More Than Meets The Eye

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Summary

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They have a lot of differences. Baekhyun’s lost faith in the world, but Chanyeol still believes in fate. Baekhyun is cautious, always the one to pull away at the first sign of danger while Chanyeol’s the one who’s insistent, adamant to draw him back in. Baekhyun is human; Chanyeol just might not be.

Notes

Well first, I’d like to thank my prompter for giving me such great prompts. There were many times I was considering switching over to another because I had to many great ideas for the others… So, this is long. Painstakingly so. I probably would’ve died without my beta. It was fun to write though and I hope that I didn’t slaughter this lovely prompt too much.

See the end of the work for more notes

Somewhere near the end of February, he sees him while moving into Minseok’s apartment. There’s no big incident, no elaborate run-in, just a simple meeting of the eyes and a polite nod as the other fumbles to unlock the door to his own housing across the hall.

It’s not even an attraction, really, or even a flame of lust, but rather it’s a kind of pull that he’s never experienced before. Baekhyun’s curious, and not much sparks his curiosity.

Chanyeol. That’s what Minseok tells him the man’s name is after shooting Baekhyun an incredulous
look. *He’s nice.* Those are the only words the older offers when told to elaborate.

“I’m going to go introduce myself.” He sets down the box full of clothes and darts out the door. Minseok calls after him but Baekhyun doesn’t pay much attention to him. He knocks on his neighbour’s door before he can stop himself.

There’s a bit of fumbling and a harsh exhale of a curse coming from behind the door but before long, the apartment door swings open to reveal a man slightly out of breath -- Chanyeol. When Baekhyun peeks behind the man’s towering figure, he thinks he can make out a knocked over lamp. Baekhyun can’t help but crack a smile.

“Hey.” Chanyeol greets, noticing Baekhyun’s view and positioning himself to block the viewing window. “I totally didn’t knock over a lamp just now. I don’t know what you’re looking at.”

It’s then Baekhyun realizes how rude it is to be staring. “Sorry,” He apologizes, “I didn’t mean to make you knock over a lamp.”

“It’s not your fault!” Chanyeol says quickly, his volume a couple decibels louder than preferred but it’s nice. His voice is nice. Low. Resonating. “It was going to fall down anyways,” He says a bit softer this time, out of embarrassment.

Baekhyun covers his mouth as he laughs. “So it was destiny for the lamp to fall?” He asks, his lips already curling into a little amused smirk.

“Maybe.” There’s a pause before Chanyeol amends, “Probably.”

Baekhyun’s smile only widens. “Then you could say it’s destiny for us to meet?” Only after the words roll off his tongue does he cringe at just how much of a pick-up line that sounds like.

Chanyeol doesn’t seem fazed though. “Yeah, maybe.” He extends his hand with a smile. “I’m Park Chanyeol.”

Baekhyun takes the hand firmly and stares straight into Chanyeol’s eyes. “Byun Baekhyun.”

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Post offices are obsolete. Practically no one sends mail anymore; it’s much too slow to be of any use anymore.

That’s why Baekhyun’s hatred for mailboxes is completely justified.

He curses as he tries to twist the key to unlock the box but to no avail. Minseok mentioned how the apartment’s mailbox can get stuck sometimes but he didn’t mention how much of a pain in the ass it could be. Baekhyun’s been here for 5 minutes and he’s deathly afraid of breaking the key in his attempts to get the damned thing open.

“Need some help?”

Baekhyun looks back to see his across-the-hall neighbor standing behind him, arms crossed and eyes light with amusement.

“How long have you been standing there?” Baekhyun asks, continuing to jiggle the key even when he’s looking at Chanyeol.

“Long enough to see that you can’t open a mailbox.”
Baekhyun groans.

Chanyeol comes closer and holds his hand out for key. “Let me try.”

“I can’t even get the key out,” He admits sheepishly and decides to just step away from the mailboxes to give Chanyeol a try. Chanyeol laughs before stepping up to the boxes. “Wouldn’t it be funny if there’s not even anything in the box?”

Chanyeol doesn’t respond, though, too concentrated on working the key to pay attention to Baekhyun. Baekhyun contemplates actually trying to carry on a conversation but decides against it, simply standing close to Chanyeol’s side to watch him work.

“I got it out,” Chanyeol announces triumphantly as he jingles the key for Baekhyun to see.

“Now open it and prove your superior mailbox-opening skills,” Baekhyun scoffs, but he can’t hide his grateful smile.

Chanyeol glances to him and returns Baekhyun’s smile with one of his own. Baekhyun can’t help but feel his heart skip a beat.

Before long, Chanyeol turns back to the mailbox and continues to work. It only takes a couple of seconds before the mailbox pops open.

Sure enough, there’s nothing in there.

“I’m going to cry,” Baekhyun states and mentally curses the mailbox to hell. His hands are red and sore from gripping at the key for so long and there’s no doubt that he’s going to complain to Minseok when he gets back.

“Don’t cry,” Chanyeol replies as he shuts the mailbox and moves onto his own that is just to the right. He opens it with relative ease to reveal a couple of letters that he grabs and shoves into his pocket. “You’re too pretty to cry.”

Baekhyun blinks at him, trying to will down the red from filling his face. “What… I…” He blusters, patting his quickly heating face with one of his hands. “...Okay,” He finishes lamely.

Chanyeol turns back to look at Baekhyun, who immediately jerks his face away.

“You okay?” Chanyeol asks and suddenly he’s closer than Baekhyun expected. He steps back, almost tripping on his feet when he does so.

“Yeah, yeah. I’m good.” He jerks his thumb back toward the staircase, ”You going back up or...?” The question trails off but the general meaning is still conveyed.

”Yeah,” Chanyeol answers, “You wanna go together?”

“If it’s okay with you,” Baekhyun shrugs, passing his internal giddiness with nonchalance.

The first couple of steps are awkward, with Baekhyun not really sure as to how to start up a conversation or what even is an acceptable topic, but his worry is dispelled when Chanyeol asks a question: “So how’d you end up living with Minseok anyways?”

“He and I go way back,” Baekhyun replies and he’s about to end it at that but Chanyeol’s expression urges him to go on. “Childhood friends,” He clarifies, “Best friends up until high school but then we went our separate ways for college.”
“How’d you end up living with him, though? If you went your separate ways, I mean.”

Baekhyun shrugs, “I don’t know. We just ended up running into each other at some coffee shop, just pure coincidence -- like fate, really. We started talking to each other again and then money got a little tight for me so he offered me a place to stay.”

“Oh,” Chanyeol says, “That’s pretty cool.”

“It’s cool that I’m too poor to afford my own apartment?” Baekhyun deadpans and he gives Chanyeol a repulsed look. Chanyeol almosts trips.

“No no no, that’s not what I mean -- I meant like... Like the fact that you ran into each other after… after all those years.” Chanyeol blusters, looking a bit frantic.

Baekhyun cracks a smile, “I was kidding.”

Chanyeol looks a little sheepish as he watches the floor, being extra sure where to place his steps. “I knew that,” He murmurs under his breath and Baekhyun can’t help but throw his head back and laugh.

“I do have a job, though,” Baekhyun clarifies, “So I’m not dirt poor as you seem to think I am.”

“I did n--” Chanyeol stops himself whenever he sees Baekhyun’s mouth start to twitch up into a smile, “Oh. Joking. I got it. Can I ask what this job is, then?”

“I’m a novelist.”

From the look on Chanyeol’s face, he must not have been expecting that. “Really?” He asks, eyes wide with awe, “Written anything that I might’ve read?”

“Depends,” Baekhyun twists his face in thought, “Do you read much homosexual erotica?”

Chanyeol almosts trips again and Baekhyun hates to say this, but he gets some sort of sadistic pleasure from tripping (literally) the other up like this. “Kidding.” He says again and Chanyeol looks like a kicked puppy. “Correction: I’m an unpublished novelist.”

Chanyeol’s silent for the next couple of steps, as they round the corner to start up the last flight of stairs. “...Doesn’t that mean that you, in fact, do not have a paying job that offers you the financial capabilities of owning an apartment?” He asks finally.

“I also do a couple of editing jobs every now and then so I’m not entirely unemployed but yeah pretty much. But that’s what Minseok’s for.”

Chanyeol laughs and Baekhyun really likes Chanyeol’s laugh. “And what about yourself? How do you manage to afford the rent?”

“Just a freelance web designer,” He shrugs, “Nothing as fancy as a novelist.”

“You say that like a novelist is some kind of renowned position but it’s really just my excuse to live at Minseok’s for very cheap with minimal human contact.”

“And you think freelance web designers become freelance web designers for the onslaught of human contact?” Chanyeol raises a brow as he hooks an arm around Baekhyun's shoulders and leans in close, “I think we’re going to get along great.” He laughs, a bit too loud for the proximity but it doesn’t bother Baekhyun. Surprisingly enough, he finds himself leaning just a bit into Chanyeol’s
“Yeah,” Baekhyun replies breathlessly, his eyes flitting to meet Chanyeol’s.

The eye contact lasts just a bit longer than intended but it’s not uncomfortable or nerve-wracking like you’d expect it to be with a near-stranger. Chanyeol pulls away seconds later. “Well, it was nice seeing you again,” He says as he draws back toward his apartment’s door.

Only then does Baekhyun realize that they’ve reached their floor. “Oh,” He says intelligently, “Oh. Yeah. It was nice talking to you.” He starts toward his door, fishing his keys out of his jacket pocket to unlock the door.

“You need help with that too?” He hears Chanyeol call out from behind him.

“Shut up,” Baekhyun says amiably just as he turns the lock, “I’m not that bad with keys.”

“Sure you aren’t,” Chanyeol says and Baekhyun turns around just in time to see his eye roll and then subsequent grin. “Have a nice day, Baekhyun-ssi.”

“You too.” Baekhyun smiles as he slips into his apartment.

"Was that Chanyeol?” Minseok asks the second Baekhyun closes the door. He’s seated at the couch with his boyfriend, snuggling up as they watch some kind of variety show on the tv.

"Yeah,” Baekhyun shrugs, toeing off his shoes before even daring to set foot into the living room. He knows how anal Minseok can be about cleanliness.

“You like him,” Lu Han, Minseok's boyfriend, sings out in a teasing way. His hands in a rather precarious position: underneath Minseok’s flimsy shirt, slowly inching up the expanse of his chest.

“I do not,” Baekhyun scoffs and he goes to join the two on the couch, not too bothered by the fact that his roommate is getting felt up about a foot away -- he’s used to this and is accustomed with third-wheeling.

“Then why were you with him?” Lu Han teases, not at all affected by the intrusion and instead moves closer to his boyfriend to give Baekhyun room on the couch.

“We just met. He was being friendly,” Baekhyun sniffs and focuses his attention on the TV screen.

“Friendly,” Lu Han repeats in that tone.

Baekhyun, like most other times, ignores him, opting to snag the remote off of Lu Han’s thigh and switch change the channel much to Lu Han’s annoyance.

“I was watching that!” He cries indigantly.

“You’re feeling up Minseok,” Baekhyun scoffs, “Focus on one thing at a time.”

He gets a dirty look from Lu Han -- and a blush from Minseok -- but that’s about the extent of Lu Han’s indictment. They watch the music program in silence, Baekhyun absorbed in the new performances while trying his best not to acknowledge the occasional moan coming from beside him. He forgets to tell Minseok to take him off mail retrieving duty.

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“You’re here again?” Chanyeol raises an eyebrow as he watches Baekhyun continue to struggle over the mailbox. Baekhyun jumps a little at the sound of his voice but he’s happy to see him nonetheless. “Lemme do it.” Chanyeol says as he moves into the space next to Baekhyun, taking the keys from his hand.

Just like last time, he opens it without any problem at all, pushing the door all the way open to reveal some ad for a nearby pizza place. “You really suck at this, don’t you?” Chanyeol laughs, moving to his own mailbox to open it.

“Shhh no one has to know that,” Baekhyun says as he eyes the pizza ad with interest. When he finally looks up, Chanyeol's already gotten his own mailbox open and is currently fishing out the two letters present in his own box. "You going up now?" He asks.

Chanyeol glances down to see exactly what has arrived for him before giving an affirmative hum. "Yeah, you?"

"Yeah, let's go together then."

"Why are you in charge of getting the mail if you can't even open the box?” Chanyeol asks to make conversation as they start up the stairs.

Baekhyun shrugs. "I don't know," He confesses, "I mean it's not that bad. I just have to struggle over opening up the mailbox long enough until some poor soul eventually comes and assists me."

"That poor soul being me," Chanyeol points out with a chuckle.

"Hey, that's your conscience making you help me, not me." Baekhyun grins and he doesn't miss the way Chanyeol almosts misses a step.

Chanyeol stumbles a bit before falling back into his usual pace. "Does he even know that you're physically incapable of performing such a task?"

"No but he doesn't need to know. I'd rather not have to take up another responsibility around the apartment."

"So what?" Chanyeol stops on the 3rd floor and looks up to Baekhyun who's already started to advance up the next flight of stairs. Even from a couple steps away, Baekhyun can see the sparkle in Chanyeol's eyes. "We're partners in crime now?"

"Well of course." Baekhyun smiles as Chanyeol starts moving again. He waits for the other to catch up.

"Mail buddies." Chanyeol grins and there he goes again, wrapping an arm around Baekhyun's shoulders. Baekhyun hums an agreement as he tries not to make his staring too obvious.

Chanyeol is attractive but he is really attractive up close, Baekhyun quickly realizes.

It’s not long until they reach the 4th floor where they wave their goodbyes before going to their respective apartments. Baekhyun gets his door open before Chanyeol has even dug out the keys from his pocket and he turns back to playfully stick his tongue out at the other before slipping into the apartment.

"Chanyeol again?" Minseok inquires and Baekhyun slams the door shut, surprised how Minseok even managed to see Chanyeol through the small sliver of visibility that had appeared when Baekhyun had opened the door.
“You like him,” Lu Han states with an amused look.

Baekhyun can’t help but avert his eyes which doesn’t help with the whole proving-that-he-doesn’t-have-a-crush-on-his-neighbor thing. “He’s my mail buddy,” Is the only thing Baekhyun can think to respond, regurgitating the term Chanyeol had defined them as earlier.

Lu Han pauses and then smirks, “He’s your male buddy.” Baekhyun wants to slap him.

Minseok does it for him, though.

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They do this far more often now; it’s become some sort of routine at this point. They collect the mail together and then trek back up, babbling on about nothing of any real importance. They then go their separate ways and when Baekhyun returns to his own apartment, Lu Han always as utterly stupid he is and as much as Baekhyun says he has immunity to said stupidity, Baekhyun can’t deny the fact that fucking Lu Han has planted a seed in his mind. He hates to admit it but it keeps him awake at night, staring up at the darkness of the ceiling just thinking.

He’s attracted to Chanyeol. He’s known that since day one.

Whether or not he has a crush on Chanyeol is the real question and it’s becoming harder and harder to definitely say no.

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“So you ever been to that one coffeeshop?” Chanyeol starts up randomly when he’s busy fiddling with Baekhyun’s mailbox key to get it open.

“Wow,” Baekhyun rolls his eyes, leaning up comfortably on the wall, surveying Chanyeol’s work. “Thanks for being specific.”

Chanyeol opens the mailbox with relative ease and then looks up to Baekhyun with a grin. “I know right? But seriously, I don’t remember the name of it. It’s a couple of blocks away from here though.”

Baekhyun gives Chanyeol a tight smile, “That’s still not all that specific but the answer is no. I don’t really know my way around here all that well yet.”

Chanyeol only hums in response as he hands Baekhyun his mail and then moves to work on opening his own mailbox. “It’s been like a month since you’ve moved in, you still don’t know your way around?”

“ Exactly!” Baekhyun exclaims, rolling up some flyer into a cylinder to point at Chanyeol. “It’s only been like a month and I don’t make it much of a habit to go aimlessly walking around.”

Chanyeol laughs. “Is that code for: I never go outside?”

“Probably,” Baekhyun shrugs.

“But seriously, you should go to the place, it’s great.” Chanyeol nods enthusiastically. “It’s my favourite coffee shop?”

“And yet you don’t know the place’s name?” Baekhyun scoffs.

“Oh hush, when you get to be my age…” Chanyeol grumbles and Baekhyun has to laugh.
“How old are you, like 12?”

“13, thank you very much.” Chanyeol deadpans.

He gets a snort from Baekhyun. “No but really? Am I older?” And as an afterthought he adds in, “Don’t you think it’s weird that we’ve known each other for a month and yet I don’t know whose older?”

Apart from the noncommittal shrug as a response to the second question, Chanyeol only blinks at Baekhyun like he had just asked the stupidest question in the world, but the look dispels merely second later. He shrugs. “I don’t know. How old are you?”

“26. You?”

There’s a hesitation and Baekhyun squints at him. “What, you forget your own age or something?”

“Something like that,” Chanyeol smirks bashfully, “I’m 25 though, turning 26 later this year.

“So I’m older?”

“It would seem…” Chanyeol adds in with a little smirk, “Hyung.”

There’s something in the tone of his voice, and in Baekhyun’s mind, that’s enough to warrant a punch. “How dare you mock such a sacred title!” He hisses, punching Chanyeol lightly in the arm. Chanyeol only grins.

“What do you mean?” Chanyeol asks innocently, “Hyung, is something wrong?”

“I’m banning you from calling me that.” Baekhyun shakes his head. “Like if you say that again, I will fight you.”

“So you just want me to call you Baekhyun?”

Baekhyun nods uncertainly, sure that there’s going to be a trick of some kind lying in there.

Again, Chanyeol smiles, all his perfect white teeth being put on display, “Well okay then, Baekhyun.”

And Chanyeol saying his name without any honorifics is even worse on his heart.

When he returns back to his apartment, he’s greeted by the words, “You like him.”

“You don’t even say ‘Hi’ anymore? Wow rude.” Baekhyun says, giving Lu Han a pinched look.

“Okay. Hi. You like him.” Lu Han amends, sticking his tongue out.

“Nope. You’re wrong. Guess again.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes and quickly books it to his room so he doesn’t have to argue with Lu Han. From past experience, Baekhyun knows that arguing with Lu Han never goes well. Especially when he doesn’t even know if he’s fully confident in his own argument.

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“Brewed Awakening,” Chanyeol says out of nowhere and Baekhyun can’t help but snort.
“What even?”

“Remember that coffee shop I told you about yesterday? Brewed Awakening. That’s the name.” Chanyeol clarifies as he jostles open Baekhyun’s mailbox door and makes way for Baekhyun to grab the letters right out of the space.

“Very nice,” Baekhyun answers distractedly as he grabs the handful of letters and starts to thumb through them.

“You should go one day.” Chanyeol says, eyes flitting over to Baekhyun for just a second but Baekhyun catches it anyways, “It’s really good.”

“Maybe I will,” Baekhyun dismisses and he brands all of today’s mail to be unimportant, just a couple of bills that he’ll have to hand off to Minseok later.

“You should come with me to get coffee today.” Chanyeol says, his eyes trained on the mailbox in front of him.

Baekhyun stops. “Are you asking me out right now?” He tries, trying to keep his voice nonchalant.

“Are you accepting right now?”

He pauses, running the options through his mind. “Your treat?”

A small pout finds its way onto Chanyeol’s face as his lips curl into a tiny frown, “And you’re the hyung in this relationship?”

“And you’re the one asking me out for coffee.” Baekhyun returns as soon as he sees Chanyeol’s pouting facade crack and reveal that glint of amusement dancing in his eyes.

Chanyeol squints at Baekhyun, contemplating his counter Baekhyun’s supposes. “You win this one, Byun.” He says finally, “So when are you up for getting some coffee?”

“I’m always free.”

“So now is good?” Chanyeol asks and he seems so eager and it’s absolutely adorable.

“That is the definition of always, is it not?” Baekhyun laughs, “But yeah, now’s fine. Just let me drop off these bills to Minseok.”

“I’ll just wait here,” Chanyeol nods as he leans up against the wall of mailboxes, waving off Baekhyun. “Hurry up or I might not pay for you.”

“You already agreed to it!” and with that Baekhyun flounces off, taking the stairs 2 by 2.

He reaches the 4th floor faster than he ever has before, just a bit more out of breath than he’d care to admit. Looking at the closed door of his apartment, Baekhyun decides his best option -- or at least the option least subject to Lu Han’s annoyance -- would be to just subtly slip the letters through the crack of the door.

He’s doing just this when the door swings opens to reveal a smiling Lu Han. “Hello there, Baekhyun. How’s it going down there?”

Immediately, Baekhyun stumbles back, not wanting to be that close to Lu Han's crotch. "Hi?"

“Going somewhere?” Lu Han asks innocently.
“Yeah I’m just going--” He stops himself about mid sentence, his face twisting into a frown, “You’re so creepy.” He states, shaking his head before moving back toward the stairwell.

“Have fun with Chanyeol,” Lu Han calls as Baekhyun starts down the stairs. Baekhyun responds by flipping the bird just before Lu Han goes out of sight.

“You ready?” He asks when he sees Chanyeol still in the same position, leaning up against the wall of mailboxes while fiddling with his phone.

Chanyeol glances away from his phone and his face immediately brightens, “Hey.”

“Sorry I took so long, my roommate’s evil boyfriend was harassing me.” Baekhyun apologizes, “We gonna go?”

“Yeah,” Chanyeol says and he’s just about to shove his phone back into his pocket when he stops. “Wait. Give me your phone number.”

“You couldn’t have thought of a better pickup line?” Baekhyun says with a snort but he holds out his hand for Chanyeol’s phone anyways, quickly programming his number into a new contact as soon as he’s given it.

“You gave me your number without one,” Chanyeol says distractedly as begins to fiddle with his phone as soon as Baekhyun hands him back his phone. “I’d like to think my game is just that strong.”

Baekhyun squints at him but Chanyeol doesn’t seem to notice, too busy with whatever he’s doing with his phone. As soon as he’s finished though, he slides it into his front pocket and finally looks up at Baekhyun, “Shall we go?”

“Yeah.” Baekhyun says with a nod and Chanyeol leads the way to the doorway. He moves to hold the door open for Baekhyun. “You first.”

“How gentlemanly,” Baekhyun snorts but still bows his head in thanks when he passes through. As soon as he’s out, though, his phone goes off and he immediately goes to check it.

Hi, the text says. It’s from Chanyeol. “Really?” Baekhyun says, laughing. “I am literally like a foot away from you.”

