the name, not the attire. It is the name that is now associated to his. It is a detail, a small detail, meaningless to those who are foreign to this selective universe but it weighs its worth in gold, here. He is now Jung Jaehyun, not on paper, not for now, but it has become his value.

“Hello, little buddy.”

“Would you like a glass of juice, young master?”

The courtesy and esteem come too suddenly for his young mind to process. He is new to this world and sometimes he stumbles when Soobin takes bigger steps than his. But she stops before the fall, pulls him back up gently and tells him he can do better. The encouragement helps him adapt to this new surrounding and he even offers little smiles when he is asked his age. When he was told he will attend the Kang’s annual dinner, he didn’t fathom the mundanity of the event.

He is surrounded by grownups, talking about things and numbers he has never heard before. Waiters with plates bigger than his head waltz around him with ease and he wonders what is the use of it all when there are barely thirty persons in here. The house looks like those he has seen on TV’s at the orphanage, when other kids were watching extravagant movies. Jaehyun didn’t envy the wealth, he just wondered if being in such place could make someone happy as he sat in a corner far from everyone. And here he is, and he felt complete because for the first time in his life he isn’t being pushed in a corner. He is in the middle of the attention, the recognition, the sense of belonging, everything that has never been granted to him.
He finds himself wandering in a brightly lit garden when Mr Jung tells him to go and play. A housekeeper, following closely behind, has been assigned to him in case he gets lost or is in need. And that is another thing that makes his heart swell with adoration for the Jungs, the care. Jaehyun has never been an active kid. He likes running around when he needs his body to lose the numbness from sitting down or sleeping too much. But he would rather sit on the swing and watch other kids play in the sand. So he walks calmly between bushes, exploring this new world of wonders and light.

“So you are the beggar Aunt Soobin took in.” The voice is elegant and almost aerial, but the tone is laced with so much venom Jaehyun has to stop walking to listen.

He hasn’t seen any other children around tonight and at some point he came to the conclusion that he was the only one. The girl is a little bit more taller than he is. He immediately recognizes Mr Kang’s features in hers and he links the dots easily. Her black hair are tied in a neat ponytail, Jaehyun can’t identify the exact color of her little fur coat, blames the poor lightening, but he guesses it is brown. She holds her head high as if she refuses to meet him eye to eye.

“I am.” Jaehyun sees no point in arguing, because she is right. Instead, he holds his head higher, refusing to show her the pain she thinks he has.

Something shifts in the way she stands, as if her defense has been pulled down way too violently. Jaehyun ignores the definition of chivalry or gentleness. The world has treated him unfairly, regardless of gender, and he is going to strike back, regardless of gender. He is ready to fight, to claw at her eyes if she insults him again. But instead she smiles, it is strained and practiced but it holds a certain respect that is rare at their age.

“I am Kang Seulgi.” She informs and Jaehyun repeats the name in his head.

“Jung Jaehyun.” He greets back. What an odd exchange after a very cold meeting.

“I know, stupid.” She brushes past him. Instantly, he understands it is not hostility, it is an invitation, a baptism to this world he will now be carved into. “Wanna play in my room ?”

One annual dinner turns into many others and Jaehyun is not the clueless kid he used to be anymore. At the age of fifteen to the day he has to leave for college, his name has shaken up every acquaintances of the Jungs with jealousy. The rivalry between him and their children has risen faster than he thought. He also thought he could like Seulgi easily, as she is smart and down to earth, pretty and shares his mindset, but he is wrong. Over the years she has become exactly who he is,
calculative and intelligent, except vanity and haughtiness are more familiar to her than anyone else. She craves for his attention, he finds entertainment in her rivalry.

*If there is something Jaehyun hates, it is those who are similar to him. He has been molded to fit into the business system, to be who he is today and he knows the darkness of his heart, the avidity of his mind, and the last thing he looks for in a friend is the reflection of those traits. He is in middle school when he learns the truth about The Jungs son. They haven’t been discreet about the matter, and Jaehyun doesn’t comment on it. Maybe knowing about it grew the competitiveness in him even if he never voiced it out.*

“Mr Jung ?” It is the third time, he heard it all but ignores it in hope she walks away but instead he opens his eyes.

He is met with the sight of Seoul’s highest skyscrapers, melting under the sunlight, and deep inside he fears they would come crumbling down towards him like an inevitable wave. With a sigh he turns around in his chair to see one of his executive chief standing behind his desk, her hands shaking slightly at her side and her gaze casted downward. She doesn’t work on Sundays, usually and Jaehyun didn’t request for her help at all but he still feels upset when the file he asked for is not between her hands.

“I’m sorry, sir.” She starts. “I tried to contact the marketing branch but since it is the weekend I couldn’t get an answer.”

He has expected so much and honestly he doesn’t feel as mad as he thought he would be, which is not like him so he glances at the glass of water next to his computer, wondering if he has been drugged. A voice at the back of his mind keeps telling him that whatever he is trying to do today, it can wait for next week. And he finds himself cringing at the sudden display of laziness coming from his guts. But most importantly, the voice at the back of his head keeps screaming at him,

*Just be thankful when someone works for you.*

The way he suddenly leans back with a groan surprises the woman. Jung Jaehyun is usually seen as the unmoving force among the executives and she starts to wonder how big of a mess she made for him to act this way. She is waiting for the outlash, the unapproving stare he will grant her but instead he opens his eyes again and waves her off with a hand.

“If you’re sure.” He says, “Just go home and have a rest.” The end of the world, the extinction of human race, she expected it all before this.
“S-sir, are you alright?” If only he was.

“Just go before I change my mind.”

He turns around to face the living city again as she bows, closing the mahogany door softly behind her. Jaehyun feels every bit of energy sipping out of his body, an unknown weigh settling on his shoulders, messing with his organized mind, turning it into an anarchy. He doesn’t want to think today, and the glimpse of white hair and smooth skin in his imagination intensifies the feeling. If he squeezes his thoughts a little more, he still can feel the touches from the night, the warm lips and the vivid voice of the other…

Taeyong is a distraction he will have to pay with more than bills, and his sanity is on the receipt. He thought that after having Taeyong around he would forget about the growing attraction, that it would calm his need like a good smoke, but it backfired, having him craving for more. And once again he finds himself acting like someone else, as if put under a spell, as if the simple thought of Taeyong’s lips against his can send him to oblivion.

He doesn’t bother reading the last reports, or checking the last files he has left for the day. Jaehyun stands up to his feet and with long strides he is already at the door. He ignores the questioning stares he gets from some employees who are probably waiting for another order, they only get a silent man, rushing to the elevator.

Nor Taeyong nor Johnny can explain how they found themselves in the current situation. It started with Ten dragging Taeyong back to the car after lunch, Johnny asking where they were going, Ten inviting him and Mrs Seo forcing her son out of the restaurant. Johnny is not well acquainted with names and brands, pinpointing exactly where they are is still a struggle for him. He makes the mistake of looking at a price tag and he immediately stuffs it back in the coat’s pocket, pretending he never touched.

His friend is being dragged around by Ten who seems more at ease around him now. The staffs are not even fazed by the boisterous man, as if him being here is a normal occurrence, in a corner Johnny can even spot the exact same shirt Ten is wearing. The lack of customers makes him grasp that this is a place where they are not meant to be at ease. But Ten still pick items after items, a hand on Taeyong’s wrist and it’s Johnny’s turn to feel out of place, left to fend for himself.

Taeyong is less impressed, he has seen it all despite not living it, but the fact that Ten is forcing him
to wear fancy suits leaves him wondering.

“You have a date with Jae tonight.” Ten winks at him and Taeyong doubts date is the right word.

“By date you mean work.” The white haired boy half whispers when he notices his best friend is barely some meters away from them, looking around the shop.

“Hey, I’m being positive here.” Ten reassures, finally handing him what he is supposed to try on. “Go try those on, you’ll look amazing.”

Taeyong doesn’t have the time to complain as two men clad in black uniforms help him to the fitting room, needles and threads in hands. Ten watches them disappearing behind a curtain and instantly his eyes focus towards the giant towering over the racks. With careful, delicate movements he travels between the rows and Johnny doesn’t seem to notice his presence. The glint in his gaze makes Ten a little bit jealous and he finds it ridiculous because he barely met the other.

His long and thin fingers caress the silver surface of a chain bracelet, one Ten has seen in some magazines before. He imagines how it would strap around the white veiny wrist and Ten finds himself smiling. This is probably how fifteen years old high school girls feel when they see him behind the screen. It is not like him to act like this, but that face, that body…

“Pretty, right ?” Ten informs the other of his presence.

Johnny’s heart does a somersault and he quickly withdraw his hand as if he has been touching something sacred.

“Whatever…” The hostility is way too present in his tone for Ten’s liking but he has to cut the younger some slack. The mere thought of Jaehyun sometimes repulses him too.

“Maybe we should get along for Taeyong’s sake ?” Ten tries but he only gets a cold glare in return.

“Should I thank you for buying his honor, too ?” The sentence stabs the older in a very painful place, he can’t say exactly where.
Johnny almost feels guilty when Ten smiles again, as if he hasn’t been offensive. But anger and hate blinds him a little more. He knows Ten has nothing to do with the contract between Jaehyun and his friend, but it doesn’t mean he isn’t one of those who agree. His burning feelings for his friend doesn’t make it better.

“There are a lot of things you don’t know.” The singer stops himself before he says too much or say something that might ruin his friendship with Jaehyun.

The smile hasn’t left his lips even with the venom laced in his soft voice and Johnny doesn’t know if he should be creeped out. Ten is nothing like the screen portrays him. The man looks like a child waiting for attention and protection in real life…

“I don’t need to know.” Johnny argues and misses the hurt on the other’s face, for his defense it barely lasted a millisecond. “There is nothing to say about people like you.”

If Taeyong bites, this one tears and crushes. Johnny feels guilt striking, once again but he doesn’t bend. If it was up to him, their path would have never crossed. He knows Taeyong would have been happier without all of this… He just knows.

“People like us ?” Ten scoffs, losing his patience. “What doe-”

“Hey guys, how do I look ?”

None of them has the strength to say breathtaking, instead they gape with approving stares at the man standing in front of them, arms stretched open as if waiting for a hug. Johnny hates the materialistic cover that drapes over his friend but this time he can make an exception. The thin silver glitter stripes that travel from his shoulder to the edge of the white shirts make him look like a river of diamonds. He feels his mouth going dry at the sight of the white fit slack pants and he can imagine Taeyong wearing his usual makeup even if he is better bare faced.

The way Johnny’s eyes shine and the curves in his smile don’t go unnoticed to Ten and he feels a little pang of envy for Taeyong. The younger has successfully managed to capture Jaehyun’s attention, it is no surprise he can capture anyone else’s. Is it odd if the singer wants Johnny’s eyes on him the same way… or even better.

“You look beautiful.” He finally manages to say, deciding that whatever display of emotion Johnny just had, he will question later. “We’re taking those.”
Ten skips towards one of the staff and Taeyong waltz playfully towards his best friend.

“Hey, I know what you’re thinking.” He says as he pats Johnny on the arm and the latter think it is an unfair move when he is dressed like this. “Let me just enjoy myself, that’s the least I can do to show you I am okay.”

I am okay, I am fine, I don’t mind. Johnny has heard it all for the past years over and over again and by now he knows how to identify the lie in each words. But there is nothing he can do. There is nothing he can do to make Mrs Lee healthy again, nothing he can do to make Taeyong happy. But what he scares the most, the fear that gnaws at his entire being is that those people they hate so much will succeed in it.

“You know I can’t support you on this.” They haven’t showed such honesty in so long but it is a necessity today. “But you know what you are doing.”

Taeyong puts a warm palm against his cheek. He can’t tell his friend that he doesn’t know what he is doing at all, he is lost, life has made a mess out of his mind but this is the clearest path for him, for now. And he tries to convey it all in that simple gesture, thankful that he has at least one friend left. The moment is cut short when he is asked to take off the clothes so they can leave.

Taeyong finds himself carrying two bags full of things he probably won’t wear ever again. In this life, in this economy everything’s made to be used and thrown, just like him. Nobody says a word, too much on their mind and the walk towards the parking lot is quiet. Taeyong knows that recomforting Johnny is just recomforting himself too. One day there will be a downfall, he will swim in self-loathing and not the priceless designer clothes nor the new friendship will save him.

And the reason of that downfall is never very far. To be exact, he is standing in all his arrogant glory next to Ten’s rundown car, leaning against his sleek one, and they all know he has been waiting. A palette of emotion runs across their features, if Ten is relieved to see his friend, Taeyong is nervous to see the man who filled his night with unorthodox memories, Johnny is less than pleased, needless to say.

Taeyong can’t remember if Jaehyun was this attractive yesterday, was his hair combed in such a classy way, did he wear the same dark outfit, was his Rolex at the same wrist? He should be damned for seeing a better version of his nightmare everyday.

He remembers hearing that the man works until late on weekends so what is he doing in the parking
lot of a mall at barely five in the evening. The answers would be for later because the man comes to him, standing tall and glorious as ever. Taeyong lets the bags go when Jaehyun takes them and from the proximity he can smell the familiar cologne… With a little bit of luck his blush will go unnoticed.

“You were taking too long.” The tycoon addresses to his friend and Ten gives him a sheepish smile.

Jaehyun doesn’t miss the way Taeyong’s friend is glaring at him but he doesn’t bother to acknowledge his presence. Instead he focuses on the way Taeyong looks down, the way his lips puckers and the light breeze ruffling his soft cotton hair. And for a second he wishes he could ruffle them instead.

“To many shops, not enough Ten.” The singer shrugs, a playful smile at his lips because he can tell exactly why his friend is here and not stressed out in his office.

Instead of hearing a smart reply, Taeyong feels a hand wrapping around his delicate wrist and just like that he is dragged by Jaehyun towards the car. He doesn’t mean to be dramatic when he turns around towards his friends, a little panicked.

“W-Wait… John-”

Jaehyun swings the passenger door open, throws the bag at the back and stuffs him in without gentleness. His voice gets muffled when the door closes in front of him and he assaults the handle to try and leave but in vain. He sees Johnny about to sprint at his rescue but Ten restrains him from doing so and he mouths a “later” even if he doesn’t seem to know when that will be.

Chapter End Notes

Hi guys! Hi to those who came from aff and found me! First of all thanks for the feedbacks the comments make me happy. Hope you like it and expect the next chapter very soon!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There is a long silence, blurred by the sound of cars passing by. Johnny isn’t really sure of what he just witnessed, certainly something that looked like a kidnapping. The only thing stopping him from calling the police is the boisterous man next to him, and the fact that Taeyong didn’t seem as bothered as he should have been.

“What is wrong with you people ?” Johnny finally yells at Ten.

“Don’t worry about your friend.” Ten gives him his nth smile of the day and that makes him wonder if he ever gets tired of beaming. “Come on, I’ll give you a ride home.”

“Taeyong is not your toy.” The younger argues because it seems he is the only one gifted with sense.

It is at that exact point in time that Ten sees it. The fire in his eyes, the quivering of his inferior lips. Maybe it’s the numerous dramas he has seen before, or the writings he did but the feeling is unmistakable. Johnny is in love. Ten can’t say he knows how it feels when all he felt before were little butterflies that turned into nothing, crushes that faded as fast as footprints in the sand.

Now, he feels compassion for the other because nothing hurt more than a one sided infatuation. And it makes him nervous too, because that means his own infatuation has no chance to be reciprocated.

“Don’t let those feelings eat you out.” The sighs Ten gives Johnny stabs harder than the words.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Denying it is probably not the best way to play it safe. Johnny is aware of how much it shows but it can’t be helped.
“Get in, lover boy.” Ten teases and Johnny finds himself gaping at the shameless man.

He is about to say it is not true, about to argue, about to throw a tantrum like child but Ten is already climbing in the car. Without a second thought, but with a lot of regret, he climbs in, too. He ignores the smirk Ten sends him when he is settled in the seat and for the entire ride, he prefers looking at the passing landscape.

“I’ll keep your secret safe.” Ten says as they take a turn towards the restaurant area.

Johnny shifts uncomfortably in his seat, palm sweaty and eyes suddenly casted on the singer. He is not joking, that Johnny is certain off. The promise is said as if he means it, as if the younger needs some sort of protection when he doubts it is still a secret now. There have been times when he tried to convey his feelings to Taeyong only to be ignored. The latter has made sure that relationships can be a burden to his life, taking care of his mother is already time-consuming.

He thought he has hidden it well, his mother, who is usually very observant seems blind to it. And in the span of an afternoon, this extravagant and loud man has read him like an open book, how scary is that?

“I don’t need your empathy.” Even he feels like it’s a lie but no comment is made.

Ten has read that, too. It shows in the way he suddenly grins compassionately, shaking Johnny to his very core and he starts to wonder who is this man. Even if he denies it, his presence is like one of a long lost friend, as if they are strangers but can read each other with so much ease. And Johnny has seen the thousands of insecurities in the feline eyes the moment he said “people like you”, still he tries to not dig in.

Johnny wonders how people see Ten, because he is just odd to him. And the question stays in his mind until they park in front of the restaurant. the car comes to a violent halt and Johnny unfastens his seatbelt.

“We are not done with this conversation.” It sounds like the singer is planning on meeting him again but Johnny doesn’t think he wants that. If Ten has managed to decipher his feelings with a single glimpse, what ravage can he do within a stare…

“I am, good night.”
When Johnny steps out and slams the door behind him, Ten feels like a rejected teenage girl but it comes with a rush. Out of all the people who want him, why does he want the only person who seems to hate him…

“The fuck did I say about rudeness?” Taeyong yells as Jaehyun speeds towards the setting sun, aiming for the hill his house is on.

Taeyong should know better when Jaehyun ignores his complaint. The man hasn’t said a word the whole ride. The younger has to admit he saw the lust on Jaehyun’s face when the orange rays of the evening grazed it. He knows what is coming. Knowing the man is not what he aims to do, but understanding his emotions is a game that gets easier for Taeyong.

He too feels the rush in his breath, the shivering in his yelling. The scariest part is this becoming an occurrence and the sane part of him screams that last night was a mistake. They both know that tasting the skins, playing the heat would only leave them unsatisfied and mad but they didn’t resist. Taeyong likes to think he doesn’t have the choice, but he is only lying to himself, he could have said no. Jaehyun clearly said that lust is just a condition he can refuse, but Taeyong has turned it into an inevitable option.

He feels giddy when the automatic gates of the residence opens in front of them and Jaehyun has never felt it being so slow. He turns off the engine, body getting hotter when they are seated in the silence of the dimly lit garage. Taeyong feels it too, none of them are blind.

“No what ?” Taeyong turns to him, a scowl on his flawless face.

If he holds back, he might as well surrender to insanity, Jaehyun thinks. So without a warning he dives in and plants his lips against the soft ones and it is divine. The craving he felt during the day turns into a pool of desire and it travels down south. Taeyong laces his fingers behind his neck, unable to deny the attraction. In moments like this, he shrugs every speeches about pride and dignity at the far back of his mind.

Jaehyun’s lips moving hungrily against his is a world apart, a thorn sugar coated in bliss, they will regret later, then come back at it again, that is certain. The older feels himself growing in his pants when he half heartedly let the other go and his soul get sucked in the way Taeyong’s red lips are swollen, the way his eyes are hooded as if he is nothing more than a ghost waiting to be used.
“We have places to go so let’s make this efficient.” The tycoon murmurs.

Taeyong has never seen anything faster than Jaehyun stepping out and yanking him off of his seat. But it is okay because they are attached mouth to mouth again, hands roaming to find a way under the suffocating fabric of their clothes.

The message is clear when Jaehyun palms his ass and with a swift movement, Taeyong straps his legs around the muscular body. Jaehyun will worry later about the alarming feather weigh of the other, all he thinks about is taking him inside. He manages to not stumble as he kisses the man and finds his way towards his bedroom at the same time.

Taeyong can’t say what part of the house they are in until Jaehyun lets go and his feet meet the cold tiles of his employer’s private bathroom.

“Undress yourself.” The low voices order and Taeyong magically lets his hand undo the string of his sweater, passing it above his head. “Slowly.”

He finds himself being pushed against the cold wall of the bathroom, Jaehyun’s hand placed next to his head, breath fanning his neck, eyes savoring every surface of skin. A merry-go-round of emotions invades his being and when he pulls at the rim of his shirt, pulling it up unhurriedly, he feels a cold hand spreading on the expanse of his flesh, burning him like steal on a sunny day.

Another hand helps him with the button of his jeans as lips suck on the base of his neck, making his head dizzy and light. It feels good, every time with Jaehyun feels better than the previous. When his pants and briefs are thrown next to his sweater, leaving him completely exposed for Jaehyun to ravish, he feels the inside of his thigh being palmed with a careful touch as if it could tear him, dangerously close to his erected member.

“Go inside…” A suction to his shoulder, another one under his ear. “Turn the shower on.” And thousands of butterfly kisses on his face. “And wait for me like a good boy.”

“Y-yes…” Taeyong prides himself in being strong and independent, but in this moment he lives for Jaehyun’s dominance and authority.

He gets into the shower booth, turns the faucet on and lets himself being engulfed by the hot water. His arousal seems to grow and he flushes his back against the cold tiles, making himself smaller when the booth can easily welcome at least four more bodies. It doesn’t take long before Jaehyun’s
naked and muscular body joins him and he moans at the sight. The sound is immediately covered by another pair of lips and Taeyong shamelessly hang on the other’s body, asking for more friction.

“P-please, finger me.” He whispers in the sensitive ears and feels the bigger member standing against his, asking for the same amount of attention.

Jaehyun complies, coating his fingers with soap and insert a digit, watching with delight as Taeyong’s lashes meet his cheek, eyes closed in pure bliss and mouth open in pleasure. How can an act so filthy withhold such a beauty… It will forever remain a mystery but he doesn’t want to know, he wants to be enchanted by the exquisiteness that Taeyong is.

His movement are torturous, too slow for Taeyong and with a scratch of his nail, he designs a perfect command on Jaehyun’s shoulder to go harder, a second digit. Despite the running water on their bodies Taeyong easily distinguish the traces of Jaehyun’s mouth on his skin and the thrusting of his finger and soon he is left unsatisfied.

“Do it, please…”

The older aligns, making the smaller wrap his legs around his waist and the cold tiles against his body reminds Taeyong of the glass walls of the terrace. But it is way better when Jaehyun’s cock fills him and he grunts, uncomfortable with the harsh penetration. Instantly murmurs of “It’s okay” fills his eardrums and he doesn’t know if he is dreaming or if Jaehyun is actually pampering him with care.

It is moderate at first, almost lethargic as Jaehyun’s brain numbs itself in the gratification of his tightness. But it turns wild at the third thrust and Taeyong screams ricochet against the marble, he moans the man’s name with such grace yet so sinfully and Jaehyun wouldn’t hear it any other way. He is falling over and over again, incapable to stop the downfall because in the matter of a few days, since their first encounter, Taeyong has managed to carve his name on his skin and on every bone of his.

The space rises gradually and Jaehyun has to double in strength to not let his knees buckle, to keep Taeyong up against the wall and he is close, close to losing it and worship the smaller with all of his being, if he is not already doing it. Taeyong let a silent cry announce his ruin and his semen is washed away with the water. One final thrust and Jaehyun is also pouring himself inside, his senses and pride crumbling on the wet floor.
Taeyong thought he saw it all, but apparently it is not the case. Jaehyun has left him some time to get ready and Taeyong has used it to ask Mrs Park about the Kangs that Jaehyun has mentioned so briefly. Prepare yourself to hate them, she said. He hasn’t memorised all the industries they are in, even if the poor woman spent one whole minute listing them. He remembers they are Jaehyun’s business partners, the most important ones so he must behave, that he understood.

The first time he saw Jaehyun, he expected a victorian mansion, shiny cars, pool filled with models, but he saw none of it. It was quite the opposite with the Kangs, except the model part. He freezes as they stood in front of a brightly lit two stories villa, the rows of columns and gigantic windows scratched the word humble in humble abode. Nervousness spreads in his body and he can’t even bring himself to look at the alleyway covered with branded cars which name he can’t even pronounce.

It reminds him of the charity party, the scale might vary but the value behind it is greater. He has been informed that only a few selected persons can attend, with less people, it gave him the space to attract attention. A hand meets his back gently and he looks up to see a hint of a smile on Jaehyun’s face. It amazes him how Jaehyun can turn from a scum to a gentleman in less than an hour but he says nothing and just lets himself be reassured. The other isn’t leaving his side and it’s all that matters tonight.

Without words they are guided inside where a good amount of guests are already conversing, coupes in hand, elegantly dressed and perfumed. Their attention is already directed to the newcomers and Taeyong looks at the carpeted floor, face turning red by each second. As expected, Jaehyun is already nodding at everyone, a professional dimpled smile on display and the younger feels incompetent and small…

“Don’t mind about them.” The older leans in to whisper and Taeyong nods. The rare kindness he shows is one the things that attracted Taeyong the first time, until he turns out to be an asshole, but he can’t but fall again tonight. If it takes fancy parties to see this side of the older, then he won’t mind. “Just be yourself and I’ll take care of the rest.”

Be yourself.

That doesn’t help as much as he wants. What part of himself does Jaehyun knows or refers to? The escort, the sex driven worker, the stubborn visionary… Even Taeyong doesn’t know who is supposed to be. So he opts on doing what he knows best, sticking to orders and smiling. He follows the older around as he greets everyone and Taeyong offers polite greetings and answers. He keeps up the facade for about half an hour until they meet an old man, probably around fifty, straight posture, booming voice and greyish hair. By the way he behaves, Taeyong easily guesses he is the host.
“Here you are, Mr Ju-”

“Always a pleasure, Mr Kang.” Jaehyun cuts, shaking his hand and the man blinks comically for a second.

“Always in a rush, I see.” Taeyong shivers a little, not daring to look in the eyes of such an important figure and Jaehyun senses it. He brings the smaller closer, hand sliding from the small of his back to lace around his waist and Taeyong suddenly feels embarrassed at the intimacy. “Stop the formalities, Jaehyun. And who do we have here ?”

Taeyong feels the question is directed at him but he stumbles on his words, not sure how he should introduce himself so he seeks for approval but he only finds what looks like disappointment in Jaehyun’s eyes. How to interpret it ? Is Jaehyun ashamed of having him there ? Little does he know the older hates his work ethics, that tendency of always waiting for approval, the way Taeyong is not the sassy vixen anymore once he wears an expensive suit…

“Jaehyun’s date, dad.” It is Seulgi who joins the conversation. “

Nobody misses the venom in her voice nor the beauty she is tonight. She eyes the men, her eyes travelling from the hand around his waist to the cold glare Jaehyun gives her. Taeyong almost chokes on his drink because he has the vague memory of insulting her some nights ago.

“L-Lee Taeyong.” He reaches out for a shake and Mr Kang accepts it, warmth never leaving his expression.

“And where are you from Taeyong ?” Seulgi is not near curious, it is obvious and by this time, Taeyong is already looking for an escape. Maybe if he sprints through the room, he can jump from one of the window and leave the country for good.

“That’s personal, Seulgi.” Jaehyun’s grip on his body tightens a little and Taeyong mentally thanks him for helping, even if he is sure the older is doing it for his reputation.

“Oh, but I am curious too.” The chuckle that erupts from Mr Kang’s lips is husky and grave and the young man uncomfortably stares. “Who are your parents ? What is their field ?”

The night has turned into an interview Taeyong is not prepared for. Seulgi bears a proud grin and her
father waits patiently for an answer. He sees Jaehyun opening his lips to answer but it gets cut short as a third figure makes an appearance next to them.

“Don’t pressure the child, my friend.”

Of course, she would be here. Jung Soobin, in a neatly cut and fit navy suit, her short hair combed back and pearls adorning her white neck. Great, all of the people he hates in one place and he is in the middle of it all, feeling helpless even though he is the subject of their conversation. Maybe he is mistaking but he sees sparkles in her eyes when she offers him a gentle smile, or is it the bubbles in her champagne coupe. Either way, he feels his guts churning and all he wants is to be out of here. He wants to ask justice for his father, ask her where they have been when he was dying under the sole of their feet but nothing comes, he feels paralyzed.

“It is time Jaehyun shows interest in someone.” Soobin says and said man raises a brow at her, Taeyong doesn’t miss it. He wonders what is their connection, from the charity party, he founds it too familiar and casual to be considered acquaintances, yet distant and polite enough to be less. “I am sure he is from an excellent upbringing.”

“And what school did you attend?” At this point Taeyong isn’t sure that talking about the public high school he dropped out from is going to please the guests and once again he is cut by Jung Soobin.

“Enough.” Her voice is stern and diplomatic, making Mr Kang look at her curiously. “I have some important matters to discuss with you and Seulgi. How about we leave the kids for a minute?”

“Have you been here before?” Taeyong’s voice waver a little due to the cold breeze swirling around the bushes.

The question comes to him when he sees Jaehyun walking with ease around the vast garden, as if knowing exactly where to go, where to stop. As soon as they were left alone, much to the younger’s relief, Jaehyun has brought up the desire to take a breathe outside. A very much needed breathe, Taeyong agrees. It is cold outside and they unconsciously walk a bit closer to each other, unbothered by the proximity.

The white haired male marvels at the way nature has been tamed, as if every leaf, every stone is made to be where it is. At this point, he can deduce easily it takes so much more to impress Jaehyun.
The man doesn’t even bother to look at his steps, maybe too confident, or maybe he knows it all by heart.

“More than I can count on my hands.” It is odd how there is no arrogance in his statement, if Taeyong replays it in his head, he can hear something that sounds like cynicism. “I’m sorry for earlier.”

Taeyong stops walking, mouth hung open and Jaehyun sees mockery in his eyes. He knows better than letting his guard down around the little vixen but he couldn’t help it, the younger would have brought up the subject anyway, he would rather bend than being insulted first.

“Did you, Jaehyun, just say sorry ?” The older scowls at the burst of confidence and malice coming from the young man. “Wait, if I open my ears a little bit more I can hear you beg for forgiveness.”

“I’m about to take it back.”

The man turns back around, ignoring Taeyong’s gleeful face, walking back towards their unknown destination. What he doesn’t expect is the sound of running footsteps on the ground and a wild and laughing snow fairy comes latching at his arm, putting all his weight as if he is about to stumble forwards. And Jaehyun stops in his escape, eyes a bit wide as he watches the man laughing, attached around his side, both hands securing around his arm. Jaehyun realizes once again how hurting Taeyong feels like swearing in a church.

Maybe he is insane, it has only been a few days he has known the other, a few days of bickering and carnal pleasure, but it felt like a few days of spring. Jaehyun knows this is wrong, someone is going to end up broken, in the best case scenario both of them, in the worst case scenario he loses the angel. Jaehyun is harsh, rough on the edge, frozen in the inside. He is sometimes cruel, sometimes void of compassion. But when this boy is holding onto him, pouring his heart out in little giggles, Jaehyun is just a man, on his knees, begging before the wall of his mistakes and faults.

Taeyong thinks he is just having some fun, that he is just chasing away the discomfort he felt inside. Needless to say how taken aback he is when a pair of warm lips meet his in a tender touch. This time, there is no need behind it, Taeyong knows by the way Jaehyun’s hands don’t roam his body, instead they are settled on the sides of his face as if keeping him warm.

He has always wanted the other to be more gentle, more human, but not this. There is no place for this kind of intimacy in a bond made of money, and the last thing Taeyong wants is to feel the useless pain attachment brings. He doubts Jaehyun wants it too. In his eyes, this kiss is just a way for the other to mark his dominance and territory, to secure Taeyong by his side whenever he needs it, a
payment for his service maybe.

“Stay in your lane, Mr Businessman.” Taeyong pushes him back gently, almost mistaking the glint in Jaehyun’s eyes with disappointment, or is he dreaming…

If it is the case, Jaehyun shows nothing of it and let the man go, stuffing his hands in his pocket.

“About earlier, don’t worry, I should have been ready.” Should have been ready … Jaehyun knows he talks about experience and it stirs a bitter feeling in his guts. Taeyong doesn’t even flinch and the statement is too casual for his liking. “Jung Soobin…”

“What about her ?”

“She kinda saved me there.” Jaehyun breathes out, but he is not hoping too much. “I mean I really hate seeing her around or even hearing her speak, but I owe her a little bit of respect.”

Inevitably, Jaehyun finds himself smiling a little at the information. He knows he is not even a step closer to reconcile the family, not even a step closer to reconcile with Taeyong himself, but he can do with what he has for the moment, and it is not like him to be patient and satisfied. But maybe Taeyong is everything he has ever needed. But if the danger of falling down, of bleeding inside, of hurting the other is still there, then he shall not step on any boundaries. He is a wise man after all, a businessman and he doesn’t fight a battle he can lose.

“It feels great talking to you this way, without insulting each other.” Indeed, it is.

“You mean when you’re not trying to be Ghandi.” That earns him a light punch and Taeyong is laughing again.

If anyone who knows him sees Jaehyun right now, they might think he has gone insane, that he has lost it, but he would say he found it all instead… And maybe, just maybe, he can admit he is falling more than he can climb back up.
Ok so first of all I'm so sorry this is a short chapter, in fact this was supposed to be attached to the previous one. But when I wrote it it got longer than expected and I haven't been updating in so long, I was tired of looking at my screen in the dark so I told myself "F*ck it I'm updating this and I'll make a new chapter out of the rest." So as you see no progress in Johnten for now, but don't worry it shall change in a slow burn. Also Jaehyun has finally come to term with the fact that he at least likes Taeyong, but the latter is not buying it (for now *wink*). I am so thankful of the feedbacks again, I wish I can answer to each comment with as much kindness so I'm answering here, Thank you and I love you!!! I am planning to add a new character soon hihih, you can guess it by the tags. Know that I really dislike writing something irrelevant to the main plot, so this character will be here to soften Jaehyun's personnality, no it's not a spoiler hahaha. Also if you think you've seen the last of Taehyun and Seulgi, feel my wrath dear friends!! Drama is on the way and there shall be blood and tears!! But also love love love ~~!


“Speculation about the researches has told us that there is no hope in finding him anymore.”

“A new possible heir to Jung corp., the Kang may feel threatened.”

“Jung Soobin has lessened her mediatic presence for the past month, sources has informed that her lawyer has leaked the concern over her place as a shareholder.”

Another article after articles and Taeyong rubs his eyes. He would say he is just curious but the fact is it has been obsessing him recently. Something inside him screams that the Jungs are maybe not what he ought them to be, but somewhere, the reality hits again. Why would he care anyway, he has nothing to do with them.

“What are you reading ?” With a quick movement, Taeyong locks his phone and stuff it in his pocket as if he has been doing something criminal.

Johnny raises an eyebrow as he takes a sit next to him, discarding his apron on the back of his chair. Of course, he knows. It has something to do with Jaehyun again, but he let it pass because he believes his friend when he says it’s another temporary job. Their shift is starting in half an hour, lack of activity and silence has once again brought Taeyong in the dark corner of his concerns, and they both know those people should be none of his concern.

“Why the sudden interest ?”

The other leans back, eyebrow raised and Taeyong knows he is in for another lecture on how he should be careful. He can’t blame Johnny, he would have worried the same to be honest, but his guts are telling him there is more to all of this than just a job. Maybe it’s the way Jaehyun behaves, or the way he doesn’t. The young man is not sure if he should see a friend or a nemesis in Jaehyun, he is not sure he has the right to see anything at all.

It has been a week and they have done the most to avoid each other, or maybe Jaehyun is just busy and Taeyong has been playing alone. But the night at the Kangs has left a deep impression on him, like a hot knife cutting through ice. He swears for a moment, a brief moment, one that barely lasted a second, he saw care in Jaehyun’s eyes. A fleeting spark that looked like affection. But maybe the
champagne has been messing with his senses.

“I saw her at a party.” But before Johnny can intervene, Taeyong stops him with a raised hand as if asking him to hear out. “She was... kind? I won’t say she is nice but she made me feel welcomed.”

Skepticism lingers for some seconds as Johnny stares at him, not sure how to formulate a bitter remark.

“Tae, you know there’s so much more to those people then meet the eyes.”

How can he forget... Days spent crying over someone lost, over the unfairness of life, over the lack of humanity... And Johnny is right. He can’t turn a blind eye to all the reasons why he has come to despise them, not for a smile or a hint of affection. Because in the end, he sees the numbers on his bank account, the hospital bills and he knows everything is just a question of interest and entertainment.

“But still, I find it sad she has lost a son. Nobody deserves such a pain.”

They both know Taeyong is finding new compassion to soften his doubts and anger.

“And you lost a father.”

It’s almost freezing in the office, and Soobin can’t tell if it’s the lack of heat from the radiator or the simple glare Jaehyun is throwing to the files on his tidy desk. She glances at her watch and usually she would already be home this late into the night. Whether she is here for business or here because she worries, she would never admit. She’d prefer handling him with a mind full of severity and a pinch of care, Jaehyun has never done well with care and he has made it clear if she believes experience.

He doesn’t even notice when she pulls the white leathered chair in front of his desk and crosses her legs in the elegant manner she is used to. She has seen frowns, sweat and concern on his face for the past decade, his work routine, the way he overworks himself are nothing foreign to her. But for the past week, his behavior has changed, like a vessel forcing through way too big waves. She has heard about him handling everything, from the little details to the bigger pictures, to the point where his
It would be selfish of hers, foolish even, if she turns a blind eye to it because she knows very well why he is in this state. She has assigned enough people to watch over him and her son, she knows the latter still work at that insignificant restaurant near Incheon, she knows Jaehyun only interact with him in the confines of his house. She might be old, but she is not stupid, she has seen the way Jaehyun cared for the boy more than he should, which doesn’t bother her, but she dreads the day he would put the his wishes before hers.

“Are you going to talk ?” Jaehyun finally asks after some minutes, eyes not leaving his work.

He misses the little smile on her face but in his peripheral vision, he can see her playing with the silver ring around her finger. Probably a way of reminding herself that Mr Jung is always in here, breathing down her neck.

“I’ve been to the board meeting.” She announces and it is nothing surprising to him. “Mr Kang is retiring in a bit and you know that Seulgi is taking over after that.”

She lets some seconds of suspense for him to stop ignoring her presence and look up from his papers, which he does. With an aggravated sigh, he finally leans back in his chair and focuses his gaze on her.

“Still delusional about his merging ideas ?” The snort he lets out is oddly colder than the constant chill in the vast office and she regrets not covering herself a little more.

“You know we’ll never surrender to his offers.” She finally leaves the ring alone, having polished it with her touches enough. “But Seulgi is an ambitious woman, and she will find a way to merge both companies. They have an upper hand on the shares.”

That he knows and he shows it by rubbing the bridge of his nose in a frustrated motion. For as long as they remember, the Kangs and the Jungs have been partners. It seems inevitable that with the Jung’s head dead, the board members would trust the Kangs more with the shares. Soobin has never been favored in the business world, having been absent before her husband’s downfall and her competence are denied. The only thing she can get from it is her name.

Jaehyun would lose everything, a sand castle washed away on the shore if he doesn’t get on the Kangs good side , having no blood relation to the Jungs. Sometimes he regrets his wits and brain
because he instantly understands the purpose of her being here tonight, and he is not going to hide it.

“Think twice about this, Soobin.” He warns.

It’s difficult for her to keep the surprised expression off her features. Indeed, Jaehyun will always be two steps further than her, that is how smart he is, that is how she has raised him. If she doesn’t use the right words, balancing the right amount of control and affection, he will never bend.

“Jaehyun, it will benefit all of us.” And by all of us, he knows she means both of them, especially her. “He is the only legitimate person that can inherit the biggest share without a will-”

“No.” She has expected the rejection but it is not like her to tolerate his rebellions. “For him to accept the ordeal, he needs to at least like you first and we are miles away from that.”

By all the searching she did, she knows that too. Taeyong is still visiting that woman in the hospital, a smile on his face every time she looks at the pictures of him in front of the building. And god knows how much she wants that sincere smile to be directed at her. And god knows how much she will never let the Kangs lay a finger on what his hers. She wants it all and what a Jung wants, a Jung gets by all mean.

Jaehyun is back on his work but he is fully aware she is not done. It reminds her of those summer holidays she convinced him to go to camp instead of staying home and he has despised every second of it. He wants to stand stronger this time because he doesn’t see himself manipulating Taeyong for such a greedy purpose. Jaehyun knows he is reaching further than the real deal. He knows Soobin wants her son back genuinely, but he knows she would sacrifice everything to keep her bloodline and inheritance on top of every other name in Korea.

“Don’t think I’m blind to this little infatuation you’ve developed.” It is enough to gain his attention back, oddly his hands itch to break something. “Don’t worry, I’m not stopping anything. I can even use it to my advantage but know that if Taeyong is not signing his agreement to inherit the major shares, I’ll make sure none of us is.”

The determination in her eyes is enough to tell him that she is serious. Not a word can leave his lips before she retreats, making sure every delicate steps she takes confirm her threat. The office is suddenly silent, he likes silence, but now it’s weighing on his shoulders. He believes he knows his own strength and limit, but that belief dissipates when he finds himself throwing a glass towards a wall of his office, rage cursing through his being. The weak object shatters in a loud crashing sound and he feels himself shattering with it.
The bitterness has faded for a while. All that is left of their conversation are orders from the kitchen and the burdening smell of sizzling meat. The buzz of the discussions from every table doesn’t help the exhaustion from their hard work and before Taeyong knows it, he is sent home to rest. All he thinks about is the warmth of his apartment, in hope Taehyun is not there to make the end of his day a nightmare.

Taeyong wraps himself warmly in a scarf, the air outside is chilly as usual, but at least he is not as tired as he expected. With a little motivation he will make it to the bus stop in a short moment and then before he knows it, he’ll be deep in his dreams, the only place he can rely on lately. His breath turns into dense, white smokes and once he has made sure he is warm enough, he heads home.

He is not ready for a change of plan yet when, barely three steps away from the restaurant, he catches a glimpse of a way too familiar black vehicle parked on the side of the road. And as he expects it, leaning against the hood, hands in his pocket and eyes meeting his, Jaehyun. About a thousand scenarios cross his mind, playing dead is one of them, but he opts on quickly looking down and walk ahead as if the older wasn’t there.

“Where do you think you are going ?” Taeyong stiffens at the way the older’s voice is strained, on the edge of cracking and he realizes that maybe he has been waiting for too long in the freezing autumn air.

The younger stops for a second, contemplating if he should just greet him and run for his life. But he realizes that beside Jaehyun, he has nothing to rely on anymore and getting fired is not in his plans. He will leave when time comes and for a minute he tells himself this is for his mother.

“Hello.” He bows mechanically, as politely as the thought of the man allows him and approaches, a practiced smile stretched on his face. “I was hoping on going home, do you need me ?”

Jaehyun stands straight with a scoff and a little shake of his head. Taeyong gulps when he sees him leaning towards him, hands still warm in his pockets and the street light flickering makes him look like a nightmare, a very delicious one. He has learnt by now that when his hair is disheveled, when the creases of his shirt are way too visible, when he doesn’t bother tidying his black suit, then he had a very bad day.

“Why would you go back to that rundown apartment when you can come back at my house ?”
Taeyong tried, believe him, but when Jaehyun always find such a way to hit on his nerves, his resolves crumble completely and all that is left is a bitter taste on his tongue. Gone is the polite little man and he crosses his arms, defying Jaehyun with his glare even if his big sweater probably makes him look like a kid.

“First of all, you don’t own me. And beggars can’t be choosers, it may be small but I like it, at least I don’t have to fill empty spaces like you.” As soon as it leaves, faster than he wanted to, he feels regrets spreading in his shivering body.

Is it a second of sadness he just saw in the other’s eyes? Is the white smoke coming out of his mouth blurring his vision? Whatever it was, it is now gone and Jaehyun takes a step backwards, hostility now miles away from them and Taeyong tries to fill the hole he just dug.

“Listen, Jaehyun. I just want some time away from all of this.” He isn’t sure of what he is trying to portray but he points back and forth between them. “I just want to be in my own home.”

My own home… How would that feel? Jaehyun imagine that would be nice but somewhere inside him, he wants his house to be that home for Taeyong. That he would never voice out loud, it is not like him, his pride won’t allow it. Admitting his infatuation is something he can’t afford when he knows they can end up broken.

“Fine, I’ll take you there, it’s freezing outside.” But kindness he can do, he has learnt to do nowadays.

There’s a second of doubt in the other’s eyes and a gentle scoff breaks the hesitation. He sees Taeyong shaking his head under the dim light of the streetlamp above them and he braces himself for another lecture. But this time he is doing nothing wrong.

“Don’t act like that, it’s not like you.” Their moment is slightly disturbed by customers stumbling out of the restaurant in a mess and Jaehyun can’t put words on what he feels at that statement.

It has been years he didn’t give a second thought to what people think of him, whether it is an arrogant prick or a saint, though he doubts the second option. But when Taeyong always sees him as the villain, despite his effort to show otherwise, he thinks that maybe it isn’t his place to be the hero. Maybe Taeyong doesn’t need one. And he tries shrugging the pinch he feels somewhere next to his slowly beating heart and it’s hard to do because it has settled there ever since he met the other. And for some reason, his own pride takes over.
“Don’t think this is out of kindness. I want compensation.”

“I knew it, you scam.” The insult is an odd mixture of venom and tease but most of all, anger. “Everything always has to be for your benefit?”

And in the darkness of the street, where they can barely see each other without squinting, Jaehyun still feels and sees the harshness of those words. Why does Taeyong always react better to his coldness than his sincerity? The answer is not under the moonlight, and they are indeed freezing so Jaehyun shrugs aside the fact that he has been offended.

But really, why is he here? If Soobin didn’t threaten him, would he still make the effort… Or does the mere thought of Taeyong struggling away from the confines of his safe house terrifies him… One thing is sure, either way, this is what he wants to do and where he wants to be now.

“Beggars can’t be choosers, climb up.”

Jaehyun has heard of it, seen the photos of the street before, courtesy of his researches, but it is worse than he thought. When Taeyong has gave him -quite sulkily- the directions, a part of him wished it was a joke. For a vast era like Incheon, where foreigners and famous shopping districts blend in the perfect city life, the Lees have to live in the most unfortunate part where streets hide more than stray dogs.

The tycoon gets off faster than he blinks, aware that as soon as they stop, Taeyong climbs off and without even a goodbye, sprints for the door. But Jaehyun is not planning on saying goodbye that soon and with determination, he fetches a bag he has left on the backseat. The plastic bag is suddenly heavy in his hands when he sees Taeyong fumbles with his keys in front of a shabby door, stuck between two buildings in a slightly worst state. For a second, he thinks he hears something behind them but it’s an illusion and Jaehyun wonders how on earth does the other manage to come back here safe everyday.

“You opening that door sometime this week?” He half whispers just in his ears and almost laughs when the clumsy man screeches while turning around.

The bunch of jiggling keys falls on the pavement and he almost smirk at the glare Taeyong gives him.
“What are you still doing here?” The younger almost yells but keeps his voice low, his neighbors are not the nicest ones. “Thanks for the ride ok? Now go back home!”

“Who says I was only going to drive you home?” Before the white haired man can utter a word of protestation, Jaehyun shuts him off. “I said I wanted compensation.”

Taeyong sighs, and there he thought he could escape the man. Turns out he is way more persistent than he thought. Knowing Jaehyun, it must be some lewd shenanigans he is thinking about but Taeyong is beyond tired, morally and physically. So with an unexpected boldness that he hopes his employer doesn’t mind, he gets on his tiptoes and as fast as lightning he leaves a tiny peck on Jaehyun’s lips. To say the latter is surprised is an understatement but who is he to complain.

“I can’t let you fuck me open tonight but that must be enough, right? Now go home.”

Honestly, Jaehyun would take him right here right now if he wasn’t a decent man. He has long ago forgotten the meaning of the word cute but right now, with a bright blush adorning the young beauty’s cheeks, and the way he looks down that’s all he thinks about. And Jaehyun quickly clears his throat before he finds himself feeling things he hates to feel.

And of course, a bold Taeyong always comes with the idea that he is always being used for his services, and Jaehyun can only blame fate for putting him up with that defense mechanism. But he can’t utter the words “I care” because that would mean he believes them, and Jaehyun too is scared beyond imagination of what may lay behind those words. Saying it is because he has never cared before would just be an excuse. Whenever he makes a step towards the other, wanting to be good, to be different, all he sees is a dead end that would turn into a heartbreak.

“I am not here for that.” Taeyong stares oddly at the plastic bag thrust in his face and he can distinguish some bottles. “Open the door, I bought dinner.”

“What? No, you’re not coming in.” He refuses sternly. There is no way Jaehyun sees his pathetic excuse of an apartment. Fear of judgement and shame overwhelms him when Jaehyun looks like he won’t take no for an answer.

“That’s how you’re going to thank me? Letting me shiver in the cold?”

“You have a big warm house, go there.” Taeyong bends to pick up the fallen keys and goes back to open his door, more meticulously this time despite the lack of light.
As soon as he gets inside, he will close the door on Jaehyun’s face and call it a night. His day has been exhausting enough, he can’t add being mocked and played by Jaehyun in the long list of his nightmares. But he still feels the other in his back even when the door clicks open, and secretly prays he will give up and just go.

Who is he kidding anyway, as soon as he turns the doorknob, Jaehyun casts him aside, too fast for him to react. The taller pushes the decaying door and it screeches in an horrifying sound, Jaehyun is in his house, and he isn’t even sure he wants to follow inside. But he has nowhere else to be so with hesitant steps he follows, turning the lights on on their way inside.

Unsurprisingly, Jaehyun doesn’t utter a word as he takes his shoes off, and Taeyong just stands awkwardly behind him, hoping Jaehyun will change his mind. But the older just makes his way further inside and drops the bag on the little table Taeyong usually sits at when he is alone.

The man seems determined to stay so he doesn’t push him out anymore, and Jaehyun hasn’t said a thing about his apartment so he assumes he is not that judgemental of a bastard yet. Taeyong puts on his own slippers and slips past his employer who is looking everywhere, arms crossed like he is about to buy the place.

He tries to ignore the overwhelming presence in his humble abode, if Jaehyun is this stubborn then he can stay, but he shall not expect his host to be considerate.

“You’re not going to invite me to seat?” Jaehyun cuts through his routine as Taeyong rummages through his closet for something more comfortable to wear.

“You’ve already forced your way in.” Taeyong half yells from his bedroom, hearing footsteps approaching and stopping right behind him at the door. “Why mind manners now?”

There is silence for a second as Taeyong reaches for a t-shirt hidden in his piles of pajamas. That seems to shut the other up and Taeyong hopes he will here the front door open and that Jaehyun will leave him alone. But instead, the deep baritone voice reaches his ear in a timid murmur.

“It is so bad that I don’t want to be alone, tonight?” The frail fingers stop upon fabrics, and he seems to freeze.

This might be another trick he is pulling, maybe he is trying to be in control again. But something
inside Taeyong tells him that he has never heard Jaehyun this sincere and almost broken. And he regrets the soft spot he has in his heart. Maybe he really does want to fill all that empty spaces, whether it is in his house or in his heart.

A sigh leaves Taeyong, he is going to make a mistake again, but he always does when it comes to Jaehyun. Accepting this absurd job is already one so maybe he should make their situation less difficult. He reaches for a sweater he remembers borrowing from Johnny and a smaller one for himself. He turns back to find the tall man leaning on the door frame, as if he is desperately waiting for a positive answer. It’s puzzling how Jaehyun seems so docile when he decides to not be a douche.

“Here.” The shorter holds the biggest sweater for him to take and Jaehyun straightens his position, something akin to a smile playing on his lips and Taeyong looks down, not wanting to get even softer for the other male. “I don’t have pants that fit you but at least you won’t damage your shirt and vest.”

“Thank you.” It is said in a very distant way and Taeyong could have been fooled by the nonchalance if not for the stupid tiny smile at the corner of Jaehyun’s lips. And he finds himself beaming too.

He pushes the older inside his room and close the door so he can have privacy and heads for the bathroom to change in his own set of clothes, the idea that maybe this isn’t that bad of a situation lingering.

Five minutes later, Taeyong finds himself looking through everything Jaehyun has bought and his eyes widen. Soju bottles, bags of candies, cookies, popcorns… And Taeyong snorts in his hands. He hears the door to his room open and close and Jaehyun joins him looking sheepish. What has been a snort turns into laughter as the ash haired man eyes him up and down.

Jaehyun looks like a… Regular young man. If not for his styled hair, he could have been mistaken for a college student struggling to pay rent. And something in the odd look warms Taeyong heart a little.

“Are you making fun of me when you’re the one who dresses like this everyday?” The older scoffs and the offended glare he gives makes Taeyong breathless with mirth.

“Come on! This is better than your expensive for nothing brands.” Unconsciously, he lets the palm of his hand trace the fit muscles of Jaehyun’s chest, trying to smooth the thick fabric of the sweater. “You look real…”
And Jaehyun finds himself unable to breathe because the words pierce through his skin like a razor blade, sharp and soothing at the same time. He looks real, free from the veil of materialism and fakeness constantly covering him. He doesn’t remember the name he was bearing before the Jungs but now, in this tiny apartment in the middle of Seoul, dressed in a Chicago Bulls sweater way too thin for the winter, he feels like Jaehyun. Who is Jaehyun? He isn’t sure but it feels like it.

“Anyway,” Taeyong takes back his hand and starts emptying the grocery bag. “How many times have you actually cooked dinner, because this is not it.”

Jaehyun racks in his fading memories as he watches Taeyong rummaging through cupboards, obviously unsatisfied with his choice of food. He remembers the days in the orphanage when children were not allowed in kitchens and he couldn’t eat as much as he was starving. Or the days he was literally starving under the heavy rain of Korea’s coldest autumn, the days when he met Mrs Park and had been served like royalty, and realizes that he has never once had a little family dinner, cooked by him, for him.

“Well, since you filled my cupboards with those kind of things I thought it was your favorite.” He shrugs, as if it is nothing when he has harassed Mrs Park about what the younger likes. When she has decided he was way too dense, she opened the kitchen cupboard for him to see.

Taeyong stops for a second as he reaches for a jar of gochujang. He bites his lips in reminiscence of his grocery trip, it was just a stupid idea of revenge and it has come to this. Of course, he liked sweets but he didn’t think Jaehyun would go all the way to buy him this amount. He keeps the little dirty secret to himself and gathers all he needs for a decent meal.

“Fortunately I have everything for making kimchi jjigae.” He mutters mostly to himself, pouring some water to boil.

Jaehyun hums in response, keeping in the excitement of a simple homemade dinner Taeyong would make for him. As sounds of cutting knife and oil stirring fills the tiny space of the kitchen, Jaehyun wanders around the flat, even if he can cross it in a single step. There are cushions settled against a wall in front of a little TV, blankets scattered on them in an improvised idea of a couch. Against another wall, on a little shelf, framed pictures stands like an altar and Jaehyun frowns, curiosity trapping him.