Chanyeol only winks exaggeratedly; he doesn’t actually offer an answer. So Baekhyun puts his phone back with a slow head shake.

And as soon as he does, there’s suddenly a hand gripping Baekhyun’s wrist, pulling him toward the right. “Now just follow me, it’s not far.”

Baekhyun practically jerks his wrist from Chanyeol’s grip, not missing the look of confusion that flashes through Chanyeol’s gaze as he does so. “I-- Sorry.” He quickly apologizes.

Chanyeol only shakes his head, raising his arms harmlessly, “No it’s my fault for being too friendly. Sorry if I made you uncomfortable.” Baekhyun can only watch as Chanyeol shoves his hands into his pocket and tilts his head to the right. “But come on.”
Chanyeol takes the lead and Baekhyun just follows. They’re nearly side by side but Baekhyun lags by just a step. He’s not sure how to fully explain why he doesn’t want Chanyeol this close to him without admitting something he himself might not be ready to say. He’s saved from having to come up with some plausible excuse when Chanyeol begins to babble.

It’s kind of cute, the way Chanyeol is talking about anything and everything at once, sometimes so distracted by his words that he almost trips on the uneven pavement of the sidewalk. Baekhyun cannot help but laugh at Chanyeol’s clumsiness but when Chanyeol glances back at him, he stops, afraid he’s being rude.

“No, you can laugh,” Chanyeol says when he sees the look of concern on Baekhyun’s face. It’s obvious that Baekhyun’s not totally convinced when he urges a second time, “No really, I’d laugh too if I could see myself. It’s just--it’s just nice to see you laugh after so long.” There’s a certain emotion splayed out of Chanyeol’s face, but Baekhyun can’t quite place it. A look of longing, of sadness is his best guess, but before he can make any final guesses, the expression clears, making way for a great smile. “But we’re almost there,” Chanyeol states, pointing to some obscure sign out in the distance.

“That fast?” Baekhyun asks in surprise.

“I wasn’t lying when I said it was just down the block,” Chanyeol laughs and it looks for a moment that he’s about to take Baekhyun’s hand and race to the nearby store, but he hesitates. His hand, instead, goes up to awkwardly scratch at his head. “Let’s hurry up, then, huh? I’m really in the mood for some coffee.”

The enthusiasm is kind of cute, that much Baekhyun will admit.

Baekhyun’s always been a coffee kind of guy. In his last apartment, there was a coffeeshop that he frequented quite often, enough so that the moment he’d walked in, the barista would greet him by name and proceed to whip up his usual. Ever since he’d moved, he’s missed that place, that kind of connection.

The place that Chanyeol brings him to could easily rival his previous coffeeshop.

It’s fairly similar in terms of atmosphere, just a tad smaller but the same kind of cozy atmosphere that Baekhyun loves. The walls are a muted tone of red, the furniture that same kind of cherrywood.

He’s in love.

“You like?” Chanyeol asks, startling Baekhyun out of his little fixation.

“I love it,” Baekhyun breathes out.

“I had a feeling you would,” Chanyeol grins widely, “And you haven’t even tried the coffee yet. It will blow your mind.”

“My expectations are already pretty high, you really shouldn’t set the bar any higher,” Baekhyun says distractedly as he scans over the menu.

“I’m gonna order now,” Chanyeol says. Baekhyun practically jumps when he finds that Chanyeol is leaning quite closely toward him “Are you ready yet?”

Baekhyun shakes his head, “Nah, I’m still thinking, you go first.”
So Chanyeol steps toward the cashier. “I want the large house blend coffee with a spoon and a half full of sugar and a some hazelnut cream. Make sure to put the sugar and cream before you actually add in the coffee and I also want a design in the milk foam.” And the long order practically rolls off of his tongue like it's been rehearsed.

“Well that’s rather complex,” Baekhyun comments and Chanyeol only laughs goodnaturedly.

“What can I say, I’m very particular about my coffee.” He shrugs and then gently pushes Baekhyun closer to the cashier. “Now you order.”

“Oh uhm. Uhm.” He takes one last glance at the menu, but eventually settles for his usual. “I’ll take a caramel macchiato then.”

As the cashier moves to ring them up, Chanyeol turns to Baekhyun. “Go ahead and find us a table, I’ll pay.”

Baekhyun nods, moving to snag one of the tables set up right next to the window. Chanyeol comes to accompany him a minute or so later, shoving the receipt into his wallet. “They’ll bring it to us in a little bit,” He says as he pulls out his seat and plops down. "So, tell me about yourself, Baek.

"Baek?" Baekhyun asks with an eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, it’s a nickname.” Chanyeol grins, “Isn’t it cute?”

"Yeah and quite creative as well,” Baekhyun deadpans. “And what do you even want to know?”


They talk for a long time. Long after their coffee has been delivered to their table, long after it it has run cold and they have to ask for another cup; they’re lost in conversation. And it’s not even about anything important, mainly just about random instances, random facts that run together into some semblance of a conversation.

And maybe this is what he’s really been missing all of this time.

On their way back, Baekhyun manages to wrap his hands around Chanyeol’s wrist and softly tug him forward. Chanyeol looks surprised, astonished even by the sudden gesture, but he mainly looks confused, confused as to the sudden change in Baekhyun’s behaviour. Baekhyun only flashes him a grin, “I’ll race you back to the apartment.” He challenges with a smile, giving one last tug on Chanyeol’s arm before letting go, a little uncertain of his own actions

There’s a hesitation before Chanyeol’s face twists to mirror Baekhyun’s own. “You’re on.”

Later that night, Baekhyun finally gets around to replying to Chanyeol. It's nothing much really, just a quickly typed out message that says hi back.

Apparently, just the one word is enough to launch them into a conversation that has Baekhyun awake until the wee hours of the night.

And it's not just an isolated event. As the week drags on, Baekhyun finds himself constantly fending off the intrusive feelings of sleepiness with a bright screen, fast responses, and the smile that's begun
to sprout on his lips.

xxx

As much as Lu Han loves to stick around the apartment, he takes Minseok out from time to time and, with Baekhyun’s luck, of course the one time he does so, Baekhyun forgets his keys.

It’s when he’s out getting yet another cup of coffee with Chanyeol.

“You forgot your keys?” Chanyeol asks as he watches as Baekhyun freezes, hurriedly checking all of his pockets.

“No,” Baekhyun indignantly replies as he roots around in his pants pocket. He has to check a second, a third time before he finally admits, “Okay, maybe. But I can just call Minseok to come back here and open the door.”

He pulls out his phone to call, but as soon as the dial tone begins, he can hear the telltale sounds of Minseok’s obnoxious ringtone from within the apartment. “Jesus fucking Christ,” He mutters under his breath, stabbing the end call button on his phone.

“You want to call the landlady? She should have a spare key or something,” Chanyeol suggests as he tries to jiggle open the door knob.

“Don’t force it! It might break,” Baekhyun rushes out, pulling Chanyeol’s hand off of the handle, “And it’s like 8:00 on a Sunday morning, I feel kind of bad waking her this early. I’ll just wait out here until they come back.” He drops to the floor and flashes Chanyeol a thumbs up. “I’ll be fine.”

“How about this,” Chanyeol starts, dropping to a squat so that he’s eyelevel with Baekhyun again, “You can wait it out in my apartment. I have board games and crap so it’ll be fun.”

Baekhyun shrugs, “I guess it beats just waiting here.” He lets himself be hauled up to his feet by Chanyeol who leads him to the apartment across the hall. “Who even goes out this early in the morning?” He groans as he waits for Chanyeol to get his own apartment open.

“We went out this early-- no earlier this morning,” Chanyeol adds distractedly. He unlocks the door and then steps in to hold it open for Baekhyun.

“That was different.” Baekhyun defends as he walks into the tiny foyer and pries off his shoes. “Nice apartment by the way,” He adds in as an afterthought as he scans around. It’s fairly similar to his own structure-wise but it’s a lot cleaner. Things are sorted in a neat fashion and it almost looks as though it hasn’t been lived in. Funny. He thought Chanyeol’s been living in this complex even longer than Minseok.

“How so?” Chanyeol chuckles. He strolls into the living room and then bends down to reach for the board games hidden strategically underneath the coffee table. Lifting up the game of Life, he also lifts an eyebrow.

Baekhyun gives an approving nod. “It just is,” He reasons before going to sit next to Chanyeol and help him set the game up.

Somewhere in the middle of the game, when Chanyeol is about 20 spaces behind but about hundreds of thousands dollars richer, there’s the telltale sounds of the couple’s return. Their eyes dart up to meet each other’s and there’s a quick gesture of Chanyeol’s chin before Baekhyun’s darting up to the door.
He has to stoop down just a little in order to press his face to the door’s peephole (he can hardly imagine how Chanyeol can deal with it, practically being a giant and all) and he’s greeted with the lovely sight of Minseok and Lu Han sucking face. He retracts from the door with a look of disgust just as he sees Lu Han’s hands creep dangerously close to the waistband of Minseok’s pants and the two slip into the apartment. “Something wrong?” Chanyeol asks as he watched Baekhyun return back to his seat.

“Is it cool if I wait around here for a little longer?” He asks bluntly, picking up his car piece to fiddle with it.

“Why?” Chanyeol asks before blustering over how unintentionally rude that came out, “I mean, you’re free to stay but like… Didn’t they just come back to open the door?”

“They’re kind of…” Baekhyun holds his tongue, trying to think of a more eloquent way to describe what’s happening across the hall, “Busy,” He decides on despite the understandably confused look that Chanyeol gives him.

“Busy?”

“Busy,” He repeats again, this time coupling the word with an intense look and an indescript hand gesture.

“Oh!” Chanyeol says surprised, his face slowly shifting to one of mild repulsion as the information slowly dawns on him. “Busy…”

“So,” Baekhyun draws out, carefully putting his game piece back to it’s original space. “You want to continue?”

Chanyeol nods in approval. His hand is trained over the spinner before he stops, flitting his gaze up to meet Baekhyun’s. “Wait. This might take a while, huh?”

Baekhyun nods with a strained look.

“I’ll order some pizza then.” Chanyeol offers and Baekhyun can’t help but grin at that.

x x x

About a month later, he comes by to hang out for a second time. But again, it’s not exactly by choice.

It’s when the two return from their mail expedition, there’s a note outside the door that humbly requests Baekhyun to stay the hell out of the apartment. Baekhyun squints at the neon green sticky note on the door and then subtly shifts his eyes over to Chanyeol. Chanyeol notices somehow and offers him an awkward smile, “You wanna come over?”

Baekhyun drops his head to the ground and nods embarrassedly. “Sorry,” He mumbles.

“It’s no problem!” Chanyeol reassures and leads Baekhyun over across the hall, “I’m always up to help a friend in need.”

“I just-- Sorry.” Baekhyun repeats as Chanyeol unlocks the door and carts him in. “These are rather odd circumstances to come over under.”

“It’s not your fault they’re like… Just…” Chanyeol trails off he a mischievous grin forms on his face, “Is this going to be a thing?” His smile overtaking his features in a way that’s looks a bit scary.
Baekhyun still thinks it’s kinda cute, though.

“I sure hope not,” He rolls his eyes, moving around Chanyeol to go sit on the sofa.

“But then we’d get to hang out more.”

“But then I’d know just how often they’re doing the do.”

Chanyeol pulls a face, “True. So how about some Monopoly?” He asks, pulling the board game up from out of nowhere.

And as great Chanyeol was at the game of Life, it just so turns out that Chanyeol kinda sucks at Monopoly. No, that’s an understatement. Chanyeol is an absolute disaster at the game, but Baekhyun can’t help but to smile at the way Chanyeol’s eyebrows narrow, how his nostrils flare when he lands on the wrong space, or when it looks like he’s about three seconds from flipping over the entire board (he never does, though).

x x x

“Minseok, I have a problem,” Baekhyun says casually as he’s passing the salt as per Minseok’s request.

“If it is about the fact that I burnt the garlic bread, I would like to challenge you to try to cook,” Minseok leers at him before snatching away the salt shaker and adding a couple shakes too many to his spaghetti.

Shaking his head, Baekhyun says, “No, it’s not that.”

Minseok nods in a gesture that urges Baekhyun on as he starts to swirl his pasta around his fork. Baekhyun inhales.

“Chanyeol is attractive. He’s nice, funny, tall -- a bit clumsy, but sweet and kind of perfect.”

Minseok drops his fork.

“So,” Minseok starts, extending the vowel far longer than necessary as a grin spreads on his face, “You like him?”

“No.” Baekhyun replies and Minseok gives him a meaningful look. “I don’t,” He reinforces, “I do not have a crush on him. I do not have crushes.”

Minseok doesn’t push it. He knows not to push it. Instead he picks up a roll of bread and rips off a piece to chew on it thoughtfully. “So then why are you telling me this?”

“Because he is perfect boyfriend material and I think,” Baekhyun trails off, not really sure himself where he’s going with this whole conversation, “... I think, you should be worried of Lu Han running off and eloping with him.”

Minseok’s momentarily confused but his face settles into a scowl with mock anger. He feints a throw before shaking his head, “I would throw this piece of bread at you but it’s garlic bread and that’s too precious to waste.”

“It’s burnt garlic bread.” Baekhyun points out.

This time Minseok doesn’t feint his throw.
“You know,” Lu Han starts up conversationally as he slumps over the dining room table, fingers drumming against the mahogany. “I’m pretty sure he has a boyfriend.”

Lu Han doesn’t even have to specify who he is. Baekhyun knows. Of course Baekhyun knows, it’s all he seems to talk about these days. His knife hovers right above the flesh of the apple and he turns to look over at the older male. “He does?”

Lu Han just shrugs, which looks pretty laughable with the way his body is sprawled oddly over the surface of the table. “I mean I always see this one guy coming out of Chanyeol’s apartment.”

The knife slices easily through apple and connects with the cutting board with a soft thud. “That means nothing,” Baekhyun dismisses as he turns back to the matter at hand, determined to slice the apple without nicking himself. Cuts on the hands are always the worst. “It could just be a friend. You know? Those things you don’t seem to have.”

Lu Han snorts. “Says the one who holes himself in this apartment.”

“Be nice or I’m not sharing my apple with you.”

“Oh the divine punishment.”

Sarcasm practically oozes from Lu Han’s words and Baekhyun can’t help but roll his eyes. “It’s enough to make you back off, though.” Collecting the apple slices onto a plate, Baekhyun makes his way over to the table and takes a seat next to Lu Han. He gently pushes the plate toward the other as a gesture to dig in.

It takes a second, but Lu Han slowly straightens himself back into an upright position and reaches for a piece. “No but really,” He says as his hands float over the pieces, obviously trying to scope out the best one. “There’s this one guy. He comes over a lot.”

“Again. People have friends.” Baekhyun sighs as he snatched the slice Lu Han was just about to grab.

Lu Han pouts but doesn’t say much, instead going in for the piece that was right beside it. “Yes, but this guy only comes on certain days,” He begins to wave his apple slice around to add emphasis to his speech. “At certain times. And only for like an hour, two max. It’s like clockwork.”

Giving Lu Han that look he usually reserves for those who are being especially ridiculous, Baekhyun exhales exasperatedly. “Why are you even telling me this? No. Better yet, how do you even know this?”

Lu Han just shrugs. “Conversation topic? Plus, now you know that there’s a 37% chance he’s gay.”

“Thank you so much for improving those statistics for me. You’re a real pal.” Baekhyun’s only just now reaching for his second apple slice, but the plate’s already half empty thanks to Lu Han. He subtly pushes the plate a little further away from Lu Han as he adds, almost as an afterthought, “You’re avoiding the “how” part of the question.”

Lu Han shrugs again. “Sometimes you just know things.”

“Please don’t stalk my neighbour’s potential boyfriend,” Minseok says as he walks into the room. His hair is still a bit wet and it’s dripping onto his shirt. Immediately, Lu Han moves toward Minseok and begins to ruffle out the wetness with a towel that Baekhyun swears he conjured out of thin air.
Watching Lu Han toweldry Minseok’s hair is so disgustingly domestic, Baekhyun has to avert his eyes.

“I don’t stalk him,” Lu Han argues, “I just happen to know that he’s an anesthesiologist, comes by at least three times a week, and prefers his coffee black.”

Baekhyun can’t help but look up at Lu Han, clearly dumbfounded by the onslaught of surprisingly personal information.

“He’s probably lying.” Minseok suggests as he waves off Lu Han and pulls out a chair to sit next to Baekhyun. As always, Lu Han follows Minseok but he remains standing, leaning against the chair Minseok is currently occupying.

Minseok is whacked lightly over the head by a pouting Lu Han. “Why would you ever doubt me?” Lu Han is doing some weird cutesy shit and Baekhyun kind of wants to hurl.

“What? You really are probably just making this up to rile up Baekhyun into -- well, to be perfectly honest, I have no idea where you’re going with this either.”

As retaliation, Minseok playfully shoves his boyfriend who exaggeratedly stumbles a couple feet back with a look of mock offense. Lu Han grips at his heart and gives Minseok a pained expression. “Do you really think that little of me?” He pauses, awaiting Minseok’s answer. When Minseok finally nods, an amused smile spread on his face, Lu Han’s face turns comically solemn. “I can prove it.”

Minseok laughs. “Then prove it.”

“Baekhyun!”

Baekhyun, who had been staring at his remaining apple slices in hopes of tuning out the badgering couple, jerks his gaze back to the other two. “What do you want?”

Lu Han jerks a thumb to the front door, “Go to Chanyeol’s right now.”

“No.” He replies immediately.

“What is that even supposed to prove?” Inquires Minseok at the same time and it’s obvious as to which response Lu Han takes priority to.

“I can guarantee that the guy is over right now.”

Minseok raises a brow. “Just because he may be there right now doesn’t prove any of the other things you said as correct.”

“One thing at a time, baby.” Lu Han winks. Minseok giggles and Baekhyun pretends to gag, suddenly remembering why he had been so caught up with keeping his gaze on the table. Lu Han continues, pointedly ignoring Baekhyun’s reaction. “This will at least establish my knowledge over the guy’s scheduled visits. The other things, I’ll prove another time.”

Tilting his head side to side and pursing his lips, Minseok thinks it over before nodding. “Okay. Let’s see if you’re right then.” The two of them turn to Baekhyun.

Baekhyun looks up to meet their gazes. “No,” He answers, shaking his head.

“Why do you have to ruin all our fun?” Minseok whines. “Do itttt.” Despite the incessant pushing in
his word, Minseok’s eyes still retains a look of concern. Like he’s ready to turn around and support Baekhyun if he doesn’t want to. He would never force Baekhyun into doing something against his will.

“You’ve already been there once, no, twice before, what’s the big deal with going again?” Lu Han adds in.

“That was,” Baekhyun pauses and then narrows his eyes at Minseok. “Wait, why does he know that? I told you not to tell him.”

“Minseok tells me all,” Lu Han sing-songs and Minseok just shrugs.

“Well anyways, I had a reason then. I’m not just going to show up at his doorway and barge in.”

“Then I’ll give you a reason.”

There’s a glint in Lu Han’s eyes. And then suddenly the guy is pulling Minseok out of his chair. His hand wraps around the smaller’s wrist and now they’re heading down the hallway, toward Minseok’s bedroom— Oh. Oh no.

“Really, guys?!” Baekhyun calls after them but his outburst is ignored.

“I just showered.” He hears Minseok complain before the bedroom door closes with a telltale click and Baekhyun needs to get out of here.

He shoots out of his chair and throws on whatever shoes he can find before evacuating the apartment. He makes sure to slam the front door on the way out, loud enough for the sound to resonate throughout the whole apartment.

His wallet has been left on the kitchen counter, he realizes belatedly. His keys, too.

There’s really no other choice than to go intrude on his neighbour.

“Hey, Baek.” Chanyeol greets with a crooked smile. He shifts his head to look behind the Baekhyun and gestures with his chin, “They at it again?”

Baekhyun nods sheepishly, “Take pity on this poor soul?”

“Always,” The taller male shifts to the side and extends his arm to lead Baekhyun into the apartment. “Come right in.”

Baekhyun flashes a slight smile before ducking into the apartment. As he toes off his shoes, he hears an unfamiliar voice yell from deeper in the apartment. “Hey, who’s at the door?”

“It’s just my neighbour,” Chanyeol yells from behind him and his voice is far louder than Baekhyun expects. He flinches at the noise. Chanyeol seems to take notice as he chuckles, ruffling Baekhyun’s hair playfully, “Did that startle you?”

The shorter bats away the hand, willing his face not to turn redder than it already is. When he pads into the living room, he’s met with a sight of a man hanging upside down off the couch, his legs hooked over the top of the seat and his head hanging off of the edge. When the stranger looks away from his Nintendo 3DS and makes eye contact with Baekhyun, his lips quirk into a smile. “Yo.”

Baekhyun bows politely, “I’m Baekhyun.”
“Jongdae,” The boy mumbles before refocusing on whatever he’s playing.

“Don’t mind Jongdae,” Chanyeol slings an arm around Baekhyun’s shoulders. “He’s much too busy training to become a Pokemon master than to interact with measly peasants like us.”

“My Charizard can and will burn your flat ass,” Jongdae bristles as he continues to mash the A button. Baekhyun does not discreetly drop his gaze to check out Chanyeol’s behind. Even if he did, Chanyeol doesn’t notice as he steps toward the couch and flops down next to Jongdae, nearly crushing him in the process. Chanyeol motions for him to come over so Baekhyun does, settling into a close yet measured distance away from Chanyeol.

“You wanna watch a movie or something while we wait this out?” Chanyeol asks as he tilts over to sneak a peek at Jongdae’s game. “Your Charizard is about to die,” He points out helpfully and Jongdae kindly shoves his face away.

“Shut up and go watch one of your stupid movies.” Jongdae actually growls as he angles his screen away from Chanyeol. Obediently, Chanyeol turns to Baekhyun with a look of anticipation.

“Uh,” Baekhyun says intelligently and he’s blanking out with what to say.

“I don’t have the biggest selection of movies but I should have something that can pass the time.” Chanyeol adds helpfully, grinning widely.

“Just don’t watch Star Wars. That’ll make Chanyeol cry and that’s not a pretty sight,” Jongdae says offhandedly before he swears under his breath, murmuring something along the lines of “should’ve used that full restore when I had the chance.”

“I do not,” Chanyeol replies indignantly, not even bothering to look back,”That was just that one time and it was because I got something in my eye.”

Jongdae only shrugs, too busy cussing out his 3DS to come up with some witty response. Chanyeol’s still watching Baekhyun eagerly and so he ends up just shrugging as well. “Whatever’s fine with me.”

“Well then we're watching Star War.” Chanyeol says with finality as he pries open the DVD case.

Jongdae groans but Baekhyun sits up just a bit straighter. ”You like this movie?” Chanyeol asks as he slides the DVD into the player.

"Whoa doesn't?" Baekhyun laughs, "Blu-Ray?"
"Who do you think I am?" Chanyeol shoots back before taking the remote and then slinking back into the space next to Baekhyun. He's considerably closer to Baekhyun this time around, their thighs just almost touching. He only settles in closer, practically cuddling Baekhyun’s side as the movie goes on.

Somewhere in the middle of the movie, Chanyeol ceremoniously gets up, randomly announcing that he’s going to make popcorn before he relocates to the kitchen.

“Hey, Baekhyun?” Jongdae asks while they wait, his game blaring the distinctive 8bit song of a wild battle.

He gives an affirmative hum, his eyes still trained on the glorious paused frame of Chewbacca.
“You like, live in the apartment right across the hall?” Jongdae continues and there’s the sound of a Pokeball being thrown from his game. “Fuck.” He comments offhandedly when the Pokemon breaks free.

“Yeah.”

“With that one guy with the boyfriend?”

“Minseok?”

“I guess?” There’s a fistpump when Jongdae is finally successful in catching whatever he was battling. “Yeah well, tell his boyfriend to stop stalking me.”

He honestly doesn’t know how to respond to that.

x x x

“Sorry about Lu Han.” Minseok apologizes at the dinner table as he slides over a particularly large chocolate chip scoopage. “You know how he can be.”

Baekhyun can’t help but forgive him.

The next day, though, he finds himself back under Chanyeol's care because of strikingly similar circumstances and he can only hope that this time Minseok has something more than just cookies. (And Minseok does. This times it's chocolate cake.)

x x x

It’s become a sort of routine at a certain point. Chanyeol (and sometimes, usually, more than Baekhyun would like, Jongdae) is always willing to offer refuge when Baekhyun has to clear out his own apartment for the time being. Lu Han is always willing to jump Minseok when the urge strikes now that he knows that Baekhyun has somewhere to go.

It’s kind of a gross cycle, really, but it works.

But on certain days, Baekhyun even finds himself at Chanyeol's for unnecessary reasons. Just a certain look that Lu Han flashes Minseok, or a sultry kind of voice is enough to have Baekhyun scrambling to the other apartment. He'd like to think it as a precautionary move but at a certain point, he begins to think that that might be an excuse.

Not that he wants to hang out with Chanyeol. It's not that at all.

“Is their sex life really that active?” Jongdae asks with a raised brow when he answers the door. Baekhyun would say that he’s surprised to see the guy open the door instead of the usual Chanyeol, but Lu Han relays the entirety of Jongdae’s visiting schedule every now and then and it’s beginning to stick.

You don’t need a third wheel. Lu Han had hissed, to which Baekhyun could only respond by smacking Lu Han over the head and saying that There’s nothing to third wheel on.

Yet. Minseok had chirped, wiggling his eyebrows at Lu Han who mirrored the action.

“I don’t know,” Baekhyun admits, “I’m just evacuating the premise in case of spontaneous action.”

Jongdae purses his lips, eyes dancing with amusement as he gestures Baekhyun in and Baekhyun’s heart skips a beat when he lays eyes on a grinning Chanyeol that’s sprawled over the sofa. “You’re
“Not by choice.” Baekhyun hurries to point out and he doesn’t miss how Chanyeol seems to deflate just the slightest bit.

Jongdae gives him a knowing look but thankfully doesn’t say anything, instead walks back to the front door. “I have to go,” He announces, “I’ll see you tomorrow, Chanyeol.”

There’s a look of surprise on Chanyeol’s face at Jongdae’s words but he waves him off nonetheless. “Okay bye.”

“You know,” Baekhyun starts whenever Jongdae’s finally left, “As many times as I’ve seen him actually come in, I’ve never actually seen him leave.”

Chanyeol only laughs. "He's really not here all that often. You just happen to come at the most inopportune moments."

"How lucky of me..." Baekhyun mutters under his breath and Chanyeol offers him a curious look.

"He's also been staying longer ever since you've been coming over..." Chanyeol adds in thoughtfully before his face contorts into a wicked smile. "Why? You miss your alone time with me?"

"N-no." Baekhyun stammers out very convincingly. "I just... He..." He wracks his brain for anything that might even semi-work as a legitimate answer but he blanks under Chanyeol's gaze. "Whenever we watch movies?" He sputters but it comes out more as a question than a statement, "He’s always playing Pokemon... With the background music still blasting!"

Chanyeol frowns at him and suddenly Baekhyun's sounding a lot more pretentious than he really is. "I mean it's not that bad..." He's quick to justify, "Just a little annoying at times. But, y'know, bearable."

Chanyeol starts out, his voice grave, "It's not his fault he wants to be the very best."

"I understand." Baekhyun nods furiously. "And I applaud him for his dedication but don't you--"

"Like no one ever was." Chanyeol interrupts in a monotone voice and Baekhyun squints at him. They end up in some sort of staring contest with Baekhyun's raised eyebrow and Chanyeol's oddly stoic expression. "To catch them is his real test." He continues, unfazed. "To train them is his cause."

Baekhyun rolls his eyes. "Are you seriously..." He trails off and then finished with a shake of his head. "Please don't."

"He will travel across the lands. Searching far and wide."

"Like why." Baekhyun raises his arms and presses his palms into his eyes out of second hand embarrassment. "What do you gain from this?"

But Chanyeol just keeps talking anyways. "Each Pokemon to understand. The power that is inside."

Baekhyun groans just as Chanyeol belts out the word, "Pokemon." And by some sort of peer pressure, he fist pumps, adding "Gotta catch 'em all" at the very end. There's an oddly smug smile on Chanyeol's face.

"You're such a nerd." Baekhyun sneers without any venom.

Chanyeol retorts with: "Says the one that recognized and then proceeded to finish the Pokemon
theme song." Baekhyun really doesn’t have a response for that.

"But... If you want..." Chanyeol starts off, giving Baekhyun a look of uncertainty. "I actually do have some Pokemon movies."

“You’re such a nerd.” He repeats. But then cracks a smile. “But let’s do it.”

Pokemon movies really aren't the most romantic things in the world and yet Baekhyun finds himself in a rather precarious situation. At first, Chanyeol had been just a bit clingy, leaving his head to rest on Baekhyun's shoulder as he made random comments about anything and everything that happened on screen. As the movies played on, Chanyeol began to grow bolder, wrapping an arm around Baekhyun and squeezing him in close as something dramatic happens. It’s only when they’re about 5 hours into their marathon that Chanyeol is resting his head in Baekhyun’s lap, blearily blinking at the screen but too sleepy to make the same kind of spontaneous comments as before.

Baekhyun’s not watching anymore though. Instead, he’s watching Chanyeol fight off sleepiness, watching his eyelashes flutter up and down as he squints at the movie unfolding in front of them.

It does something to his heart. Something that he’s been foolishly trying to deny for months.

“You like him.” Lu Han says while obnoxiously wiggling his eyebrows with a mildly concerned Minseok next to him. Baekhyun opens his mouth to responds before just snapping it close. “Shut up,” he mumbles and goes to his room.

He hears Lu Han yell “Called it!” from the living room.

x x x

Baekhyun doesn’t plan on returning to Chanyeol’s so soon after he’s finally realized -- and accepted -- the feelings he harbors toward the other. He instead plans to wait it out, bide his time until he's over it or until he can figure out how to ignore his feelings, whichever comes first. Unfortunately, he doesn’t get the luxury of a choice.

He’s okay with Lu Han. He truly is; he’s gotten used to his incessant teasing and continual presence in his (Minseok’s) apartment, but there are certain lines that he’s not willing to cross; that aren’t supposed to be crossed.

There’s a manual out there somewhere, Baekhyun’s sure, that defines exactly what is acceptable when dating someone’s roommate. The golden rule, though, would have to be to keep all forms of fornification in a private place, away from unwilling eyes.

Of course, Lu Han just has to violate this.

And Baekhyun supposes it could be his own fault. He had announced that he was going out and that in itself is a green light in Lu Han’s book. But he had said he’d be gone ten, fifteen minutes tops and that was -- or at least should -- definitely not be a green light in anyone’s book.

But here he is, front door open just a bit to reveal the sight of Lu Han and Minseok doing the unspeakable. For longer than he’d like to admit, he stands frozen in shock but the urge to puke draws him out of his daze and he slams the door closed and darts toward the apartment across the hall.
He knocks on the door furiously and the door swings open almost immediately. Baekhyun doesn’t wait for Chanyeol to invite him in as he barrels past the giant and throws himself on the couch. "I need to wash my eyes... With bleach." He whines as he presses the palms of his hand into his eyes.

"What's up with you?" Chanyeol asks as he shuts the front door and makes his way over to the older.

"I... I saw things that should've never be seen by anyone."

Chanyeol laughs and Baekhyun doesn't even need to look to know that his face is doing the weird twitchy thing. "Shut up, don't mock my pain." He groans at the memory, "I think I'm scarred for life."

"Well you're in luck," Chanyeol smiles as he slips into the kitchen. "What better way to forget than with a little alcohol?" He holds up two 6 packs of beer triumphantly.

It doesn’t take much to get a buzz going on but Baekhyun continues to guzzle down can after can long after the wooziness had begun to kick in. “You might want to slow down.” Chanyeol suggests as he extracts the can of beer from Baekhyun’s hand and moves it out of his reach.

“You don’t understand.” Baekhyun whines as he stretches to get the can. Chanyeol only moves it further away.

“I don’t. You want to talk about it?”

It is then when Baekhyun realizes that in his effort to retrieve the stolen beer can, he’d settled into a rather unconventional situation, reaching across the expanse of Chanyeol for his drink. He gives up his fruitless endeavors and quickly clamors away to lean back onto the foot of the couch behind him. “I’d really much rather bash my head repeatedly with a blunt object until I forget everything I saw.” He mumbles, bowing his head. He himself is hyper aware of his reddening face but hell if he’ll let Chanyeol see it.

“You’re overreacting so much.” Chanyeol laughs as he sets Baekhyun’s drink to his side and bends back to stretch his arm above his head. Baekhyun tries his best to look away, to not notice that little strip of abs revealed from that action but he can’t help but glance back to Chanyeol when he feels an arm settle around his shoulder to pull him closer to the warm body next to him.

He’s drunk but he’s not drunk enough for this kind of thing to not quicken his heartbeat. “He calls Minseok Baozi when they do it.” He blurts out.

Chanyeol quiets. “... I don’t know how to respond to this piece of information,” He admits after a while and settles for giving Baekhyun a squeeze for comfort.

“I don’t know how to live with this piece of information.” Baekhyun groans, “Now give me my beer back.”

Wordlessly, Chanyeol passes back his drink and they lapse into a comfortable silence as they continue to drink, Baekhyun still tucked closely to Chanyeol’s side. “Goddamnit.” Baekhyun breathes after a while and there’s a low rumble from the other as a response. “Can we at least talk about something to get my mind off of... that?”

Chanyeol tenses and suddenly the grip around Baekhyun loosens. “I-I’m sorry. I should’ve known to... Okay. Sorry.” He hurries and Baekhyun can feel the larger figure fidget beneath him. Baekhyun takes this opportunity to push himself just a little more into Chanyeol.

“Don’t apologize. Just talk about something.” He laughs and feels a breath of relief when Chanyeol’s
grip tightens once again to bind Baekhyun to his side. He feels so safe here, so at ease.

The night runs long but Chanyeol's supply of beer seems to be more than enough for them (well, mainly Baekhyun) to drink their problems away.

As Baekhyun reaches over for the next beer can, he offhandedly comments to break the silence: "You don't talk much."

"On the contrary, I've been told that I talk too much."

"No, like when you're drunk."

Chanyeol only shrugs, "I'm just not really all that drunk right now."

"Bullshit. You drank just as much as me," Baekhyun says, pointing out Chanyeol's pile of empty cans of beer.

"Actually," Chanyeol laughs, pulling out two more cans from somewhere behind him. "I've had more."

"Why -- no, how? How are you not drunk yet?" Baekhyun whines.

Chanyeol only shrugs, "High tolerance, I guess?"

"That's not humanly possible." He pouts as he shoves another can at Chanyeol. "Then drink."

Just as Chanyeol reaches for it, Baekhyun pulls it away. "I changed my mind," He states, trying not to get distracted by Chanyeol's cute little frown. "Let's play a game. Like a question game -- something to pass the time."

"That sounds ominous," Chanyeol smirks but nods anyways, "But okay, let's do this."

Baekhyun sits up and turns to the side to look at Chanyeol. "Okay, I'll go first. What's your…" He trails off for a second, wracking his brain for some kind of question. "...favourite colour?" He finishes.

Chanyeol grins, "Wow. Really digging deep, huh?"

"Oh, shut up," Baekhyun grumbles, playfully slapping Chanyeol's thigh. "We'll get there, just slowly."

Chanyeol rolls his eyes but answers anyways, "Black, I guess."

"You guess?"

"It's black. Happy?"

Baekhyun cracks a smile. "Wow, talk about morbid," He laughs, "But your turn."

"Well then what's your favourite colour?" Chanyeol asks.

"What an original question," Baekhyun snorts. "And gray."

Chanyeol laughs, "Yeah like you're the one to talk."

"Grey's not morbid!" Baekhyun protests, waving his arms around rapidly, "I could be talking about
light gray for all you know."

"Well, are you talking about light gray?" Chanyeol challenges.

"...No. Shut up. It's my turn."

The game continues for a couple more rounds and only really mundane information like favourite song, favourite food, and such is exchanged. Whether it’s because of his naturally short attention span or because he’s drunk and wants to do something exciting, he doesn’t know, but Baekhyun’s bored and is ready to step it up.

"Is Jongdae your boyfriend?" Baekhyun blurts out at the next opportunity and his eyes go wide. Even in his drunken inhibition, the cold splash of regret hits him immediately.

Chanyeol lowers his beer and squints at Baekhyun. "Ew, no."

"Oh. So," Baekhyun turns to the younger and swings a thigh across the his legs, alcohol pumping liquid courage into his blood as he squares up on the other. If he were sober, there would be at least seven different warning signals going off in his head, but he's not; his mind is silent.

Chanyeol eyes him warily as Baekhyun starts to shift his weight onto him. The older straddles the man, his heart beating faster and faster. "Is this okay?" He moves forward to softly press their lips together and then pulls away shortly after to look into Chanyeol's eyes, searching for acceptance.

Chanyeol blinks at him a couple of times, face devoid of any emotions apart from shock, before melting into a smile. "Of course," He murmurs before he tilts his chin up to connect their lips again.

x x x

It’s in the morning when it finally sinks in just what he had done. Baekhyun’s painfully hungover, a particularly intense headache pounding on his brain, but he can’t stop thinking about how he might have just *fucked everything up* as he rolls over and buries his face into his pillow.

Minseok, being the perfect angel of a roommate he is, comes in only a couple of minutes later, a small rap against the open door alerting Baekhyun of his presence. The noise makes his head want to explode but he’s happy to see Minseok nonetheless and Baekhyun childishly stretches out his arms to beckon his roommate over. Minseok immediately waddles over. He’s balancing a plate of food and a mug of coffee on a serving tray and Baekhyun sluggishly sits up as Minseok works to prop up the legs of the tray so it stands properly.

His hands are immediately drawn to the small pill that's lying next to the glass of water. "Painkiller?" Baekhyun asks, already positioning the pill at the entrance of his mouth.

"Ibuprofen," Minseok affirms and watches Baekhyun swallow down the pill with ease.

“Have I ever told you I love you?” Baekhyun says as he pops a piece of bacon into his mouth. “Because I do. A lot.”

Minseok hums noncommittally as he slides next to Baekhyun, pulling the covers over his legs much to Baekhyun’s weak protests. “So what happened last night?” His roommate asks casually as he picks at the threads of the blanket.

“I drank too much,” Baekhyun manages to say between mouthfuls of egg, “And I may or may not have ruined my relationship with my only other friend in this building complex.”
“So no biggie,” Minseok shrugs and Baekhyun gives him a look.

“I don’t appreciate you making light of my problems,” He mumbles.

“But they are small problems,” Minseok reasons, inching closer to Baekhyun. “In fact there’s no problem. You like him, you kissed him, where’s your--”

“How do you know I kissed him?”

“You’re really chatty when you’re drunk.”

“Hyung,” Baekhyun whines, waving his fork at Minseok accusingly, “Don’t take advantage of my loose inhibitions and nonexistent judgment.”

“It’s not my fault you came into my room and woke me up at some ungodly hour, rambling on about how soft Chanyeol’s lips are.” Minseok rolls his eyes, reaching over to steal a piece of bacon from Baekhyun’s plate. Baekhyun winces at Minseok’s words, opting to stab at his egg instead of validating that with a response. “I think it’s cute, really. You just move in and then there’s a love interest like right across the hall. Bam. Like destiny.”

Baekhyun’s lips settle into a frown. “You know I don’t believe in that bullshit.”

“It might not be as stupid as you make it out to be,” Minseok shrugs before stealing a sip of the Baekhyun’s coffee and then grimacing at the bitterness. “But seriously, things seem to be going fine if last night was any sort of indication. What’s the problem?”

“I,” Baekhyun starts with a particularly aggressive stab, “I just don’t know if I’m ready?”

“Because of…?” Minseok trails off when Baekhyun gives him a look.

“Yes, because of him.” Baekhyun bites out. And he hates how affected he is by the mere mention of him, by the mere thought of him. Baekhyun reclaims his mug of coffee and raises the cup to his lip, taking a long scalding sip.

“Did you just burn your tongue?” Minseok asked, the concern present in his voice almost completely hidden by the utter amusement in his tone.

“Fuck off.” Baekhyun mumbles, setting the mug down with a bit more force than necessary. He cups his fingers around the cup, seeping in the warmth of the ceramic. “I just-- I don’t know.”

Minseok sets a hand on his thigh as a comforting gesture of some sort. “It doesn’t have to be as…” Minseok pauses, waiting for the right word to come back to him. “Serious as the last one, I mean.”

Baekhyun shoots him a confused glance, “So like… You want me to use Chanyeol to get over myself?”

“No no no,” Minseok rushes out and then sighs, “...Yes, maybe, I don’t know! Just… you like him, right?” He pauses, awaiting Baekhyun’s affirmation. Baekhyun nods before moving his eyes to watch the steam drift up from his mug. “Then just -- god this sounds so bad -- have fun with it. You don’t have to know how deep you’re going to get into this so just… experiment. See how things turn out: If it’s great then maybe you’ll consider getting serious; if it’s bad then you can break things off easily. I just--” Minseok makes a face, obviously frustrated that his words aren’t coming out like he had hoped they would, “You’ll never know whether you’re ready or not until you try.”

“That…That…” Baekhyun tapers off, taking a deep breath before he tries again, “That was cheesy.”
"Your mom is cheesy" is Minseok's automatic reply and Baekhyun elbows him in the arm. They share a laugh, the tension broken by their immature sense of humor, but Minseok's face soon draws back into seriousness.

"But really," He says, "Think about what I said."

They exchange a meaningful look accompanied by a brief moment of silence. "Well," Minseok starts, "I'm going to leave you alone to eat or sleep or whatever you like to do when you're hungover."

“Hey, Minseok?” Baekhyun asks just as Minseok starts to get up, “You just ate like half of my bacon.” He points out.

“It’s just a small price you have to pay for my wonderful presence,” Minseok winks and Baekhyun can’t help but smile back.

When he awakens a couple hours later when the sun has already begun to set, he trudges out of his room in search of something to drink. The moment he manages to get out his room, he’s practically tackled by Lu Han. He stumbles backward, trying to shove the hugging Lu Han off of him but to no avail. It’s too much effort and he ends up just letting him be while he asks with as much venom as he can muster, “What the hell are you doing?”

“Hugging you.” Lu Han answers as if it’s the most logical thing in the world. “Because you just won me $20.”

“And how did I do that?”

“You got together with Chanyeol!” Lu Han cheered and his voice is way too loud.

“You made bets on me?!” He nearly screeches.

“Well of course,” Lu Han shrugs as if this is the most normal thing in the world. And maybe it is. For him. “What else do you think we do for entertainment?”

Seeing Baekhyun’s face, Minseok rushes in to clarify, “Not on like everything. Just like the little things.”

“How is me getting together with Chanyeol a little thing?” Baekhyun asks and Minseok visibly stiffens.

 Okay, so we only made bets on the little things plus maybe one or two big things.”

Baekhyun groans, “What else did you bet on?”

“Mainly just Lu Han’s prediction.” Minseok explains, “Like stuff about Jongdae mostly.”

“And about who I’m dating, apparently.”

Lu Han shrugs. “Yeah. And that. But mostly my predictions.”

“You guys are impossible.”

x x x
Baekhyun takes the first day to mull over Minseok's word, to weigh out his options and figure out what he's going to do. He spends the next two working up enough courage to go through with his choice.

*I'm coming over,* he texts Chanyeol. In the back of his head he hopes that Chanyeol doesn’t reply, or says that he’s not home so that Baekhyun can use that as some semblance of an excuse as to why he wasn’t able to clear up things with Chanyeol for yet another day.

He’s disappointed when his phone vibrates, displaying a short *Okay* as the response.

He knocks on the door.

It opens about two minutes later to the sight of a disheveled Chanyeol. His hair’s a mess, as if he’s just gotten out of bed, and there’s a toothbrush shoved in his mouth, some toothpaste foaming at his mouth. He grunts in greeting, his mouth too full to form a word.

“Sorry,” Baekhyun says sheepishly, “I should’ve come later, huh?”

There’s a considerable bit of muddled groans from Chanyeol that Baekhyun can’t seem to decipher. He’s about to question it when Chanyeol so kindly raises a finger and then races back into the apartment, down the hallway, and into the bathroom. With a quiet snort at Chanyeol’s actions, Baekhyun lets himself into the apartment, quietly shutting the door behind him.