Taeyong hasn’t changed from his high school self that much, still skinny and petite, the same features and gentle smile, no defiant glare. Jaehyun smirks to himself, guessing the other must have been popular. Another boy is standing next to Taeyong, arm framing his shoulders, and Jaehyun notice how they share nothing alike. Same with the older woman and man in hanbok next to the boys.
Jaehyun wonders how easily Taeyong can be fooled that he hasn’t noticed the difference.

In another picture, the younger is posing with a trophy of what seems to be a literature contest, a proud man standing next to him. And Jaehyun suddenly feels the same pride filling him, because he has expected nothing but smartness from Taeyong. He is aware of the prejudice weighing on escorts and sex workers, and from the moment the young beauty opened his mouth, Jaehyun knew they were just that, prejudice.

It is nothing big, no expensive vase, or leathered chair but every corner of this place reminds Jaehyun of the orphanage, the other kids. The way they were laughing carelessly as he watched from a corner, the way they would cuddle each other during cold days, or share a bowl of milk… Taeyong used to have something he has never known, the happiness of being surrounded by people who cared and loved. And now the only thing that Jaehyun owns, the satisfaction of being someone who matters, belongs to Taeyong too.

As he sits quietly at the dining table, watching over the other’s back, something in him begs for surrender. Surrender to Taeyong, stop fighting and give yourself some warmth and rest finally, it says. And whenever he is about to take a step towards that appeasing idea, Soobin’s voice begging for salvation breaks everything and he is once again reminded of where he stands.

“Here you go!” He snaps out of his thought when a bowl of steaming red soup is placed in front of him and Taeyong sits across him.

“That man, in the pictures, your father?” The question feels strange in his tongue, because he knows the truth but he wants to know.

As he takes a first sip of his dinner, he wants to know who Taeyong was in the past, how he lived, what made him who he is today. And the young man seems very enthusiastic as a response, face half hidden behind his hand as he chews but voice clear.

“Yeah, it was in eighth grade. You see how I won that literature contest? I’m smart too, you know.”

Jaehyun doesn’t reply as a sign of teasing, only opting on raising his eyebrows and that earns him a little inoffensive kick under the table. The food tastes good, the air is less crisp than outside, it smells like home in here and Taeyong’s hair bounce atop of his forehead when he giggles and Jaehyun questions how he has been living until now, without all of this.
“How was your father?”

Taeyong stops eating for a brief instant, staring at his guest, more like intruder, with disbelief. Jaehyun cares? Since when and why? Or does he feel too awkward and is in need for a conversation? Either way, the man waits for an answer and Taeyong decides that maybe he should let his guard down for tonight.

He has never tried to speak to the man, and he did with his former clients, even if what they told him would be forgotten. But Jaehyun is different, because no matter how high Taeyong builds his walls, the other always finds a way in, not willing to give up. And the escort lets himself believe that he is wanted, just a little. In a month maybe, perhaps by tomorrow, he will be thrown away like a used tool but now, he can just give in.

“He was the best.” He starts, recalling the blurred memory of the fatherly smile, the sometimes terrifying voice, the comforting hands and it does more good than bad. “He wasn’t rich but he always did his best to buys us the prettiest clothes and fanciest meals. He would come back from work and feel exhausted but he’d stay up with me to watch my favorite rom coms, cuddling me to sleep…”

The tycoon feels it before he even hears it, the feelings, the longing of a lost heaven and he finds himself despising fate for taking such joy from the man. Taeyong has lost more than Jaehyun will ever win in a lifetime, and he feels guilty, for what he isn’t sure.

And the younger talks about his childhood, his favorite teachers, his trips to the sea and how beautiful his mother is. He doesn’t even know when they find themselves on the makeshift couch, facing each other but they are comfortable. And Jaehyun just listens, candies and cookies discarded between them, bottle of sojus emptying. He feels like a high schooler on a sleepover. It feels ridiculous but it feels right.

The way Taeyong’s eyes crinkle in joy just speaking of the past makes Jaehyun understand that he has been happy, happier than he could have ever been if he was with the Jungs. And he knows it’s selfish of him to try and take that away, to make Taeyong someone he should have been, but was never meant to be.

“What are your parents like?” Taeyong asks when he realizes he has talked about himself too much.

A little frown welcomes his question and he wonders what just went through Jaehyun’s head. Does he have a bad relationship with his rich parents just like in the dramas? Before Taeyong feels bad and tries to take back his question, Jaehyun shakes his head a little, taking a sip of his bottle. Already
sensing that Taeyong is taking too much advantages of his own share of soju.

“They aren’t as amazing as yours.” He shrugs when for real he can’t know.

The persons that come to his mind are those who raised him but they are not his parents. They have never acted like ones anyway, not that he blames them. They were just like those at the orphanage but better, less presents but more caring. He knew from the start they wanted an heir, not a child to love, and he signed for it.

And his real parents… there is no way for him to know who they are, where they are, as far as he remembers he has grown up at the orphanage and except the Jungs he has never known any other families. And he doesn’t want to know, whether they died or just gave up. If they gave up on him, it means they don’t want him back so there is no point in wanting to know.

“Where are they?” Taeyong asks again and it feels like burning bullets for Jaehyun.

“Somewhere out there.” The answer stays cryptic and Taeyong doesn’t ask further.

He understands he has been pushing a point of pressure to much and if Jaehyun doesn’t want to talk about it then he won’t.

“You’re always so grumpy, you should find a hobby.” The younger fires out of nowhere, giggling, already feeling his third bottle at the pit of his sanity.

“I have one-”

“Work is not a hobby.” Taeyong refutes the idea with an exaggerated shake of his head.

“Then I don’t want to have one.” He scoffs.

He does have one if teasing Taeyong counts now. Or having deep conversations about why society is so fucked up, then yeah it can take his mind off work.
“Look, for example, I really liked dancing in middle school.” Taeyong starts to giggle again, and Jaehyun is genuinely divided between taking the bottle away from him, or letting him make a fool of himself.

And he suddenly thinks about all the times Taeyong has argued with him, and the second option is better.

“Oh, why don’t you show me that?” The defiance is insolent, almost challenging and Jaehyun knows he is going to have his share of laugh tonight, and god knows it has been years the last time he laughed.

“I may be selling my services to you, sir…” Taeyong inches too close into his personal space, eyes wavering but smile still as soft as an angel and Jaehyun restrain himself from ravishing the drunk vixen. “…But I am not your personal dancer.”

“Well, I guess it’s just because you don’t know how to.”

He almost lets out a little laugh when Taeyong stands up, eyebrows in a deep frown and a tiny kissable pout appear on his lips. It’s as if Jaehyun as just insulted him, maybe he did. That can only be concluded by the younger’s talent if it exists. And that is how Taeyong gets trapped in the game and Jaehyun finds himself playing along.

“Open your eyes, then cause you won’t believe them.”

With determination, he goes standing in the middle of the room, eyes still lingering on the arrogant man who dared to challenge him. For a moment he just stands awkwardly and Jaehyun almost pity him. But Taeyong raises a perfectly curved arm above his head, the other stretches towards the left and he spins once.

There is no music, the movement is a little bit stiff, a little bit far fetched, Jaehyun is sure the man doesn’t excel in dancing as much as he says but it is alright. Not because it is good, but because it is amusing, heart warming and homey. And he spins a second time and Jaehyun laughs for the first time in so long when the so called ballerina stumbles a little on his tiptoes.

Despite the ridiculous attempt, Jaehyun still finds that body heavenly, as if it has been painted by the most delicate artist, with the finest tools to give life to the most beautiful being to ever exist. Jaehyun is not a romantic at heart but he knows Taeyong is an universal beauty, able to surprise he coldest
And surprised Jaehyun gets when the man attempts another clumsy spin, misses his chance to stand back in his feet and trips. With an almost inhuman speed, Jaehyun is on his feet, catching the younger in his arms before he hits the ground and time doesn’t freeze, it disappears, fading from the abstract trap it has created around them before.

None of them can tell if it’s barely midnight or late, a night stretching towards the sunrise as they stare into each other’s orbs. Taeyang feels dizzy and he isn’t sure if is the alcohol or the strong arms holding him in place and for some reason it makes him laugh a little.

“You’re always catching me every time things goes wrong for me.” Perhaps he is out of his mind, saying that out of the blue.

But somewhere he wants Jaehyun to know that he is thankful for appearing when he thought he didn’t have a job anymore. He is thankful because Jaehyun treats him good even if he is a jerk.

“Let’s put you to sleep.” The older cuts his train of thought.

And Taeyong feels his heart beating against his chest, as if wanting to escape because Jaehyun is handsome but terrifying at the same time. He is warm sometimes, glacial sometimes. And Taeyong wonders who is the real Jaehyun, because he definitely likes the one who is vulnerable, the one who searches for Taeyong whenever he feels a little bit too lonely.

It’s good, it tastes like sugar and soju when Taeyong lets their lips meet, melting together in an odd dance, better than the one he tried to show. Jaehyun freezes for a second because Taeyong has never initiated any intimacy before, and he has seen him dizzy from alcohol. And they say it only speaks the truth so he allows himself to dream that this is more than just an impulse.

Their lips molds against each other, tasting every surface of their cavities and when their tongue twirls in a slow waltz, Jaehyun thinks that dance could be his hobby too.

“Stop making me fall for you.” Taeyong murmurs against his lips and Jaehyun detaches himself, not sure he has heard that right.

He looks back at the scattered bottles on the floor and confirms that he drank less than the other. He
feels totally sober, totally fine, yet he feels himself falling too, hands sweaty, heart beating, eyes shaking for the first time in his life. He knows, he has known from the start he is deep in, no matter how much he denies it, Taeyong is so much more than a simple fuck, more than a lonely night for him.

He’s been suffering for days, weighing what’s right and what’s wrong, what he should do or not. He’s been suffering for years, not knowing who he should be and he knows, he knows he is going to break. But for now, just for a little bit in this lifetime he will allow himself to show just how much Taeyong means to him.

“I-...” But the words won’t come, because he has never said them before. He has never felt them before.

It can’t be done overnight but it can be shown so instead he leans in for another kiss and Taeyong immediately reciprocates it with as much desire. Monsters are waiting behind the door, demons are going to chase them to the end of the Earth. But for now, as they hold onto each other, onto that intoxicating feeling, surrounded by childish candy wraps, it’s okay, just them in the bubble where they are nothing but Jaehyun and Taeyong.

And just like that he lifts the man up, and puts him gently on the futon in his dimly lit room. Taeyong’s eyes are hazy, unfocused but they can’t seem to leave Jaehyun’s face. The latter crawls under the cover with him and feeling braver now, lets his hand caress the soft cheek, trying to remember every detail of the flawless face. One day he will lose all of this, so he is going to remember it all, cherish it before the downfall. This is a selfish decision but the heart wants what he wants and none of them has never desired something this much.

“Tell me I matter.” The voice is barely audible, the walls are thin and they can hear the street outside, the howling in the night, the blurred noises of passersby but they both feel the insecurity laying in Taeyong’s soul and Jaehyun has is too.

“You are precious, remember that.” Jaehyun answers, closing his eyes, rubbing their nose softly together and between the close walls of the bedroom, he knows he is convincing himself of the same thing.
Hello lovely people! First of all here is a very very late christmas/new year/lunar year/valentine gift for you. I feel like this chapter is lazy despite the words count because there is so much more I wanted to add but it started to get too long and since I put romance as a tag, I want it to be romance too so here is a little bit of fluff before the storm. I’m sorry for the long break cause exam is just hell, holidays are time consuming despite the joy and just life you know. Now I’m free because I have a mong break from college so expect another set of regular (no oun intended) update. Johnten coming next, new character as I promised, drama as I promised. A special thanks to my gf who wanted to be mentioned cause she the one who gave me the sleepover idea for this chapter (hope you satisfied dumbass). Again thanks a lot for all of the feedbacks and all the cute things you guys said! (Also let’s talk about WayV omg guys Liu YangYang is tryna kick Jaehyun away from the top of my bias list. And I can only say danke)
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It’s been so long, about a week, that he didn’t wake up to the morning sound of the city. And maybe years he didn’t have pleasant dreams anymore. If Taeyong allows himself to dream a little bit more, he would like to believe it is all thanks to the man enveloping him in an almost suffocating embrace. And he starts to wonder, while staring at the ceiling, since when did Jaehyun become so intimate.

The memories from last night are still vivid in his mind, and for some reason he regrets the alcohol hasn’t tampered with it. The loud beating of his heart, the lazy and torturous longing isn’t something he is sure he can afford now. But as his eyes meet the other’s still sleeping face, it transforms into wild tidal waves…

*You are precious, remember that.*

But he has had his share of delusions in the past. The delusion that family would always stick together, the delusion that life would be gentle, the delusion that he is more than what society makes of him… And Jaehyun is so much more, important, influential, smart, and maybe a little too generous with him. The deception is looking like an unavoidable end and he is afraid that if he catches himself off guard, he would be a simple play toy again.

“Are you going to stare longer?” The docile face turns into a frown but the tight arms around his waist won’t seem to loosen.

It is an odd sight. Jaehyun, the ever so distant and powerful presence, sleeping on a futon in an insignificant apartment in the middle of nowhere.

“Wake up, we both have things to do.” Taeyong hasn’t intended to be so aggressive, almost indifferent but sometimes he doesn’t know how to deal with the bubble of anxiety stretching his fears when he sees the older.
That seems to stir Jaehyun out of his slumber, frown deepening, brown irises coming to life. For a mere second, the desire is there, Taeyong longs to touch him, feel the soft skin wrapped around the sharp edges as if nothing else matter but them. But everything matters outside of their bubble…

With an impulsive move, he detaches himself from the grip, which he instantly misses. The day must go on and having his feelings messing with his pragmatic mindset is not in the plan. Soft but firm, the grip attached around his wrist, soft but firm. And he looks down at the man holding him back, breathe catching painfully in his chest.

Is it craving, a deep yearning he feels in the touch, desire and solitude in the dark brown eyes… He was once told that reading in someone’s gaze was hard, but he could see it clearly and clear memories from last night comes back, torturing him at the very instant. Jaehyun is a child, they both know it, a lost child looking for a shelter desperately, something to rely on but Taeyong can’t take that responsibility, for the sake of his sanity and his own heart.

“I wasn’t lying, I care.” The tycoon half whispers, voice muffled by the pillow as his rare timidity resurfaces.

“I know.” And that’s a lie, cheaper than giving his breaking soul to something with no positive outcome. “Let me go, Jaehyun.”

And he feels the guilt suffocating him between the narrow four walls of his bedroom because the hand falls back on the blanket, and Jaehyun closes his eyes, probably asking himself what he did wrong. Nothing, the younger wants to say. If only he wasn’t who he is, if only Jaehyun wasn’t Jaehyun then he would have given in. And right now, he can’t afford the emotional sacrifices a complicated relationship can bring.

After minutes of pacing the kitchen, not even sure of what he is supposed to feel anymore, he ends up picking up the empty bottle of sojus they have left on the floor. It is a negligible feeling, really, but throwing them away feels like erasing the painless night he has lived, the first one after so many years of struggle…

“You’ll come back tonight, right ?” It is Jaehyun, dressed back in his usual fancy attire, ready to leave. Taeyong turns away from the sink he has been facing, looking the man up and down and missing the simple version of him.

It is a side of the man he finds odd, as if everything changed over night, the gentleness, the attempt at
being more civil and human like… And the man himself knows it, the first step must be made for Taeyong to trust him, to trust his guidance in this world of madness. Perhaps, it is an attempt to heal himself too, because he has learnt by now that hurting the other is like belittling his own pride, he meant it when he confessed how precious the other is.

“Of course, dummy.”

The burdening silence of his little flat falls again when Jaehyun leaves with a nod, barely convinced he can come back to his own empty house. Taeyong shrugs it away with the front door closing.

The man is one he remembers from somewhere, he can’t put his finger on it. But the sleek vehicle parked in front of the door, the attire, even his demeanor tell him he is not the frugal type. The tiredness kicks in when the familiar stranger leaves, and he finds himself falling back against a wall, legs still holding but on the verge of collapsing. If he remembers right, it has been a week he didn’t sleep, but he can’t when he constantly have to run away from his loan sharks.

Life is never easy on people like them and the rage against all the unfair obstacles he had to face comes back when the shabby door opens again and the object of his madness comes waltzing out like a victim, and god knows he sees him as everything but a victim. Taehyun watches from behind an alley as the young man zips up his jacket, taking certain steps towards the Seo’s restaurant. It should have been him, the one without troubles, the loved one, the favorite child…

Maybe it’s the bitter after taste of alcohol, or his exhaustion that fuels whatever anger he has kept inside, and he knows he shouldn’t but his mind is asking him to do something about it, and Taeyong is the only thing in this system he can have control over, when everything else is fleeing out of touch.

He was willing to share, he thinks as he approaches the other with unsteady steps. When his father has brought back that lost child, there wasn’t a soul around willing to help the poor toddler, no police officer ready to give a second glance to a family without a penny. But they had kindness running in their blood, him, his parents… Taeyong has never stained his reputation, that of a good boy making everyone proud. Taeyong had what should have been his and he took it all from under his feet when his father died. It should have been him and his mother, no third mouth to feed, no sacrifice to send him to college. And Taehyun did what he had to do, putting Taeyong in his lane before that sacrifice could be made, having him pay back the kindness…

“Taehyun ?” He stops in his track, head dizzy, body barely sturdy enough to stay up. But he is strong, he is not weak… He can’t be weak in front of the weakest one.
Taeyong has stopped walking, turning back at the sound of footsteps behind him. Here it is again, that worried look, that constant look making him guilty. He is not weak… Taeyong is, always acting like he matters even if he himself finds his behavior questionable. “What a kind boy, what a perfect son, wh-” The voices, he hates them because Taeyong is nothing but an outsider…

“So now you are hanging out with the big crowd.” He scoffs, bones freezing at the sudden breeze, his clothes barely enough to keep him warm.

They both know where the conversation is leading and an immense pride overwhelms him when he sees the younger stepping back, fear etched on his face.

“Mom … She is not your mother, Taehyun wants to scream. But he can’t, because if Taeyong knows, he would have no interest in providing anymore.

“Don’t fucking talk back to me!” Without hesitation, body acting out of anger, another fist lands and Taeyong finds himself on his knees, warm tears wetting the concrete.

And Taehyun catches it, the barely audible murmurs of his brother. And he knows he is hoping for help, hoping for mercy. The name is unfamiliar but Taehyun knows he is praying for that man to come and save him.

“Just because he fucks you for money, you’d think he cares for you ?” Maybe he does, because in the end it is always Taeyong, the world seems to revolve around him. His parents’ love, all the best thing in life, it always comes back to Taeyong. As for him, he is left in the dark, crouching in agony and loneliness, wondering where it went wrong. “Do you think people care ? It’s give and take in this world, Taeyong, never forget. Even within our family, it’s give and take so why do you think someone like that would feel anything for you ? Nobody really cares for poor people like us.”

Recently, Ten seems to make mistakes on purpose. It must be the untamed rebellious side of him, or his eccentricity. But here he is again, in the little street, glasses and scarf keeping passersby from seeing his face. He is not as pretentious as thinking that young ladies would flung themselves at him, but avoiding any form of public scandal would keep him afloat until his next comeback.
It is curious, he has never seen a sign giving the name of the restaurant, just a bright front store with various dishes displayed on picture. Maybe he shouldn’t have came this late in the morning, seeing customers already lined up for a table. A simple exposure and Taeil would have his head on a plate. But Taeil is the reason why he is here at this hour. The other is busy and Ten wouldn’t have found any other opportunities to sneak out of the agency.

The bell chimes above him as he gets some looks, maybe too dressed for a fading winter. He recognizes and remembers the place, not like it would have changed in a week. The object of his affection is at the counter, chin on his hand, focusing on a computer screen, big glasses perched on his nose and Ten holds his breath, scared that it would disturb the meticulously arranged vibe of the restaurant. When Johnny is not as feisty as his best friend, he can look docile and soft, like a sunny day of spring.

“Welcome!” Ten remembers the petite woman sharing the same features as Johnny, and much to his surprise, as their eyes meet, she seems to recognize him too, mouth hung in shock.

With a warm smile she can’t see, only guessing by the crescent of his eyes, he put a finger in front of his hidden lips and she nods, reciprocating the action.

“Can I borrow Johnny today ?” He knew, before even asking she wouldn’t resist, but he is still taken aback by the way she nods so enthusiastically, not giving it a second thought.

Without glancing back, the charming woman speed walks to the counter, ignoring as a lady in a corner raises her hand. Ten can’t hear what is said from beside the entrance, but he sees as she claps the computer closed and tries to get her reluctant son to his feet. What a domestic scene. Perhaps this is what Jaehyun sees in Taeyong, all those things he never had, the closeness of a family, the lack of interest in every actions, love and care being the only lead.

The playfulness is short lived, blurred in the noise of the restaurant as Johnny sees him, frown obvious on his childish features. Has he expected a warmer welcome? Ten wouldn’t say that. It has been clear from their first meeting that the other is not going to open to him that easily. Ten is stubborn, having worked his youth to have what he desires and Johnny Seo is not different, because he is all that Ten desires from the first encounter.

“What are you doing here ?” Johnny asks with hostility when they finally stand face to face, his mother still attached at his side.
Ten doesn’t miss the little pinch the petite woman gives and Johnny flinches, in the most discreet manner.

“Don’t be rude.” Mrs Seo scolds.

“I need a stroll, a little break and a little company?” His pleading tone doesn’t seem to faze the giant, only making him frown deeper, suspicious about Ten’s intention.

After all, they only met once. Johnny is a simple man, living above a restaurant, trying to help is parents, with nothing but a simple life too. And Ten is… Ten. One just has to turn around a corner in Gangnam to see his face on a gigantic screen, promoting for some skin care. Johnny knows how deranged they can get, and he doesn’t want to be an entertainment.

“I’m sorry but I have work.” He simply replies, hoping on avoiding the celebrity but to no avail.

“You spend your day moping around, take a break.” His mother stops him with a glare and from the corner of his eyes, he can see the idol laughing in his big grey scarf.

“How about we make a deal? I get your time and in exchange I promote the restaurant on social media.”

To that, Mrs Seo gapes, maybe a little too happy at the idea. Ten knows how selfish and shameless it sounds, but it is the last string he can pull and there is no doubt, with Mrs Seo there, it is going to work.

“What do you take me for? Some sort of goods you can buy?” The giant counter attacks, clearly not pleased with the fact it seems to be alright with everyone except him.

“Go take that break, and don’t even think of coming back before we get that promotion.”

Johnny doesn’t do cafés. If anything, he despises such posh places, he doesn’t have the pretension so called authors or noisy high schoolers have. And this one is different, elegant and refined, smelling like sage and grilled beans. The chairs are far more cosy than what they have at the Seo’s and
everything looks too expensive for his basic tastes.

He can blame it on Ten who grabbed him by the wrist as soon as they were out on the bigger street and forced him in despite his reluctance. Ten is even more talkative from what he remembers, gushing about this and that on their way, about any dogs passing by, about any shop they encounter and in some way it calls for the younger’s pity. As if the Thai male has never seen such simple things in his life. But maybe he is just like that, excited, almost uncontrollable.

“Here.” Ten appears from behind him as he is seated in a secluded area of the café, the chill beats of a jazz tune in the background.

A simple cup of mocha is placed in front of him, making his sense tingly at the delicious smell. Ten takes the seat in front of him, discarding his scarf away, only big glasses obstructing his soft and pretty features. As much as Johnny tries to not be seduced by it, he knows he can’t. The entire continent has come to term with it, Ten is beautiful.

“Why are you doing this?” Instead of feeling offended by his cold tone, the older only gives him a sheepish smile and Johnny has to hide his blush behind the cup.

“Can’t I spend time with someone I like?”

It burns, too hot, the mocha, that is why Johnny almost spits it out. Ten looks sincere and he desperately tries to focus on the lingering taste of chocolate and coffee on his lips instead. He remembers their discussion, and by far, Johnny has given no reason for the other to like him.

“You and Jaehyun are sick fucks if you think you can toy with us for your entertainment.”

The heat of their beverage is not enough to melt Johnny’s walls, and here Ten hoped they were made of sugar. People like you. It rings in a corner of his mind. He still wonders what it means for the younger. The label sounds wrong, almost aggressive. And Ten wants to blame Jaehyun for what he reflects for both of them.

“Toy ?” The singer licks some foam off his lips. Right at this moment, he doesn’t know where his sincerity stands. But he knows Johnny is someone he can waste affection for. “Look at us, how many people do you think we can trust and like ?”
Johnny looks up, unable to hide his curiosity. He knows what the words hide, and it’s strange. *If you can’t even like me, who do you think does?* And he feels a little guilty for judging the other male without knowing him but it is quickly covered by the image of Taeyong being taken away by Jaehyun, images of Taeyong stumbling home drunk after being used…

“What do you want from me then?” Johnny lets himself relax, hostility gone, aware that fighting against this stubborn male is only going to rile him up more.

He can see the mischievous glint in the feline eyes, the corner of the idol rising in a sly smile. And he fears the worst. Ten has read him like an open book the last time, who knows how far he can see again this time.

“I want to date you.”

The mocha is still hot, Johnny convinces himself. He is not sure he heard that right, but Ten reaching to wipe the corner of his lips in a quick dab tells him it is real. He misses the comfort and warmth of the restaurant, he misses the time when some random celebrity didn’t mess with his mind.

“I’m out of here.” It is too much for him. The game has gone too far.

Why would Ten blurt that, boredom, lack of friends? Johnny doesn’t want to know. Without waiting for an answer, lips still tingling from where Ten’s handkerchief touched, he takes out his wallet, leaving the exact price of his coffee on the table and proceeds to leave. His attempt is disturbed by the scratch of a chair against the wooden floor and the conversations of other customers gets blurred in Johnny’s head. A grip stops him from making further steps away from the table.

He now understands as he looks at the shorter holding his wrist. He now understands why they are seated where nobody can see them. What a scene if Korea’s most wanted sweetheart is seen in public, in such a compromising situation. Johnny already imagines the absurd headlines about him, exposing his life like it’s not worth much.

“I don’t have time for your games. If you’re bored, go find someone else.” And the younger has to restrain himself from saying the other has many options to choose from.

The glint is gone from the shorter’s eyes, replaced by a frown, almost sincere enough to mess with Johnny’s heart. Who does Ten think he is to play him… His crippled bills are placed in his hands and his heart stop beating, squeezing in a painful manner as Ten tiptoes, his breath caressing
Johnny’s cheek. He smells like coffee, and the younger regrets feeling attracted to the alluring scent.

“I am not playing.” The idol murmurs. “Maybe it’s time you heal that foolish heart of yours.”

For some reason, as the other detaches himself from their too intimate position, Johnny finds it hard to be offended despite knowing exactly what the statement implies. Instead, it sounds like one of those popular tunes in his mind, ringing a thousand times, making him wonder if he should sing along or just turn it off.

“If you want to find how sincere I am, come deliver me lunch whenever you’re ready.” The black haired vixen says before Johnny can comprehend their discussion. A little card is slipped between his fingers and the crippled bills. “Come and the restaurant will get that advertising I promised, I’ll be waiting.”

Waiting, it means more than counting days until Johnny comes finding him. He’ll be waiting until he finds that breach in the other’s heart, that breach he can slip in and once it is done, he will make his home in there, chasing away every thought of Taeyong he can find. And just like that he walks away, hiding his face back in his scarf, ready to face Taeil’s wrath for leaving without notice.