He stands awkwardly in the middle of the living room, not sure whether he should take a seat or just wait for Chanyeol to come back. He’s saved from actually making a decision when Chanyeol’s head pops out from behind the bathroom door. “Hey, go to my room, I have something to show you.”

Baekhyun’s a bit shocked; he’s never actually been in Chanyeol’s room before, but he at least knows where it is. “Oh… Okay…” He says uncertainly as he makes his way over to Chanyeol’s bedroom.

“I’ll be there in a second,” Chanyeol promises as Baekhyun passes by.

He’s never really thought about it before, but the room is as he would expect: not too messy but with enough things displaced to give a lived-in look. The window sill is large, allowing in enough light to fully illuminate the room without the help of electricity.

He doesn’t quite know where to sit, not sure whether it’d be weird to go sit on the bed or rude to move the papers off of the chair and sit there, so he remains standing. Chanyeol comes back in soon after.

“You can sit on the bed if you want.” Chanyeol says as he enters the room, immediately noticing Baekhyun’s discomfort.

“Oh okay.” Baekhyun obeys and takes a seat on the bed, keeping his legs together and his hands folded in his lap.

“You look really uncomfortable.” Chanyeol points out.

“What?” Baekhyun lies back and sprawls his limbs all over the bed to take up as much space as he possibly can. “Is this better?”

“Much.” Chanyeol laughs and closes the door behind himself before he moves towards the bed. Immediately, Baekhyun sits back up.

"You're closing the door? Is this your way of making a move on me?" Baekhyun says bemusedly
and Chanyeol only scoffs.

"You wish," He rolls his eyes as he approaches the bed. Before he actually gets on, though, he kneels at the foot of the bed and reaches to get something from underneath. "I just don't like leaving my door open; it's like a personal pet peeve."

"I see," Baekhyun absentmindedly dismisses as he eyes Chanyeol sliding something black and rectangular from beneath the bed. "What are you even doing?"

"Getting this." Chanyeol grins up at Baekhyun as he sits down on the floor right in front of the case. He flips open the locks to reveal an acoustic guitar. He runs his hands over the lacquered wood a couple of times before lifting it out of its case, plucking halfheartedly at the strings. There’s a look of concentration on his face as he carefully turns the tuners until he reaches his preferred pitch. “Listen to this,” He says after a while, finally glancing up to see the incredulous look Baekhyun is giving him. “I’ve been working on this for a couple of days.”

He recognizes it after the second note. “Oh my god.” He breathes out, watching Chanyeol’s fingers dance across the fretboard in fascination. “Is this…?”

Chanyeol hums in agreement but it isn’t until he finally hits the chorus when he’s comfortable enough playing to actually provide a more in-depth answer. “Yeah, the other night, I remember you saying that it was your favourite song and it’s a song I like a lot so I just figured…” He shrugs off the ending, but the action messes with his concentration and he has to focus a bit to get back on rhythm.

Baekhyun gapes, “I don’t remember most of what happened that night and yet you somehow manage to remember something as tiny as that?”

“A favourite song is hardly something small,” Chanyeol laughs, his hands beginning to fumble over the strings as he loses his concentration. “Fuck,” He swears as his fingers trip over each other and then eventually come to a stop, “It’s still in the working.” He says a little sheepishly.

“Get up.” Baekhyun orders and there’s confusion on Chanyeol’s face.

“Did… Did you not like it?” Chanyeol asks, setting his guitar back in its case. “Did I slaughter it that badly?” He laughs but the slight tones of uncertainty stick out.

Baekhyun shakes his head and wordlessly pats at the space on the bed next to him, a silent gesture for Chanyeol to sit next to him. Chanyeol obeys, but hesitantly, watching Baekhyun carefully as he takes a seat. “Should I have waited? Until it sounded a bit better?” He chuckles nervously but Baekhyun shuts him up with his lips.

Turning Chanyeol’s face toward him, Baekhyun raises his hand to run through Chanyeol’s hair before settling onto the nape of Chanyeol’s neck. Chanyeol is frozen at first and it takes a good couple of seconds before he’s kissing back, pressing back into Baekhyun’s lips.

Baekhyun is the one to pull back for a gasp for air, but he keeps their faces close, their foreheads touching as he steadies his breath.

“Is this going to be a thing now?” Chanyeol asks softly, stroking the side of Baekhyun’s neck, his finger circling one of the more prominent moles.

Baekhyun laughs. “I hope so.” He whispers before moving in to initiate a second kiss.

x x x
Their relationship progresses smoothly, slowly, to the point that it's rather difficult to tell whether they're actually dating or if it's just some odd extension of friendship.

Either way, Jongdae still comes over frequently. And that peaks Baekhyun’s curiosity.

It’s one thing to come four times a week, every week, on the same days. It’s another to spend these visits camped out on the couch while Baekhyun and Chanyeol hang out in another room.

And Baekhyun’s questioned it, why Jongdae spends so much time around the apartment even when Chanyeol isn’t there entertaining him but Chanyeol had only shrugged. “I dunno, I guess he just doesn’t like his own apartment?” Was the only excuse Chanyeol could come up with.

“Still...” Baekhyun had replied, pursing his lips in thought.

“Hey,” Chanyeol had said and Baekhyun had raised his head to glance up at his boyfriend. Chanyeol had pressed a soft kiss to his lips, “You evacuate your own apartment for... reasons. Maybe Jongdae does the same?”

Baekhyun had been too busy blushing to give an answer.

He doesn’t think much of it anymore, passing it off as some kind of weird buy-one-get-one free package deal.

They do spend ample time alone, though. Baekhyun’s gotten good enough at remembering Jongdae’s schedule to come over at times when the other isn’t around. He does, however, make some mistakes from time to time.

“Hey!” Baekhyun says as soon as the door swings open but he freezes when he’s greeted with Jongdae’s face instead of Chanyeol’s.

“Problem?” Jongdae asks, an eyebrows cocked in question.

“I uh,” Baekhyun stammers, “I wasn’t expecting you here today...”

“Sorry for the inconvenience, princess,” Jongdae winks. Baekhyun pretends to gag but that only serves to heighten Jongdae’s amusement. “But I’ll leave you alone so you can have quality time with your man.” Every word that’s coming out of Jongdae’s mouth is greasy and embarrassing and Baekhyun fakes a punch at his arm for subjecting him to that kind of pain. Jongdae doesn’t even flinch.

A little disappointed by the lack of reaction, Baekhyun ventures further into the apartment but still no sign of his boyfriend.

“Your darling is in the bedroom.” Jongdae winks again and Baekhyun flips him off. Jongdae only laughs, slouching against the wall to pull out his gaming device from where it had been hidden away in one of his jacket’s inner pockets.

As per Jongdae’s instructions, Baekhyun goes into Chanyeol’s bedroom to find Chanyeol on the bed, humming softly, strumming on his guitar, while bobbing his head to whatever’s playing through his oversized headphones. “Hey,” Baekhyun calls out but Chanyeol doesn’t hear. He goes closer.

“Hey,” He tries again, this time putting a hand on Chanyeol’s shoulder to get his attention. Chanyeol nearly falls off the bed.

“Baekhyun!” Chanyeol exclaims, his eyes full of glee as he pulls out his headphones. “When did
you get here?” He sets down his guitar next to him before opening up his arms for a hug. Baekhyun laughs and goes in, wrapping his arms securely around Chanyeol’s neck.

“Just now,” Baekhyun whispers before pressing a kiss to the back of Chanyeol’s ears. “What were you playing?”

“Just something that I’ve been working on.” Chanyeol answers and he practically jumps up off of the bed. “You want to hear it?” He asks excitedly.

Baekhyun nods, detaching himself from Chanyeol to take a seat on the bed. He expects Chanyeol to grab his guitar and start playing but instead he stands up, approaching the bedroom door. “What are you doing?” Baekhyun asks with a puzzled expression.

“The door.” Chanyeol says as if it’s enough of an explanation.

“I don’t think Jongdae would mind hearing you play guitar? I mean he’s pretty immersed in his game…”

“It’s not that,” Chanyeol laughs, successfully shutting the door and returning back to the bed. “It just bothers me.” He shrugs, settling next to Baekhyun.

“Oh yeah, you and your weird door thing. I forgot.”

“It’s not weird.” Chanyeol pouts as he reaches behind himself to get the guitar. Baekhyun’s about to protest but Chanyeol holds a hand over his mouth. “Now be quiet and listen.” He grins and removes his hand to start playing. The strumming of the guitar is then accompanied by the low hum of Chanyeol's voice.

It's not a long composition, barely spanning over about a minute and a half, but it's something else. Bordering on a mix between a ballad and a lullaby, even without words the melody is bittersweet.

"Wow." Baekhyun breathes out when Chanyeol finishes, glancing up from under his bangs to give him a look, "You're a graphic designer. Where the hell is all of this musical talent coming from?"

To hide his quickly reddening face, Chanyeol wipes at his face, averting his eyes, but Baekhyun can see the effects of his compliment. "It's not really that good..." Chanyeol mumbles, blushing.

"Don't sell yourself short," Baekhyun grins. He reaches over to the guitar and Chanyeol lets him grab it from his hands. "I've always wanted to play..." He muses absentmindedly as he strokes at the wood.

"You want me to teach you?" Chanyeol asks and Baekhyun's eyes light up.

"Really?"

"I'm not the best of teachers, just a forewarning.” Chanyeol adds in bashfully. He moves off the bed and stands himself in front of Baekhyun. He carefully begins to reposition Baekhyun's arm.

After a bit of jostling, Baekhyun finally managed to comfortably hold the guitar but it takes a bit longer than he would care to admit. Baekhyun laughs despite himself. "Well I'm not the best of students."

Chanyeol returns a grin. "What a pair we make."
They finally stop whenever Chanyeol announces that he has to go to the bathroom. They’ve kept at it for about an hour and a half and true to his words, Baekhyun is most definitely not a good student. His fingers, while slender and long, have a hard time arranging themselves in the correct chord position and he has a hard time remembering the frets, having to constantly glance over at the top of the fretboard to count off the frets every couple of notes. He’s diligent, though, determined to achieve and Chanyeol is patient, calmly rearranging Baekhyun’s fingers and pointing at helpful tips when need be. By the end of their session, Baekhyun’s successfully learns about two, albeit terribly simple, songs.

"I’ll be right back." Chanyeol promises and steps out of the room.

“Can I get something to drink?” Baekhyun asks, following Chanyeol out but taking a left into the living room. He finds Jongdae splayed out on the couch as per usual, immersed in his Pokemon game.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol yells back his reply as he hurries into the bathroom, “There should be something in the fridge, just go grab it.”

Baekhyun nods before he realizes that Chanyeol can’t actually see him. He steps into the kitchen with the intentions to raid the fridge but before he can even manages to grip the refrigerator’s handle, there’s Jongdae’s body wedged between the appliance and Baekhyun. Baekhyun doesn’t even remember seeing him move. “Hello?” Baekhyun gives a small smile, his features twisted in clear confusion.

Jongdae gives him a hard look that softens away as quick as it had come. He beckons Baekhyun closer as if he has a secret to tell; Baekhyun obliges.

“Pst,” Jongdae whispers and Baekhyun can practically feel Jongdae’s little smirk on the shell of his ear. “Don’t tell Chanyeol, but there’s a surprise in there. I wouldn’t open it if I were you.”

Baekhyun leans away to stare at Jongdae. “Surprise?”

“Open the fridge and you’ll be buried in a month’s worth of groceries.”

“Oh. Okay.”

“So now you know.” Jongdae smiles and then practically hauls Baekhyun back into Chanyeol’s bedroom, “So just continue on with your little… whatever you do in there.” There’s a final smile before the door closes and Baekhyun can’t help but feel that whole exchange was weird. He brushes it off as nothing and goes to wait on the bed, plucking absently at the strings of the guitar left abandoned on the bed.

Chanyeol returns about a minute later. “You get your drink?” He asks, wiping his wet hands on the back of his pants.

Baekhyun shrugs, taking particular interest in the guitar’s A string as he plucks it more rapidly.

Chanyeol goes rigid abruptly and all of a sudden, he’s pressing down on the strings, stopping Baekhyun’s constant picking. “What do you mean?” He asks. Baekhyun can’t help but feel a bit of aggression in his voice. He shies away from Chanyeol’s balking figure.

He averts his eyes and suddenly Chanyeol is coming closer, his eyes full of anger and what Baekhyun thinks to be fear. “What do you mean?” Chanyeol repeats, his voice harsh.

“Jongdae stopped me from opening the door.” Baekhyun says, raising his hands above his head as if
to prove innocence, “I can’t tell you anymore than that. I’m sworn to secrecy.”

Chanyeol freezes and his anger dissipates as he shrinks back in relief. There’s a silence in the air as Chanyeol exhales. “Fucking Jongdae…” He whispers, shaking his head.

“I don’t think what he has planned for you is that bad?” Baekhyun comments, not really getting why Chanyeol is overreacting so much over a harmless (probably) prank.

“It’s just…” Chanyeol starts and then shakes off the thought, “Nevermind.”

“Just,” Baekhyun pauses, trying to think of a way to lighten the odd mood that’s been set in place, “Don’t tell him I told you.” He tries and Chanyeol cracks a smile.

“No worries, your secret is safe with me.”

x x x

There’s one time when he comes over where only Jongdae’s in. It’s odd, really, why Jongdae is alone in Chanyeol’s apartment, and ever since Baekhyun and Chanyeol had started dating, Baekhyun had pretty much stopped wondering -- speculating -- about Jongdae’s reasons for visits.

It’s now that these theories -- suspicions -- come back to Baekhyun. It’s not so much about wondering if the two are dating (because that's obviously not the case), but rather why Jongdae’s always over. He’s got to have some kind of reason and Baekhyun's going to figure it out.

“Chanyeol’s not here right now,” Jongdae says as soon as he opens the door.

“Oh.” Baekhyun replies, expression a little pinched in confusion, “Do you know when he’s coming back?”

“No clue,” Jongdae admits, “But you’re free to come in a wait. It is, after all,” He stops here to wiggle his eyebrows obnoxiously, “Your boyfriend’s apartment.”

His stomach lurks. He knows that he’s in some sort of relationship with Chanyeol but they've never really come up with a formal definition for it. Hearing an official name for it makes his heart drop to his stomach and he’d rather not ponder on as to why.

He doesn’t blush, though. There’s absolutely no reason, like blushing, that makes him duck his head as he pushes his way into the apartment. “You’d make great friends with Lu Han, I swear.” Baekhyun mutters under his breath and Jongdae, apparently picking up on Baekhyun’s little exhale, only hums agreeably.

When Baekhyun goes to sit down on one side of the couch, Jongdae taking a seat on the other, Baekhyun realizes that he’s never actually been alone with the other. However, it’s Jongdae that so kindly voices this out.

“Isn’t it weird,” He asks as swings his legs up and onto Baekhyun’s lap, onto an area considerably closer to his crotch than what Baekhyun is comfortable with. He doesn’t know how to remove the legs without seeming rude or having to resort to actually touching Jongdae’s feet. “We’ve never been alone together?”

“Are you making some kind of move on me?” Baekhyun deadpans and he settles for inching himself close to his side of the couch until Jongdae’s feet are out of the danger zone. The couch is kind of small so Jongdae’s heels are still resting on the edge of his thigh, but it’s improvement nonetheless.
“No, I’m quite okay.” Jongdae shakes his head before adding as an afterthought, “I’ll leave that kinda thing for Chanyeol.” He winks cheesily and Baekhyun gives him a blank stare.

Things are quiet for a while because Baekhyun has never really been around Jongdae enough to find something like a common interest. He squirms in his seat for a while before eventually settling for an oh-so-wonderful conversation starter: “Do you have keys to this place?”

“Yeah, why?” That signature smirk of his is plastered on his face, “Lover boy jealous?”

“N-no!” Baekhyun sputters, a little louder than necessary. Jongdae winces but smiles pleasantly nonetheless. “I just... You... you...” Without really completing his thought, Baekhyun trails off with a pout. “I thought you guys were dating before.” He mumbles, almost inaudibly.

Jongdae practically chokes. As he’s pounding on his chest, coughing on his own saliva, he shoots Baekhyun a bewildered look. “Why would you ever think that?” He hisses out, looking almost offended by Baekhyun’s statement.

Baekhyun shrugs, “I don’t know. I mean you were -- are -- always here. That’s a little suspicious.”

“Haven’t you ever heard of friends?! You know, people who go over to your house who don’t happen to have sex with you?” In his exasperation, he manages to wink at Baekhyun and Baekhyun’s tries his best to keep a straight face, to control the blush heating up his face.

“Yeah. That’s what I thought too,” Baekhyun answers but then shrinks back, “But then Lu Han was always giving me weird ideas.”

“I have never met, nor do I have the intentions to meet, this Lu Han but I think the moral of the story here is to never listen to Lu Han.”

“But his arguments seemed so valid... I mean you do come over exactly four times a week. On the exact same days.”

“Maybe I don’t have anywhere else to go...” Jongdae says solemnly and Baekhyun really doesn’t know how to answer that.

Thankfully, he doesn’t have to when Jongdae ends up cracking up with laughter. “I’m just kidding. Oh my god you should’ve seen your face.”

Baekhyun narrows his eyes, “I don’t know. It’s a viable possibility.”

“Well that’s offensive.” Jongdae sniffs but ends up breaking into a smile, “Just kidding. I’ll have you know I’m an anesthesiologist so my hours are pretty short but the money is still pretty great. I just like Chanyeol’s place because, y’know, free food and all.”

“Still,” Baekhyun argues and he really doesn’t know why he’s persisting but he continues anyways, “You still come here really way too often. On like the same days.”

“Wow someone sounds jealous.” Jongdae smirks, “Maybe I’m just free on those days. Did that ever occur to Lu Han?”

This time around, he doesn’t have a rebuttal. “A lot of things don’t occur to Lu Han.” Baekhyun finally admits.

“Well glad that we’ve got the fact that I never have and never will harbor any sort of romantic interests toward that loser Chanyeol,” Jongdae stops to rest a hand on Baekhyun’s arm and give him...
a sympathetic look, “No offense.”

“None taken.”

x x x

Baekhyun approaches Minseok as soon as he returns home. "You're about to owe Lu Han about twenty more dollars."

"What do you mean?" Minseok asks, obviously distracted by his work in front of him.

"Jongdae really is an anesthesiologist."

And then Minseok finally looks up from his textbook with a look of absolute terror. "No," he whispers, "How did he even know that?"

Baekhyun only shrugs his shoulders sympathetically, "Better luck next time." He's about to walk away when he feels one of Minseok's hands grip around his wrist.

"Wait." Minseok hisses, eyes desperate, "Lu Han... Doesn't need to know about this information."

"I thought your relationship was one built off of trust."

"What Lu Han doesn't know won't hurt him."

"It might financially."

Minseok practically snaps his pen in half. "I'm the one who is letting you live under my roof for practically nothing. Your loyalty lies with me and you will not betray me like this." He practically snarls and Baekhyun usually never sees this aggressive side of Minseok unless they're watching football or playing Mario Kart.

"Whatever you say, hyung." Baekhyun awkwardly laughs, backing away from Minseok's desk slowly.

x x x

With or without the presence of Jongdae, though, their relationship progresses as they learn more and more about each other every day.

One of the these being that Chanyeol likes driving. Baekhyun learns that whenever Chanyeol suddenly offers to go on a spur of the moment drive around town just as Baekhyun’s typical self-imposed curfew rolls around. Baekhyun has no reason to say no.

Down in the parking garage of the apartment complex (where Baekhyun has never bothered venturing down since really, there’s no use for a car-less person like himself), Chanyeol ushers him over to a sleek black two-seater Lexus. He thinks it some kind of luxury car but his car knowledge is minimal at best.

“Nice car.” He muses, and he means it. He doesn’t know much about cars but if the dent-free exterior and the shiny paint job are of any indication, the car is in great condition.

“Her name is Dara.” Chanyeol pipes in helpfully and Baekhyun can’t help but laugh.

“So you’re the kind of dork who actually names his car.”
“It forms a connection with them!” Chanyeol halfheartedly argues, pulling his keys out of his pockets to unlock the car before stepping forward to open Baekhyun’s door for him.

“Whatever you say, Park.” Baekhyun sniggers and there’s a frown on Chanyeol’s face as he uses his arms to nudge Baekhyun fully into the car before slamming the car door closed. About a minute later, Chanyeol joins Baekhyun in the car, sliding into the driver’s seat. “So are we going anywhere specific?

"Uh,” Chanyeol says as he sticks his keys into the car and turns, revving it to life. "Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Not really,” Baekhyun as he moves to put on his seatbelt. "Wherever you want is fine by me."

"Then let me take you to this place."

Baekhyun only grins, "Whatever you want."

There’s a blanket of silence as they drive, thin, but there. It’s not uncomfortable, though; Baekhyun seems to take comfort in it as he reclines back just the slightest bit and leans up against the frame of the door. Chanyeol turns on music but he keeps the volume on the low, the air filled with the sound of his voice humming along, rather than the actual music of the song. Not that it matters, Baekhyun much rather prefers Chanyeol’s voice.

They go on like this for what seems like a while and from the looks of it, Chanyeol is either taking him somewhere very far away or nowhere at all seeing how he seems to be driving away from the city. “Where are we going?” Baekhyun asks offhandedly whenever he notices them reaching the outskirts of the cities. To his surprise, just as soon as they approach the city boundaries, Chanyeol makes a quick, probably illegal, u-turn in the middle of the road. There’s no one else around so it doesn’t really matter, but it has Baekhyun diverting his full attention to the driver. “What are you doing?”

“Driving back towards the city,” Chanyeol answers.

“Then what about the first question? Any idea where we’re going?”

At that, Chanyeol seems to blanch, adopting a sheepish frown soon after. “I had a destination.”

“Past tense?” Baekhyun questions with a raised eyebrow.

“Past tense.” The driver affirms, “I had a place I wanted to go to but then I realized that it’s probably closed at this time of night.”

“And you didn’t think of voicing this concern until after we were about an hour into our little driving adventure?” In his voice, there’s no semblance of anger or irritation, but rather just amusement, plain and simple.

“It occurred to me.” Chanyeol starts off quietly and he has to focus his attention back on the road again. “But only when we were already pretty far into our travels. I was going to tell you but I kept putting it off because—” He cuts himself off, sparing just a quick glance at Baekhyun before gripping at the steering wheel with what seems to be a look of embarrassment. “I wanted to spend more time with you.” He mumbles out. He speaks quickly but not quickly enough so that Baekhyun cannot understand.