It’s been an hour, maybe more, maybe less. Jaehyun remembers the look his secretary gave him when he left earlier than usual. He felt giddy in his shoes, like a nervous toddler before the dentist. What has gone wrong? Simple, he fell and Taeyong wasn’t there to catch him. It seemed clear this morning that Jaehyun will only be another passerby in his life. But the tycoon would only be lying to himself if he gives up. The heart wants what it wants, and at this point he is already to deep in to find an exit.

He has expected to see Taeyong, he doesn’t know yet what to say or what to do, but he knows he’d appreciate another bickering session, or even just another lecture on how he is behaving. Funny how dependent he turned in the span of a week. He’d be a fool to deny that his walls have crumbled from the moment he saw Taeyong.

He turns around in the leather chair of his office, he can hear Mrs Park walking up and down the corridors sometimes. As usual, only the night sky outside keeps him company and he finds it hard to like it here when there is no one to talk to. It’s cold as it used to be before.

“Dinner's getting cold, Jaehyun.” The tired housekeeper appears at his door and he realizes it is
getting deeper into the night. “He’ll be home soon, there’s no use waiting for him.”

Mrs Park’s worried expression is something he is familiar with. Even if it has been long, the last time he saw it. She probably thought he grew up enough for her to stop worrying, and for that he is thankful because weakness is something he doesn’t like to show.

“You may go home. I’ll go to bed soon.” She leans on the door frame, giving him a skeptical look.

Jaehyun turns away, pushing himself out of his too comfy chair and as he looks at the clock above his desk, midnight falls. And still no sign of Taeyong. He said he’d come back, and Jaehyun has learnt he is a man of words, but his heart almost leaps out whenever he thinks the other won’t come back.

“I will leave you then, have some rest.”

His gaze finds the city in the horizon, not having the strength to look at Mrs Park when he is lying. From the glass wall, he sees her blurred reflection walking away from the door and as soon as he sees her leaving through the gate, he finds himself slumping back into his chair.

“And just like that, she left the room.” A fit of giggles follows the story and Taeyong can’t help himself but laughing along.

His mother is not what you can call funny, but joy she owns and it makes even the coldest heart melt with every word she says. He has been sitting next to her for some hours now and he is aware he is not supposed to be here anymore. But the nurses have come to appreciate his presence over the days and he was their little secret.

Mrs Lee looks better than those past days and her son assumes it must be the food. He tries his best to make her eat what he buys instead of what they serve here and she never questions where he gets the money from, or more like Taeyong wouldn’t answer.

The day has been long, his mind clouded by useless thought about what ifs, about him and a certain man and in the end all he got was a headache. What Taehyun told him has been bugging him, keeping him from every positive thought because after all, he is right.
Jaehyun is everything he is not, Jaehyun has the world in his hands, power in his words and probably money on his mind. Why would Taeyong even matter at all among all of that… No amount of lies and false promises leaving Jaehyun’s lips could change his mind at the moment. He knows better.

He has heard other clients tell him how beautiful he is, how they wish they could leave their wives for him or how much he counts for them. And the next morning he is forgotten in his miserable life, as they go back to what is important, as he was just a temporary breathe of fresh air for them. Why would Jaehyun be different. For people like him, men like Taeyong are made to fulfill their fantasy of false romance and fucked and nothing else. Someone they can use as an escape from stress, someone they can play with just to make sure they are still sane, to make sure they still have the control…

“What is your pretty head thinking about?” Mrs Lee gently knock on his forehead, cutting his train of thoughts.

“Nothing… I’m just a bit tired from work.” He lies, partially.

A warm hand covers his, something she always do whenever he feels down. And the warmth radiates in her little smile.

“I know the treatment is expensive, and it’s making you suffer.” She shush him before he can retort. “I wish I could bear it all alone.”

Not under his watch, he wants to say. But her gaze is firm so he nods. He will make sure it doesn’t happen, the woman can’t even manage her health, how would she handle a job. And he also has to repay everything she did for him, it is his turn now to take care of her.

“I will get going, now. It’s already late.”

If he could, he would stay here forever by her side but it’s only a matter of time before the receptionist comes finding him. And he can see from the bags under her eyes she barely slept. Here is warm despite being in a sterile room in a cold hospital. Because everywhere she is is home. And as soon as he is out of here, he will be back at Jaehyun’s where his mind seems to be in a constant war with his heart.
“Have a safe trip back.” He leans down for a kiss on his cheek and waves a little as he makes his way to the door, doing his best to stay as quiet as possible to not alarm any other patient.

The constant noise of the day is gone and only the rush of some emergencies are left. He hates it, everything reminding him of his mother’s state. The sterile walls, the blue and white lights of the corridor, the smell of detergent… and this heavy feeling in his heart that he still has so much to take care of.

With a tired movement, he fetches out his phone, hoping Johnny is still at the restaurant as it is approaching closing time. Sometimes, he is aware of the selfishness he acts with around the other, but Johnny is the only shoulder he can lean on. It rings about three times as he makes his way to the entrance. And it stops as the familiar voice of the receptionist call to him. He quickly hangs up.

“Hey Minri. I-I know the payment is overdue but I’ll have the m-” he rushes before she can say anything.

Most of them are good people, Taeyong knows. But everyone has their limit when it comes to kindness and he has overstepped theirs. Instead of commenting about it, she shakes her head with a small smile and Taeyong has to tilt his in confusion.

“Don’t worry about that, it’s been paid. Didn’t know you had a boyfriend?” The statement makes her blush, and Taeyong thinks it’s his place to do so.

“A boyfriend?”

It’s almost one in the morning, he’s been counting, eyes tracing the city lights as they dim one by one. Jaehyun has been expecting the click of the gate opening, and he jumps to his feet, he didn’t have the time to think about what he would say. Funny how he always have words for everything benefiting his interests, how eloquent he is in front of those admiring his ambitions, but how he is lost when it comes to being the most basic human being, the rawest feelings can’t seem to make his lips open.

But he doesn’t expect the rapid footsteps and ragged breath approaching as he turns towards the door of his office. And Taeyong is home. Taeyong is home. His body is shivering and trembling in what the tycoon hopes is longing, bleached fairy hair covering his eyes. And in them, something like fury-
“Who the hell do you think you are?” It comes cracking between the words. A sigh leaves Jaehyun’s lips, he has managed to make him ad again, which doesn’t surprise him anymore. He could just breath and Taeyong would be nagging his ass. “Tell me who do you think you are, mingling with my business? Who gave you permission to pay the-”

“Didn’t I make myself clear this morning?” Gone is the gentleness. So this is about that… Jaehyun is a clumsy and selfish human being. And he is not about to respect Taeyong’s boundaries because he wants, and when he wants, he gets.

The younger suddenly stand straight when he sees the other walking in a dangerous manner towards him, step by step as if gauging his fear and marvelling in it. If Jaehyun thinks he can be stubborn, Taeyong can beat him at that game so he tries to stand tall, face stoic but eyes wavering. And soon Jaehyun leaves no place to breathe between them, his breath fanning Taeyong’s warm cheek in a tingling caress.

“I’ve been waiting to do this all day.” The sensual whisper in his ear makes him want to cave in as a gentle hand comes meeting with the back of his neck.

“Stop. I’m not your toy.” Taeyong divide them with hands on his chest, trying to push him away. But even in his moment of anger and doubt, all he wants is to lose himself in the musky cologne of the bigger man in front of him, to hold him and beg to never let go.

“How said you are?” The hand on his neck retracts but Jaehyun’s lips come crashing with it instead. And it’s all a little bit too much.

It is burning, as if ripping skin because Taeyong knows that he can’t believe words easily, less actions when most of the time, it speaks louder, especially with Jaehyun. He is a man of few words, the ex escort has learnt, but when he acts, he is sincere. And this here, the constant lust, the scorching touches, how can he be so sure they speak for themselves. So with the energy and will remaining, he pushes him away, inhaling sharply to keep his tears in.

“I am not something you can play with only to throw away, Jaehyun. Stop trying to make me your property.” He looks down but his stares quickly comes back up when he hears a scoff.

How to fight desire when the tycoon stands so invitingly in front of him, hands glazing through his hair, making the smell of his manliness enveloping Taeyong.
“Are you deaf? I said I fucking care.” Arms suddenly traps him against the door, caging the sides of his body as Jaehyun leans close enough for the tip of their nose to touch, but not enough to satisfy their hunger.

And those eyes, so sincere yet so unreadable, Taeyong doesn’t know anymore, because it rings in his head again and again like a mantra…

*It’s all give and take…*

“I’ve heard it all before.” Their gaze meet and for a second Jaehyun regrets throwing himself on the bundle of tenderness in front of him. “You think you’re the first one? Those who fucked me before all thought they owned me. But none of them were true.”

A fleeting second of madness, Taeyong sees it in Jaehyun’s eyes, but his mind and heart are too clouded until the man pushes himself away. It all happens quickly, the way Jaehyun turns around with a growl, the way he grasp a crystal ashtray from his desk and the shattering of it against a wall. And it excites him, that Jaehyun would go all shade of mad just because he wants him to be. Maybe he is trying to convince himself he can give up by pushing the buttons…

“So what?” The yelling barely compares to the anger and Taeyong almost feels his legs give in in fear. “Don’t ever compare me to those filthy bastards. I care for you, I want you and I will worship you…”

Taeyong sobs when the man’s voice cracks in a torturous manner after each words and last thing he knows, Jaehyun is kneeling at his feet, face buried in his stomach, arms securing his waist in a tight lock.

“I can’t trust you.” His words contradicts the fingers coming to entangle themselves in Jaehyun’s hair.

It is all too much. He wants to trust, he wants to put all his worry behind and stay in those arms until death comes looking for him. But life has never been gentle with him, and people are versatile and paradoxal, Jaehyun especially. And Taeyong doesn’t know if tomorrow or even tonight he’ll have his heart broken.

“I don’t care.” The voice is muffled in the wrinkles of his shirt and he resists a small laugh when a
warm breath comes tingling his belly button. “If you ever try to leave, I will sue you for failure to honor our contract. I will prove myself to you and I will wait until your mind is filled with nothing but me.”

When did it happen… The darkness of the bedroom enveloping them in an intimate moment, and Taeyong feels like it is different this time. Jaehyun lays him tenderly on his blanket, only his shirt open left on his body for the man to admire, and admire he does, so gently, and maybe they are losing themselves.

The younger hates the reassuring presence hovering above him, he hates the aching sensation between his legs, he hates the hushed breath he is offering, and he hates that Jaehyun is still fully clothed. But a hand slaps his away when he tries to discard the annoying pieces of clothing on the man.

“Don’t even think about touching anything.” Jaehyun murmurs, lips on his neck, marking a path of purple stars to his chest and next thing Taeyong knows, his hands are locked by Jaehyun’s above his head. “I told you, I’ll prove myself, and it starts with the pleasure being all yours.”

His back leaves the mattress in a graceful arch as Jaehyun sucks dirtily on a nipple, his clothed knee finding a way between his trembling thighs, pressing against his bare cock in a painful touch and Taeyong has to restrain himself from grinding down on it.

Jaehyun kisses him once or twice, leaving little pecks on his forehead, on the curved arch of his beautiful eyebrows, on the waiting corner of his impatient lips, in the crook of his flushing neck… And soon he is a moaning mess, begging to be touched under the rays of the moonlight.

“Please, Jaehyun… Aha… T-touch me.”

He doesn’t need to ask twice when lips come kissing the tip of his erected cock, then the base, and everywhere as if searching for that holy land. Taeyong meets Jaehyun’s eyes as he descends fully on his manhood, stares filled with nothing than pure and raw desire. A bop of head, another long lick of a tongue and Taeyong is dying to release his hands and run them all over Jaehyun’s body but he is stuck. Point proven, the pleasure will be all his.

Jaehyun eagerly leaves his cock with a last peck and comes back above him like the cloud shading the moon outside of the window. The younger looks like an angel. Like a forbidden fruit he can’t get enough of, like a sheet of purity and tenderness he is soiling. But he is selfish, and he wants to soil, every inch, every curve with his maddening affection.
Taeyong can see the obvious bulge threatening to explode in Jaehyun’s fancy slack pants but the older quickly diverts his eyes by kissing him languidly. He is keeping to his words, none of this is about him. A cold finger suddenly comes warming the rim of his hole and Taeyong gasps into his mouth. Even with only a hand, Jaehyun manages to overpower him and restrain his wrists from escaping.

It plays for long seconds, as if trying to remember the lines of his entrance by heart and then it pushes him. It is raw, with no preparation but the pain drives him insane, because it feels good. When did Taeyong become such a masochist? But again, when did Jaehyun become so weak?

“O-Oh my god, Jaehyun…”

It thrusts in and out, making the angel wither in pleasure under him, and soon it is joined by a second finger, a third and when Taeyong bits harshly on his shoulder, he lets the fourth join the game. He doesn’t mind the teeth sinking in his flesh, enough to bruise him but not enough to hurt, when he is restraining the other’s hands from marking crescent in his back.

Taeyong’s prostate is abused with such ferocity he almost forgets it is not Jaehyun’s much desired dick filling him. At this point, even the city in the far distance probably hears his groans and moans, his rapid murmurs of the other’s name, his walls crumbling down. And when lips comes fighting with his, he comes untouched, white cream dirtying his chest. He tries to breath, to calm down, to think it is now over, all this game of pleasure. But when he less expect it a tongue comes cleaning his chest and it almost wakes the member between his legs again, but he is drained out.

“Fuck, you’re so gross.” He manages to scrunches his face in fake disgust.

When he thinks Jaehyun will let him go, he finds himself wrapped in a strong embrace and Jaehyun is blanketing him with his heavy weight, face hidden in the crook of his neck. Taeyong knows, he can smell and feel it, the burning wants in Jaehyun, the longing, but the older is stubborn and hisses when he tries to unbuckle his pants.

“Was that enough to prove my point? Will you stop being stubborn?” It is almost endearing, Taeyong thinks as he lets the sheets cover them, fingers playing with the brown locks tickling his nose.

“Sleep.” Is all he murmurs, as if scared to break the beautiful post coital moment.
The answer is not satisfying enough for Jaehyun. For the time being, he will take what he can. God knows if tomorrow Taeyong will change his mind. But for the first time in his life, he is scared of loneliness. Not having Taeyong is even more threatening than leaving the orphanage. It is even more threatening than the heavy rain that poured on his head that night. Because not having Taeyong is worse than not having a home and a family.

The cold is ten time more painful when the lack of sleep shrouds one’s mind. He stumbles between an alleyway rapidly, ignoring the fact that he is straying far from home again. He needs to do something tonight than fighting with the oppression that everything is wrong. What has he done of his day? Nothing productive than making everything worse…

Taehyun almost trip away from the sidewalk and he doesn’t miss the car slowly driving behind him. All he cares about is to shelter himself from the wind. One would think taller buildings would help, but concrete is as cruel as nature. The car stops and he contemplates on doing the same, because for some reason he knows it is for him. He has seen it from a mile away ever since he left the apartment.

The black glass window of the passenger side slides down carefully, as if afraid to reveal the secret from behind. It is a woman, barely older than he is Taehyun notices. The dim light of the lamp post above them barely hiding her beauty and he feels intimidated. She turns to him with a practiced smile, tight and professional.

“Ever heard about the Jungs?”

Chapter End Notes

Guess who's back? Back again? So first of all, I AM SORRYYYYY. I always seem to start my author's note with some apologies. I really should stop promising you fast update cause everytime I do, something always stops me from not breaking that promise. I finally had some freaking vacation away from Paris for a moment, not that I hate the city but I wanted to be chill without doing anything but, chil... Anyway kill me guys. I cringed while writing the smut cause I don't like writing about something so cheesy, I only like writing smut while keeping it sexual but I guess some serious character development is needed. Also I want to make it less angsty now on their
feelings cause let's be honest it's been eight fucking chapters of running around in circles. New character soon, for real, i just didn't expect their appearance to take so much time, plot fault not mine. And finally sorry for leaving this chapter on a bitter end. Hope you still enjoy this story as much as I love writing it. I hear your pleas for update don't worry. This fanfiction is my baby, I'm never giving it up. Each one of my free time I write, but my mind is always a mess so I spend a lot of time thinking about organizing it and sometimes, even with great inspiration I get writer's block. But anyway, thanks again for your beautiful comments, it really warms my heart and makes me feel like I am not doing this for nothing. See you in the next chapter!
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It’s almost like every day, except for the smell of frying bacon in the hallway, the odd feeling that something is different. Taeyong must salute the effort for once. In the span of two weeks, despite his constant absence, which Taeyong can’t explain as he still isn’t sure of Jaehyun’s line of work, he has noticed some change. They bicker less, and by less he means less than four arguments every hour. But Jaehyun has still a long list of personal issues and if Taeyong counts them all, he could probably write a novel.

The man is full of himself and stubborn. Slaps and punches almost flew his way when Taeyong has asked why he always comes home with bags full of expensive pastries and Jaehyun has replied, very nobly, “because I can”. And with great frustration but satisfied, Taeyong has been forced to eat them all. The tycoon is like a wall, having basic conversations with him, not like the younger tries, always turns into him lacking common knowledge in what he calls the “commoner way of life”. And each time, it results in the ex escort insulting him, and Jaehyun thrusting in his ass against a wall. Maybe he should add cursing kink to the list.

But today is different. Usually, as Taeyong refused to share his bed, he wakes up to an empty house, with only a distant “hello” on the screen of his phone. At least the older really tries. And he falls asleep in his bed after a long day at the restaurant, convincing himself that he doesn’t care if Jaehyun is still at work. He almost forget it’s a bright monday when he sees the man seated at the kitchen counter, scrolling on his phone, coffee long cold in front of him.

“Good morning, Taeyong.” Mrs Park is busying herself at the stove, and that’s the delicious smell of bacon.

Something in him is sure that the stare Jaehyun is giving him, following his every movement without a word, is all but reassuring. Even burdening as he takes his own seat across the man, a delicious set of breakfast in front of him. The wall clock strikes nine in the morning, and Taeyong cut the impromptu staring contest.
“Aren’t you late ?” The eggs taste heavenly but all Taeyong focuses on is the fact that usually, at this hour, he wouldn’t even dream of seeing the man anymore.

The phone is gently put next to a plate and Jaehyun rest his chin on a hand, elbow rudely sitting on the table. But none of them could care less about correct etiquette when Jaehyun seems to forget his meal in exchange of staring at the barely awoken man in front of him.

“I’m taking a day off.” And the spotless marble counter finds itself under a puddle of hot coffee when Taeyong, out of shock, let the cup slip from his hand.

If there is something he has learnt, Jaehyun breathes and lives for his work. To the point everyone is convinced the constant frown on his face is a result of that. His daily life, the way he is organized, leaves no place for mistakes and mess is a constant reminder of his ambitions. It’s almost ridiculous, almost unreal to hear that from him. And Taeyong is not a fool. He knows it is a part of those changes Jaehyun tries so much to prove.

“If you’re doing that because of me, stop. It’s useless because I have to go to work.” That earns him a gentle scoff, as gentle as a sarcastic Jaehyun can get.

“I know. I’m going with you.” Fortunately Taeyong’s cup of coffee is already empty from his precedent clumsiness. This time it’s Mrs Park who lets a plate escape from her into the soapy water of the sink.

“No! Why the fuck would you even do that ?”

The man is dead serious, when did Jaehyun ever joke around anyway ? Taeyong has heard his rare attempt at humor and he secretly prays to never hear it again. He would need long months of therapy after teaching the man what April Fool is and actually seeing him trying to pull one in mid January. Not that Jaehyun saying he is dying of terminal cancer was something wise to joke about. Needless to say, nor Taeyong, nor Mrs Park laughed.

“You made a scene because I apparently don’t respect your way of life. So I want to honor it now.”

“You literally called me an idiot for taking the bus with, I quote, sweaty and stinky people! Not everyone can afford a Bentley, Jaehyun!”
“I offered to drive you. And why are you yelling?”

“Because you’re insufferable! I don’t want you to drive me around like I’m a spoiled kid. Period.”

Taeyong lift an eyebrow at the older’s audacity to sigh. Sometimes he can’t even fathom the fact that he is five years younger than the childish tycoon and it plays with his nerves.

“I’m coming with you.”

Indeed, despite the biting cold outside, the people in the bus are… sweaty. But the sight is funny, almost absurd. Jaehyun in all his six feet glory, squeezed between what he would call commoners, hissing whenever he feels anyone accidentally touching him. Taeyong hides his amusement in his hand when the man knocks his forehead against the pole in front of him. Maybe the punishment is a little bit too much, the shorter of the two thinks as he reminds himself of their arguments.

“We’re taking the car.”

“Nope, either you take the bus with me, either you stay home. You said you wanna experience my life so come on.”

Seeing his determination, Jaehyun set aside confrontation and just strolled along. The walk to the stop has been eventless, except for the man complaining on how far it is, to which the younger answered “Shouldn’t have lived on a hill”. And the suit, the suit is above it all. Probably the cherry on top for Taeyong. When he has told the man to dress casual, he didn’t expect the Prince of Wale Check suit to come out of the closet. It gave the man a less strict look than usual, especially with the white clean sneakers at his feet, the younger even has to admit he looks perfect, but not for a no star meat restaurant. Needless to say the vest ended hung on his forearm.

The ride is as normal as Taeyong can define it, probably endless for Jaehyun. Especially with all the eyes on him, not that Taeyong cares about how every middle aged women seem to giggle whenever they cross stares with the taller man. If Taeyong believes his mother, and he always does, then he too is handsome. There is no need for him to uselessly be envious of the attention Jaehyun receives, or is he the one who wants the taller’s attention…

“Behave, don’t be a jerk.”
Taeyong knows he sounds unfair, as he didn’t see what Jaehyun is capable of yet, but as they enter the warm little restaurant where the delicious smell of meat and broth mixes up, he can see the gears working in the other’s brain to come up with a remark. But it quickly stops and Jaehyun only clears his throat. The first disadvantage of his presence would be the attention, Taeyong notices. It is barely noon but the usual tribes of high school teenagers and college students are already finding tables for themselves and Jaehyun seems to distract the numerous ladies from doing so.

“Taeyong, good morning!” Mrs Seo is joyful as usual, making everyone wonder if there is even a time she is not. “And who is this charming young man?”

Jaehyun smiles… Jaehyun. Smiles. The younger has to hold his sneaky remark to himself. Jaehyun always find a way to get what he wants, to the extent of acting like someone else and that infuriates him. And the little warmth in his chest is definitely not a result of the rare smile he has grown to appreciate.

“Jaehyun.” The tycoon extend his hand for a shake, making Mrs Seo giggle as if she is one of the teenagers. “I am here to help.”

“By all means, don’t.” Taeyong says through his teeth as he shares a glare with the other. Mrs Seo is oblivious to his call for help, and he prays she refuses. “Johnny and I are enough, right Mrs Seo?”

“I would never refuse free workers.” She giggles again and dang, everything seems to go against Taeyong today. “Especially Taeyong’s handsome boyfriend!”

The statement makes both of them choke on thin air and the younger doesn’t miss the little victory smirk Jaehyun is sending his way. Has he mentioned Jaehyun is an asshole? Probably a hundred times before but with each passing seconds, the fact intensifies.

“Not his boyfriend, mom.” And as if to make everything worse, Johnny.

Taeyong is aware of the possible animosity between the his best friend and his employer. He has never been blind to Johnny’s feeling, even if he acts like it more than often, and one can’t say Jaehyun is on his best friend good side. And as his friend appears to greet them, everyone can tell Jaehyun isn’t a big fan either.

“Well… Johnny, this is Jaehyun.” Is it awkward? The tension is palpable like thick water, no smile,
not even a nod of acknowledgement. Just Johnny glaring, Jaehyun glaring back, unsaid insults waving in the air. “Let’s get to work, come with me Jaehyun.”

Before none of them can utter anything, Taeyong tries to save the mood, pulling Jaehyun along towards the back of the restaurant. It is a little room where lockers are decaying and doors are creaking oddly. What used to be a staff room is today a mix of that and a room where anything from empty boxes to brooms are living alongside each other. But Taeyong doesn’t care about what the other has to say, and it seems he has a lot to say ever since they entered the restaurant.

“I don’t like him.” Is all the older says, crossing his arms over his chest as he looks at Taeyong rummaging through a locker for aprons.

“What a surprise, he doesn’t like you either. Look you both have one common ground, isn’t that wonderful?” The other bites sarcastically as he finds two clean brown aprons and tosses one that Jaehyun catches before it hits his face. “Now please behave and let’s get over this day in peace.”

When Jaehyun loosely ties his apron with a sigh, it reminds Taeyong of the night they spent at his flat. The little child, scolded for being himself, meditating on his mistakes is standing in front of him again and something softens in his heart. As much as he doesn’t like to admit it, he will always notice how Jaehyun is trying, how much Jaehyun bites on his tongue sometimes or everything he does to get on his good side.

He is not a bad man, Taeyong knows. He is just a little clumsy and a fool sometimes. And Taeyong is a masochist for finding some charm in that.

“Come here, dummy.” He beckons Jaehyun to get closer which the older does but with squinted eyes as if suspicious about his intentions. “That’s not how you tie it.”

If they both feel the warmth and sparks when Taeyong circles the older’s waist with his arms then they say nothing of it. After all it’s just their front pressed intimately, nothing new. The knot at the taller’s back is untied rapidly but all they seem to focus on is the thundering beat in their chest. To be honest this is Taeyong’s favorite part of this whole process. Taking care of the older, showing him what real life looks like, growing alongside each other before they argue over something stupid again.

“Is it always like this ?” Taeyong lets out a little hum to ask Jaehyun what he is talking about as his fingers still tangles with the laces of the other’s apron. “All eyes on you while you work? All those giggling high schoolers?”
There is softness in his tone but the underlying jealousy is audible and Taeyong chuckles because behind his mask of confidence and strength, Jaehyun is just a little insecure boy, too small for this tough world. And here he thought it was Jaehyun they were looking at. The knot is done perfectly, in a way Taeyong finds secure and he takes his hands back, trying to keep them to himself.

“What can I say? I’m a wanted man.” It is nothing but a little teasing as he, out of reflex, smoothes the wrinkles on the white shirt in front of him.

What he doesn’t expect are the hands getting a hold of his wrist in a possessive, obsessive manner. The gentle push against one of the locker and the sudden moist lips finding his in a delicate but languid dance. It is quick, it is intense but effective. It is magnetic and sends shivers down his spine. Jaehyun is rarely gentle, even in bed, but when he is, Taeyong feels hundred of storms raging in his heart.

“What was that for?” It comes out in a airy whisper, and if he is not rooted to the floor, he probably is floating above the clouds.

Jaehyun stares down at him, that same stares he used for days now, filled with desperation and longing, one of his rare display of tenderness.

“To remind you your affection is on standby for me only.”

As if I can forget that, silly.

Apprehensive. Johnny has been apprehensive of Jaehyun. But everything that seemed like prejudice dies when he watches the way his best friend and the man waltz around the tables in a perfect teamwork. For the past hours, there has been bickering. Jaehyun doubting Taeyong’s methods, Taeyong scolding him for slacking and in the end they both give in, as if meeting halfway. And Johnny feels a restricting feeling inside as if his soul has been squeezed.

They balance each other like day and night, the waves and the shore and it hurts. It hurts when he sees Jaehyun cutting himself and Taeyong rushing him to the side to take care of it. When Taeyong almost trips and Jaehyun is just behind to catch him and they both find themselves in a blushing mess. Johnny is jealous, maybe a little too bitter but what did he expect. From the start he knew Taeyong was never his.
“Blooming love is such a pretty thing to witness.” Johnny almost falls off his chair at the cashier when his mother appears out of thin air, her chin resting on her hand as she leans against the counter.

She is watching as Jaehyun struggles balancing plates on his hands and Taeyong snickering in a corner. A wrong step and the plates would come crashing down. Luckily the man is as careful as he is stubborn.

“I can’t trust him.” It sounds harsher than he intended and if Mrs Seo has noticed she says nothing but a soft hum.

“You don’t have to, honey.” Her tone makes him think she is not on his side. Not like she has ever been. “All you have to worry about is that blindness you nurture.”

Blind… What a bland word. Johnny admits he is sometimes blind to his mother’s love, when she stays up all night taking care of his fevers. And he only sees it when it’s time to apologize for his mistakes. He is blind to his father’s love when the man scolds him for doing something wrong and only remembers it when they spend their days in silence wondering why they are even spending time together in the first place. And now, perhaps, he is blinded by his own unrequited love for Taeyong, too blind to understand he is only hurting…

Maybe it’s time you heal that foolish heart of yours.

“I’m taking a short break.”

Grey and blue, swirling in a wave of navy. Little dots of black followed by a man, standing in front of the vast nothingness. It has been an hour or two Ten has been observing the abstract painting in front of him. Why is it there? As if intensifying his gloomy mood, and who even paints such loneliness… He has never brought any attention to it despite having used the same dance studio for years now. But boredom and lack of activity has him turning around in a chair and studying little details around the room.

At some point he even found himself throwing his pens around in the sole goal of it touching the light switch. Taeil has been gone for long hours now to take care of some other artists he could care
less about. If he knew his day would be so unproductive, he would have stayed home, or maybe forced Jaehyun to spend time with him.

“Ten?” There’s a knock at the door, making him stumble out of his chair in surprise. He quickly tidies his mess as best as he can and get back to seating professionally like he is supposed to. “There’s a delivery for you.”

He’s been counting days in this damned studio, for one person to come over, he has lost hope after two to three days but is it finally the day? He tries to suppress his excitement, and with a little yes from him, the door opens.

And it is the day. Johnny looks as fine as ever in his usual big hoodies, not like Ten made notice of it, or maybe he did. He can’t believe how sappy he sounds over a man. As expected, the man came to deliver food. The plastic bag ruffles in his hold as Ten stands up with a light bounce in his steps.

“You came.” He states the obvious, a little bit too nervous for someone who spent the last years under the spotlight.

“I didn’t come for free, you owe us an advertisement.” Johnny says, handing the plastic bag containing freshly cooked vegetables and grilled meat. He won’t admit he paid a particular attention to how delicious it must taste.

Ten only chuckles knowing very well his words have hit the other in the right place.

“Stay?” There’s a second of hesitation but Johnny is not a fool either.

The green monster in him would say he is here for no reason. But who is he to deny that the image of Taeyong and Jaehyun breaks his mind in million of pieces. Who is he to deny that Ten is right and that maybe it is time to move on.

“I have been waiting.” Ten confesses as they settle on the wooden floor facing each other and Johnny acts as if he didn’t hear it. “What changed your mind?”

“Your douche of a friend is at the restaurant.” Johnny shrugs, letting Ten link the dots alone.
The idol stops midway into chewing, not waiting for his guest to serve himself. And a little laugh erupts. Of course, he would be. If there is a similarity between him and Jaehyun, it’s that they stop at nothing to get what they want and no doubt he has decided to court Taeyong in the boldest way. Ten won’t comment on how dangerous that idea is in their situation but it is not his to tell, and definitely not to Johnny.

The Jung bloodline be damned. If his friend’s happiness lays in Taeyong’s hand then he probably deserves a chance at grasping it. Ten, more than anyone, would know Jaehyun deserves a little rest.

“It’s such a Jaehyun thing to do.” He tells to himself. “But I doubt that dumbass is related to any of this. Tell me why you are here.”

*Because I believe in your words when you say you like me. Because I’m tired of running in circles. Because you read me like an open book. Because I’m a fool.*

Words that Johnny refrains from saying out loud in fear of believing them too much. It is so hard to get them through his thick skin, too hard to admit that maybe there’s a spark of hope he sees in Ten, a blooming friendship or anything to take him out of the grave he dug, but there is something.

“Because you told me to heal.” He opts on saying.

But in the feline eyes, in the way Ten chuckles and forces a piece of meat between his lips -that Johnny half heartedly accept with a groan- it means everything.

“Wait! Before I finish all of this…” The idol takes out his phone and a click resonates through the vast room. “Here!”

It is one of those instagram pictures with food placed meticulously, quite aesthetically if Johnny dares to say. And he finds himself trying a little grin as Ten types some -probably ridiculous and pompous-caption, his tongue darting at the corner of his lips.

“So, this is a date then!” Ten says and Johnny chokes on a piece of carrots.

“Don’t get your hopes high. I haven’t said anything yet.”
It is playful, in the most innocent way, the turn of the idol’s lips into a frown, pretending the statement hurt. It is not the teasing and fake sadness that stirs something up in Johnny. It is the flash of hope in those eyes, and he knows that Ten is expecting so much more from this.

“Stop frowning, I can literally hear what you are thinking.” Here the older goes again, reading him like it is the easiest task ever. “I know I will never be Taeyong. But I can wait even if you only want me as a replacement.”

His words freezes Johnny like a bucket of cold water. If Johnny has seen his own desperation in love, Ten’s a burden on his unavailable heart. And now he understands the responsibility of having someone else’s feeling between his hands and he doesn’t know how to manage it. They are not from the same world and he is not sure if Ten is still joking around. But it is selfish of the idol, putting such a heavy weight on his shoulder.

“Don’t belittle yourself like that.” For some reason, Johnny knows he could have added something more. Something like you are worth something too. Or you deserve to be loved. But he has never been the romantic type so he stops before he says words he shouldn’t.

“You don’t trust my words, do you?”

A long silence during which Johnny avoids the other’s gaze. Ten always sounds so sure and confident with his feelings and Johnny is just a newborn in this game of love, learning step by step how to not be overwhelmed.

“How can you be so sure, that you like me?” He feels like a child, going back and forth, answering questions with questions but Ten makes no remark. “We don’t even know each other.”

“Wanna know? Come here.”

There is a mischievous glint in the singer’s eyes, and Johnny can hear the gears working in his little head. In any other context, he would have ran away, he would have told Ten to fuck off like he did last time. But for some reason, no matter how much he tells Ten he won’t see him again, that he is no interested, look at him coming back like a wanderer looking for a shelter.

He had the choice. He could have stayed away like he planned to, he could have ignored every words Ten said. But he is here, desperate for an escape away from heartbreak. Despite the esteem he has for the idol, maybe a replacement is really what he needs, but that would be his secret to keep.
Nobody can tell at what moment he stood up just to kneel before the other, but it happens in an aching heartbeat. Soon enough it is a game of stares again, gauging who would make the first move, if it is even appropriate to do so. It is Ten who take the lead, leaning forwards.

Johnny isn’t sure of what to expect but he can imagine it, after all Ten is beautiful. His eyes full of mirth, his lips, everything and Johnny is a step away from diving into that. There’s a second of hesitation, and they feel like high schoolers doing something they shouldn’t, afraid of the world judgement. Afraid of their own judgement.

“Can I?” Ten murmurs, a caress away from ravishing the younger male.

Yes, Johnny had the choice. He could have definitely said no, but then he nods because why nots, what ifs, remorse is always better than regret. And as their heartbeat strikes like clocks, lips meet in a tender and slow motion, learning each other’s curve and pace.

This is different from what Johnny wanted, different from who his heart wants but it is not bad. It feels wrong, using someone to fill a hole, but it feels like right path. They melt into each other. Taeyong may be the dark tunnel he is walking through and Ten may be the light at the end of it… Is he making a mistake? That would be for another story because kissing has never felt so good.

Ten’s warm hands cup his cheeks and his tongue guides Johnny’s to the comfort of his lower lips, his upper lips, his whole being like a burning spark crawling under their skin-

“Ten.”

The stop is brutal, a blanket pulled away on a cold night. Johnny is left breathless, not daring to turn around in fear of seeing who interrupted them. All he sees is Ten’s swollen pink lips, his face draining out of colors and his eyes wide in shock.

“Fuck. Taeil.” The singer whispers under his breath, face contorting in a displeased grimace.

No better words could be said, because they both understand it is trouble coming their way.

“I have to go, but please call me, my number is on the card i gave you.” The older almost pleads to a
still mute Johnny. And just like that he scrambles to his feet, leaving in a rush, pulling the stranger away from the dancing room.

Little does he know he left Johnny in a mess, torn between his feelings and what just happened. Torn between believing this is right and believing it was a mistake. Johnny is terrified, terrified of his undying love for someone he would never have, terrified of having someone else’s heart in his palm. And he knows that with one wrong move, one careless thought he can crush it in pieces or crushing his own.

“Do I have to report what I just saw to the agency?” Taeil’s voice sounds bitter but Ten tries to ignore it as he plays with the rim of his shirt.

“Aren’t you supposed to protect me?”

“How am I supposed to protect you when you jump off every cliff you find…” It is softer this time and Ten feels guilty.

It has been six years, the day he had plead Taeil to take him under his wings, the days he was talentless and motivated. Taeil was there to believe in him and give him the strength to move. But Ten is not that reckless kid anymore. If his career hasn’t forgotten him then life did. Loneliness, the pursuit of fame and excellence destroyed a part of him he wants to find again.

Ten needs love, he needs to live, he needs all the pressure to leave. And Taeil doesn’t seem to understand it.

“Can’t you just let it pass this time?”

“I can’t.” comes the dry answer. “The last time I turned a blind eye, I had so much to salvage just so you could keep your career.”

None of them likes to reminisce those days. It was unbearable, the flashes of the cameras to the loss of fans, to Taeil begging the agency to not give up on the Thai idol. So many steps further has been made and there is no going back.
“Can’t I just be allowed to live for once? See whoever I want? Do whatever I want?”

Taeil’s simple sigh says it all. Before Ten can even dream about it, all his expectations crumble to the ground again.

“You know you are not anyone, Ten. It’s either this life or the simple one. Lose one and keep the other.”

What is he supposed to do when his heart is aching for both? His childhood was made of reaching his parents and peers’ expectations, and he knew it when he left Thailand that nothing would be easy. Something in him wanted the sacrifice to be worth something, and in the end all he wants is to throw it all away… What a dishonor to his own hard work.

“Think about it, Ten. But remember if you decide to dive into this game, you are not the only one, you involve that boy too.”

Of that he is perfectly aware but somewhere in him, he is ready to risk it all, even hurting Johnny just to have him. But he is confident, that he can protect them both from the words raging outside.

A meal. A meal should be perfect, Jaehyun seems to like traditional Korean food. The only issue is that Taeyong can’t cook that well. Or a hug. Jaehyun would definitely like that. Well, nothing tells Taeyong that Jaehyun likes skinship, though. They do have intimate moments, but apart from that and the kissing, Jaehyun has never initiated skinship with him. The white haired man slumps against the counter with a harsh sigh.

Giving Jaehyun a reward or not… He feels like he should as he watches the man attending to a table. Obviously, the tycoon is not the best waiter there is. All he seems to do is nod and write down the orders. He is awful at showing warmth, which amuses Taeyong whenever some elderly people coo at him and Jaehyun is left in an awkward mess. The funniest part must have been when Jaehyun almost shook hands with the customers. Taeyong had to sprint towards him and telling him that bowing is enough. To which Jaehyun replied “I don’t bow to people.” Needless to say, welcoming clients has instantly been crossed off his task list.

One thing is sure, Taeyong is less tired than usual and he has to thank the man for that. His help did lessen the burden of his job. Contrary to Jaehyun, he has nothing to offer except a thank you.
Whatever, why would he need a reward, he is not a pet… But if he was he’d be a good boy.

The thought makes him laugh on his own, almost scarring a poor lady passing by.

“Taeyong, would you come a second?” Mrs Seo calls from the kitchen and Taeyong leaves to find her, enough with terrifying the people with his mental breakdown. “Jaehyun is a lovely person, isn’t he?”

He shrugs as if he wasn’t just thinking the same thing. The woman just gives him the knowing smile she apparently gives to everyone as if her eyes could make anyone reveal any secret. Taeyong should know better, she has seen him grow up along her son and she can certainly read through every of his smiles and scowls.

Lovely isn’t the word he would use to describe Jaehyun. Hard working would be more appropriate in this case. And proud is Taeyong because everything that turned this day into regret vanishes as the day approaches to an end.

“Would you boys stay for dinner? So I can thank you for your hard work.”

Taeyong gulps at the thought but he doesn’t have the gut to refuse as he watches Mrs Seo already rinsing some rice. It looks like the more times passes by, the more fate finds a way to include Jaehyun in the intimacy of his routine. First sleeping at his house, and now having a meal with the closest people he has to relatives.

If he is perfectly honest with himself, it warms him a little. It feels like an accomplishment to see the man accept every parts of his life like a challenge, and not backing off despite the instability of it.

“I can ask him abou-”

There is no chance to finish his sentence, no chance for Mrs Seo to put the rice to cook as a loud crash interrupt their conversation and they all know too well where it is coming from and who might have caused it. Earlier plans are forgotten as they rush towards where some people are gathered outside, where some tables are waiting to be served.
Taeyong has expected broken plates because of clumsiness, or bottles spilled because of inattention. The sight that welcomes him is one that does not please him a bit. He could have forgiven any mistake but he sees red at this one. Jaehyun is towering above a man, maybe in his fifties but does it matter. All that matters in Taeyong’s eyes is how the man is on the floor, nursing a bloody nose while cursing under his breath, everyone staring at him, Jaehyun obviously fuming with his fist clenched at his side.

So many thing could have angered Taeyong, from the murmurs around them, to Johnny standing on the side in pure shock. But all he sees is Jaehyun, eyes burning with anger. Something awakes in him, and he mirrors the same anger, because who does Jaehyun think he is?

“How dare you hit him?”

For a second, Taeyong tells himself he should listen to the story but he is deaf to any excuse. Because he knew it ever since they left for the restaurant that Jaehyun was going to slip off, to make him mad again. And every time the tycoon acts like a mighty brat, it is all Taeyong sees again, the arrogance, the rudeness, the lack of empathy in him. Things he has tried to forget those days. All he wants is for his days to be peaceful, for his days to go as they went before Jaehyun, and along the road, said man always seemed to find a way for it to be restless.

“How apologize!” Taeyong yells despite the self control he is trying to maintain.

Jaehyun comes out of his anger bubble, as if finally aware of the scene, of Taeyong’s presence. And briefly, regret flashes in his eyes, something like guilt, and Taeyong wishes it lasts but unfortunately it doesn’t. There he is, the proud and stubborn Jaehyun he despises so much.

“This scumbag will receive no apologize from me.”

Jaehyun makes sure every of his words comes out like venom, he wants who might hear he means them. Perhaps if Taeyong, for a second, took his side, saw the good side in him, then he would have crumbled. He knows, from the start, that Taeyong will always see him as the evil circumstances made of him. And even if Jaehyun is not giving up, he needs a break from being the only one making giant steps.

“This is not how you treat a customer, Jaehyun! Apologize this instant!”

Once again, they are surrounded by fog, like every time they bicker, keeping them from reaching out
and cutting them from the outside world. Mrs Seo is already helping the injured man to his feet but all they both see is each other. And in the end it's a call for help they should have uttered. But the words come faster than Jaehyun could think. The animosity Taeyong bears towards him, towards the heart that tries to love, and maybe jealousy from not being the one Taeyong choses over anyone awakes something in him.

“Of course, you of all people sure know how to treat a customer.”

Taeyong stops Johnny from laying single finger on Jaehyun. And silence follows during which Taeyong looks at the floor, the asphalt, the patch of light on it coming from a nearby lamppost. He surely doesn’t have a bloodied nose, but the wounds those words opened is as vast as an ocean. He misses the guilty look Jaehyun is giving him, nor the longing.

All he hears is the voice in him telling him that those past days have been an illusion and in the end he is who he is. Some things never leave, and from the start Jaehyun saw him as a simple whore, and maybe today he still sees him as one just because he didn’t give himself easily.

“I should have never brought you here, or even let you in.” The stillness and calm of his tone scares him. “I thought I could trust you and maybe learn to like you too, I genuinely thought you are a good person. Leave.”

He hears a rustle and Jaehyun’s apron is tossed on the floor to meet his sight. And then the older stomps away, far from his sight but Taeyong could care less if Jaehyun is mad at him. He could care less if he did hurt Jaehyun too, because Taeyong has promised to himself that he would never be taken for granted, he would never be played with or broken by someone. Life wants him to be strong and strong he will be.

“Taeyong.” Johnny wakes him up from his aching daze.

The white haired man manages a little smile as an apologize.

“I am fine, don’t worry. I am sorry.”

Johnny ponders for a moment, having something on his mind and Taeyong clearly sees it. There is something that should be said but the taller doesn’t seem ready to say it.
“Jaehyun, he…” The voice dies and Taeyong shrugs it as Johnny being shaken by the turn of events.

After all he should have known better when his best friend told him Jaehyun was no good. And even if he knows it is not what Johnny wants to say, he tries to ignore the guilty feeling in him because Jaehyun is the last thing he wants to talk about.

“N-evermind.” The taller says finally, walking back inside, leaving Taeyong, silence as the only judge in this self trial.

Chapter End Notes

Hello again lovely people! Hope you like this chapter (tho i doubt you do hihi). As usual so sorry for the slow update. I feel like life has been shit recently, i spilled wine on my phone resulting to me wasting shit loads of money to buy a new one. Add to that that I can't go back home to my parents this summer and they live a ten hours flight away from Paris. BUUUUUT I am kinda happy about it because the month i am supposed to go back *drum rolls* NEO CITY in Paris!!!! 10th of July I am finally seeing my sons omg heart attack. And also Pride month like it makes me ten times happier than usual. Anyway I am rambling about my life sorry hihi. I am so happy for NCT's Superhuman second win and them ending their world tour, i m so prud of em and i bet you guys are too. I want to thank u guys also for the feedbacks, I always read your comments with delight cause you are sweethearts! Love you!!! See you next chapter!!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

For years -through her childhood to her teenage years- excellence has always been the key words. No Kang would settle for less than excellence. From her grades to the astonishing accomplishment in her career, there is nothing she wouldn't do to achieve greatness and tackle her goals to the ground. That is how she grew up, that is how she thinks and that is how things should be.

Seulgi has never been one to back off, she is smart, she has the right weapons to seduce and she is aware of it. Has it been four years or more since she started to work with the Jungs? All that she knows is that she is made to be where she is. And even if she has to use force, she will stand above both empires, the Kangs and the Jungs.

Of course she has a great esteem for Jaehyun, a vague admiration that balances between affection and envy. Her heart beats for the bold, the authority, the intelligence and Jaehyun has it all. But Jaehyun is one hell of a wall to destroy.

Hence why she is seated discreetly in the waiting room separating Soobin’s office to hers. It is not like her to be noisy, to play so dirty. It is like her to win and win she will. The clock ticks, it has been a good thirty minutes since the man invited himself in Mrs Jung’s office. A sanctuary Seulgi will never have the access to. It is made for those who are part of the Jung’s circle, very selective, very secretive. It is made for those who are allowed to hear their most sacred stories.

Click

The door opens in an agonizing motion and she starts to get impatient, making Mrs Jung’s secretary doubt her intentions. The Kang’s only daughter could care less, because her purpose of being here soon appears, clad in his brown suit, a briefcase in hand. None of those are important. What he has to reveal is.
“Miss Kang.” He bows briefly when she walks up to meet him, making sure she is not in a hearing distance from any living soul.

“Mr Yoon.” She mirrors the lawyer’s greeting. Oh she could smell fear just from the way his eyes tremble and beneath his white shirt, she knows he is shivering. “There are some things I would like to know about the case of Soobin’s son.”

“You know it is strictly confidential.” The man chuckles nervously, eyes going back and forth between her and the exit.

One should never take her for a fool. Apart from her smart brain, she has wit, she has an excellent gut feeling and that gut feeling tells her the sought after child is not very far.

If there is one thing she knows, it is how to read people and through the years she has worked with the Jungs, she knows Soobin never gives anyone a second glance, especially to a stranger or shall she say mere commoner, one that has been an escort on top of it all. The only time Soobin gave importance to a person, it was Jaehyun so why would she let any man, any dirty hand even touch her treasured heir?

“Lawyer Yoon, what a respectable title.” There is no need for her to elaborate because by now the man is aware of what or who he is confronting. “We both know you want to keep it like that.”

The Jung’s most sacred stories... So secret, so safe within the confines of their little group. In Kang Seulgi’s world, in the game she plays, there is nothing -not even the most kept secret- that can’t be obtained, that can’t be bought with a little push of power and money. Some may say her veins nurture greed and sick intentions, but she is not the only one. Men are greedy, and just like Mr Yoon, they’d rather be on the side of a winning abyss than being swallowed by it.

“Would you please stop frowning?” Mrs Lee asks for the nth time since the day started. To which her son replies with a very unconvincing “I am not frowning, mom.”

She is not blind yet despite her age and state. She can see clearly that something is bothering her son and the boy himself doesn’t make it very discreet. Ever since his childhood, she knew Taeyong as someone who never lets his emotion burden people. Be it sadness or worry, he would keep them for himself and force an half hearted happiness instead.
Who is he trying to fool? She raised him and she knows every little frown, every little curves of his lips hide some troubled mind. The woman could see it on how Taeyong isn't so enthusiastic while reading to her, how he forgot to water the little plant above her bed, how he talks less than usual. She tries not to make a big deal of it as he is of age for those kind of inner turmoil.

“Is it Taehyun again ? Has he wasted money again ?”

Somewhere Taeyong wished it was that. How hypocritical of him that something that is so troublesome has now become something so small in his list of priorities.

“No, mom. Stop worrying, I am fine.” He answers, opening a book and trying to find where he stopped the last time they went through it.

“What ? Lovers quarrel ?” She jokes but Taeyong almost chokes on air.

How could he possibly tell her that she is close to the answer. And is Jaehyun even a lover ? Is there even a word to qualify what is going on between them now ? Just two long days of Taeyong avoiding him, two long days of them not uttering a word to the other or turning mad whenever they are in the same room. The younger was on the verge of leaving but Mrs Park has asked him to stay for she doesn't want to be left alone with a moody Jaehyun. And he also figured that running away over and over again is never a solution.

Not like he is trying to find one. Some may find him stubborn but something in him can't shake off Jaehyun’s words. He also couldn't bear the fact that he was on the verge of giving in to Jaehyun and that may be what annoys him the most. He should have thrown his pride away, but every time he sees Jaehyun being mad at him, he asks himself what right does the dickhead have to be mad? He is the one who punched someone and said mean things…

“Come on mom, where would I find the time to date ? Who would even date a poor boy like me?”

He should have thought better before saying those words cause he sees her turning sour at them, worry etched on her wrinkles.

“It’s my fault, I am sorry darling.”
There is no need to lie. Both would have preferred a better situation but fate is never good to right people but the way to hell is paved with good intentions. Instead of fighting fate, there is nothing else to do than trying to stay afloat and letting life play its game.

Taeyong scoffs at how pessimistic that must have sounded in his head.

“This is the reality and all we can do is getting through it together.” Her smiles comes back with a little waver. “I’ll do all that I can to make it right, and don’t ever worry about it.”

“What would I do without you?” To that Taeyong grasps her hand, protecting her frail fingers from the coldness of the sterile hospital room.

“Read this book ?” He leaves a kiss on her temple, greeting her goodbye. “I have to go, eat your meals ok ?”

“Got it, chief !” Not even the bitterness of the previous conversation can erase the goofy smiles from their face.

Taeyong packs up, making sure to take his worried with him as no one should bear them but himself.

“Honey ?” She calls, holding on his wrist before he can leave. “Don’t lose hope. There is someone out there who will love you and do anything for you, even some crazy things, just to keep you happy. Just like me.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Little does she know that he does have someone in mind.
He can barely close his eyes. The wind is prone to madness outside, and when he creeps out from under the blanket, Jaehyun can see a stray branch from one of the closest trees tapping against his bedroom window. Despite being thick, the warm blanket is not doing a great job as a safe shelter from his insomnia. Despite being soft and comfortable, the mattress is not enough from keeping him above the ground and he feels tiredness swallowing him.

Jaehyun could blame it on the weather, on stress from work but it would be lying to himself. It has been two days, since the incident that he barely slept. He has never been good at throwing his pride away, and until now he still holds his ground for he knows he is not wrong. Hold his ground he will do if it breaks the wall there is between him and Taeyong.

Three thirty in the morning seems like a good time for a glass of water. It is just his luck when the one on his night stand is already empty. The house is covered in darkness when he makes his way to the kitchen, but doesn’t expect the hue of orange light coming from it and he stops at the door.

Is it because Taeyong is haunting his night that he himself can’t find sleep ? It seems so as the petite male is rummaging through for the cupboard, certainly looking for his usual sugar pumped snacks. Jaehyun scrunches at the simple idea of it. His first step startles the other who clenches his shirt where his heart is with a hard gaze turned towards Jaehyun.

Any other night, Jaehyun would have jumped on the occasion to kiss the daylight out of him, Taeyong in his oversized shirt and bare legs, what a sight to behold. Considering their situation, Taeyong would punch him square in the face before he can even approach an inch further.

There is no animosity tonight, it is a cold war, a silent battle of staring, waiting for the other to be done with their ordeal and leave. But instead, they end up at both end of the counter, looking everywhere but at each other, not sure of what to say. Having spent those days ignoring each other is not helping either.

Jaehyun is the first to make a move, in hopes it plays in his favor. Taeyong is luckily situated right in front of the sink. He takes large steps, fetching a glass on the way and in a matter of second he has Taeyong trapped between him and the sink. They both feel the shivers in this game of seduction but Taeyong is far from giving in, even when Jaehyun’s crotch press against his behind, back warm against his back as he fills the glass with water.
The loud beating of their heart can’t hide the younger’s sudden loud breathing, probably stopping himself from moaning at the intense contact.

_Typical Jaehyun, using sex to resolve problems._

Said man gulps his water in a go and Taeyong has to restrain himself from staring at his bent back neck and the extent of his beautiful pale skin. Jaehyun detaches himself and in an attempt to move away, Taeyong finds himself stumbling over his own feet, cliché really. And just like that -it plays like a dumb movie in Taeyong’s mind- Jaehyun has him secured against his chest. It feels like a déjà vu, Jaehyun catching him before he hits the ground…

“L-let go.” Trying to sound harsh can’t dissolve the nervousness in his voice nor the desire to wrap his arms around Jaehyun’s neck. “I haven’t forgiven you yet.”

“Who says I am asking for forgiveness ?” Comes the equally cold response.

The hold doesn’t loosen, if anything, he is held tighter against the other man and Taeyong allows himself to cheat a little and discreetly breathes in his masculine scent.

“Are you lacking that much manner ? Unless you are planning to say sorry, let go, Jaehyun.”

There is no need asking a third time as the grasp around his skinny waist disappear along the warmth. Taeyong will never admit how much he misses it instantly.

“I am going to bed. Good night.” The younger rushes before letting his walls fall which he would regret immediately, missing the frown freezing Jaehyun’s traits.