Baekhyun hums, “You could just ask me to stay longer if you want, you know?”
“You always seem so rushed to leave at a certain time,” Chanyeol shrugs, "I just figured you had somewhere to be, something to do."

"And I just felt like I'd be overstaying my welcome if I stayed over." Baekhyun replies back.

"What?" Chanyeol asks and there's this look in his eye, "Stay over? I didn't say anything about wanting you to stay the night, you pervert." He teases and Baekhyun's immediate response is to smack him on the thigh.

"We both know that's exactly what you're alluding to here," Baekhyun says but before Chanyeol can refute, he continues, not affording the opportunity for the other to interrupt. "Now I don't know what you usually do when you go joyriding but I'm hungry. We should stop by somewhere to eat."

"What even is open at this time of night?"

Baekhyun shrugs, "I'm sure there's something."

There is, indeed, something but it just so happens to be a 24 hour convenience store located about five minutes away. It's a bit run down but it's clean, manned by a very apathetic cashier who so helpfully leads them to where their water boiler is. He leaves them to their own devices afterward with only the wise words of “Don’t, like, fuck everything up”.

“I’m not gonna lie,” Chanyeol starts out as he clicks the water boiler on before taking a seat, “I’ve never done this before?”

“Done this before? As in eaten at a gas station or gone out to eat in the middle of the night with someone as cute as me?” Baekhyun smiles mischievously, taking the seat right next to Chanyeol.

“The former,” Chanyeol answers distractedly, grabbing two pairs of chopsticks and then handing one to Baekhyun.

At this, Baekhyun can’t help but pout, “So you’ve done this with someone as cute as me before?”

Chanyeol just shrugs.

“Well,” Baekhyun says, filling in for Chanyeol’s silence, “At least I get to say that I was the first to bring you to eat at a convenience store. I mean, what kind of life did you live without me?”

Chanyeol only hums in agreement as he breaks apart his wooden chopsticks, “What kind of life, indeed?"

They get back late that night, noisily fumbling up the stairs at an inappropriate time of night even though they’re drunk off nothing but sheer ecstasy. Whenever they’ve reached their floor, to Chanyeol’s surprise, Baekhyun doesn’t break off to return to his own apartment. Instead, he stays rooted at Chanyeol’s side, laughing at something he had said. Whether it had actually been a joke, Baekhyun doesn’t know. Everything seems unnecessarily funny at 4 am.

Chanyeol doesn’t question it, either. He just unlocks his door like normal and watches as Baekhyun waltzes in before he shuts it closed.

That’s the first night he stays over. It’s nice to fall asleep next to the warmth of a body again, to be
lulled to sleep by the beat of another’s heart and he can’t say that he hasn’t missed this. 

Apart from the chaste kiss Chanyeol presses to his forehead right before they go to sleep, they don’t do much of anything.

(He can’t say the same about the morning after, though.)

x x x

When they’ve been dating for a couple of months, it’s Lu Han’s bright idea to invite Chanyeol over for dinner.

“This isn’t even your apartment, Lu Han.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes as he hobbles over to the couch with a basket of laundry that is to be folded. “You can’t be going around inviting people over. That’s rude.”

“I’m over so often that I practically live here anyways,” Lu Han shrugs as he goes to sit on the arm of the couch, watching Baekhyun do the chores.

“Then do your damn part in this household!” Baekhyun hisses, chucking one of the shirts at Lu Han’s face. It doesn’t hit, since his aim is pretty crappy, but Lu Han’s startled jump from the projectile is entertaining nonetheless.

“That was rude.” Lu Han says as he begrudgingly picks up a pair of pants and folds it. “But no really, I want to meet Chanyeol.”

“What, your stalking isn’t good enough to get ample amounts of information on him?”

“I don’t stalk him.” Lu Han narrows his eyes.

“Oh yeah, that’s right. Only Jongdae.”

This time it’s Lu Han throwing an article of clothing at Baekhyun. And this time the said article of clothing is a pair of pants. And this time the said pair of pants managing to smack Baekhyun right in the face. “I need to get to know him.” Lu Han continues, “I need to see if he’s worthy.”

“You’re not my father.”

“No, but Minseok is your mother and he agrees. Right, Minseok?”

They turn to where Minseok is settled on the dining room table and watch him expectantly. A couple moments later, Minseok’s fingers stop typing and he returns their gaze. “What?”

“Say yes.” Lu Han urges.

“Yes.” Minseok says immediately and Lu Han smiles proudly.

“So now you have to bring him over. Mother’s orders.”

“That’s what you’re talking about?” Minseok asks, closing his computer to actually join into the conversation.

“Yeah, don’t you think it’s a stupid idea?” Baekhyun says and tries to clear a little space on the sofa for Minseok to sit on.

Minseok looks uncertainly on the tiny space that Baekhyun had managed to clear and opts for just
taking a seat on the floor. “I think it’s a wonderful idea.” Even though Baekhyun’s focused on
Minseok, in his peripheral, he can see Lu Han fistpumping.

“In what world would it ever be a “wonderful idea” to introduce someone to Lu Han?” Baekhyun
asks, wrinkling his nose in mock disgust.

“It’d be nice to meet him.” Minseok shrugs, completely ignoring Baekhyun’s last comment, “I mean
I talk to Chanyeol every now and then, but I’ve never really gotten to know him. Dinner is actually a
pretty good idea.”

“Minseok,” Baekhyun groans, “You’re supposed to be on my side. Bros before hoes.”
Minseok only laughs, “Just promise me you’ll ask him.

“Yeah, yeah. If I remember…”

And Baekhyun has no intention to ever actually ask Chanyeol to come over. There's no way he
would subject his relationship to the uncertainty that is Lu Han. But of course, Minseok is adamant
about the whole "being friendly" thing.

He actually goes as far as coming out to join Chanyeol and Baekhyun on one of their little mail
adventures.

“What are you doing?” Baekhyun hisses when he notices that Minseok is following him out of the
apartment and to his meeting place with Chanyeol.

“I have to ask Chanyeol something. Because someone refuses to invite him over.” Minseok sniffs.

“I forgot,” Baekhyun starts to argue but the look Minseok shoots at him has him dropping his gaze to
the ground.

“Why are you so afraid of inviting him over?” Minseok asks, a genuine seed of concern hidden away
in his eyes. “I mean we aren’t that bad.”

Baekhyun shrugs, hoping to brush off the conversation but Minseok isn’t discouraged that easily.

“Are you afraid we’re going to embarrass you?” Minseok speculates, “Or maybe you’re afraid of us
harassing him? Or... are you worried that he’s going to meet your friends...? Are you worried that
it’s getting too serious? That it’s like another step in opening up your w--”

“Can you just shut up!?” Baekhyun exclaims exasperatedly when Minseok strikes a chord, but he
immediately regrets his choice in words, his choice in tone when he sees Minseok’s face fall. “I just--
I uhm. Uh. I don’t want him to meet Lu Han.” He amends lamely but the expression doesn’t leave
Minseok’s face.

“Sorry,” Minseok apologizes quietly and they stand around in awkward silence until Chanyeol
finally comes out of his apartment to meet them.

“Hey, Minseok’s here!” He points out but immediately, Chanyeol notices that something is off.
“Did... something happen?” He asks, a little offput by the odd atmosphere.

“Hey,” Minseok forces on a smile, “Nothing’s wrong. Baekhyun and I were just talking.”

“Oh.” Chanyeol looks like he’s about to say more, probably probing more into the situation but
Minseok interrupts.

“So I’m going to go back inside, it was nice seeing you, Chanyeol.” Minseok says and starts to make his way back to the apartment.

“Wait.” And obediently, Minseok stops. “Did you need to tell me something?” Chanyeol asks, but Minseok only shakes his head.

“No, it was noth--”

“Minseok wanted to know if you’d be up for having dinner at our apartment one of these days.” Baekhyun pipes in, and Minseok gives him a wide-eyed look. “He wants to just scope you out, see if you’re an okay suitor. Check to see if your a serial killer. The usual.”

Minseok looks surprised, to say the least, and Baekhyun only offers him the slightest of a smile. He’s always been terrible at mouthing words but Baekhyun can at least make out the distinctive movements of “Thank you” that Minseok mouths.

Chanyeol, as per usual, appears oblivious to Minseok and Baekhyun’s silent conversation and only nods happily. “Sure, I’d love to. You could’ve asked me yourself, you know. We’re neighbours, right?”

“Right.” Minseok nods happily before he disappears into the apartment.

“Well that was odd,” Chanyeol comments offhandedly and Baekhyun only shrugs, moving to slot himself into Chanyeol’s side. “He’s been wanting you to ask me to eat dinner with them for a while, hasn’t he?”

“For like two weeks,” Baekhyun laughs. “You know me so well.”

Chanyeol hums in agreement and begins to lead Baekhyun down the stairs. "But I’m curious.” He asks as he carefully places his steps down the stairs, trying his best not to topple over and drag Baekhyun down with him. “Why were you so hesitant to have me over?”

"It's weird in general. Inviting my boyfriend over for dinner... They act like my parents." Baekhyun rolls his eyes but freezes when he sees Chanyeol looking at him incredulously. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing I..." Chanyeol mumbles. "I mean we’re dating obviously but... You... You've just never called me that before."

"O-oh. I just thought... Jongdae used it once... So like... Does it make you uncomfortable?"

"No!" Chanyeol rushes out before averting his eyes, "I like it..."

"Okay." Baekhyun lowers his gaze to the floor and an awkward silence befalls over them.

"But uhm..." Chanyeol starts up again, breaking the silence by bringing up an older topic. "I feel like that's an excuse. Be real with me.” He pauses. Spinning around to face the other, he puts his arms on both Baekhyun's shoulders and looks directly into Baekhyun's eyes. "Am I that embarrassing?"

Baekhyun doesn't respond immediately. “More like Lu Han is embarrassing.” He says after a while, forever using Lu Han as his scapegoat. “I would rather have you go and live your life without ever meeting that guy.”

“You know, the more you talk about him, the more I actually want to meet him.”
Baekhyun shakes his head, frowning, “That’s what I was afraid of.”

Chanyeol agrees to come over two nights after the invitation has been extended.

“What are you doing here?” He asks when he finds Baekhyun at his front door, an hour before they had agreed upon, “I thought I’m supposed to be going over there.”

“You are.” Baekhyun nods in agreement, “But I want to prep you for this whole dinner thing.”

“Did Minseok kick you out because you were a pain in the ass?” Chanyeol asks uncertainly.

“Minseok did kick me out.” Baekhyun says bluntly, but he doesn't affirm nor discount the second part. Instead he asks, “Let me in?”

He’s met with a smile. “When would I ever turn you away?”

When they finally do come over for dinner, it’s Baekhyun who plans to knock on the door. “I’m afraid that Lu Han is going to do something.” He reasons with Chanyeol, practically shoving him out of the way so that he can do it.

Chanyeol allows him, with a laugh. “I feel like Lu Han is not even half as bad as you make him out to be.”

“Then, man, tonight will blow you away.” Baekhyun says as he goes to knock on the door. It takes only a mere three seconds before Lu Han pulls open the door.

“Chanyeol!” He greets, immediately extending a hand for Chanyeol to shake.

“You must be Lu Han, correct?” Chanyeol asks with a polite smile as he takes the other's hand, but Baekhyun can see the smile begin to strain as Lu Han proceeds to pump his hand up and down energetically.

"Yes I am, nice to meet you!" Lu Han affirms with a grin. He doesn't stop shaking and eventually it becomes Baekhyun's responsibility to pull Chanyeol back and break the handshake. "Come in." Lu Han says with a smile, as if the last minute of intense handshaking hadn't just happened.

Baekhyun leads Chanyeol in, keeping a hand around his wrist just in case Lu Han might lure him away for some impromptu interrogation. "This place is nice." Chanyeol comments offhandedly as Baekhyun tugs him through the apartment to the dining table.

Right before they actually take a seat, though, Minseok steps out of the kitchen, embarrassing ruffle-y apron and all. "Chanyeol!" He greets with a gummy smile. "I'm glad you could make it."

Chanyeol returns with a slight bow. "Thanks for inviting me."

"Dinner's not quite done yet." Minseok says and he's about to say more when a pair of arms snake around his waist. A face then appears from behind him, Lu Han's chin propped up on his shoulder in a way that only works because of Minseok's height. No one really knows when exactly Lu Han entered the kitchen, or when he got behind Minseok, but they don't question it. Minseok just continues, unfazed, "Why don't you show him your room or something."

"Keep the door open though. You're forbidden from closing it with a boy in the house." Lu Han
pipes in helpfully and it's comments like these that are part of the reason why Baekhyun wasn't looking forward to bringing over Chanyeol.

He doesn't say anything; responses will only encourage Lu Han's behaviour. Instead he carts Chanyeol to his room, making sure to slam the door closed despite Lu Han's loud objections.

"He told you not to close the door." Chanyeol smirks, "Aren't you a rebel."

Baekhyun only groans, pulling out his desk chair to collapse into. "Do you see why I didn't want you meeting Lu Han?"

Chanyeol shrugs. "I don't know. It's kinda cute how clingy he is. He's like a koala."

"Maybe at first..." Baekhyun mumbles under his breath.

Again, Chanyeol shrugs. He's just about to drop down to the floor to take a seat, limbs already slightly bent to lower himself, when Baekhyun stops him. "You could just sit on the bed," He says without thinking.

There's a twinkle in his eyes and Baekhyun really doesn't know what it's about until Chanyeol says, "Already inviting me to the bed? This relationship is moving a bit fast, don't you think?"

"Kindly shut up." Baekhyun rolls his eyes. He turns his back toward Chanyeol as he searches his desk for that CD he's been meaning to show Chanyeol.

“Make me.” He hears Chanyeol challenge from behind him and the words have Baekhyun abandoning his search for the CD (chances are, he probably lost it anyways) and spinning back around to look at Chanyeol.

“Is that a challenge?” Baekhyun throws back, eyes narrowed.

Chanyeol doesn’t even have to reply before Baekhyuns stalking over to the younger. “Is that a challenge?” He repeats, wedging himself between Chanyeol’s legs.

Again, Chanyeol skips out on replying and they’re just standing there (well, Chanyeol’s sitting), breathing each other in when Chanyeol laughs. "So much sexual tension." He snorts but Baekhyun doesn't find the situation to be quite as funny, surging forward to lock lips with Chanyeol.

“Dinner’s ready!” Lu Han announces cheerfully as he so kindly barges into Baekhyun’s room without knocking. The couple on the bed immediately still, eyes turning toward the intruder with a look of embarrassment. Slowly, very slowly, Chanyeol reaches to the ground near the side of the bed to retrieve Baekhyun’s discarded shirt. Slowly, very slowly, Baekhyun removes his hand from Chanyeol’s pants and begins to put his shirt back on. Slowly, very slowly, a wicked smile forms on Lu Han’s face. “I thought I told you not to close the door.” He says with a smirk.

He closes the door too quickly for the pillow that Baekhyun’s thrown to reach him. “Do you see why I didn’t want you coming over to meet him?” Baekhyun groans as he tugs down his shirt to cover his belly.

“I don’t know.” Chanyeol shrugs, zipping his pants back up. “It’s kinda cute how clingy he is. He’s like a koala."

This time it’s Chanyeol who is attacked with the pillow.
Baekhyun returns to the dinner table first and drops down into his usual seat. The table is already set but neither Lu Han or Minseok are seated yet; Minseok’s still finishing up some dish and Lu Han is there adhering to his side as always. “Where’s your boyfriend?” Lu Han asks with a knowing smile.

“In the bathroom.” Baekhyun replies nonchalantly, picking some food off of one of the dishes on the table.

There’s a glint in Lu Han’s eye and he moves over to Minseok, making a show of cupping his hands around his mouth and whispering something into his ear. By Minseok’s pained expression, Baekhyun can already guess what he’s said. “Go sit down.” Minseok shoos his boyfriend back to the table and Lu Han follows obediently with a pout.

Lu Han takes the seat across from Baekhyun and immediately leans forward with a wicked look that’s almost terrifying. He’s just about to say something, something perverted probably, or oddly personal, but Chanyeol returns just in time and even though Lu Han’s bad, he has the decency to refrain from being totally disgusting around new people.

Minseok comes to the table soon after, holding a basket full of bread fresh out of the oven. “Here’s some garlic bread,” Minseok says as he sets down a basket onto the table. “Help yourself.”

“Hey look, it’s not burnt.” Baekhyun teases, earning a kick in the shin from Lu Han. He flips him off as he goes to reach for a piece. “You want a piece?” He asks, turning toward Chanyeol.

“Nah I don’t really like garlic.” Chanyeol comments and Lu Han’s mouth drops open.

“Who doesn’t like garlic?” Lu Han gapes, “What are you, a vampire?”

Minseok smacks his boyfriend. He tries to be subtle about it, to be polite, but the table doesn't block nearly as much as he'd hope. “It’s just a personal taste, idiot.” He then turns to Chanyeol. “There’s a lot of garlic in tonight’s dish… Do you want me to make something else?”

Chanyeol’s quick to refuse, “No, it’s quite okay. I don’t dislike it that much.” He flashes a reassuring grin for Minseok but the elder is too distracted with Lu Han who is grinning proudly.

“You’re so cute,” Lu Han cooes as he reaches up to peck Minseok on the cheek.

“Ew,” Baekhyun sneers, rushing to cover Chanyeol’s eyes with his hand, “PDA.”

True to his words, Minseok had added a lot of garlic in the dishes and Chanyeol ends up just barely picking at his food. He refuses all of Minseok’s apologetic offerings of cooking something else, though, and does end up taking a bite or two to appease Minseok.

The dinner passes pretty quickly, and it’s really not as bad as Baekhyun expected it to be. They talk about mundane things, only occasionally directing questions toward Chanyeol and even then, they aren’t anything particularly horrifying. Lu Han is on his best behaviour and that in itself is enough to be thankful for.

They’re in the middle of one of Lu Han’s many random anecdote when Chanyeol’s phone vibrates from inside his pocket. It’s fairly quiet and only Baekhyun actually notices Chanyeol fish the device from out of his pants and quickly read the message. Baekhyun is too far and too proud to do something like actually sneak a peek and read the text but when Chanyeol locks the phone screen
and puts it back in his pocket, he can’t help but be a little curious.

He’s just about to lean over and ask what it was about when Chanyeol speaks up. “Hey… uh.” Chanyeol interrupts while Lu Han is still speaking and Minseok pales.

“I told you he was getting bored of you and your stories,” Minseok whispers but it comes out much too loud. Chanyeol laughs.

“No uh...” He stops himself, “This is going to sound awkward but uh...” He glances at his phone yet again. “Jongdae. He’s supposed to come over today. Is it cool if he comes in here?”

Lu Han nods excitedly, “Jongdae? Of course he can!”

“Oh? Are you friends with Jongdae?” Chanyeol asks amicably.

“Uh... Kind of?” Lu Han coughs awkwardly.

“He’s never met him before.” Baekhyun points out helpfully and the confused look on Chanyeol’s face is priceless.

“Well. Uh...” Chanyeol stammers, his furrowed brow deepening by the second, “I’m just gonna go let him in.”

He clambers up and moves over to the front door. The minute he’s out of hearing range, Lu Han jumps up and leans toward Baekhyun. Baekhyun startles back and Lu Han hisses, “What the hell are you doing, you’re making me look like some kinda creepy stalker.”

“Are you not a creepy stalker?” Baekhyun asks innocently, enjoying the affronted look on Lu Han’s face.

“I’m... I’m not a stalker.” Lu Han pouts, sinking back into his chair. Minseok rubs a comforting hand over his arm.

“Jongdae’s here.” Chanyeol announces when he returns to the dining room, an awkward looking Jongdae in tow.

Lu Han’s face immediately brightens. “Jongdae!” He calls out and Jongdae only flashes him a weird look before quickly bowing to Minseok. “Sorry for intruding.” Jongdae says sheepishly and Baekhyun has never seen him be so polite before. “Your place is delightful.”

Minseok bounds up to shake Jongdae’s hand and retrieve a chair for him to sit in. “Sit sit,” He smiles as he pushes a bar stool over toward the table.

Jongdae bows again and takes the seat. He sits there awkwardly as he watches the others, about a foot below him, eat their cake. Minseok seems to pick up on this and he springs out of his seat. “Do you want something to eat? Something to drink?”

Jongdae only shakes his head, smiling politely, “No thank you, it’s too much. I’m already intruding.”

Baekhyun has to physically stop himself from saying “You sure are”.

“No, I insist! You’re the guest.” Minseok urges but when it’s clear that Jongdae isn’t going to relent anytime soon, he makes an executive decision and just asserts, “I’ll make you some coffee.”

With a tight-lipped smile, Jongdae begrudgingly accepts.
The table is pretty quiet while Minseok’s up making coffee. Chanyeol and Jongdae seem to be in the middle of a mental conversation, Lu Han is occupied with just watching Jongdae, and Baekhyun is left fidgeting awkwardly. It’s Minseok yet again that breaks the silence. “How do you like your coffee, Jongdae?”

“Black is fine.” Jongdae answers and Lu Han cracks a smile for no discernible reason.

It’s when Minseok finally returns to the table that Baekhyun understands why. After Minseok has handed off the coffee and sat back down in his seat, Baekhyun can just barely see as he discreetly pulls out his wallet and presses a $10 bill into Lu Han’s palm. He frowns at the two but they ignore him.

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Baekhyun does end up regretting bringing over Chanyeol for the dinner. But in a way he wasn’t expecting.

Somehow, during dinner, the conversation had taken a turn toward Baekhyun’s writing (or lack there of, according to Lu Han) and now Chanyeol has taken toward badgering about Baekhyun’s work.

“Why do you never write around me? Or like show me what you write?” Chanyeol asks when they’re mindlessly watching some show, their hands comfortably entwined together.

“Because that’s bad luck.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “And plus its un-edited. I’d rather die than let anyone see that kinda monstrosity.”

“I don’t even know what you write about, you never told me!” Chanyeol turns toward Baekhyun, eyebrows furrowed.

“I’m pretty sure I did.” Baekhyun dismisses, keeping his eyes locked on the television.

“No no,” Chanyeol shakes his head, and to Baekhyun’s dismay, turns down the TV’s volume. “All you told me is that you don’t write homosexual erotica.”