There is never much to do in a hospital when your energy is limited. She has read so many books, taken so many walks around the yard, talked to so many patients that in the end the most entertaining activity would be staring out of the window.
Every visits from her son ends in a pit of self loathing, for lying, hiding the truth, loving him more than she should... After all, no matter what he is her son. After all, the truth doesn’t have to come out. Until footsteps approach her bed.

The sudden visit cuts her from her less than entertaining day. It is not a nurse, nor someone she knows but her face holds some familiar traits. The woman is taller in stature, thinner even, moving her body with refined grace, maybe too much for a move as minimum as walking. Maybe has she seen her on TV?

“Lee Ji Yeon ?” The way it comes out seems forced, almost as if the name evokes disdain in the woman. She nods nonetheless. “Do you know who I am ?”

Nor the blue tailored suit, nor the white fur hanging off her shoulder, nor the shimmering silver ring on her left hand could give an hint.

“Should I ?” Ji Yeon answers, unsure of how she should address this woman. Such a person has nothing to do in a yard full of disease and dying commoners, maybe charity, though her coldness makes her a natural enemy.

“I won’t turn around the bush then.” The woman takes the seat where Ji Yeon’s son was previously, crossing her legs and straightening her back as if it could dominate the patient. “I believe you have something that is mine, have been for twenty years.”

“I don’t get what you are saying and I think you are mistaken-”

“I am not.” The visitor interferes and the truth clicks in Ji Yeon’s mind before the woman says it. “The boy who just walked out of this very room.”

Those traits, so subtle, almost invisible but if one takes a closer look, if one is already on the edge of knowing the truth, confronted to the reality, then they can’t be mistaken. Once the veracity of the fact hits Ji Yeon, she is unable to not see it. Twenty long, agonizing years of what ifs. What if someone out there is waiting, what if someone out there is longing... And finally today, this very moment, she has the affirmation that Taeyong was never hers.

“I-... I am sorry.” Is all she can say. What else is there to say.
“You don’t have to be.” There is no compassion in the grin the woman offers. “He has survived all those years, thanks to you. And I believe I owe you. I will send you abroad, you’ll be in the hands of the best surgeons and doctors there are, and once you find your health back, I will give you a job, a stable life, you won’t have to worry about anything anymore. And I never go back on my words.”

It sounds way too good to be true. The promise of a better life, of no more breathless night and shivering body, it all sounds too good to be true. Ji Yeon doesn’t rush to thank the woman, if there is something she has learnt, is that nothing comes for free in this life.

“All I ask from you is to disappear from Taeyong’s life.” And the beautiful promise breaks in millions of shards of glass.

Nothing comes for free in this life. Nothing except the love from a family. Taeyong’s selflessness, his sacrifices, his unconditional love, those were all delivered to her without a price. There is not a dream, not even a dollar bill in this world that could make her give it up.

“No, I won’t lose him.” And before negotiation can be made she adds “I have been there for him as much as he has been there for me all those years. I have raised him as my son and I won’t lose him.”

It starts a fire in her visitor, a second of anger in her dark orbs and Ji Yeon wonders if she should have kept quiet.

“We all lose something. And I know you lost your husband.” It is not Taeyong, Ji Yeon realize, the familiarity she sees in her, it is way more than that. “There is no use for me to introduce myself as you already figured it out. And as a revenge of what happened to you, if that can lessen your hate, then my husband is also dying four floors above you.”

“You are made of greed, you are inhuman for even telling me that and I will never let Taeyong in your hands.” Her voice raises an octave, provoking the woman to fight her stubbornness. “Taeyong is an adult, and he will make his decision. And there is no way he will even glance at you when he discovers the truth. So please, get out.”

“Decision ?” The woman scoffs. “Do you know what decision he has made just to have you in this bed ? That boy sold his dignity, his body, all of that under your watch and you expect me to believe you are better than me ?”

“You are lying…” She won’t cry, not in front of Jung Soobin, but as much as she denies it…
It was there, under her nose… She knew something was wrong, she knew Taeyong was hiding something, and she can’t even be mad. All those nights out with Johnny, how he always put food on the table despite the low salary from the restaurant, all those clothes he hides from her, and she should have done something but it felt good to be in denial. She could have put the blame on trust but Jung Soobin is right, she would never be as good as her.

“If you look out of that window you like so much, then you will understand who rules those grounds.” It is a threat and at this point in the conversation, her throat has closed up. “The clock is ticking and my husband will be gone soon, Mrs Lee. So I advise you to think about it. Don’t deprive him from a better life, one that he lost just because of your selfish love. All I ask is that you disappear, without uttering a word of this to Taeyong and then every of your problems, every of his problems will be erased.”

*Tax refund… Investment… Administration*

For someone who has an encounter with those words on a daily basis, it is funny how they seem to mean nothing right now. He doesn’t understand them, or more like Jaehyun can’t seem to focus on them and it frustrates him to no end. Where there seemed to be no barrier between him and control before, there is now the indelible face of a certain man.

Or he could just blame it on Ten and the way he sips loudly on his organic cucumber juice on the armchair across his desk. Something along the line of taking a break between two commercial shoots, not like Jaehyun cares. What looked like a friendly visit is now a trial full of wrong judgements.

“Sometimes I forget you are a man before being a robot.” Ten’s input isn’t always necessary, read never. “Did you know that a sexual approach isn’t always the best ?”

Now he regrets telling his friends about last night kitchen encounter with Taeyong. It seems that every discussion with Ten ends up in the singer convincing him to spill the beans. And like every time he ends up closing the files he is working on to listen. Or argue.

“My intent wasn’t to have him forgive me.”
“Well, you kinda punched a man—”

“Which I don’t regret.” Jaehyun cuts crudely.

No one seems to understand that the matter at hand is not his actions. It is the fact that Taeyong always sees him as a bad guy with vile intentions. He doesn’t mention it cause he pictures Ten affirming that he is.

“Of course, you are who you are. You’d kill a baby then frame it above your fireplace.” Jaehyun is not offended anymore, a skill he has mastered over the years. “You still haven’t told me why you did what you did.”

And he is not planning on doing so. Ten is not waiting for it either. Jaehyun has never been a man looking for recognition for the good things he does. If there is one thing he has promised himself, it is that the only recognition he will beg for is the Jung’s. One day that useless pride of his will bring him only bad omens.

“You know, Jaehyun, sometimes you do bad things with a nice purpose. And most of the time nobody sees it. But when you love someone, it doesn’t matter anymore, it doesn’t matter if they appreciate it or not. All that matters is that you please them, even if you have to apologize unfairly for it.”

It has been years, Jaehyun thinks, that Ten hasn’t said something wise. Not that he considers that wise, but he wouldn’t mind keeping the advice.

“I am not in love.” He corrects before getting back to work, signaling silently that the discussion is over, his heart is closed for now and Ten will have to come back another time.

“Yeah, keep telling that to yourself, it won’t make it true.”

The idol leaves with the promise of a friendly dinner soon but even with the absence of his friend, Jaehyun’s attention is not coming back. Same inner turmoil as another male somewhere else in the city.
Nothing is going right today and Taeyong blames it on Jaehyun too, the same way Jaehyun is blaming his lacking on Taeyong. The only difference is that the older can take a break whenever he deems it right to do so while Taeyong can’t just leave the restaurant whenever he pleases. The fact that Johnny seems to be avoiding him and slacking in his own work is not helping.

Ever since the incident, Johnny hasn’t answered to his messages, nor has he joined Taeyong during breaks. For how long does the other plan on avoiding him? And for what reason? Because more than a coworker, Taeyong is in dire need of a friend, his best friend.

He huffs for the nth time when the same lady keeps ordering rice over and over again. It sounds unfair because she is not at fault but he is not in the mood to be the usual kind waiter today. And it intensifies when Johnny passes him by with dirty plate, not sparing a single glance. Anyone could feel the nervousness in him in a mile radius. Taeyong will have to corner him by the end of the day because Johnny knows something he doesn’t, and that he should.

“You should take an early leave, sweety.” Mrs Seo comes from behind him, almost making him drop the bowl of rice he was about to deliver. “You don’t look fine, look at your pale face.”

He would if he could, but Mrs Seo doesn’t understand that he can’t take a look at his own face. Nor can he leave, because another demon is waiting for him out of those doors and he is not to keen on seeing Jaehyun yet. He could go back to his flat, but ever since Jaehyun took the liberty to pay his mother’s hospital bills, he too wants to keep his part of the contract fulfilled.

“I’m fine, plus Johnny doesn’t look like he can handle it alone tonight.” He sighs.

“You guys are all troubled about that Jaehyun, right?” One can never hide anything for too long around Mrs Seo. For some reason, she always tries to mend everyone’s broken pieces.

“Why would Johnny be troubled over Jaehyun?”

“I’ll give you some time to talk to him, go.” She shoo him away and Taeyong is still perplexed as he is pushed towards the kitchen.

Johnny understands very well he is not capable of being a good waiter today and Taeyong sees him busying himself with cooking, which is not his forte either but if that can ease his mind…
The shorter is fully aware that Johnny sees him approaching, and if he does he makes nothing of it. Instead, his eyes are glued to the poor carrot he is butchering. Taeyong would have compassion for the vegetable if not for his purpose here. He walks further, as if cornering a little animal, which is quite ironic when Johnny is the subject.

Just as he is about to speak, Johnny leaves his workspace to busy himself with the plates in the sinks, some meters away.

“John, don’t avoid me.” He might as well shoot first. The kitchen is not big enough anyway for Johnny to run away again. If Taeyong has to, he will run around the place like a kid to catch his giant of a friend.

“I am not avoiding you.” The taller finally seems to give up, he turns around to face a frowning Taeyong.

“Then why won’t you talk to me ? Is it about Jaehyun ?”

How he wishes it was only about Jaehyun, how he wishes he could just sweep that under the carpet. It is deeper, more painful than just Jaehyun. Taeyong is not a fool. Nobody else on this Earth knows him like Taeyong does and there is no need in lying.

Fourteen years old, little Taeyong who was is only friend. Teenager Taeyong with whom he has shared his first heartbreaks and drunken nights, and now this Taeyong he sees as more than just a boy and a friend… And today is the day he has to be a man himself and do what’s better for both of them.

“You are in love with him, right ?”

Taeyong doesn’t expect the conversation to go against him. Now he is the one cornered. He could admit to it, he could say that he is or he isn’t but thruth be told, he himself isn’t sure. He cares when Jaehyun acts like a douche, he feels giddy and content when Jaehyun holds him to sleep, he feels appeased when on rare occasion he sees Jaehyun’s smile, but can it be labelled love…

“I care for him.” And of course he hasn’t forgotten the delicateness of the state he and Johnny are in. He is not blind, he is fully aware of the feelings Johnny still harbours and it feels criminal to give his heart to another man. “I know I said it was just another job but… Feeling affection for him has never been in the plan, I am sorry…”
“Don’t be.” Johnny forces a smile because he obviously can’t hold it against his friend. Feelings come unexpectedly, just like his. “I guess we were both mistaking about him.”

One might think the addition of Jaehyun to the group can lessen the amount of work but by the evening, Johnny feels his sore muscles aching. The restaurant is exceptionally full tonight, and to be honest even if he doesn’t like it, Johnny is thankful for the new addition.

He observes as Jaehyun wait a table next to his, barely minding the wind outside when Johnny starts to shiver under his sweater. The man did respect their work, which the twenty two years old didn’t expect. If there is a quality he has seen in Jaehyun, then it is work ethic. The way he balances plates carefully, his patience towards the most demanding customers, he overcame it all.

Even Johnny can see what Taeyong sees in Jaehyun, he may be cold and somewhat mean, but he probably is a good person and Johnny feels like he can trust him.

“Tell me, boy.” A man calls as Johnny is serving him another bottle of soju. “Can the pretty boy with white hair wait our table instead?”

Johnny knows exactly what type of client he is dealing with as the other men at the table snickers at their friend’s input. The young waiter has dealt with a fair share of drunkard before, and there is no way he will have Taeyong serve them. First because his friend is often subject to unwanted courting, and also because he is busy enough with the tables inside.

“I am sorry, sir. I will be your waiter for now.” Johnny bows despite the absurdity of the request.

Give them an hour before Johnny will have to call his father to chase them away or call a cab for them.

“I don’t think you know who you are talking to, boy.” The man adds, making his friends double in laughter. “You are in no place to refuse, I want the pretty boy.”

His words are slurred and Johnny scrunches at the foul smell of soju. Not to mention they have attracted too much attention by now, disturbing the other clients.
“I am sorry, sir but I cannot have him work more than he already does.” Johnny bows a second time, already making plans to leave but the man stands up.

He may not be towering over Johnny’s taller stature, but he has enough muscles visible to make one believe he is a good fighter. And if Johnny can, he would like to avoid fighting.

“You don’t understand, he won’t work.” The man sways a bit already pushing Johnny slightly but enough to make him stumble a step back. “We just want to see his pretty little-”

“Sir, I think you’ve had enough to drink for tonight.”

Johnny’s eyes double their size -in fear of something bad arriving but also in mild surprise- when Jaehyun steps in front of him to face the man. Jaehyun is certainly not taller either, but he is bold, not like Johnny and he doesn’t mind confronting the man.

“J-Jaehyun, there’s no need-” Johnny tries to resonate but the man is already trying to reach to him.

“What ? You can’t defend yourself, boy ? You need a friend ?” Luckily, thanks to the barrier Jaehyun is, the man barely touches him.

Instead it is the older male who takes a hold of the man, gentle enough to not mean violence, but rough enough to keep his arms from reaching further.

“I think you need to leave.” Jaehyun tries.

“I won’t leave until I have the pretty boy for me.” He seethes through his teeth. Johnny has to applaud Jaehyun’s self control.

“Let him go, Jaehyun. There’s no need for this.” Johnny murmurs from the back.

The younger is right. He is here to make Taeyong proud. His anger management issues have always
been what triggers the latter in hating him further and he is not about to ruin everything. With a sigh, he lets go, giving the man one last glare before turning around.

It happens faster than the blink of an eye. Johnny stumbles back as he feels his sweater being pulled and the man turns him around, fist in the air ready to strike.

“Are you underestimating me?” But his punch never land.

Before anyone can react, Johnny is set aside and a fuming Jaehyun, way quicker, lands a punch on the man, sending him stumbling back on the floor, surprising anyone around, even Johnny. He didn’t know the man had so much strength in him.

At that moment, Johnny knew he should have thanked Jaehyun for protecting him, he should have sent the man away or called the cops. There are so many things he should have done right, but he did wrong. Next thing he knows, Taeyong is there and there is two possible scenarios. Jaehyun, the hero, or Taeyong, forever Johnny’s to have. He is afraid, that anything he says, if he tells the truth, would push Taeyong’s into Jaehyun’s arms and he isn’t ready for that. But he guesses it is not his happiness at stake…

The next thirty minutes see Taeyong running out of the bus towards the house, muscles aching from rushing to get there, head overthinking about what to say. Yes, he was wrong. Yes, he should have given a chance to Jaehyun to explain himself. Yes, he has been stupid and needs to apologize.

Mrs Park sends him a perplexed look as he runs into the dining room, panting as if he just ran a marathon. He may look tired but his face says he is anxious, nervous and she instantly knows what it is about. People are like spectrum, she often says. They are made of colors, some dark and some vividly bright, they coexist, the bad side, bad actions, mixed with the good counterparts. There is no judgement to be made when you only see a color to who a person is. And she always knew the two idiots would come to realize it.

“Jaehyun is in his office.” She dares to tease, pardon her as her days are often boring.

“I-... How do you know-”

Instead of answering, she is pointing to a little box at the end of the table. Funny how two persons
can be so similar yet think they are so different. Taeyong undoes the little yellow ribbon keeping the white box closed and when he takes the lid off, a stupid grin etches on his face.

Macarons. He has missed it, Jaehyun bringing back pastries for him just because he can. It has only been two days but he has somehow realized he prefers his annoying and arrogant self than his silences.

*I am sorry for yelling at you… No, I am sorry for not listening to you.*

Taeyong works on his apology as he is walking down the hallway. Somewhere along the way, his pride almost takes over again and he is on the verge of spinning around and leave. It all reminds him of the night he came in here to accept Jaehyun’s offer. Except this time he is sincere.

*Come on, he bought macarons, you like macarons…*

What an absurd excuse, he thinks. There are days one must man up and own to their mistake. Today is that day for Taeyong so he knocks at the door of Jaehyun’s office, fidgeting until he hears a faint permission to come inside.

Jaehyun must have thought it is Mrs Park as he looks surprised, seated on the couch across his desk, a book in hand. They simply stare for a second. Taeyong feels the blush maring his cheeks, what a shame he has to be the one to apologize. To be honest he likes proving Jaehyun most of the time, so having Jaehyun prove him wrong is new to him.

Jaehyun is far from looking flustered but they both know he has always been good at staying stoic. The book is left aside as they both wonder what sentence could break the ice. Taeyong wants to just jump in his arm and hug him but that would seem inappropriate, isn’t it? After all they are two idiots not knowing how to act when falling…

“I thought your intentions were to court me, not killing me with diabetes.” It is reprimanding, teasing but in their own language, the one they speak when lost in their little bubbles, it is perfect as a start.

“You are doing fine killing yourself with it.” Jaehyun answers, biting back a smile.

There are still things to say, but at that moment they know everything is forgiven without having to say it.
“I am sorry.” Jaehyun is the first to say and Taeyong almost feels his legs giving up because it is so unusual yet so heart fluttering.

“Don’t, I am the one who is sorry for yelling at you.” Taeyong lets his stubbornness in the hallway. He never thought he’d say it one day but it feels good to admit his mistake, especially when it offers him the hint of a smile from the other.

“Just so we are on the same page, I am not sorry for punching that lowlife.” Of course, it wouldn’t be Jaehyun any other way. “I didn’t mean what I said back then, you are way more than just a simple whore for me.”

It is painful, the way Taeyong’s heart beats whenever Jaehyun displays his rare affection and softness just for him. He finally dares to step in, and even dares to do a little more. He leaves no chance for Jaehyun to speak. The older has always been giving, Taeyong has been running away, it is his turn to give back.

There is nothing sexual in the way he straddles Jaehyun by sitting on his laps facing him. Maybe he has some naughty intentions but they are hidden far under the surface. He likes the look of surprise on Jaehyun’s face, then the way his traits softens and he is looking at Taeyong like he is looking at the definition of love and Taeyong doesn’t regret his action. It is his turn to make efforts.

“Let me talk.” His fingers find their way in the other’s brown locks, the other hand resting comfortably against his neck as they just look into the galaxy of stars inside their eyes. “I don’t blame you for saying what you said. I have been unfair to you. To be honest, somehow, I was waiting for you to mess up, to give me a reason to reject you. But the days passed and I realized I like you when you annoy the hell out of me.”

They are there, finally, those deep dimples hinting that Jaehyun genuinely smiling, a smile coming from the bottom of his cracked and cold heart. And it is for Taeyong only. It is so short, their story, yet so intense with some more pages to write, but Jaehyun knows he will never give such a precious and vulnerable side of him to anyone else than the man in his arms.

“I want you to know that you are not what your past made of you.” The sentence is enough to pull a sob from Taeyong but Jaehyun add a peck to his neck and he feels like melting. “As long as you are by my side, nor me, nor anyone else will treat you like an object. I will kill them before they do.”

“You’ll go to jail, dummy.” Taeyong laughs, hiding his face in the broad chest he missed so much.
“I’ll give you a credit card so you can bail me out.” For a long moment, Taeyong feels Jaehyun’s warm big hand tracing circles in his back and they may be at peace for now. Jaehyun smells like musk and sage, that he will never forget, and he wants it to be etched on his own skin. “Are you mine ?”

Instead of replying with words, which would spoil the moment as Taeyong can’t trust his voice to not waver, he plants a kiss on Jaehyun’s lips. It has been so long and he didn’t know he wanted this so bad. Taeyong hums as a tongue comes poking his lower lips and he grants entrance.

Macarons are good, but kissing Jaehyun like there is no tomorrow is sweeter. Inevitably, hands roam from Taeyong’s thigh to the muscles under his sweater and a moan animates their kiss. They have longed for each other for too long to not give in, with feelings so sincere it could tear their soul apart.

“Am I interrupting ?”

Just as fast as Taeyong has kissed Jaehyun, he finds himself being pushed hard enough to land on the carpeted floor in an almost comic manner. Always trust Jaehyun to not manhandle him.

The older sends him a regretful look he shrugs because it is not important. What is important is the boy standing at the door, a smug grin on his face, bubblegum blue hair sticking in all direction and Jaehyun groans out his frustration.

Out of all the things that could have happened at that moment, in the big scheme of this universe, it has to be Jisung.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I am feeling generous haha. Joking, I am trying to be faster on update cause summer holidays are finally here and I’ll try to complete this story before starting uni again. Hope you guys are satisfied with this chapter hihi. Look forwards to the next. Also have you seen JCC at Johnny's like... My poor heart. Anyway I have read your feedbacks and once againf you guys are total sweetheart I love you so much!!!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong's path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The boy, Jisung as Jaehyun exclaimed frustratingly, reminds Taeyong of a little puppy. A grumpy and brash puppy but a puppy nonetheless. He wouldn't go as far as saying that the atmosphere is heavy and awkward, but it is far from a Christmas Eve joy. Taeyong has to restrain himself -countless times- from ruffling the bubblegum blue hair because the boy is just too adorable for his sake. If not for the fact that he looks like he could bite Taeyong at any time ever since he stepped in here.

His behavior towards Jaehyun is something else. The man has been offered the boy’s brightest smile, even an attempt at a hug if not for Jaehyun sending him flying meters away from him, earning a disapproving glare from Taeyong.

Jaehyun rubs his temple, a very unpleasant scowl on his face as he seats at the kitchen counter, Jisung just across him, staring as if he has never seen anything cooler than the tycoon. And Taeyong… He is still in the shadow, not knowing who this stranger is, but that doesn’t stop him from fixing a snack for the boy who came to pay them a visit at… Nine in the evening.

“What do you want?” Jaehyun finally asks, and believe Taeyong or not, the man didn’t even greet the boy.

“I’m here to see you, obviously. I’m gonna stay here a little bit.” The teenager, Taeyong guesses, says as if it is the most normal situation ever, to show up at someone’s doorstep during the night.

“No, does your father even know you are here?” Jaehyun asks, his joy far from coming back.

“Nope, I just left.” Jisung shrugs calmly. “But he never cares anyway, I want to be with you.”
Taeyong leaves a plate of homemade brownies in front of the boy, God bless Mrs Park for helping him making them days ago or they would have turned worse than his cupcakes. He almost jumps away when Jisung glares at him. One would believe he is confronting a scared little animal in front of its den.

“Isn’t that cute ?” Taeyong tries to lift their spirit but both man just throws him a disapproving look. For an instant he doesn’t know if he is actually staring at two teenagers. “Help yourself, Jisung.”

“I don’t wanna eat this. And don’t say my name like you know me.” The boy bites back.

“Jisung !” Jaehyun scolds and Taeyong has to squeeze his thigh under the counter to signal that it is alright, it is simply a grumpy little kid, nothing he can’t handle.

“Who is he anyway ?” Taeyong fidgets at Jaehyun’s side, not knowing what to do when the two of them talk as if he isn’t there. How is Jaehyun going to introduce him ? Him and all his insecurities ?

He has guessed by now Jisung and Jaehyun belong to the same world and have known each other for long. Who is he in the midst of it all ? A lover ? Just a mere commoner who Jaehyun has taken an interest to ? He doesn’t doubt Jaehyun when he says he is more than that but the reality is still the same no matter the amount of sweet words the older tells him.

“Nobody you deserve to know because you are leaving.” Before the kid can protest Jaehyun is standing up, fetching his phone. “I am calling a driver, you’re going back home.”

“No, don’t make me, please.” Jisung whines but Taeyong hears desperation in his voice.

“You’re not staying here, period.” Jaehyun forces and Taeyong’s heart breaks a little at the way Jisung’s shoulders slump.

“Give us a minute, Jisung.” The twenty two years old man interrupts, grabbing Jaehyun on his way.

The taller is not pleased when Taeyong forces him back into the office. He could cry and throw a tantrum like the kid he is but Taeyong is having none of it either. Jaehyun is always dense, oblivious to people’s feeling, a little too blind to affection and someone has to fix that. Taeyong wouldn’t be as presumptuous as saying he is better and he can do it but he at least is not about to throw out a poor boy out there in the street, during a cold night.
“First of all, who is that boy?” Jaehyun has seen him mad before but when Taeyong crosses his arms, defying him with the hardest glare, is it weird he just wants to bend him over and fuck the daylight out of him?

“A… A friend from Busan.” It is not the exact truth, but it is not a complete lie either. It is what is closest to the reality for Jaehyun.

“Oh, and why won’t you let him stay?”

“Have you seen him?” Jaehyun scoffs and Taeyong takes a step further, trying to tower over, to no avail, a mad Taeyong is a sight that sparks the playful insolence in Jaehyun. “He is evil, the cute face is just a show.”

“Really? Because what I saw back there were just two Jaehyun, identical, being insufferable.”

“That’s exactly why I don’t want him anywhere near me.”

It would have been hard for anyone to guess the underlying of that statement but Taeyong is not anyone. In the span of some weeks, the man who started off as a complete stranger is an open book, a crystal ball for him to read. There are still countless moments when he doesn’t understand Jaehyun, what is going on in his reckless and selfish mind. But when his voice is tern, eyes languidly searching his for a shelter then he knows there is a fog of fear behind them.

Jaehyun may look like a complete jerk at times but Taeyong knows to well that his insecurities are bigger than his ego. The younger has understood, without it being said, that Jaehyun has became someone he himself hates and despises. It is obvious to Taeyong, in the way Jaehyun insists so much on changing, in the way he spends sleepless nights on the balcony just looking for comfort in the dark, in the way he seems to punish himself mentally whenever he offends Taeyong…

“You will be alright, ok?” Taeyong is bold at the moment, intertwining their fingers and he feels like this has always been a routine. It feels as if they just didn’t accept each other barely an hour ago, it feels as if their heart have met thousands of years ago. It is tiring to be the subject of each other’s attention and affection, but god it feels so natural. “He is just a little toddler, we can’t let him leave.”

“He is 17.” Jaehyun deadpans and earns a deserved, inoffensive slap on the chest.
“Jaehyun! You were about to throw out a 17 years old who came all the way from Busan out there in the cold night ?”

“He’s old enough to manage.”

“Have you seen how he looks at you ?” Jaehyun is an heartbeat away from telling the man it doesn’t compare to how he looks at him… “He likes you a lot, I can say. So don’t be so harsh on him, just let him stay the night and you’ll see what to do tomorrow ?”

“I’ll go tell him he can stay the night.”

Taeyong is satisfied with himself when he sees the teenager settling in one of the spare bedrooms. It feels good to help from time to time even if the kid still harbours some kind of distaste for him. It doesn’t matter as long as he knows he is not feeling rejected. Teenagers tend to overthink at this tender age. Nothing is more comforting than being with your family.

“Stop grinning like that, you’re scaring him.” Jaehyun titters.

“Well, my duty here is done, I’m going to bed.” What a fool he is for thinking Jaehyun can be a saint. The thing Taeyong should never forget is that Jaehyun is -as he loves to exclaim- a businessman and whenever the moment calls for it or not, he lives by the saying “an eye for an eye”.

“Where do you think you are going ?” The older pulls him before he can step towards his room and he finds himself being pushed inside another bedroom.

“What are you doing ?”