“Well now that you know what I don’t write, it shouldn’t be too too hard to figure out what I do.” Baekhyun shrugs, reaching over to steal the remote control from Chanyeol.

Chanyeol chuck it across the room before he even has a chance. “What the hell?” He asks, narrowing his eyes and Chanyeol only shakes his head.

“Tell me.” Chanyeol says.

“No, it’s okay,” Baekhyun shakes his head, “It’ll be like a mystery. Everyone loves a mystery.” He is just about to get up and retrieve the remote that Chanyeol had stupidly thrown away but he’s stopped by Chanyeol’s grip on his arm. He’s jerked back onto the couch. “What the hell, Chanyeol?” Baekhyun begins, rubbing at his shoulder.

“I have ways of making you tell me, you know.” Chanyeol says with a straight face as he starts to back Baekhyun into the corner of the couch. Chanyeol brings his face in extremely close, so that there’s less than a foot distance between their faces. He stares into Baekhyun’s eyes intensely but the slight twitch of laughter gives his act away and Baekhyun can’t take him seriously.

“I’m not sure how I should feel about that statement.” Baekhyun admits with a laugh, pushing Chanyeol’s face back so that it’s a more comfortable distance away.
Chanyeol comes back merely seconds later, this time considerably closer. “Tell me.” He whispers before he goes in and steals a kiss.

The giggle that Baekhyun lets out leaves him absolutely mortified but Chanyeol seems to think it’s cute as he does it again and again, pressing chaste kisses onto Baekhyun’s lips over and over again. “You know,” Baekhyun sputters out, still laughing, “Kissing me isn’t going to get you anywhere.”

Chanyeol suddenly freezes and lifts himself up just a centimeter or two. “You’re right!” He stage whispers, before swooping down to brush a kiss against Baekhyun’s cheekbones and then to his ear. “I guess I need a change of tactics.”

“What?” Baekhyun just manages to croak out when he feels Chanyeol readjust himself so that his knees are on either side of Baekhyun’s hips. “What are you doing--?”

And suddenly there’s Chanyeol’s hands running up Baekhyun’s sides. Tickling him. Baekhyun practically howls with laughter.

"You're so ticklish, Baek." Chanyeol smirks as he continues, Baekhyun squirming beneath him.

"No," Baekhyun wheezes out, trying to push off the offending male. "No shit, Sherlock."

Chanyeol grins, leaning down to the junction of Baekhyun's neck and whispering, "Just tell me, and this. This all can stop." Baekhyun can practically feel Chanyeol's smile pressing against his neck, his breath puffing on the sensitive skin.

"You are so creepy." Baekhyun shakes his head, starting to flail around his legs as Chanyeol continues relentlessly. "I'll never tell you." He punctuates with another shove.

But this time the shove is strong enough for Chanyeol to go flying off the couch and tumbling onto the ground. There’s a muted thud of Chanyeol’s head on the coffee table and then a quiet groan of pain from the younger.

“Oh my god! Are you okay?” Baekhyun gapes, peering over the side of the couch to look at Chanyeol. Chanyeol’s clutching at his head but he doesn’t seem to be too affected. He affirms his condition with a cheesy smile and a thumbs up.

“No worries. I’m good. But I’m going to stay down here. You know, for safety reasons.”

"That--" Baekhyun starts off, offended, but stops. "That actually might be a good idea." He finishes shyly and draws out a warm chuckle from Chanyeol. He drapes an arm over the side of couch to touch Chanyeol’s face. Chanyeol’s eyes immediately flutter close.

“Yes, you’re fingers in my face is exactly what is going to fix the situation.” He mutters but Baekhyun can see the faint traces of a smile.

“Always.” Baekhyun smiles back and pats Chanyeol's cheek. Retracting his hand, Baekhyun folds his arms beneath himself and rests his cheek on the makeshift pillow of limbs, keeping his gaze set on Chanyeol.

When they lapse into a relaxed kind of quiet, Baekhyun finally whispers: “Supernatural books.”

“What?” Chanyeol asks, looking up at Baekhyun with a look of question.

Chanyeol sits up all of the sudden and Baekhyun only watches him. “Scooch over.” Chanyeol instructs, pushing Baekhyun’s body just a little toward the inside of the couch. He’s just about to climb up onto the space he just cleared out but he stops about halfway on. “And just so you know. I’m getting on. So don’t like, fling me off again.”

Baekhyun gives an affronted look but keeps his mouth closed because he did technically fling Chanyeol off before. “I won’t.” He promises quietly instead and Chanyeol grins.

“But supernatural books,” Chanyeol starts as he’s comfortably settled lengthwise across the couch, pressed up against Baekhyun, staring face to face, an arm and a leg hooked around the older for support from falling. “That’s pretty awesome, I think.” Baekhyun makes a sound of confirmation just before Chanyeol adds in, “Why would anyone laugh at that?”

“I don’t know. Because that’s like a cliched teenage romance genre now?” Baekhyun shrugs. “They think it’s childish, I guess.”

“You’re writing out your dreams, your imagination.” Chanyeol says quietly, “What’s so childish about that?”

Baekhyun doesn’t have a good answer for that so he doesn’t reply. When he realizes that Baekhyun’s not going to answer, Chanyeol asks instead. “What do you write about then?”

That draws a laugh from Baekhyun. “I just told you, supernatural books. What, you have a memory of a goldfish or something?”

Chanyeol shakes his head frantically but with their close proximity, he almost knocks into Baekhyun. “No I meant like, plot-wise.”

“I’m not telling you.” Baekhyun replies suddenly, “It’s bad luck to discuss an unfinished novel. It’ll jinx its success.”

Chanyeol snorts, “Bullshit. Then what about your editors, don’t they kind of have to discuss the unfinished novel with you before it goes to print?”

“That’s totally different. The editor is the only one allowed to know of the story’s imperfections.”

Chanyeol frowns, “But isn’t it better to get an extra set of eyes to scan through the book, to catch any unseen errors.”

“Nice try, but no.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes. “But I will tell you…”

“Humour me.”

“It’s about…” Baekhyun trails off just to see Chanyeol watch him expectantly. He takes the chance to lean in just a bit closer to press a kiss to Chanyeol’s lips. When he pulls back, he's quick to rush out. “It's about this guy who becomes a thing by accident and then does the thing to save himself from this other thing.”

It takes a while for the words to actually sink into Chanyeol, namely because of the impromptu kiss, but when they do, it has him crying out indignantly. “You asshole!” He exclaims, sitting up. “That’s what literally every book is about.”

“You called me an asshole.” Baekhyun fakes a pout. “There’s no way you’re getting anymore top
secret information.”

“I hate you.”

“Don’t we all.” Baekhyun grins. He’s taken by surprise when Chanyeol leans over to kiss him but welcomes it anyways by looping an arm around the younger’s neck.

Chanyeol rolls his eyes. “I’m going to read it one day.” He states confidently. “Mark my words, one day I will read it.”

Baekhyun snorts. “One day.”

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For the most part, Chanyeol does continue to randomly pester Baekhyun about his novel: how it’s going, what part he’s on, what’s it about, and things of that nature. It’s all pretty passive; Chanyeol acknowledges Baekhyun’s feelings toward his writing and doesn’t press for more information. What’s not quite as passive, though, is Chanyeol’s constant effort to help Baekhyun out with his writing. Since he’s not actually able to read the writing, he can’t actually help with specifics but he’s always more than willing to send Baekhyun stuff about writing tips or good words for said.

Baekhyun appreciates the effort, the support, and he thinks its adorable that Chanyeol’s thoughtful enough to do these kinds of things. It’s all really sweet and surprisingly helpful.

Chanyeol seems to stick to just random questions and articles which is why it’s so unexpected when Chanyeol volunteers to take him somewhere.

“Hey, let’s get out of here.” Chanyeol offers out of nowhere when they’re folded up together on the couch one night after dinner.

“What do you mean?” Baekhyun mumbles, scooting just a bit closer into Chanyeol’s body so he doesn’t topple over the couch. “I’m so comfortable and I’d really rather not move.”

“No no no,” Chanyeol says and to Baekhyun’s dismay, he sits up. “This will be great. Romantic even.” And now he’s suddenly being hauled off of the couch. “You need fresh air, anyways, you like never go out.”

“I do too!” Baekhyun indignantly argues, “Just yesterday…”

“Just yesterday, what?” Chanyeol challenges.

“I… uh… went to the grocery store…”

Chanyeol rolls his eyes. “You went to the convenience store. The one that’s about a block away.”

“It’s still going outside. And what do I need to go out for?” Baekhyun whines, “What is there that the outside world has to offer?”

And it takes a while before Chanyeol comes up with an answer, and just when Baekhyun thinks that he’s given up, he says, “Inspiration. How can you write when you don’t do anything? When you don’t have any kind of experiences to base it off of?”

“I have had plenty of experience in my previous 25 years of life, thank you very much.”

Chanyeol raises an eyebrow in challenge, “Really? Because what I’ve gathered, you’ve spent your previous 25 years the exact same way you are now: trying to avoid the outdoors at all cost.”
“Let me reiterate: What is there that the outside world has to offer?” Baekhyun argues indignantly.

“You write stories of adventure, of the unknown. Don’t you need to base it off of experiences?

“Yes.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes, “Pray tell me where I can find something like a vampire in this world.”

“Well not… Not like actual mythical creatures or supernatural beings but like… Maybe places with a nice inspiring atmosphere.”

“Where would you even go for supernatural inspiration?”

Chanyeol only grins and Baekhyun has a sinking feeling that he’s going to regret even asking that question.

“So your idea of a romantic date is to take me to the woods in the dead of the night?” Baekhyun deadpans, staring unimpressively at the looming trees before him.

“Well, for one, it’s like 5. Hardly the dead of the night.” Chanyeol laughs. “It’s a kind of inspiration, is it not?”

“It’s going to get dark though. And yes. The fear of getting mauled by a bear is going to really help me get through that one scene I’ve been having trouble with.” Baekhyun sneers, faking a kick at the back of Chanyeol’s legs. “Thanks a lot, man.”

“It’s what I do.” Chanyeol says proudly, “But really. Let’s just walk around. You can just absorb the scenery and maybe talk out some scenes you’re having trouble with writing. I’m a great listener you know.”

“What makes you think that I’m going to tell you about my book’s plot? I told you it’s bad luck to tell someone about an unfinished novel. It’s a secret!”

Chanyeol pouts, “Okay fine. We can just walk around, talk, enjoy the outdoors. This is the place I always escape to whenever I need to clear my head so I think it will do you good.”

“There’s literally nothing to enjoy about the outdoors.” Baekhyun frowns while kicking at the dirt.

Chanyeol only grins. “We’ll see about that.”

Surprisingly enough, it does turn out to be kind of fun. Walking around with Chanyeol, talking of nothing of importance, taking in the atmosphere, he actually does come up with some good scenes to add into his story but he’ll never admit that to Chanyeol. They wander deep into the woods, and about two hours later, they settle down on some random log to watch the sun go down.

“Something’s poking at my butt.” Baekhyun states helpfully as they wait for the sun to settle onto the horizon.

Wordlessly, Chanyeol pulls him into his lap, his eyes still transfixed on the slow setting sun.

“I was suggesting you to move over or something but this is good too.” A smirk finds its way onto Baekhyun’s face as he grinds down onto Chanyeol’s lap. “Though I’m not sure if this will be much better.”
“Shut up,” Chanyeol says and Baekhyun laughs triumphantly. “Just watch the stupid sunset, you idiot.”

The sunset is pretty. Scratch that. The sunset would’ve been pretty had the dulled hues of red, orange, and purple not been blocked by a shit ton of foliage.

“Not gonna lie,” Baekhyun hops off of Chanyeol’s lap before helping Chanyeol back onto his feet. “The trees blocked like everything. I didn’t see anything.”

“Yeah sorry, I should’ve taken you somewhere with a better view.” Chanyeol says with a look tinged with disappointment. “Next time.” Baekhyun thinks he hears Chanyeol murmur.

He doesn’t question it, though, and Chanyeol just continues on, “So you want to turn back or go just a bit farther?”

“... Just another hour or so.” Baekhyun admits and he hates the shit-eating grin that appears on Chanyeol’s face.

“I knew you’d like it here.”

“Shut up.” He frowns as they begin to walk. “It’s getting cold…” Baekhyun muses as he wraps his arms around himself. Chanyeol suddenly stops.

“I’ll go get your jacket from the car.” He says all of a sudden and Baekhyun shakes his head.

“The car is way too far and it’s really not all that cold.” He shivers despite himself and that’s enough to have Chanyeol running back toward the car.

“I’ll be right back!” Chanyeol calls over his shoulder, “Don’t move.”

Before he can call Chanyeol back, he’s gone. Baekhyun heaves a sigh, ultimately deciding to just sit back down on that nearby log and wait for him to return.

He probably isn’t sitting there for more than five minutes but it feels like eternity as he brings his knees to his chest and curls into himself to conserve body heat. “Jesus fucking Christ it’s cold,” He hisses to himself, slowly rocking himself back and forth.

And then he hears a snap of twigs from behinds him and he freezes, limbs suddenly rigid with fear. “C-chanyeol?” He calls out softly, “Are you back already?”

There’s no response and his blood runs cold. Slowly, very slowly does he turn back, praying to god that it’s Chanyeol trying to be funny and not like a bear or something.

It’s not Chanyeol.

But it’s also not a bear.

Instead, it’s a deer. Bespeckled with snow white dots and about as startled as Baekhyun is, it’s a fucking deer. “Jesus Christ.” He breathes out, his eyes wide and unblinking as he watches the deer with caution.

He remains motionless as the deer begins to take a couple of tentative steps forward. When the deer eventually comes within a foot radius, Baekhyun extends a hand forward. He's not really sure what he’s doing, trying to pet a deer, a wild animal, but to his surprise, the deer actually continues inching closer until it can finally touch its head on Baekhyun's hand.
This might just be the best day of Baekhyun's life. For the first couple of strokes, he leaves his hand at the bottom of the deer's face, just tickling against the bottom of the snout, but slowly, as the deer seems to relax just a bit, he repositions so that his hand is now on top, petting the deer.

This goes on for a while. The wild animal allows itself to be petted for a surprisingly long amount of time and Baekhyun allows himself to pet the wild animal for an equally surprising amount of time. It probably would’ve gone on for significantly longer, though, had it not been for Chanyeol’s intrusion.

"I got your jacket!" Baekhyun hears through the thicket of trees. It's undeniably Chanyeol what with the unmistakable voice, and the clumsy clomp of steps.

“Come slowly!” Baekhyun shouts out. When he sees the deer startle from his volume, he only continues to pet it, making a some soft cooing noises at it in hopes of calming it down. “I have a deer here.”

As per his instructions, Chanyeol proceeds with caution, looking a bit ridiculous in the way he slowly creeps through the thick foliage of the bushes with exaggerated motions. “Whoa.” He breathes out, taking in the sight and the sound catches the deer’s attention.

The deer’s reaction is instantaneous. It’s limbs tense and it give one last look at Baekhyun, one full of pure, unadulterated fear, before dashing away.

“You were petting a deer.” Chanyeol states the obvious.

“Indeed I was,” Baekhyun says, rising from the log to go stand next to Chanyeol. “But you scared it away.”

Chanyeol grimaces, “Sorry. I brought your jacket, though.” He offers the said item to Baekhyun.

With a thankful smile, Baekhyun takes the jacket and shrugs it on, quickly zipping it all the way up and shoving his hands in the pockets to warm up again. “It’s weird though,” He says once he’s finally regained feeling in his fingertips. “You approached so calmly and yet it just fled as soon as it laid eyes on you.”

Chanyeol shrugs. “I don’t know, I mean deer can be pretty unpredictable.”

“I don’t know,” Baekhyun muses aloud, “This one seemed so placid, used to humans or something.” And it might be just him, but Baekhyun swears he sees Chanyeol’s eyes twitch.

"Weird," Chanyeol dismisses quickly before ushering them into a new topic, "So we gonna walk?" He asks, extending an arm for Baekhyun to take.

Looping an arm through Chanyeol's, Baekhyun presses himself close to his boyfriend. "Yeah let's." They spend a while walking around but it's a different kind of ambience that Baekhyun can't help but soak in. The night is so dark that they can barely see what's just a foot in front of them but the lack of vision only intensifies the sounds, the scent, the atmosphere of the forest.

There are a couple drawbacks of wandering around in the dark of the night, namely the more than occasional tripping and getting lost. Somewhere along the way, they lose their way and it takes hours to circle back to where they'd come from. It's fun, though, just spending time with him like this.

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And as cool as the forest was -- is, Baekhyun expects it to be a while before Chanyeol brings him
back there. He’s wrong, though, and within the next week, he finds himself back in Chanyeol’s car, driving on the familiar road that brings them back to the forest.

“Why do you keep bringing me to this forest?” Baekhyun laughs the next time Chanyeol decides it’s high time for Baekhyun to get some ‘fresh air’.

Chanyeol pretends to look offended as he shuts off the car’s engine. With a pout, he says, “What? Are you telling me that you don’t like this place?”

“Not particularly,” Baekhyun rolls his eyes but gets out of the car regardless. While waiting for Chanyeol to do the same, he spares a glance at the scenery. It’s serene, beautiful even but it’s still definitely not his idea of an ideal date. “You didn’t bring me in the middle of the night. So that’s an improvement.” Baekhyun snorts at Chanyeol’s fistpump.

“No but really,” Chanyeol says, walking over to the car’s trunk. Baekhyun follows and is surprised to see a bag of food and some blankets stored away in the back. “It’ll be nice, I swear.”

“Well you look about a thousand times more prepared than last time. I’m guessing we’re actually here to do something apart from walk aimlessly around the forest and get hopelessly lost?” Baekhyun asks innocently and he has to repress the urge to laugh at the blush quickly filling Chanyeol’s cheeks.

“Would you let that go?” He whispers and he pretends to wipe at his lips in order to cover the red, “That was one time…”

“And there can easily be a second time with the way this date’s going.” Baekhyun so helpfully points out.

“I know this forest like the back of my hand.” Chanyeol mumbles, his pride obviously a little hurt.

“Well you apparently don’t know the back of your hand very well.” Baekhyun snorts but he helps to get the things out of the car, grabbing the couple of neatly folded blankets in the trunk. Chanyeol grabs the large basket of what Baekhyun hopes to be filled with food that was sitting right next to them.

“I didn’t know people legitimately owned picnic baskets.” Baekhyun comments as Chanyeol shifts the basket’s handle into the crook of his arm.

“Shut up,” Chanyeol says pointedly before taking Baekhyun’s hand and leading him into the forest. “And be prepared to be swept off your feet.”

Chanyeol leads them a bit further into the woods this time around -- or at least that’s what Baekhyun assumes. He doesn’t quite remember the exact logistics of the forest, given that last time it was shrouded in shadows, but they do seem to take a longer time to get to the destination.

When they finally do arrive, Chanyeol brings them to a clearing in the forest, revealing a large, sparkling lake. “Here we are,” He smiles, eyes locked on the way that the sunlight reflects off the water. “You wanna start setting up the blankets?”

Baekhyun nods, dropping to his knees to spread out the blanket as Chanyeol moves to the other side to help. “Why didn’t we come here to watch the sunset last time? We’d actually be able to see it from here.” Baekhyun comments, distracted with smoothing out the wrinkles in the fabric.

“By the time we would’ve made it here, the sun would have been long gone,” Chanyeol shrugs.
Whenever he’s satisfied with straightening his side of the blanket, he barrels onto it, taking one of the other, clean blankets and draping it around his shoulders.

“True.” Baekhyun gives up with trying to make the blanket perfectly flat -- it’s near impossible with Chanyeol seated on top -- and sits down next to Chanyeol.

“I mean, if we wait around long enough, we can see the sunset again today.” Chanyeol comments as he moves the basket of food closer to him. Slipping his hand in before quickly pulling out a bag of chips, he offers his newfound treasure to Baekhyun.

“Also true.” Baekhyun repeats as he accepts the offering.

So, that’s what they do. Somehow, the hours pass by quickly and before they know it, the sun is retreating, colouring the skies with pale tones of orange and pink. It passes by pretty quickly, gone within minutes, leaving them with a quickly darkening sky.

As soon as it’s over, Chanyeol’s looking over at Baekhyun with a sparkle in his eyes. “The lake looks nice doesn’t it?”

Even without explicitly saying it, Baekhyun knows where the other is going with this. “I’m not getting in that water.” Baekhyun declares before Chanyeol can say anything else.

“Come on,” Chanyeol begs, already scrambling to his feet. “It’ll be fun.” He draws out the last syllable as if that will make his argument all the more effective. (It kind of does.)

“Excuse you,” Baekhyun shakes his head, “But I would prefer not to put myself through that kind of torture.”

“I bet it’s not even that cold.” Chanyeol insists but he’s only met with a blank look from Baekhyun.

“Why not?” Chanyeol starts again, changing his approach. He tries to tug Baekhyun up onto his feet but he’s resilient. “Where’s your sense of adventure that you’re always writing about?”

“My sense of adventure has nothing to do with skinnydipping in the middle of September.”

“I beg to differ.”

With the way things are going, Baekhyun’s already over the fence. There’s really no harm in doing it so why not? “This is just a way for you to get me naked, isn’t it?” Baekhyun asks with a sardonic smile.

“Darn,” Chanyeol exhales, comically snapping his fingers in a disappointed gesture, “And I would’ve gotten away with it if it weren’t for you meddling kids -- er. kid.” He bends down to punctuate his words with a kiss to Baekhyun’s nose.

Baekhyun sticks his tongue out. “Just for that, I’m going to leave my clothes on whenever I jump.”

Chanyeol perks up immediately, his eyes gleaming with excitement. “Wait, wait. So you’re gonna do it?”

“Yeah, we better go before I change my mind.” Baekhyun nods, allowing Chanyeol to finally pull him to his feet. As they near the water, Baekhyun stops to remove his socks and shoes and poke a toe into the water. He shivers at the feelings. “It’s so damn cold.” He hisses, jerking his foot hurriedly
out of the freezing waters.

Chanyeol only shrugs. “You already agreed to this. No backsies.”

“Your elevated language astounds me.” Baekhyun snorts. “But I have to say, I’ve never done this before so you’re going to have to take me through this like step by step.”

“I realize that.” Chanyeol says with a laugh. “There’s no real way of doing it but… Well, first.” He pauses and proceeds to pull off his shirt. “You strip.”

Baekhyun gives him a look, trying not to get too sidetracked by the soft contours of Chanyeol’s abs. “I’ll pass,” Baekhyun dismisses with a wave of his hand. At the sight of Chanyeol confused little frown, he adds, “It’s way too cold to be nude.”

With a shrug of his shoulders, Chanyeol turns to remove his pants, “You’re just gonna be even colder when you get out.” His fingers are slipping under the waistband of his underwear, about to remove the garment when Baekhyun rushes to stop him.

“Wait.” He says suddenly, and Chanyeol immediately freezes. “Leave your boxers on.”

“Why?” Chanyeol asks but he moves his hands away anyways.

“Because it’ll be weird. Me completely clothed. You completely naked.”

“You could always strip too,” Chanyeol suggests with an exaggerated wink.

“I am okay.” Baekhyun laughs at the gesture, “Just leave your stupid underwear on.”

“Ugh,” Chanyeol groans, with a comical roll of his eyes, “God, Baekhyun. Why do you have to be such a buzzkill?” The shy little grin that edges up on his face lets Baekhyun know that it’s really just a joke. Baekhyun lightly smacks him on the arm anyways.

“So like…” Baekhyun starts, uncertainly looking at the lake, “We just jump in?”

“That’s the gist of it.” Chanyeol affirms with a nod and he reaches over to take one of Baekhyun’s hand. He leads Baekhyun back a couple of feet so that they have a bit of space to run before they actually jump in. “So on a count of three, we jump.”

“Why am I doing this again?” Baekhyun murmurs as he eyes the body of water again.

His question goes ignored as Chanyeol starts the countdown. “Okay one. Two. Three!”

Chanyeol goes with a running start, almost dragging Baekhyun behind him and then they jump.

It’s fucking cold. It’s so fucking cold and Baekhyun hates himself for agreeing to it.

Whenever they submerge, Baekhyun immediately shuts his eyes closed and raises his free hand to pinch his nose to stop the water pressure from forcing water up his nose. Chanyeol, however, pushes away his hand and makes him open his eyes. In front of him, Chanyeol is grinning wildly and all of a sudden he’s moving closer, disentangling their hands to wrap his arms around Baekhyun’s waist to press in closer.

He connects their foreheads first, his eyes boring into Baekhyun’s. Then he moves and touches their noses together in an eskimo kiss before finally turning his head to plant a kiss on Baekhyun’s lips.

The action is surprising and has Baekhyun his mouth gasping open in surprise, letting out precious
oxygen from his lungs. Before he can close it though, Chanyeol’s pressing himself closer and
sucking lightly on just the tip of his tongue before moving in to close the kiss again. It’s very nice
and all, very romantic, but Baekhyun can’t last very long, his lungs already running low on oxygen
within less than thirty seconds.

Chanyeol doesn’t seem to have this problem. Even as Baekhyun pushes him away, quickly covering
his nose and mouth with his hands as if that will help retain the quickly escaping air, Chanyeol seems
just fine, only the occasional, small air bubble arising from his mouth.

He tries to stay down as long as possible but before long, his lungs are burning for oxygen. He
rushes up to the surface just as Chanyeol points excitedly at something and drops to the bottom of the
lake.

Baekhyun resurfaces, gasping for air. The lake isn’t exactly deep but it’s not shallow enough for him
to actually touch the bottom; he has to constantly doggie paddle to stay afloat.

After he manages to catch his breath, he goes back under; he’s curious to see what Chanyeol was
pointing at. When he’s back under the water, he tries his best to stay at the bottom of the lake, tries
his best to copy the way Chanyeol is sitting with ease but he can’t. He has to constantly exhale the
little amount of oxygen he has left just to sink. Before he can even see what Chanyeol was trying to
point out, he has to go back to the surface to catch his breath having already wasted his breath trying
to stay at the bottom.

Again, he goes back under but his last gulp of oxygen was too rushed; he has to go back up before
he even gets a chance to sit on the floor.

This time around, he stays above water for a good five minutes, waiting for his breathing to return to
complete normalcy before he even bothers to try again.

Whenever he finally feels like he’s ready to submerge, he manages to sink to the bottom quickly
where he’s met with a slight wave from Chanyeol. Chanyeol’s still seated comfortably on the floor,
not seeming to be running low on air. He directs Baekhyun’s attention to what he’s been watching
this whole time and it’s just a crab. He has wasted so much oxygen just to see a tiny little crab.

Surprisingly enough, though, he ends up wasting even more just watching it scuttle around. But
soon, too soon, the familiar burn sets into his lungs and he has to scramble to get some air.

This time, though, whenever he returns to the surface, Chanyeol follows him up.

“How did you stay under for so long?!” Baekhyun manages to exclaim through his labored pants.
Chanyeol doesn’t even seem to be out of breath. Noticing that Baekhyun’s having a bit of a workout
just staying afloat, Chanyeol moves forward to hug him, moving to wrap Baekhyun’s legs around his
waist so that his weight is completely supported by the strenght of his arms.

“What do you mean?” Chanyeol asks as he moves quickly to peck Baekhyun’s wet cheek with a
kiss.

“You were underwater for so long!” He flaps his arm around to add emphasis but as soon as he
begins to fall backward. To keep himself from falling, he has to lunge forward, wrapping his arms
around Chanyeol for dear life. “You should’ve died, being under there that long. And I don’t know
if that’s cool or mildly terrifying?”

“The thought of me dying is only mildly terrifying?” Chanyeol snorts. “And I dunno.” He tries to
shrug but it’s a bit difficult with the way his arms are positioned around Baekhyun’s waist. “I guess I
can just hold my breath for a long time.”

“But that was for like ten minutes!” Baekhyun gapes, not seeing how Chanyeol isn’t utterly
dumbfounded by the amount of time he held his breath like he is.

Again, Chanyeol tries to shrug, but gives up, instead opting for an eyebrow raise coupled with
pursed lips that convey the same kind of message. “The record for holding your breath is 22 minutes,
I don’t see why you’re so amazed by just 10 minutes.”

“But those are professional divers who train for that kinda stuff.”

“Maybe I’m a professional diver, you don’t know that.” Chanyeol challenges with a sparkle in his
eyes and it takes all of Baekhyun’s will not to smack his boyfriend upside the head.

“It was just so inhumane…” He breathes out and he doesn’t know if he’s imagining it but he swears
he sees Chanyeol’s jaw lock, even just for a second.

“So you about had enough of this?” Chanyeol asks, using his eyes to gesture at the water around
them.

“Oh thank god,” Baekhyun laughs, a little breathlessly “I thought you’d never ask.”

“You didn’t like it?”

“It was okay,” He answers, tilting his head from side to side. “But I’m freezing my ass off and that’s
definitely not a plus.”

The chuckle he draws from Chanyeol is satisfying in a way he’d never expect. “No worries, it’s still
here.” Chanyeol flashes a wicked smile as he proceeds to grope Baekhyun’s butt.

This time, Baekhyun doesn’t stop himself from smacking Chanyeol. “Take me to land, Park.” He
instructs with an angry facade that only cracks at the sound of Chanyeol’s breathy laughter.

It’s unexpected but Chanyeol doesn’t just bring him back to the shore, but he goes as far as to carry
Baekhyun all the way back to their blanket. “It’s so fucking cold.” Baekhyun hisses, hugging himself
just a bit closer to Chanyeol for some semblance of warmth.

“You complain about the cold whether you’re in the water or not.” Chanyeol snorts as he
ceremoniously drops Baekhyun on the blanket. Immediately, Baekhyun moves to wrap the blanket
around himself for some kind of warmth. “You should’ve taken your clothes off. Now you have
nothing dry to change into.”

“Shut up,” Baekhyun groans, “I realize that now.”

“Here,” Chanyeol offers the older his shirt. “Take this.”

Baekhyun’s eyes flick between the offered shirt and Chanyeol, back and forth long enough as if to
emphasize how stupid Chanyeol is being. “I’m not taking your shirt.” He says, squinting. “You are
not going shirtless in this cold as fuck weather, either.”

“I really don’t get cold.” Chanyeol shrugs, pushing the shirt closer to Baekhyun in silent insistence.

“You’re going to catch your death in this weather and that would be,” Baekhyun stops himself, his
lips curving into a mischievous smile, “Mildly terrifying.”

“Fuck you.” Chanyeol deadpans but the way his eyes crinkle as he smiles discount any kind of
actual venom. “And I’m not going to let you freeze yourself to death either so what do you suppose we do?”

“I’ve got an idea.”

It doesn’t go exactly as Baekhyun plans as they end up in a rather peculiar position what with the way Baekhyun (wearing Chanyeol’s shirt as per Chanyeol’s adamancy) is situated in Chanyeol’s lap, the bare chest of the younger pressed into his back as he hunches over his own legs to bunch the ends of the blanket together, keeping it from pooling around them.

“Just until we’ve warmed up enough.” Chanyeol had said when met with skeptic looks from the older. “And then we’ll book it to the car.”

It’s not the soundest plan but Baekhyun finds himself going along with it anyways.

“Your underwear is wet.” Baekhyun comments while they’re sitting, waiting to warm up.

“I am aware.” Chanyeol says, his warm breath puffing against the shell of his ear. “But need I remind you that you were the one who wouldn’t let me take it off?”

“I’d really rather not sit on your naked dick.” Baekhyun snorts, moving his head to the right to softly knock against Chanyeol.

“Nothing you haven’t done before.” Baekhyun doesn’t even have to look at Chanyeol to know that he’s smirking obnoxiously right now.

“And you’re the romantic one in this relationship.” Baekhyun muses, “I worry for our future.”

Chanyeol’s chuckle rumbles deep throughout his chest and Baekhyun can clearly feel the reverberations given their close proximity. It’s only after his laughter has completely subsided that he asks, “So you like this place?”

“At the risk of you saying ‘I told you so’, I’m going to have to say yes.”

And comically, Chanyeol leans in to whisper into Baekhyun’s ear. “I. Told. You. So.” He says, punctuating each word in a way that has Baekhyun thrusting his elbow back hard into Chanyeol’s stomach. Again, Chanyeol laughs, not harmed in the slightest. Whenever he gets over his own obnoxiousness, he asks another question: “So does this serve as adequate supernatural-book-writing inspiration?”

Baekhyun groans in an over-exaggerated manner. “Why do you always bring things back to my book?”

“Because if I bring it up, maybe, just maybe, you’ll slip up and actually reveal something about this oh-so-mysterious piece of literature.”

Baekhyun shakes his head and Chanyeol has to lean back just the slightest bit to keep Baekhyun’s head a safe distance away from his chin. “Nuh-uh. Not happening. Not on your life.”

Chanyeol only laughs at Baekhyun’s reaction, “One of these days, I’m going to get you to let me read your damned story.”

“I’m not saying that you can’t read it.” Baekhyun shrugs, turning his head just to watch amusedly as
Chanyeol brightens just the slightest bit. “You just have to wait until it’s published.” He teases and a tiny frown conjures itself on Chanyeol’s face.

“Oh then so be it.” He pouts.

“What if it never gets published?”

“Then I’ll wait forever for you.”

Baekhyun smiles; he quite likes the way those words sound on his tongue.

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But as much as he likes the thought, the idea of forever, it’s different when it comes to implementation. When it comes to actual commitment.

It takes a while for it to happen, though, for everything to blow up. Somewhere in early November, during some nondescript day when Baekhyun is just hanging out in Chanyeol’s apartment for no real good reason.

He doesn’t really know how it happens. One second, he’s badgering Chanyeol from the dining room table, randomly reading out random facts that he’s found on some buzzfeed article, and the next he’s being pushed into the sofa, Chanyeol quickly piling on top of him to meet his lips with a kiss.

It’s a bit different from usual; Chanyeol is taking his time before coaxing Baekhyun’s lips open, taking his sweet time trailing his hands underneath his shirt and eventually down his pants. He keeps their mouths connected the whole time, swallowing down any and all of Baekhyun’s sounds.

It’s only when he has Baekhyun panting, hips sporadically jerking up for more, when Chanyeol finally disconnects. “Bedroom?” He whispers into Baekhyun’s ear and it really shouldn’t even be a question.

It feels different this time around, far slower than he’s used to. Each touch lingering even just a second longer -- gentle, like he’s going to break. Every kiss pressed to leave a mark, and every caress to intensify the pooling heat in the pit of his stomach.

It drains Baekhyun, has him panting like never before and his heart aching for more.

Even after they finish, Chanyeol keeps them pressed together, his arms tucking Baekhyun’s face into his chest so that he can hear the rapid beating of his heart. It’s just them breathing. Their loud inhales and exhales filling the air until Chanyeol breaks the spell with just three words.

“I love you.”

And all of a sudden, Baekhyun’s throat closes. It suddenly feels just a little too warm wrapped in Chanyeol’s arms, too sticky being at such a close proximity, and Baekhyun feels disgusting.

Chanyeol doesn’t seem to notice Baekhyun’s sudden discomfort, instead going to cuddle him in just a bit closer, pressing the side of his cheek onto the top of Baekhyun’s head.

“I’m sorry if that was sudden.” Chanyeol blurts out soon after, “I just. I really do. I know we aren’t all that far in this relationship and you’re supposed to wait a while longer before you let something like that slip out but I feel like there’s really something there and I guess I just--” Chanyeol’s rambling but Baekhyun’s not listening to it. Instead, he’s pulling out of Chanyeol’s grip, out of the
sheets, scrambling to get out of the bed and throw on his clothes.

“W-what’re you doing?” Chanyeol asks, immediately sitting up.

“I... Uhm. I have to go.” Baekhyun stammers only affording one last glance at Chanyeol’s confused face before he leaves and slams the door shut.

“Get out.” Baekhyun bites out as soon as he enters the apartment.

Just one look at Baekhyun’s gaze and Minseok pushing Lu Han off of his lap. He’s shoving Lu Han off of the couch and shooing him out the door despite Lu Han’s pitiful expression and weak protests.

After Lu Han’s successfully vacated the premises, Minseok steps closer to engulf Baekhyun in a tight hug. He pulls back after a while to wipe away a tear that Baekhyun didn’t even know was falling. “It’s late, I thought you were going to stay the night at Chanyeol’s. What’s wrong?” He whispers. “Did something happen?”

“He told me he loved me.” Baekhyun says, his voice choking at the word of love.

Minseok doesn’t say anything for a while, opting to instead rub small circles into the Baekhyun’s shoulder blades with the tips of his fingers. “Is that,” He starts, his eyes earnest, “A bad thing?”

“You remember what happened last time.” Baekhyun mumbles and drops his gaze to the ground.

“This is different. Chanyeol is different.” Minseok soothes, his fingers switching up into drawing little infinity signs in Baekhyun’s back.

“And that’s why this hurts. He’s different. He deserves my love but I-- I can’t give it to him.”

“Why?” It’s one word but it’s all Minseok needs to ask.

"You know exactly why..."

Minseok only gives him a pointed look as he repeats, "And you just said it yourself. This is different. Chanyeol is completely different -- you don't have to worry about that."

"I always have to worry about that." Baekhyun scoffs.

"It happened just the one time," Minseok replies quickly.

"And it could very well happen again." Baekhyun retorts. Just as Minseok opens his mouth again to protest, Baekhyun cuts him off with a shake of his head. “You know the second law of thermodynamics? Of entropy? It says that as time goes on entropy increases and everything will eventually descend into chaos. It doesn’t matter how different things are, how different things may start out, it all ends the same, it all dissolves into disorder.”

“Baekhyun.” Minseok says quietly, resting a comforting hand on Baekhyun’s thigh. “I’m getting my Ph.D in physics in a year or two. I know about thermodynamics. And I don't think that this is even a valid application of it--”

Choosing to ignore Minseok’s last sentence, Baekhyun cuts in bitterly. "Then you should know that everything is bound to fuck up eventually. Why should I bother with falling in love, why should I even put in effort in a relationship if I know that the universe is just going to fuck it all up in a couple of years.” And at this point, the tears are starting to collect in his eyes again.
Minseok doesn’t say anything at first, “I thought you didn’t believe in fate.” He says.

“I don’t.” And Baekhyun’s laughs. “I don’t believe in fucking fate or destiny or any of that optimistic shit. I don’t want to believe in it but-- but if I don’t. Then I have nothing left to blame but myself. Then I know that what happened with Kyungsoo -- what’s going to happen with Chanyeol -- was all my fault. I-- I can’t handle that.” He’s full out crying now, splotchy red face, ugly runny nose, and all. Minseok rushes to squeeze him tight, tighter than before.

He doesn’t actually expect any words from Minseok; he doesn’t want any words from Minseok. He’s perfectly fine seeking silent comfort in the older’s embrace, tears staining Minseok’s ratty t-shirt and sobs muffling in Minseok’s shoulder.

Minseok starts, though, when Baekhyun’s cries start to die down. “You know, entropy is--”

Baekhyun groans. “I get it. You’re gonna be a physicist. I don’t need you to rub your scientific shit in my face.”

“No, this is relevant.” Minseok shushes and Baekhyun buries his face into the crook of his neck. “You’re right. The law states that entropy is increasing -- that as time goes on, the possibility of disorder increases…”

“Way to make me feel better,” Baekhyun mumbles, but his tears are actually beginning to subside.

“I haven’t made my point yet.” Minseok laughs softly. “So entropy is ever increasing but at what rate? Whether it can and will ever be enough to become disorderly is the real question.”

When Baekhyun doesn’t say anything, Minseok takes it as a cue to go on. “Whether or not a system will ever reach the point of disorder is, unless there’s energy agitating the situation, something that’s set. A high entropy system is almost destined to erupt into chaos sooner or later but one with low entropy… The chances of it becoming disordered are improbable, nearly impossible even.”

“You aren’t making any sense.” Baekhyun murmurs. “But your voice is nice so it’s okay.”

“So going with your idea of entropy applying to more than just an isolated system but in something like relations, maybe a relationship is like one of these systems. Maybe there are ones that are meant to, destined to fall apart. But then there are others that are meant to last. And others that can extend their time until chaos, possibly push it off indefinitely by adding in just enough energy input into their relationship to sort it out, put it back to work. With enough effort---”

“I used it thermodynamics as a shitty, spur-of-the-moment analogy. I don’t need you making legitimate sounding science-y theories out of it.” Baekhyun mumbles under his breath and Minseok smacks him.

“Just shut up and give me your input.” Minseok says and Baekhyun quiets, thinking it over.

“Then the kind of system it is. How am I supposed to figure out which one it is then?” He asks after a while.

“You test it out. Just like everything else in life. You figure it out through trial and error.”

“And what if I’m too afraid to get hurt to just go out and try it out again?” His voice comes out sharper than expected and he can feel Minseok tense next time.

This time, Minseok doesn’t have an answer.
There’s silence. “That’s like a fifty-fifty chance of the relationship failing, then.” Baekhyun says quietly.

"A little more, maybe significantly more given that there's really no indication that half of the time, it is a stable system but..." Minseok trails off as he sees Baekhyun gawk at him. “It’s better than your 100% chance, no?” Minseok decides to say instead,

“This still requires me to believe in fate, you know?” He adds in afterwards, really just saying the first thing that comes to mind.

“Maybe fate isn’t as bad as you make it out to be,” is Minseok’s soft reply and that shuts Baekhyun up.

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The next day, Baekhyun decides to go over to Chanyeol’s around noon. He dreads the thought of returning after leaving so rashly but he figures it’s the least he can do. He owes Chanyeol that much at least.

Chanyeol opens the door merely seconds after Baekhyun knocks, like he’s been expecting him, but Baekhyun doesn’t recall sending any sort of prior warning to his visit. “Hey.” Chanyeol offers a small smile.

Baekhyun tries his best to return it. “Hey. Can I come in?” He asks but he's already stepping in anyways, taking off his shoes before moving to take a seat on the couch.

"Why aren't you angry?” Baekhyun asks whenever Chanyeol makes his way over to take his seat right next to Baekhyun.

He just shrugs. "What's there to be angry about?"

“The fact that you said you--” Baekhyun says, voice loud and clear before he chokes on the next word, “You-- you loved me.” His voice is just barely over a whisper, “And I couldn’t say it back.”

“It’s okay,” Chanyeol smiles but Baekhyun can see the hurt in his eyes.

“It’s not okay.”

“It’s--”

Baekhyun cuts in as soon as he sees Chanyeol’s mouth open, forming the distinctive beginnings of the ‘o’ in ‘okay’. “Stop. No. It’s not okay.” He stresses, clenching his fist. “It’s not okay. In no world is this okay. I am literally saying that I can’t love you back, and you-- you... How can you just say that it’s just okay?!”

“Look, Baekhyun.” Chanyeol interrupts, gripping Baekhyun’s shoulders as the smile plastered on his face begins to look a little strained. “It’s okay. You weren’t ready. Let’s just put this all behind us. How about we go get some coffee tomorrow?”

Defeated, Baekhyun agrees.

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As a sort of return to normalcy, they decide to go out for coffee again at their favourite coffee shop. They walk there in mostly silence, small talk just barely keeping the unsettling quiet from setting in.
When they finally arrive, Baekhyun motions for Chanyeol to snag a table. "I'll get the coffee." He says, glancing at the coffee shop's menu in the corner of his eye.

"Okay I want the--" Chanyeol starts but Baekhyun cuts him off.

"The large house blend coffee with a spoon and a half full of sugar and a some hazelnut cream. You also want the sugar and cream to be poured in before the coffee and you want some milk foam with some kind of design on the top. I know, the usual." Baekhyun finishes and Chanyeol looks at a loss for words.

"Yea...yeah." He stutters out, looking a bit shell shocked, "I'll just uh get us a table."

While Chanyeol is off grabbing a table, Baekhyun steps up to the cashier and orders.

He doesn't really want to sit with Chanyeol, waiting around awkwardly for the coffee to arrive so Baekhyun stands around at the counter. The cashier gives him a weird look but shrugs it off.

Baekhyun can practically feel Chanyeol's gaze boring into his back but he doesn't dare turn around. Instead, he pulls out his phone to kill some time.

When the coffee is finally ready, he takes it upon himself to bring it to the table. Again, the cashier looks like he wants to protest but he -- Sehun as the name tag says-- allows it anyways, watching cautiously as Baekhyun attempts to transport the two mugs full of hot liquid back to the table.

Chanyeol stands up when he sees Baekhyun coming over. He moves to take his cup from Baekhyun and then sits back down. “You got something different.” He points out.