No answer comes from the man as he circles his arm around the thin waist he likes so much. Taeyong smells like vanilla, a little bit like lemon too and tastes even better when Jaeyong lets his hungered lips meet the expanse of his pale neck. So delicate and so fragile, his Taeyong...
“Jaehyun stop, I am tired.” The younger’s voice commands otherwise, muffled in the broad chest. The wavering in his vocal chords, the slight trembling of his body says he is as thirsty as the other.

“You are sleeping here from now on.” The order is clear, making sure there is no room for discussion.

There is always room for discussion, with Taeyong. The latter wiggles in the hold in hope of being released but Jaehyun is too strong for him. What even pushes him to try, it is obvious Jaehyun will be stubborn again tonight. Truth be told, if he could he would let Jaehyun do whatever he wants but tonight his weak heart is beating too loud, loud enough to keep him awake. Maybe he needs a little more time to process that they now belong to each other…

“You are being unreasonable, again.” As much as Taeyong would have liked it to sound like a scolding, Jaehyun’s travelling lips keep on messing with his emotions.

Next thing he knows he is being pushed on the bed, a smirking Jaehyun hovering above him and it is all too much. Taeyong realizes he has always taken for granted how ethereal this man is really is. From his brown soft locks, his porcelain skin, his broad shoulder, the dimples at the corner of his every grin, he is gorgeous in a painful way. Physically painful way.

“I have an unwanted guest under my roof because of you and I am the unreasonable one ?”

Then he dives in the crook of his neck again, a gesture that forces the giggles out of the younger. He may likes the annoying Jaehyun, but he adores the soft version of him, the one who makes him feel like a priceless masterpiece, the one who makes the butterfly in his stomach fly all around.

“I'll sleep here, but no touching, tonight.” Taeyong is just a mere human, unable to resist the call of the devil. Jaehyun could have asked him to jump off the window, he would have done it without hesitation.

“If you say so.”

The whisper is close to Taeyong’s lips, so close that he is about to change his mind and let the man ravish him, destroy him to build him up again. Jaehyun teases the ghost of a kiss on his lower lips before pulling himself up to disappear behind the bathroom door. It takes Taeyong a full minute to regain a normal breathing, his lungs giving up every time
Jaehyun teases him, he gives up. Jaehyun destroys him, he refuses to be fixed. Jaehyun makes love to him, and he falls. What a scary dynamic, so scary the masochist in him wants more. How the hell did he even manage to keep himself away all this time when the man is even more sugary than any treats he had before?

His brain goes on overdrive when he lays silently under the cover, everything in Jaehyun’s room smells like him and Taeyong giggles to himself when he discreetly inhale in the pillow. Jaehyun is his and he his Jaehyun’s, they are different and so far apart but the other’s arms are the safest place on earth.

“You could just tell me if you want to sniff me that much.”

Taeyong almost rolls to fall down from the soft bed as Jaehyun appears next to him, his side dipping as he lays. The younger fight the blush creeping up his cheek, turning the lights off from the switch above his head so the dark would make his shame more bearable. If Jaehyun’s scent is an addiction, his presence is a drug.

“Shut up and sleep.” Taeyong’s trembling voice is muffled and he turns his back to the other, hoping he can find sleep in such a tense atmosphere.

He should have taken the man up on his offer instead of being stubborn. In another perspective, being stubborn brings out the clingy Jaehyun… His breath stops when arms circle his waist in the dark, touch so tingly and comforting… So warm. He is pressed against a firm chest. Why is his heart beating so loud for everyone to hear?

He can feel the man’s nose, forehead, the plump of his cheeks seeking comfort in his t-shirt and if he isn’t embarrassed enough from being caught sniffing Jaehyun’s pillow, then he hears said person inhaling loudly, body going numb at his own scent…

“Goodnight, Jae…”

Silence follows after the softness of his voice.

“Say that again.”
Of course, only Jaehyun can be excited by a simple nickname.

“I said sleep-”

“Say. That. Again.”

The arms tightening around his form makes it harder to breath, but at the same time is the only things that can keep him alive right at that moment. Oh he is falling so so hard…

“Goodnight, Jae.”

“Goodnight, angel.”

Taeyong doesn’t find a single blink of sleep that night, letting his heartbeat lull the man he longs for so much.

It is good to finally have Johnny acting like his usual self, talkative, funny, especially not ignoring him. Taeyong knows it must have been hard for his best friend to push him in the arms of another man. Despite his immense joy, maybe gushing about it to his friend is not a good thing, but it is Johnny who seeks for him first as soon as he arrives at work for the lunch service.

Luckily, the place isn’t as full as it usually is, the everyday squads of loud students rushing to catch the afternoon classes. It is between two tables, Taeyong taking orders that Johnny intercepts him, forcing an early break.

“Are you and Jaehyun ok, now ?”

The shorter is no fool. Anyone could hear the nervousness in his voice, as if the simple idea of Jaehyun stabs him. Despite the hurt, Taeyong knows Johnny genuinely cares, still drowning in guilt for being in part responsible of the past days argument.
“John John… You d-”

“Hey, don’t worry, ok ? I am not sad, anymore.” Johnny is a liar, that he knows. With every word, he feels the ground swallowing him but it feels good. It is a shower of relief, to force himself to move on.

It is always painful to pull a dagger out of a wound, once it is done, the bleeding is worse. And when the healing process starts, all that is left is a scar that makes you stronger and better.

“Then we are ok.” Taeyong soothes, rubbing his friend’s back. Even if the topic gravitates around him, Johnny is the one who needs comfort.

“Do you love him ?”

Silence. The question is abrupt, to an outsider it may sound intrusive, personal… Yes, he is out of breath whenever Jaehyun looks at him. Yes, it is painful, like bullets firing through his system when Jaehyun is away. Yes, he thinks about Jaehyun every step of his day. Does he love him ? If he is not ready for the question, he is less than ready for the answer. But the shorter knows aside from his mother, Johnny is the only one he can be honest with, the one he can rely on and he deserves to know.

“I know I like him.” None of them miss the little smile and if Johnny stares longer, he can imagine little sparks in his best friend’s eyes. He wouldn't want it any other way. “He is rough and a little bit of a jerk… Ok, he is totally an asshole but he makes me happy and he likes me back, it’s all that matters, right ?”

“It’s all that matters.” It really is, no amount of repeating that statement could make it truer. “But if he hurts you in any way, I am going to beat the fuck out of him.”

Johnny doesn’t like the way his friend clutches at his side, laughing like no tomorrow. He is a very fit guy mind you. His decency and chivalry was the only things that stopped him from beating that drunk man days ago. If he wanted to, he could have finished him on the spot… He thinks ?

“I’d like to see you try, my hero.” It is enough to tell them that no matter who owns Taeyong’s affection, Johnny will always be his favorite guy.
“Leave.” The older finally snaps after an hour.

*Click. Clang. Clang. Click.* The little noises are incessant, infinite, disturbing and way too repetitive. Jaehyun, for the first time in years, regrets buying the decorative object. What he used to see as a stress reliever has become a stress inducer in the span of an hour… And again, the Park family must have thought the same thing at Jisung’s birth.

The teenager has been playing with his Newton’s cradle ever since he followed the older to work, which Jaehyun didn’t notice until the boy made a sudden appearance in his rearview mirror from the backseat, a second away from leading them both into a fatal car accident. Jisung laughed until Jaehyun parked on the side of the road, trying to force him out of the car.

“Help!” The kid shouted to some passersby as they threw dirty glances at the man.

With hindsight, Jaehyun should have thrown him on the asphalt and rolled him over. Fuck jail.

“Hyung, I am bored.” The kid dares and Jaehyun tries to ignore the urge from his fingers to reach a pen and plant it in his neck. It’s fascinating, the creativity Jisung gives him in such a short span of time for he came up with fifty different ways to get rid of the kid. Half of it involves the paper shredder.

“Leave, then. Don’t you have friends?”

“It’s like asking you if you have some.” Touché. Jaehyun won’t comment on it.

The tycoon knows about the cross weighing on Jisung’s shoulders. He still bears it at 27, and a ten years difference doesn’t lessen the weight of it. Loneliness, pressure… He didn’t have anyone to rely on or nobody he could run to to get away from the vile of high society. It does sound harsh but he wishes Jisung goes through it the same way because it did nothing but strengthen his mind.

“I am putting you on the next flight back to Busan.”

“Well, then I’m just going to pay Aunt Soobin a visit. She’ll force you to babysit me again, who
knows maybe this time we’ll go to Bora Bora ?”

Jaehyun quickly retracts his finger from the intercom linking him to his secretary. The memories of the yesteryears summer terrifying him. Soobin is kind to the kid, she is obliged to for the teenager is the son of one of her closest associate which doesn’t help Jaehyun’s situation. Her soft spot resulted in Jaehyun taking the teenager on a vacation to Spain, and he despised every second of it. Which wasn’t Jisung’s case who came back home with a bag of polaroids in which Jaehyun proudly managed to be blurred.

“Then fucking read a book and shut the fuck up.”

The whisper of “Language !” from the younger goes unnoticed. Jisung finally makes up his mind, deciding that his unconditional admiration for the older doesn’t top the fact that the latter is boring for lack of a better word. And soon he finds himself wandering around the building, exploring the place as if he didn’t already know every nook and cranny, pretending he doesn’t see the secretary following him.

Nothing is as interesting as it used to be when he was just a child, fascinated by the vast space. Now that he has reached the end of his high school years, the place is just a reminder of what awaits in his gloomy future. Jisung isn’t an easy character, if anything he is as reserved as his favorite hyung, hating the mere contact from any breathing being. The next hour finds him trying to avoid the employees cooing at his youthful appearance as well as the intrusive pinch some receptionists try on his cheeks.

It is when he walks the corridors of the upper floors, where higher profiles like Jaehyun works, that he finally catches something interesting. A night has been enough for the kid to know he dislikes Taeyong, out of pure jealousy or childishness, he doesn’t know but the other male is too close to Jaehyun for his liking. And seventeen years has been more than enough to know he hates Seulgi with the deepest rage a teenager can behold.

“Can you fetch me something to drink ?” He orders the exhausted secretary, shielding Seulgi from his sight. She is standing a few feet away, her figure slim enough for only Jisung to catch and he will eavesdrops what she has to say over the phone without the employee intruding. “Mango, very icy, a smoothie with whipped cream and marshmallows on top, caramel drip. I want a paper straw, you know environment and all.”

Jisung almost chuckles at the way the male’s eyes widen in pure horror at his request, maybe at the disgusting image of such a drink, or the fact it will be impossible to find. As far as Jisung is concerned, he can go to New York looking for it all he needs is to buy time.
“Shoo!” The man leaves, half limping from tiredness towards the elevator.

“I talked to the brother.”

The teenager struggles to hear but he can decipher some of her sentences. His hair color is not helping if he has to step closer so with great precaution, he sticks his back to a column. Nothing seems important to Jisung’s disappointment. Judging from her tone she is talking to Mr Kang. If Jisung and Jaehyun themselves struggle to find friends, a third World War can occur before Seulgi finds some.

“Taeyong will be out of the picture before the truth reaches him.”

Jisung recognizes the name and his curiosity is already poisoning his judgement anyway. One thing he will never get is why people always talk of private matters in such public places. If he thinks about it, he is actually the one who shouldn’t be here for this floor is only accessible to her and her guests, he will remember to give back the access card he stole from Jaehyun’s office.

“Jaehyun is no threat. If anything I can manipulate him. He himself is keeping Taeyong close waiting for the right moment and I think feelings are involved. Let me pull the right strings and Soobin’s son will be old news just like twenty years ago.”

He may be young, but Jisung is witty and smart, not like it takes a genius to link the dots. Jisung wasn’t born yet when the news made the headlines of every newspaper in the country. Knowing Jaehyun, in their circle, comes with knowing his past and origin. Knowing his past and origin comes with knowing about the Jung’s most agonising tragedy. “Boring” flies out of the window as Jisung tip toes to the elevator.

The night has fallen when Johnny finally discard his apron. His mother is checking the cashier one last time as Taeyong disappears to the staff room to get changed. He is on closing duty again tonight, luckily only some chairs are left outside, all he wants is to be home and sleep the exhaustion away.

As fast as he can, the cold wind blowing against his back, he gathers the furnitures in a rush. To be honest he has pretended not to see it, the sleek black car, so familiar, parked in front of the restaurant. Pushing his play further, he pretends not to see the man in a tidy black suit leaning against it. No matter how he looks at it, Jaehyun knows he saw him, and Johnny is just making a fool of himself avoiding his stare. He puts the chairs back inside before deciding that his pride is only going to make
it worse.

Jaehyun watches his every step as he approaches, rubbing his calloused hands against his jeans. The man oozes charisma, Johnny must admit that and he can see why Taeyong is so attracted. The way he stands, his little gestures, every little details of it still bothers Johnny. It is arrogant, dominant, calling for a punch in the face.

“Good evening.” Johnny greets.

“Good evening.”

It is awkward and tense for some seconds, a war of stares and raised eyebrows.

_Comon, Johnny, be the adult._

“I-..” One gulp, Jaehyun is definitely gauging him, as if waiting for a little mistake to send him in the depth of hell. “I think you and I started on the wrong basis. T-thank you for defending me last time…”

He is waiting for a shrug and a gentle sentence asking him to fuck off but he is surprised when a hand is reached out in front of him. Johnny rubs his hands against his jeans again, ashamed that he would take such a firm and noble handshake with sweaty fingers. Jaehyun doesn’t seem to mind as he genuinely proceed to show how peaceful he can be. The handshake last three seconds but it is reassuring it went well on both side.

“I didn’t do it for you.” For Taeyong of course, they both think. “Jaehyun.”

“Johnny.” It is quiet again, with only the sound of the city decorating their discussion. “I’m glad Taeyong has you, please take care of him.”

“Will do.” Ok, Jaehyun is not the most talkative guy he has met so far.

“If you hurt him, I will beat the crap out of you.”
Of course he gets the same reaction as Taeyong, except Jaehyun is more reserved in his laugh. No matter how Johnny sees it, they are made for each other.

“I’d like to see you try, kiddo.” Jaehyun calms down.

“I am taller than you.” The threat is definitely harmless.

“Where did all this height hide some nights ago?” Johnny hates Jaehyun, there is no mistake to that. And he hates Taeyong even more for choosing this offensive douchebag. “I can’t promise I won’t hurt him but if I do I’ll let you land a punch.”

“Good, I will go back inside before he comes out.”

Johnny almost slaps himself when he points towards the door with his thumb awkwardly, as if Jaehyun needed to know where he will go next. If it is ridiculous, the older says nothing and Johnny slides away in a nervous run.

Jaehyun watches with hidden amusement as the other disappear and he sees the person he’s been waiting for on the other side of the glass walls. There is a hundred percent chance Taeyong will nag at him from being here. “Stop wasting your time driving me around, I don’t like it.” But Jaehyun can be a gentleman and no amount of nagging will stop him. The other males miss the important part, his pleasure is not found in driving the other male around…

His amusement vanishes as he sees the object of his affection taking Johnny in a hug, it is quickly replaced by a cold feeling when he sees him planting a soft kiss on the other’s cheek.

*He is just a friend, Jaehyun. Do not spoil the night.*

“What the hell are you doing here, again ?”

How comes - as soon as Taeyong sees him - he gets a lecture while Johnny, freaking stupid Johnny gets a goodbye kiss ? Forget the not getting jealous part, he owns this man and no friends or best friends or childhood friends will take that title away.
“Do you kiss all your friends in front of your boyfriend?”

Taeyong chokes on thin air.

“First of all, you weren’t even supposed to see that and who says you are my boyfriend?”

Arms sneaking around his waist, the comforting perfume he is fond of, the lips against his neck should be enough of an answer. He can’t fool himself, the simple mention of that title stops oxygen from getting to his lungs but it’s alright, he can breath Jaehyun’s scent for now.

“I do.” The man stubbornly says, trying to pull a moan out of Taeyong as he tightens his grip and soon all the younger feels is his face pressing into a broad chest.

Jaehyun is warm, tonight.

“It’s just platonic, he is my best friend.” The sentence is muffled and Jaehyun hums in his hair, making it even harder to think, why is he even justifying himself…

“And you are mine, angel.”

Plump lips meets his in a hungry kiss, teeth teasing his lower lips. Maybe Taeyong is not so mad that Jaehyun picks him up, maybe he wants it to happen everyday… But that is his secret to keep.

“Stop calling me that.” *Cause it makes my heart beat faster*… he places between little pecks that he finds sweeter than the night. Spring, it is coming and it is messing with his head and hormones.

“No.”

He is cold and he wants to be home but Jaehyun is such a good hugger he doesn’t have the heart to detach himself. It is warm and cozy, like something he wants to taste every second of his life-
“Fuck, you guys are gross.” Taeyong quickly pushes the other away. Red blooms on his cheek as he watches the window on the backseat side of the car rolling down, revealing a mop of bubblegum blue hair and Jisung’s scrunching face comes in sight.

Ok, he should ask Jaehyun about why his windows are tinted next time. Or at least warn him if there is someone inside. He can’t believe a seventeen years old has witnessed such a scene, and he can’t believe he has been one of the protagonist.

“I want to go home already so get in and drive.” The window rolls back up, the same way Jaehyun rolls his eyes.

Taeyong tried to restrain himself but he ends up kicking the other in the leg.

“What is he doing there ?” He whispers, half shouts.

“Are you serious ?” Jaehyun looks at him as if he grew another head. Did Taeyong really forget he is the one who insisted on the kid staying ?

“Screw me.” Gladly, the tycoon thinks to himself.
Here is a chapter for you, sweethearts!!! I hope you guys don't hate Jisung I swear is not THAT bad... or he is *evil laugh*. So... NEO CITY PARIS was the best night of my life. that's all I have to say. Jaehyun he is... OMG i have no words. Anyway thanks again for the feedbacks guys i realy appreciate it so much, I read every of your comments and I love each one of them, they keep me going. Also shameless advertising, I've opened an instagram account which is solely about writing and prompts and poetry. If you guys wanna know what I am up to as an amateur writer: @prompt_it_up . See you in the next chapter for some smut hihi
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Taeyong does his best to live day by day, being an escort and taking care of his mother. Jaehyun is not sure where he stands anymore, glory and power seems insufficient. Everything breaks lose when Taeyong’s path crosses the Jungs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lee Ji Yeon has expected a serene dinner, perhaps a little chat with her roommates, just a tranquil lonely night. Nothing unusual, she can do lonely, it has never been a bother. Instead the cafeteria is colder tonight despite the thin green cardigan she is covered with. A week - or is it more - hasn’t been enough to make up her mind. To be honest, even a lifetime spent meditating wouldn’t be enough. What is one to do when they have to abandon a son?

If Jung Soobin didn’t come for her, she would have never given an answer. The plastic chair of the cafeteria is suddenly uncomfortable but it doesn’t compare to Mrs Jung’s presence, her hard stare and her little smile that screams play pretend. Money sure makes a woman different. It has built an invisible fortress around Soobin, giving her a silent dominance, a silent glamour nobody else owns around them. Money sure makes a woman who she wants to be, be it a god or a mother.

The white paper Soobin has slid on the table lays untouched next to Ji Yeon’s empty plate, a pen weighing down on it in a suffocating pressure. She will never have enough time to make up her mind, but she has enough time, a lifetime and more to nurse her guilt.

“I have no protest if you want to read it all, take your time.” Soobin’s tone signals that she can buy time as much as she wants. And if she can buy time, what can’t she buy, then?

The truth in her words is priceless compared to her rings. How long before Taeyong will live, not survive, if Ji Yeon exists… How much does she need to give to erase all the sacrifices her son has done. A sign, simple letters that make her name, one pathetic name that Jung Taeyong has served all his life without complaint. She needs to free him. She needs to be a mother, the one she claims to be.

Surprisingly, she is not shaking as she signs, not even hesitating. Nothing dramatic, just lines of ink that may weigh on her heart but will release the son she has held prisoner in her misery.
“You will be sent abroad, as I promised your life will be saved I will make sure of it. A decent amount will be transferred to you, you won’t have to work anymore until your last breath.”

Soobin can’t be as heartless as not seeing the tear that slid down the other woman’s cheek. Maybe she saw it, maybe she could care less as she slides the paper back in her handbag the same way she would a business deal.

“Keep your money.” Ji Yeon wipes away the stray tear, saving the last bit of pride as much as she can.

“You may think of me as a monster.” Soobin scoffs. “But I never come back on my words, I’ll give you what I promised as long as you keep your side of the deal.”

Ji Yeon glances up at the hospital clock as Soobin makes a move to leave. Time is so expensive, so unreachable for her. Fate can take her away tomorrow, as much as it can take her away in a decade, aneurysms are ticking bombs playing with its host’s luck.

“Allow me one last request.” Soobin’s chair screeches but her abrupt stop hints that she is considering. “Give me some more days, not too long. I beg of you. The universe seems gentle with your kind, your husband will live longer than how long I am asking for, so I beg of you, I’ll tell you as soon as I am ready.”

Is it a second of compassion Soobin shows by casting her eyes down? Ji Yeon breathes in and out, with the minutes, praying silently that the woman finds an ounce of mercy in her rough soul.

“If Taeyong hears of this, or if you attempt anything against me, I will make sure you won’t see him anymore in a less decent way.”

Her exquisite perfume leaves a trail as she turns around.

“It was raining.” Another abrupt stop, Ji Yeon sees her holding her shoulders high and her back is less menacing than her front. “It was raining the day my husband found him crying behind a shop. No police station wanted to listen to a poor family, struggling to put food on the table. To be honest with you, I wanted to leave him somewhere out there, life is so hard and I couldn’t even take care of my only son properly. But that kid cried all night calling for his mother and when I asked him for his name he mumbled “Taeyong”, not even sure. And Taeyong he… He likes sweets, he likes the color blue and the beach. He likes literature and romance movies. He is kind and responsible, mature and
loving. He lost his father at a young age, the same way you are losing your husband, I know you understand how it feels. I wish him the best with you and if you have an ounce of humanity and love for him in you, you’ll understand one day what it takes to be a mother.”

Nothing guarantees Soobin has listened to her, nothing guarantees her heart has been open for her words. If she did she doesn’t show it. Her hand raises to her left in her renown grace and sophistication, a man in a suit comes running to her, bowing as he approaches.

“Get the car ready.” And just like that she is gone, as fast as the wind that took away all Ji Yeon has ever had in this life, maybe she’ll be luckier in the next.

Days pass by like seconds fleeting through an hour. Smooth yet long and full of hope, maybe not what Taeyong has expected from a relationship before, but he isn’t complaining. Being with Jaehyun is like an unwanted bliss, unexpected but sweet. Days of waking up close to each other have seen Taeyong chasing away his doubts. Bickering with Jaehyun, kissing Jaehyun, everything Jaehyun is has become a constant for the younger.

If the concept of home has been clear to Taeyong a long time ago, in his comfortable routine at the restaurant, in his barely warm apartment or within his mother’s laugh, he notices it may not be the same for the young tycoon. Perhaps it is in the way the older has the habit of seeking for him now. The long waits in his car for Taeyong to be done with his evening shifts, the morning waiting for Taeyong to share breakfast with him or even the glances here and there when he thinks the younger doesn’t see him. The lack of anything normal in his life has melancholy settling in their daily life. It brings back so many forgotten questions in Taeyong’s mind. Where is Jaehyun’s family? Why is he never talking about them? Is there anything else he thinks about or even likes beside work?

Those questions have been shrugged by Mrs Park as water under the bridge, unanswered or in a very vague nod between two cups of tea. Hence why, Taeyong is fidgeting nervously, looking out from the glass window after his shift, expecting the familiar black vehicle he knows like the lines of his own face. Behind him, he can hear the clutters from the kitchen and Mrs Seo chirping excitedly about what is to come.

“Are you sure about this?” The recomforting smell of kimchi jigae reaches his nose the same way Johnny’s sudden voice eases his nervousness.

“I am not sure he would even like it but I think he needs it.” The little grin at the corner of his lips pulls a nod from Johnny.
Said man keeps to himself the question he is dying to ask, already finding the answer in the way Taeyong skips outside when the awaited car headlights reflect on the glass. *You love him, right?* Johnny has always been the one to believe love is measured in intensity rather than time. Barely some months have transformed everything in them, in him, in Taeyong and -he is certain- in Jaehyun.

“We are having dinner with the Seos.” Taeyong risks it immediately, not finding the courage to elongate the possible rejection.

Nothing can say Jaehyun is excited, pleased or repulsed by the idea. He is not saying anything and under the dim lamppost, Taeyong can barely make out his expression. There is a long silence, it is probably short but for him it felt like an eternity. All he can do is wait with expecting eyes that he hopes are shining enough to convince Jaehyun.

Jaehyun is not a family man, yet he has found the time to always have his night meals with Taeyong. Every night spent with him takes him back to that moment they spent in the younger’s apartment. If he dares say, his favorite moment. A confession that Jaehyun promises to keep to himself. And even if socializing is not his forte, when Taeyong is looking at him this way, he could ask for the moon and Jaehyun would be on his way to space.

“Fine.” Right now, he could care less that Jisung is probably sulking out of boredom in his house, he could care less that Mrs Park is waiting for them to eat her home made food, he could care less who the Seos are, or who he is, all he cared about is Taeyong taking his hand in pure joy and dragging him inside.

The same smell of food at the end of the day is the first thing that hit him. Then Mrs Seo’s usual coo, which he suspects she gives to any handsome gentleman. Her smile is so bright he can barely look her way.

“Jaehyun, welcome back!” Her sentence stirs something in him, thought he makes no comment.

For a long time, Jaehyun has already realized she is as much a mother to Taeyong as Lee Ji Yeon. The Seos are the only family Taeyong has really counted on and that he must treat them the same way he treats his beloved. That is why, as soon as he is greeted, he is reminded of the last time he was in here. His next move surprises himself as much as it surprises Taeyong. He could count on a hand the moment he has apologize in his life, for he likes to believe he owes no apology to a world who has stepped on his pride, but those last weeks, he did it more than he did in a lifetime.
“I am sorry for last time, I-”

“Don’t, darling.” Mrs Seo cuts him, a warm hand on his forearm. “You were right, we are not mad. If anything, we like you even more.”

Jaehyun feels overwhelmed, not knowing if he should focus on Taeyong’s hand still in his or hers rubbing soothing circles. After those words, she invites everyone to seat at the little table in the middle of the now closed place. Taeyong lets his thumb gently caress the back of the much bigger hand and he gives an encouraging nod to Jaehyun when he looks at him. *You did well, I am proud of you.*

The first minutes are not the most ideal ones. Mr Seo is a silent man and Jaehyun sees himself in the man, yet the sincerity he is talking with are as comforting as the sizzling meat in front of them. Johnny tries not to stare at the way Taeyong often hides his hand under the table, probably to reassure Jaehyun with little taps on his thigh and Mrs Seo is typically… Mrs Seo, talkative, a little loud and maybe a tad bit intrusive.

“So, Jaehyun, have you ever had kimchi jigae? I wouldn’t know what you usually eat but I can humbly offer you this. It isn’t fancy or any-”

“Honey, let the man breathe.” Mrs Seo scolds teasingly and Jaehyun thanks him with a nod.

“I like kimchi jigae. It’s my favorite to have.”

Taeyong looks up at that only to look back down with a blush because of the invisible smile Jaehyun gives him, the one only him can see… Jaehyun is referring to the night he cooked for him, or so he hopes.

The dinner is so much more than Taeyong has expected. Awkward conversations, tense silences are what he has been waiting for, instead Mr Seo makes sure Jaehyun gets his fair share of soju. Mrs Seo and Johnny jibs little jokes at each other, the woman sometimes reminiscing the boys’ younger days and sometimes, he even catches hints of tenderness from Jaehyun who listens diligently. From time to time, the older’s palm find its way on his knee, squeezing softly, warning *I am not used to this, but it is alright.* When he takes his last bite and Mrs Seo is already packing dessert for them, he prays that Jaehyun found family in here. He prays that Jaehyun forgets the loneliness from those past years, and that he finds it in him to change his life to a more warmer one.
“I am so happy he found you.” Mrs Seo quips when Taeyong is bidding goodbye to Johnny and his father and they are far from earshot. “He is happier, and thanks to you he is stronger, Johnny is stronger.”

For a brief second, he is certain it is something the woman shouldn’t have said, for she spilled a secret that is not hers to tell. Jaehyun understands the underlying of that sentence easily, as easily as it slipped out of her mouth from the soju she has drank. Jaehyun is not one to be jealous, and he knows that he can’t let a past resentment ruin the contentment he found tonight.

Yet during the drive home - during which Taeyong rambles about his day - to the moment they tiptoe to their room like kids scared to be caught coming home late, he thinks about everything Taeyong could have had. Johnny is handsome, corresponding so well to those romance movies Taeyong likes to watch. The Seos are so warm, the perfect family and he doesn’t doubt the Lees too. But here they are, Taeyong laying in his bed, looking like the world is his. Jaehyun is convinced he is not the world, if anything he will bring only hell… That train of thoughts pulls the only reaction he can think of at the moment.

“You are so lonely, tell me if I am wrong.” It is not a blame, it is even the purest form of sympathy Jaehyun has witnessed in his life. Typical Taeyong, so skilled at sharing compassion the way he shares love.

He is not wrong. Taeyong isn’t different from anyone who has ever uttered those words to him, but coming from his mouth, Jaehyun believes them. One way or another, the younger would know anyway, giving they are living together. One way or another, Taeyong would see this pitiful part of him he has never shown anyone but Soobin.
“Johnny loves you.” So why me? hangs in the air, they both hear it nonetheless.

Even if they bicker all day long, even if they joke around with poison in their words all day long, they hear what they can’t speak of because Jaehyun is for Taeyong the way Taeyong is for Jaehyun and no other team can complete them.

“Are you jealous again? I am laying in bed with you, aren’t I?”

But it is not enough. Jaehyun whispers. God, he is so insecure, so insecure it scares him. He knows that when Taeyong will discover the truth, it will be over. When Taeyong will leave him, there will be nothing of him but the ruins of a man who once had the world in his hand, only for it to be taken away. When Taeyong will leave him, the king he thought he was will be nothing but a fool.

“Come here.”

Jaehyun scoots closer and for once he wants to be taken care of. He wants to be weak, he wants Taeyong to be his knight in shining armor, the priest who will exorcise his demons away, the shelter that keeps him hidden from the prying eyes of those who wants nothing but his downfall.

It is soft and comforting at first. The nibbling on his lower lip, cut between little whimpers of wanting more. Taeyong’s cold hand creeping up under his shirt, painting tiny trails of affection, tracing his collarbone as if digging through clay to make the most sumptuous sculpture… Jaehyun wants to be selfish. His insecurities keep on chanting in his mind, Johnny will never love as hard as this, Johnny will never feel those hands on him, Johnny will never live nights like this, Johnny can fuck himself cause Taeyong is mine and nobody else’s.

When his shirt is thrown away somewhere on the carpet, his desire makes his thoughts more and more aggressive. He is mine, and I will keep him locked if he ever try to leave, he is mine and I’ll die if he ever try to leave. It is so terrifying how intensely he feels for the younger, how this fire they have has consumed his sanity the moment their eyes met for the first time. He wanted to dive and swim in this, and now he is voluntarily drowning.

Jaehyun’s back find the headboard, cold sweat sticking to leather and Taeyong climbs on his lap, bright eyes enough to light the room the way they need it. They feel their cocks pulsating, underwear restraining their moves as the younger grind slowly, tempting Jaehyun to the most sinful act he can think of. God has sent him an angel and all he wants is to make love to him.
Impatience takes over and Taeyong is soon discarding his shirt too, lips finding their way against the mold they fit so perfectly in. The kiss is languid and demanding, Jaehyun’s palm fitting right on tiny waist and this is their idea of heaven. So unorthodox, so vulgar yet so healing and vital.

Bare members are quickly released and their inaudible moans fill the darkness. Taeyong tries to fit them both into his hand, rubbing, stroking, appealing, mouth unable to move away from the juncture of Jaehyun’s sweaty neck, his scent so masculine and addictive.

“Fuck, baby… you drive me insane.”

Jaehyun moves his hands from the waist to the thighs, scared he would bruise and stain his favorite part of the younger’s body, right after his precious face.

“Let me, tonight.” Taeyong murmurs against his porcelain skin. “Prep me, Jae.”

He doesn’t need to ask twice and Jaehyun is already reaching in his bedside drawer with used agility. He coats his fingers with the translucid lube, making sure he is slippery enough to not hurt his baby. Taeyong mewls when cold fingers circle his rim, forcing him to grind more violently against the other. He doesn’t care if he looks desperate in the moment, if he is being possessed by lust and acts like someone else, because everything he wants is right in front of him and he is aware all he has to do is ask.

The first finger is always the strangest penetration but soft lips nibbles on his, tongue fighting his and he almost forgets he has a whole digit poking his prostate. Jaehyun is not the softest lover, but god he is skilled. He throws back Jaehyun’s name in his own mouth when a second finger meets the first, then a third and he is a trembling mess in his man’s arms.

When the stretch is enough and precum is staining his length, he takes a hold of Jaehyun wrist as of to say enough and lets himself suffer through the penetration of the other’s member in him. He feels filled and satisfied he is sure he can die this way, right here, right now.

“So good for me, angel.” Is choked in between pecks and Taeyong is almost convinced he comes from heaven.

“Meet me, baby.” He would be embarrassed one day, if he hears himself again but now, lust and the deepest form of affection has taken over.
Jaehyun is a cliff he is standing before, his heart and brain asking him to jump off. And he does. Jaehyun meets his descent, tip meeting his pleasing point and they both moan out their pleasure. If making love is a skill, making love to Taeyong is art and Jaehyun plans on worshipping it. He likes everything he sees, snowy hair fluffing up and down with each of Taeyong’s bounce on his lap, rosy lips half opened in pure ecstasy, eyelashes meeting cheeks as if forbidding him to see the secrets behind the eyelids he wants to kiss so much…

He is allowed to though, when Taeyong falls on his length over and over again, hands trembling against his knees before sneaking around his shoulders in a suffocating embrace, he is allowed to see the billion of stars making up the galaxy in Taeyong’s eyes. And he comes undone, the same second the other gives his last whimper and shakes in a mindblowing orgasm. Jaehyun spills inside, almost guilty for tainting the masterpiece he is cradling against his chest, but when Taeyong kisses where his heart is, it stops brutally only to jumpstart again.

They stay in silent in their bliss for a few seconds and Taeyong almost regret looking at Jaehyun right after. It is at that instant that he knows, at that instant that his skin shivers and the lump in his throat descend to his lungs and keeps him from breathing… He is so scared but he is also so sure and certain that never in his life he will find anything this deep and desirable again and it slips before he can stop it.

“I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I am back beautiful people! Those past months have been insaning, with me
moving out, college starting again, and I also got an internship urghhh. Anyway can you believe this story is like a year old and I feel like I haven't done much. I know where I am going with it, I know how it is supposed to go but transitionning through it all is hard haha. But I hope you guys still like it and are looking forward to it, I hope we all can get to the end of this togethe lmao. I hope I didn't let you down and I am so sorry this chapter is a little short so I tried to make the content worth it. Also can we talk about Super M, and MTV Ema and Moonwalk and everything NCT has achieved this month like I am so so proud of them. Let's keep working hard as a fandom to give them bliss and success every single day!!! See you in the next chapter!!
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Columbariums are usually forlorn, solemn, cold… But during the fall, right before the winter wind plays among the trees, columbariums are another world. A world of majestic white marble, a quiet world made of prayers and wishes. As icy as his heart is, Jaehyun find some sort of rest in between ashes and flowers, hands respectfully joined at his front.

He has never been in one before, yet he has imagined, dreamt a lot of time how it would have been if he had witnessed his biological parents’ burial, or how it would be once Mr Jung finally leaves. He has imagined void and tears, unfairness and regrets. Oddly, today he feels embraced, rested… Maybe he has always been made to be in peace with death, brave in front of a force that is at the bottom of his fear list.

“Come here,” A voice to his left disturbs his thoughts, a hand hugging his forearm in a soft tug. “He is on this side.”

Doesn’t it feel strange, almost surreal to address a ghost as if he was still alive? Perhaps not, because Taeyong seems happy to visit his father as if he was coming home after a long time. The gleam in his smile, despite sporting melancholy, is filled with relief and warmth. How ironic, that this man cherish a drawer of ashes more than Jaehyun ever cherished any living being around him…

“Dad, hello.” The younger starts with a deep bow, and Jaehyun almost chuckles at how his white hair fit with the surrounding so much. No night of sex, no sun setting behind his smile is more beautiful than the Taeyong right this moment. “I have someone I want you to meet.”

“I love you.”

One can never be ready enough to the violence of those words. Certainly not Jaehyun for whom it is a first. But what’s the difference really, everything is new recently. Waking up to a warm body next to his, feeling like who he was always meant to be, being obsessed about someone, what’s the difference of it all from hearing I love you.
There is a glint, something like impatience in Taeyong’s eyes as he waits for the answer, fingertips gently tracing the line of his muscles. He needs to breathe the words out, that he knows, before it suffocates him. He knows that he is the first who fell, but who would have thought Taeyong would be the first to say it.

“I love you too.”

Is there any right answer, a way to say it? Jaehyun doesn’t know but the way Taeyong’s lips turn into a blinding smile must have hinted he did it right. He means it, from the bottom of his heart, and speaking so sincerely is something Jaehyun hasn’t done in a long time. I love you, and I want you to know it before you stop loving me.

“You don’t have to say it if you’re not ready.” It is muttered so softly Jaehyun almost feel guilty. The hand previously caressing his torso finds his cheek in the dark and Taeyong climbs down from his lap to lay down.

“I mean it, I am sincere.”

“Then it’s wonderful.”

Just like one would easily push open the door to a home, Taeyong let the man settle in his arms, body sweaty but heart full. From where he is laying his head, Jaehyun can hear Taeyong’s heart beating as loudly as his own, and the fingers playing in his hair holds a warmth that is so unfamiliar yet very welcomed.

“You know,” the younger starts again, wanting to get it out of his chest before sleep comes for them. “I have never trusted anyone like I trust you. There is only one man I respect like I respect you.”

This time, the jealousy is kept at bay because in the sleep ridden voice, Jaehyun knows who is talking about. There is nothing as precious as being placed on the same seat as that man for the tycoon, no other achievement fulfills him like this one.

“Can I meet him?”
Having been raised a decent Korean, Jaehyun gives his bow too, maintaining several seconds of respect for the man who made Taeyong who he is today.

“Dad, this is Jaehyun.”

Never in 27 years did Jaehyun think he would hear that. Isn’t it funny that he has always seen himself being worthy enough to be above anyone and anything, but never worthy enough of someone’s love… Is he even worthy enough to be standing in front of such a valuable man, looking at him from heaven, probably cursing him for who he is.

“He is the man I chose.” The grip around his fingers tightens, the same way his stomach tightens, the heat too much to handle, the words too pressuring for his irresponsible heart, yet it is alright. “He saved me, and he saved mom. Thanks to him, we’ll be fine. I wish you’d meet him…”

Those words -as true and genuine they sound for the younger- buzz like thousands of bugs in Jaehyun’s mind, for they are lies to him. He wishes he didn’t have to pretend. Around Taeyong, being his true self sounds like a lie when all he is is a deception. So Jaehyun closes his eyes, ashamed to meet anyone’s eyes and mutters his inaudible prayer.

*I am sorry.*

They mean nothing, as insignificant as a house of cards stacked in a toddler’s bedroom, another bunch of lies in his long list. They are a bunch of lies when the same night, he pounds into Taeyong, crying his name without remorse, when in the morning, he kisses Taeyong without remorse, when the following days, he loves Taeyong without remorse. Jaehyun is selfish, knowing he is driving them both into a wall, that there will be more casualties than witnesses to their collision, but he allows himself to be selfish because love is stupid and love acts blind.

That is how he understands he needs distance to think. Leaving Taeyong behind, even for a day seems too much for him, but when the news drops, when he is asked abroad for work, Jaehyun doesn’t hesitate jumping on the opportunity. Ending whatever they have is not an option, but stopping the game, the lies, sounds better.

“I have to leave for some days.”

Taeyong stops humming to the song on the car radio, glancing up to the man behind the wheel, squinting as the city light makes it hard to decipher his features. Of course, Jaehyun has a life that
doesn’t involve him. Jaehyun has responsibilities, he has a lot of things on his shoulders, and even if the thought of being away from him saddens Taeyong, he has to accept the reasons.

“When are you leaving? Where are you going?”

There is a long silence, as if the tycoon is hesitant on answering. Little does Taeyong know, Jaehyun himself hates delivering the information, as if the idea of a physical and temporal distance hurts him.

“Tomorrow morning, Japan.”

The younger expects comforting words after that. But I’ll call don’t worry. I’ll call you everyday. It won’t be long, I’ll be back to you before you know. Nothing follows. Jaehyun closes up once again, like every time Taeyong wants to know anything about him. And the thought comes crashing like tidal waves again, he has a life that doesn’t involve you.

The coldness he is treated with reminds him once again that there is a whole world separating them. Jaehyun is not fully his even if Taeyong has given himself entirely to the man, his intimacy, his deepest scars and secrets, everything he ever was and who he is today are all Jaehyun’s… Did he rush things, did he scare Jaehyun by saying I love you first? Did he pressure him in this act of domesticity by introducing him to his family? Is everything too much for a man whose shoulders already bear an entire universe?

Just like that in the morning, the bed is empty and cold next to him. Taeyong finds himself caressing the pillow of a ghost, insecurities overwhelming his mind. Are they even alright? It is not like Jaehyun to easily show affection, that he knows, it is not like Jaehyun to be the perfect boyfriend, that he knows. But it is like Jaehyun to be cold, to be cruel, to be so close and so distant the next second, that he knows.

Taeyong tries to not let the emotional struggle mess with his day. As much as he tries, the lack of words, not even a goodbye note, missing Jaehyun feels as normal as breathing.

You landed safely? 10.04

How is Japan? 11.32

I miss you, call me? 14.16
“You’ve been staring at your screen all day, are you okay?”

Taeyong almost drops his phone in the sink, amidst dirty dishes. Johnny quickly reach the object before the accident, gently placing it on the counter of the restaurant kitchen before turning his friend to face him.

“I am so sorry, I know I’ve been distracted, I hope your mom is not mad at me.”

The shorter fidgets, eyes looking from left to right, hoping to mask his worries. For someone as sharp and attentive as Johnny, it doesn’t go unnoticed. Even during Mrs Lee worst days, Taeyong has never been so worried, so far from everything. Johnny has pretended to not see when the other dropped a pair of chopsticks on a customer's lap, apologizing repeatedly. He has hoped for his friend to open up on his own, but knowing his friend, without a little push it won’t happen anytime soon.

“Don’t worry, even if you spend your day sitting down, mom would still nag at me about how I do nothing next to you.” The taller mentally pat himself on the back for making the worried man chuckle. “Now tell me, what’s wrong with you?”

The hesitation already tells Johnny what it is about. After all, trouble is never too far from Paradise gates, just waiting for a breach to get in.

“Is it Jaehyun?”

Johnny can’t help the protectiveness, Taeyong is not his, but he is still friend and family. The latter seems to understand it too as he sighs in defeat. There is no point on hiding anything, for he doesn’t know how many time he is going to break down this week.

“He left over seas this morning. He is so distant about it, no goodbye, and he is not answering my texts.”

He deliberately lets out the fact that he confessed his love, or that Jaehyun met his father. Casting Johnny aside is enough, no need to rub it in his face. Especially now that he has issues about it.

“Come on, Tae,” The taller chuckles, almost melting at the pout his friend is sporting. “Jaehyun is a
busy man. I am sure it is not against you.”

Taeyong begs to differ, he wants to argue because he is convinced Jaehyun is true, that he wasn’t joking all the time he made it felt that he couldn’t breathe without the younger, that he adores him body and soul.

“Look,” Johnny adds, sensing the air is turning sour. “I am sure whatever he does takes a lot of his time. Maybe it is burdening him this time, maybe he doesn’t want to worry you, maybe it’s a big issue he has to deal with.”

“You’re right.” It makes sense. As much as Taeyong wants to be the center of Jaehyun’s world, he is not.

He keeps telling himself that, nights after nights when the sheets are too lonely for a man alone, when the screen of his phone is still void of any answer. He stops texting, reaching out, when Jaehyun is less busy, he will come through. And when that happens, Taeyong will realize how stupid he has been for worrying over something so trivial.

Mrs Park has stopped forcing him to have dinner, knowing very well how the house owner’s absence affects Taeyong. It feels wrong to find himself alone with Jisung in the kitchen, acting civil when the teenager glares at him from across the table. It feels wrong to be normal without Jaehyun by his side. And it scares Taeyong, to the pit of his stomach. In the span of some weeks, he finds himself not being able to live without knowing what Jaehyun thinks, feels, where they are, what they are doing, what do they mean to each other.

He recalls those nights, waiting in the hospital waiting room, not knowing if each time his mother is going to come out alive or not. He recalls those nights in a stranger’s arms, not knowing if he still is himself, or if every time he does the unthinkable, he gives a part of his person away, selling it to the devil. He recalls waiting for Jaehyun to fall asleep next to him, wondering if he will be brought back to reality when he wakes up.

Maybe Jaehyun realized this has gone too far, that he is just a toy and this makes no sense. Taeyong is a used body, a used soul, a leftover of some other aristocrats like him and a man like Jaehyun doesn’t take leftovers.

Taeyong finds himself, days later, still left in the dark, crawling to Jaehyun’s like closet. What is he
doing, has he gone finally insane? Is this what falling in love is like? Acting delusional and being ridiculously nonsensical? Nonetheless, he lets his fingers glide in between the hanging shirts, craving the man’s touch like some silk fabric can replace it.

Who knows, maybe Jaehyun is in the arm of another right now, finally realizing it is where he belongs… Taeyong finds himself frowning as he discards his own shirt, replacing it with one of Jaehyun’s. One that smells like the musky cologne he has learnt to breathe through, one that smells like Jaehyun. And the rising sun finds him like that, bundled up on the bed in the white fabric, the navy blue sheets a mediocre replacement of the man he has dreamt about all night long.

“You shouldn’t be here. Someone could have seen you.”

Ten knows that, there is no need to remind him. But the days have been so long, with his thumb hovering over the same number on his phone screen, Taeil’s words replaying in his mind, wondering if he should call or not. He honestly thought he’d be discreet, sitting on the bench across the restaurant in the dark night, still hoping that Johnny would notice him.

It is rewarding in some way when Johnny actually did, but he didn’t think further, no perfect plan on what he is going to say. Maybe he just wants to see the other.

“I know,” He chuckles, standing up to reach Johnny’s level, only reaching his chin. “I have been waiting for your call.”

“Why didn’t you just call me?” Johnny stuffs his hands in his big sweater and for some reason Ten wants to drown in it too.

It has been a torture, not contacting the other, replaying the cons and pros of this in his mind over and over again. No matter what is at risk, the fact that he has never liked someone he way he likes Johnny still tops it all. Ten is stubborn, and right now he is not being smart, but he will think of the consequences later.

“I was hoping that this time, you’d make the first step.”

The accusing tone stirs some guilt in Johnny. He wanted to call, but nothing is certain. Ten’s
affection is still too heavy for him to bear, when he is not even sure of reciprocating them. He liked their kiss, a lot, but kissing is different from caring. What is he supposed to do, when a healing heart is still way too weak to feel anything at all…

“I… I know, I am sorry-”

“Keep the sorry to yourself.” It isn’t aggressive, it is rather teasing, almost reassuring as if saying it is okay. Johnny, nonetheless, still sees the want in Ten’s eyes, the same one he has seen the last time they met and it is enough to convince him this is not a game. “I told you I will wait.”

“You’re a masochist.” Ten scoffs at that. He has lived his entire life being a pain lover, being pressured by risk. From his career to his love life, it is nothing he is scared of. “Did you come here just to tell me that.”

The mischievous glint in the feline eyes shine brighter than the lamp post above and Johnny regrets asking.

“I want to spend some time with you.” Always the same excuse, the same reason as if it is a vital thing, Johnny doesn’t understand why would someone want to only spend time with him. After all they live in a world of interest. “Actually, I told my driver to go, mind taking me home?”

And once again, Johnny could have said no, once again, he could have ditched whatever Ten is aiming for, he could have just gone back inside and not turn around. But Taeyong’s pain upon missing Jaehyun, the kiss he shared last time… It feels like an addiction, a second of ecstasy where he forget everything he ever loved and his mind is filled with Ten.

That’s how he finds himself driving fifties on the highway, Ten riding behind him, arms secured around his waist. The feeling is almost toxic, so toxic Johnny’s rational mind barely cares about the wind scraping his clothes. Letting an unrequited love dictates what he should feel about another man… Yet, pleasing Ten feels so right, knowing open arms are ready to shelter him after a storm, knowing that he is being appreciated the way he has never been…

“This is my stop.”

Ten discards the borrowed helmet on his head as they stop in front of his apartment complex. Johnny knows this side of the town, and almost laughs at how he is now standing there hoping for more when he has countlessly warned Taeyong about those people.
Now what? He will go home and wonders once again when will Ten appears out of the blue to drown him in affection whenever life is a little bit rough? He will hesitates to reach out again, feeling guilty for replacing pain with free care? Even he himself knows it is not right… So when Ten is about to turn around, eyes screaming at him to do something, Johnny knows he should give up.

For now Ten is here, and he doesn’t know how long it will take him to fall too, he doesn’t know how long it will take him to see Ten the way the older sees him, but at least he will have a home, a shelter…

“When,” Ten stops as a hand grabs his wrist, burning through the cold wind. “When you said you liked me-”

“I already told you, I mean every words.”

“When you said this isn’t a game-”

“Johnny,” The touch on his cheek sends his beating heart into oblivion, this is terrifying, unknown territory. “This isn’t a game.”

If it is hard to believe words, it is easy to notice the sparkles in Ten’s eyes when everything is going his way. Sincerity is rare, but finding someone who will wait for your heart to open up is rarer.

“If I give you the green light, if I say I want to be with you,” The singer’s breath itches, not even daring to think about that eventuality in case it only leads to pain. “You promise that I won’t be hurt?”

**But you will hurt someday.** Ten wants to say it. But Johnny, he is so vulnerable between his palms. He’d rather trade future pains for happiness now. What if he dies tomorrow, what if Johnny changes his mind tomorrow, he’d rather not risk it so he lies through his teeth, the same way he lied to Taeil about being careful. There is no careful when it comes to the heart. Careful is for things that break, and Johnny’s heart, Ten knows, is strong enough.

“I promise.”
Johnny doesn’t know what got into him when Ten murmured *follow me* in the dead of the night. This isn’t like him, but maybe it is time to change from the man he used to be. There is no time to admire the penthouse he is led to, all he has time to marvel at is the light grey walls of Ten’s bedroom when he is pushed to seat on the bed.

“Tell me if this is too much…”

Ten traces the corner of his lips with his thumb, and Johnny’s lap and arms is full of the other man. Everything is already too much, so there is no use in stopping, he wants to trust for once. The kiss the share this time is nothing like the last one. It is full of tongue, of lust and groans over their impatience.

With Ten there is no taking slow. He is a man of passion, when he falls, he falls hard. When he wants, he wants hard. Johnny doesn’t know where to put his hands, this is a mess and he is scared of doing something wrong, something the older -who is clearly more experienced- wouldn’t like.

“Just touch me, ok?” Comes the reassuring voice as Ten gently puts his forehead against his, breath coming short in between them.

The older guides his hand and Johnny shivers when the hand above his slides under the older’s shirt, gracing his sensual hip bone, slowly coming up to his torso and panicking, the younger initiates another kiss, hoping to find an answer to what to do in it.

He tentatively slides his hand over a nipple and Ten moans softly in his mouth. The sound sends electricity down south and Johnny really likes it, he isn’t stopping tonight.

“Can I take it off?” Ten nods eagerly when Johnny takes ahold on the hem of his shirt.

“Take off yours too.”

Soon they are chest to chest, kissing becoming an addiction, touches a simple bonus to the exciting feeling blooming in them.

“Kiss my neck.” Ten orders as he flips them over on the bed, Johnny now hovering above him, and the timid child he has met the first time is now a man whose eyes feed on lust.
That Johnny knows how to do and he doesn’t hesitate latching his lips to the patch of marble white skin. Ten tastes like sweat and love, and he loves it. Next is the collarbone, then the skin of his chest and the older is left being a panting mess between dark sheets.

Johnny doesn’t even register when Ten unbucks his belt, hands grabbing for his member and god… God is this what it feels like when someone care for you… Gentle touch stroke from the base to the tip of his burning member and Johnny hides his face in the hickey painted neck, too scared to look into the feline eyes because what if he loses control.

“Hey, it’s okay, look at me.”

It is all it takes for their pants to join the other pieces of clothes on the carpeted floor. It feels good when Ten stroke their members together, so good Ten keeps repeating how beautiful he is and Johnny believes him.

Johnny has never fucked another man, but how he should be done naturally comes to him when Ten’s gaze gives him confidence. Something he would never even dream to do in this lifetime is all he wants to achieve right now. The older reaches his drawer in a soft movement, a bottle of lube coming in sight.

“Coat your fingers.” This time Ten’s tone is more demanding, any sign of reality and sanity out of the window.

The lube is cold on Johnny’s finger, almost uncomfortable, but he wouldn’t go raw at this. Ten tries to muffle a choked out moan when cold fingers circle his entrance, hesitant to hurt him. Right now, he knows Johnny could slit his throat open, he’d still love it.

“Am I doing this right?” Johnny asks in another bruising kiss and Ten can only trust his nod, voice fading when a first finger enters him.

“A-add a second one.” The older cries against Johnny’s shoulder blade.

And so he does, slowly stretching Ten, feeling proud that he is the reason why he falls into bliss. Johnny feels himself getting impatient when Ten grips on his forearm, face drenched in sweat.
“Do it.”

The sentence repeats over and over again in Johnny’s mind, this should be the limit but he hasn’t gotten enough. He wants this as much as Ten does, and how absurd is it when yesterday he thought he’d never move on.

Johnny aligns himself, member twitching at the simple thought of what he is doing. Ten has got him so messed up, believing lies, doing things he shouldn’t be doing, finding relief where shouldn’t find it. At the end of the day, it’s all okay because Ten promised it will be.

And Johnny pushes in, Ten’s moaning countless baby’s in his ear. It is not him pounding in, it is not him getting lost in lust above the beautiful singer, it is the man he should be and should have been ever since he met Ten.

Chapter End Notes

Hello!! I don't have a lot to say aside here is an update hihi. Nonetheless I want to thank you all as always for the feedbacks. I always read every comment with delight and I genuinely appreciate what you are saying!! Thanks for the kudos I love you guys!!!!!!

End Notes

So basically this work was on aff but some people told me I should post it here so here it is darlings! I hope you guys will like it, this is my first time on ao3 and I find it very convenient so thanks to those who suggested me this website!

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