“Yeah.” Baekhyun only shrugs as he takes his seat. “There was a special.” He doesn’t really know what else to say so he blows over his coffee and then takes a sip.

“How is it?” Chanyeol asks right after Baekhyun swallows it down.

“Good.” He answers with widened eyes, “Like really, really good.”

“Two reallys? It must be mindblowing.”

“Life-changing.” He accentuates.

“Really?” Chanyeol asks, a smile playing at his mouth. “Well now I have to try it. Give me a sip?” He’s already reaching for Baekhyun’s cup.

“And why would I do that?” Baekhyun laughs, moving the coffee so that it’s just out of Chanyeol’s reach.

“Because you lo--” Chanyeol’s grin falls immediately and he has to stop himself to replace the word. “Like me.” The pause is obvious, though, and has Baekhyun fidgeting in his seat.

Baekhyun doesn’t say anything about it but Chanyeol quickly apologizes for it, “I’m sorry. Should I have not said that? Does it make you uncomfortable?”

“No,” Baekhyun sighs, “It’s fine.”

Chanyeol still continues to apologize, “I’m sorry. I’m really sorry, I just… It kind of slipped out, it’s not meant to pressure you or like--”

“Hey.” Baekhyun cuts in, effectively shutting Chanyeol up, “You’re babbling.” He holds out his cup
for Chanyeol to take and offers a little smile, “But takes some. It’s seriously the best coffee I’ve ever had before.”

Chanyeol’s a little hesitant to take the cup, but he sips some regardless. When he does, his lips curl into the faintest smile. He returns the cup to Baekhyun who in turn gives a forced smile and sips as well. An uncomfortable silence that has Baekhyun squirming in his seat settles over them.

“Look, Chanyeol,” Baekhyun starts, heaving a sigh that earns a look of concern from Chanyeol. “I don’t want it to be like this. I don’t want it to affect our relationship but at the same time, I don’t… I don’t want us to just go on pretending it never happened.”

Chanyeol’s quiet. “So…” He begins hesitantly. “What do you want?”

“I…” And he falters when he tries to come up with the words. “I don’t know.” Baekhyun admits, lowering his eyes to the table. Maybe this is the root of the problem. Of all his problems. He doesn’t know what he wants. He never knows what he wants.

There’s a sharp inhale from Chanyeol. “What do you want me to do?” He repeats, his voice hushed but steady. “Look, Baekhyun.” Immediately, Baekhyun’s eyes flick up and meet with Chanyeol’s intense gaze. “I love you.”

Baekhyun coughs and reaches for his coffee, hoping to swallow down the sudden feelings of nausea.

“I love you.” Chanyeol says again, not even in the slightest fazed by Baekhyun’s reaction. “But you have to tell me what you want. I’ll do anything, but you have to make up your mind.”

"I just..."

"You have to make the decisions." Chanyeol cuts in, urging.

“What do you want me to do?” Baekhyun snaps, suddenly. "What am I supposed to decide on? How we’re supposed to act around each other? How we’re going to be? Our dynamic?” Baekhyun starts to ramble, the uncanny feelings of hysteria settling in. “Am I supposed to just figure this whole damned thing out on my own?”

“No that’s not what I--” Chanyeol cuts himself off. Instead, he changes his approach, moving to grip one of Baekhyun’s hands in his own. “Do you like me?” He asks in a seemingly random manner.

“What?” Baekhyun says surprised, “Yes! Of course I do!”

"Do you want to be in a relationship with me?"

"Well yeah," Baekhyun says, squinting. He fails to see the point in Chanyeol's questions.

"Do you…” Chanyeol pauses to give Baekhyun’s hand a light squeeze, “Want to be in this relationship for a year? 5 years? 20 years?”

Now he knows where Chanyeol was going with it. He has a harder time answering this one. “I…” Once again, he falters and finishes with just the same, “I don’t know.” Baekhyun jerks his hands away from Chanyeol, not seeing the flicker of hurt that flashes through the other’s eyes, to bury his face in his hands. “I don’t know.” He repeats again, his voice muffled by his hands. “It’s not really a matter of wanting or not wanting.”

Chanyeol moves to push Baekhyun’s hands away, forcibly uncovering Baekhyun’s face. “Then what is this about if it’s not about wanting?” He asks, staring straight at Baekhyun.
He can’t take the intensity in Chanyeol’s gaze and he has to avert his eyes. “It’s about being able to. More specifically, It’s about not being able to.”

"Why?" Chanyeol asks point blank and Baekhyun's instinctive reaction is to shrug. He watches as Chanyeol's jaw clenches, obviously frustrated by the response. Frustrated by Baekhyun. "You can't think of anything?"

Again Baekhyun shrugs but the frown pulling at the corner of Chanyeol's mouth has him adding, "Commitment issues. The like."

And just slightly, that has Chanyeol's face brightening. "Then we can fix that. You just have to become accustomed to the idea of long term"

"Why are you acting like I'm something broken? Like this is something I need to fix?" Baekhyun snarls out, "This is something you can’t just fix. It's a flaw. It's my flaw."

“I’m not saying that I’m trying to fix you.” Chanyeol says. He keeps his voice soft but the irritation in his voice is pretty easy to pick out. “I’m just saying that this is something we can work through, something we can resolve.”

“Work through. Resolve. That means the same thing as fixing me, as changing me.” Baekhyun huffs. “I’m sorry that I can’t be as perfect as you might’ve hoped but--”

“Look, Baekhyun.” Chanyeol interrupts. He exhales as he massages the bridge of his nose with his fingers. “I’m not going to lie to you. I want to be in this relationship for the long run. I don't want this to be just some stupid fling that ends at the first sign of trouble. This is just one of the things that needs to be worked through."

"Has it ever occurred to you that maybe that's not what I want?” He spits out, eyes aflame with anger. “Has it ever occurred to you that maybe all I wanted from this, from you is a simple fling? Maybe this was all just for fun.”

"You're lying." Chanyeol shakes his head. "You want more than that from this. You aren't the kind of person who would -- who could just do that."

“And I suppose you know just absolutely everything about me given that you've known me for less than a year.” Baekhyun growls.

“Why are you getting so mad when you’re the one at fault? You're the one who can’t love me back.” Chanyeol cuts in and he doesn’t raise his voice, doesn’t even look angry. Instead, his voice is steady, low, but still cut with the way they’re coupled with the emotionless stare of Chanyeol.

That shuts Baekhyun up. His freezes mid-word. He doesn’t know how to respond to that so he does what he does best.

He gets up and leaves.

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Whenever he gets home, he locks himself in his room, sulking. Minseok (even Lu Han at one point) knocks on his door every now and then to offer him some kind of food or ask if he wants to watch something with them, but for the most part, Baekhyun rejects all the offers. He’d really rather just wallow in his own self-pity alone and undisturbed.

Someone obviously doesn’t get the message because sometime the next morning, the door slowly
creaks open despite being locked. He needs to get around to fixing that lock.

“Go away, Minseok.” Baekhyun groans, not bothering to lift his face from where it’s quite firmly planted in his pillow. “Or Lu Han. Whichever one of you bastards decided to come in.”

The footsteps approaching his bed stop. “What if it’s not either of those two?”

The sound of the voice has Baekhyun practically jerking up to look at the intruder. “Chanyeol?” He squeaks.

And there he is, standing awkwardly in the middle of his room. In his arms is a fairly large bouquet of white tulips and--

“Are those dead leaves?” Baekhyun blurts out despite himself and Chanyeol seems to shrink away.

“They… uh… There’s a reason.” Chanyeol stammers out, hurrying to point out one of the tulips. “You see, these mean forgiveness and,” He moves to picks out one of the leaves, “These mean sadness. So like…”

“You put. Dead leaves. In a bouquet.” Baekhyun tries to stifle his laugh because not only would it be rude but inappropriate given the current situation.

Chanyeol only offers a sheepish smile, “It seemed like a good idea at the time.” He admits before moving to lay the bouquet down on Baekhyun’s desk. “Can I…?” He doesn’t finish off his question, instead making a gesture to the space on the bed.

Baekhyun fights back the laughter bubbling in his throat and gives a slight nod, he himself moving to the edge of the bed so that they can sit side by side. When Chanyeol sits, Baekhyun can feel the slight dip in the bed but he keeps his gaze trained forward to the bedroom door. “Look,” He says and he can feel Chanyeol’s gaze. He doesn’t dare turn around, though. “Yesterday, I was being a dick. I was -- am -- being selfish and I totally, understand if you want to end this all.”

There’s a beat of silence and Baekhyun is afraid. So afraid that Chanyeol will get up. That he’ll just walk straight out the opened door and out of his life.

But he doesn’t. He stays where he is, looking unbelievably lost. “Why would I end this, why would I leave just because of that?”

And Baekhyun shrugs despite himself, despite how irritated he knows Chanyeol gets when he’s unsure of himself, unsure of their relationship. “It could happen,” He tries to justify but he can’t stop himself from lifting his shoulders again just slightly. “It does happen. It will happen.”

“Why are you like this?” Chanyeol asks but his voice is soft. The question in itself sounds accusatory, angry, but there’s nothing but concern in Chanyeol’s tone. Right as Baekhyun opens his mouth to answer, to say the exact same things as yesterday as that’s the only way Baekhyun can see this conversation going down, Chanyeol holds up a hand, immediately cutting him off. “And I don’t want to hear an answer like yesterday. There’s a reason behind problems like these, always. So what’s yours?”

And it’s not that Chanyeol’s wrong. There is a very legitimate answer to the question but instead, Baekhyun only averts his eyes. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Will you ever want to talk about it.”

He’s at a loss for words. “I-I don’t know.” He admits and he hears Chanyeol suck in a breath. He
doesn't have the courage to look Chanyeol in the eyes, meekly avoiding eye contact by fiddling with the hem of his bed’s blanket.

The silence lasts for a long beat, the two of them just sitting side by side, waiting for the other to speak up first. “Baekhyun,” Chanyeol starts out slowly, “I wasn’t lying when I said that I would wait forever for you.”

"You never said that to me." Baekhyun says before he can stop himself. "You said that about my book, not me."

"You, your book, everything." Chanyeol moves to caress Baekhyun's cheek. "I don't know if what you said yesterday about not wanting to be with me for a long period of time was true or not--" Baekhyun hurriedly shakes his head. He's about to open his mouth and say something, deny his stupid, irrational rantings of yesterday but Chanyeol holds a hand to his mouth, a silent gesture to let him finish. "But what I got from yesterday is that you're unsure of this. You're unsure whether you really want this or not and I get it. I'm willing to wait for you to make up your mind about this -- our -- relationship. I'm willing to wait for you to accept the idea of commitment -- if that's what you actually want. And if it's not, then I'll be okay, I just want you to be able to tell me truthfully. I'm willing to wait for you, for all eternity, so long as you'll allow me."

“Why?” Baekhyun asks softly. “Why are you willing to do this? Why are you so prepared to do this much -- for me?”

Chanyeol offers a small smile, reaching down to grip one of Baekhyun’s hands. “Because you're worth it.”

“There’s better people out there. People who would be so much more willing, so much more deserving to have someone like you.”

“To me, there’s no one else better than you. For me, there’s no one else better than you.”

"You're making a mistake," Baekhyun croaks out, trying to blink back the tears threatening to fall.

"Then I'll make a mistake," Chanyeol shrugs. “So forgive me? For all of the things I said yesterday, things I didn’t mean, forgive me?”

“You shouldn’t be the one apologizing.”

Chanyeol quiets for just a second. “Then accept me?”

Baekhyun blinks at him and then curves the corners of his mouth into a small smile. “Give me that damned bouquet.” He holds out his hand and Chanyeol obediently retrieves it from off the table to hand it off to Baekhyun. He spares just a glance at the arrangement before hastily picking out some of the dead leaves from out of the bouquet.

“What are you doing?” Chanyeol exclaims, alarmed by Baekhyun’s actions, “They’re symbolic.” He pouts, trying to stop Baekhyun from throwing out the part he’s picked out.

Baekhyun laughs. “Then this should be symbolic, too” He teases, “Look, I’m throwing out the sadness.” He punctuates his words by chucking some of the leaves he’s managed to pick out into his room’s wastebasket.

Chanyeol frowns. (But that doesn’t stop him from helping Baekhyun out)

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Chanyeol, in fact, does wait for a very long time before Baekhyun ever says anything about the issue but it’s not like he seems to be waiting for Baekhyun’s explanation. He doesn’t mention it again. He doesn’t pry; he doesn’t badger. And that’s fine with Baekhyun.

And Baekhyun, he doesn’t want to talk. He doesn’t want to tell, doesn’t plan on telling Chanyeol -- on telling anyone besides Minseok, really -- why he’s so afraid of being in love, of being committed for a good amount of time but that changes.

But one day, when they’re just hanging around Chanyeol’s apartment as always, he’s suddenly struck with an odd urge to say it, to admit it and get it off his chest once and for all.

“Kyungsoo.” Baekhyun mumbles, his head currently settled in Chanyeol’s lap as they’re watching some random movie that’s come on TV. "That's his name."

“What? Who?” Chanyeol asks, confused. “Kyungsoo?” He reaches over to the arm of the couch to retrieve the remote, turning down the volume.

“Yeah,” Baekhyun replies, keeping his eyes forward, refusing to turn toward Chanyeol even if he can feel Chanyeol’s gaze on him. “He was my last boyfriend.”

This time, Chanyeol turns the TV completely off. “Where are you going with--”

“Can I tell you a story?” Baekhyun cuts in, sitting up straight. And Chanyeol’s silent. He takes that as a yes. “So once upon a time, there were two boys who met in college. They hated each other. From the moment they met each other, it was like oil and water; they didn't mix. They weren’t supposed to mix. Something about their dreams, their personalities, their everything set each other off. They were opposites but I suppose opposite are always attracted to each other in the end.”

Chanyeol nods slowly as Baekhyun continues. "The first time they got together, it was a mistake. Orchestrated by the effects of alcohol, all of it was just a drunken mistake. Afterwards, they treated it as just that and went back to ignoring each other, hating each other, that kind of thing. But it happened again, and then again. Somewhere around the seventh time of waking up naked next to each other, I guess they finally realized that there was a problem.

"So they talked, finally got themselves entangled into some kind of relationship but it was all kinds of fucked up. Really, it was the exact same as before just under the name of boyfriends. It wasn't even a relationship but a one night stand. A series of one night stands. A series of mistakes.

"And they tried to work it out, be romantic, be normal, but every time they opened their mouths, it was just screaming. They fought about everything. Anything." Baekhyun grimaces. "You’d think it be logical for them to just break up, break apart but against all odds, they lasted throughout college. It seems just pure lust was enough to make it through.

"After college, they moved in together, thinking that would help smooth things out, but it really only made things worse. At least before it was arguments. But after they graduated, they realized how wrong it was to be fighting so much in the first place. They were supposed to be mature now, adults and so something as childish as petty arguments had to be done away with.

“Neither of them were particularly good at moderation, though, so from one extreme onto the next, they moved to silence. It wasn’t meant to be like that at first. It really just started out as them biting their tongue whenever they felt the need to start an argument, you know, to become more tolerant toward each other. And it seemed to work -- at first. The amount of disputes decreased significantly but as time went on, as they grew -- no, forced is a better word --to be more tolerant of each other, as they forced themselves to endure every little thing that might set them off, they just ultimately came
to the conclusion that keeping quiet, not speaking at all was the best way to get through without an argument.

"And it's not like they didn't acknowledge how wrong all of it was. It was wrong for them to be fighting so much in the first place. It was even more wrong for them to cohabit a place and still act like complete strangers, move about as if there was no one else there. There was a lot to be fixed. But they never really got around to fixing it.

"Somewhere along the two year mark is when things started improving. They started to talk more, started to at least try to connect and love. At a certain point, their love even seemed normal. But this meant two different things to them. One thought it was finally them trying to stabilize their love, to normalize it so that it was a steady flame, not just spontaneous flickers of passion.

"The other, though, he apparently saw it as a way of drawing their relationship -- if you can even call it that -- to a close. You know, paint over the flaws, the fuck ups, so it all looks pretty whenever you look back on it. There was the inherent difference in values, in ideals and they just never got around to fixing it, they never got around to even recognizing it.

"The optimistic one just thought things would only get better from there on out but he realized he was wrong when he walked in on the other fucking into some other man on the bed. Retrospectively speaking, it wasn't so much the fact that he cheated that was the problem; it was more in the way that the fucker reacted. He didn't seem to feel any sort of regret or remorse for what he'd done, it was like he thought it was just okay to do. Like the relationship had deteriorated so far to the point that things like this were okay."

"He was wrong, you know." Chanyeol interrupts for the first time. "It doesn't matter what the situation but he cheated on you, you aren't to blame."

"You figured out this story is about me?" Baekhyun offers a wry smile.

"I didn't realize that you were trying to make me think it was anyone else." Baekhyun sighs. "I wasn't. It's just easier to think of this whole situation as something that's outside of me. So I don't have to recognize all of these stupid, stupid mistakes as my own."

"They aren't stupid." Chanyeol's quick to defend, reaching out to grip one of Baekhyun's hands in his own. "I mean, yes, there were probably smarter ways to deal with some of the things but you were young. Too young to know much better."

"That was less than a year ago." Baekhyun shakes his head, letting out a mirthless laugh. "So I wasn't all that young but I was still plenty stupid."

"A lot can change in a person in that little period of time. Maturity isn't measured by time but by experience."

Baekhyun doesn't add to the idea, instead only offering a noncommittal shrug as an answer before moving onto something else. "But what hurt me in the most was the fact that I was the only one who thought it was love. Fucked up, yes, but in my mind it was love, especially when things began to get better. And I expressed this many times, practically abused those three words and let my feelings be known at nearly every instance. Looking back, saying it that often, the frequently probably degraded their meaning. It lost its significance, became more of a routine thing rather than something special. I guess he fell into that habit too…"

"He said them back. Not nearly as often as I did but enough to where I actually believed it. He said
them without ever meaning them, though. Never once did he actually mean it and I guess that's what was the worst part of it all.” Baekhyun finishes and he can feel the tears that are threatening to fall.

"So this is why you don't...?" Chanyeol trails off, finishing his sentence with just an earnest look instead of actual words.

“Well that and also my pet turtle died..” Baekhyun cracks a small smile, trying to lighten the mood. “So I'm afraid to ever love again.”

Chanyeol's face remains solemn, though, and Baekhyun heaves a sigh before saying, "Chanyeol. You're great, really. But I'm afraid of becoming like him, of saying those words back for the sake of parroting them back without any meaning." Baekhyun forces a laugh, wiping at the tears collecting in his eyes, “It’s kind of stupid, isn’t it? How one thing managed to affect me so much. It was one relationship. It was a college relationship, for fuck’s sake. Things aren’t even serious at that point -- or at least they shouldn't have been."

“Maybe not for others. But it was for you.” Chanyeol answers softly as he pulls Baekhyun into a hug.

There's no words spoken at first; Baekhyun's trying to stop the tears from falling and Chanyeol trying to wrap himself around the other as tightly as possible.

“How long ago was this?” Chanyeol finally asks when Baekhyun's calmed down.

“You know when I first moved in?”

Baekhyun can't see it, what with the way his face is buried into Chanyeol's chest, but he can feel the way Chanyeol nods. "Just about a week before that," He says, "Right after I saw him with his lover, I packed a suitcase and left for a hotel. Two days later, he somehow found out where I was staying and sent all of my things packed in neat little boxes. He left a note but it wasn't an apology, all it said was, the apartment is mine and that was the end. I ran into Minseok in the next day or so, told him what happened, and he offered to let me move in with him. So I did."

"I--" Chanyeol starts out but he's at a loss for words, "I'm so sorry."

At this, Baekhyun pulls himself away from Chanyeol's chest and offers a small albeit shaky smile. "I'm not. He was toxic and I needed to get away from him. Meeting you was the best thing that happened to me."

Again, words seem to escape Chanyeol and instead he brings Baekhyun in close to him again. In a low voice, he whispers his response into the shell of Baekhyun's ear: “Stay with me tonight?”

Baekhyun only nods.

It's later that night, when they're lying sticky on the bed, Chanyeol says it.

“I love you.” He mumbles sleepily as he runs his hand through Baekhyun’s hair.

“Stop. Don’t say that.” Baekhyun snips, “It makes me uncomfortable. Guilty.”

His words seem to awaken Chanyeol out of his post-coital daze. Chanyeol's quick to apologize and that's seems to be the end of it.
But it's not the end of it because Chanyeol still drops those three words occasionally, but whether it be by accident or on purpose, Baekhyun doesn’t know. For the most part, he seems like he genuinely didn’t mean to say it, characterized by his sheepish expression and eyes wide with apprehension. But there’s one incident where it's undeniably intentional.

It’s happens near the end of November. On Chanyeol’s birthday, to be exact.

Chanyeol’s turning 26 and they go out to some fancy restaurant to celebrate. Chanyeol’s treat.

“I’m just saying.” Baekhyun starts, irritatedly fiddling with one of his keychains. “How is it a birthday dinner if you’re paying?”

“And what I’m saying it that it’s a treat in itself to see you get your butt out of the apartment and its 5 mile radius.” Chanyeol answers back, only sparing a look at Baekhyun when they’re stopped at a red light.

“But you’re still paying so it’s not a present.”

“Did you not listen to anything I just said?” Chanyeol laughs, “And okay but think about this? Are you really offering to pay for a dinner at a place that sells a single dish for like 50 dollars?”

Baekhyun doesn’t say anything. “No…” He admits and he doesn’t even need to look over to know that there’s a triumphant smirk plastered on Chanyeol’s face. As the car begins to accelerate again, Baekhyun adds, “Which is why I suggest you turn this car around. It’s not too late to order some chinese food or something.”

As a reply, Chanyeol only snorts, “You’re such a cheap date. I want to eat somewhere nice for my birthday so I’m going to do just that. Even if I have to pay for it myself.”

“You’re making me sound like a terrible boyfriend!” Baekhyun protests, lightly punching Chanyeol in the side. As he does it, Chanyeol decides it would be funny to suddenly swear severely to the left, eliciting a shrill shriek from Baekhyun. “You piece of shit!” Baekhyun exclaims, grasping his racing heart.

“It’s not my fault you’re poor.” Chanyeol shrugs nonchalantly, as if he didn’t just almost kill the two of them.

“Are we just going to ignore the fact that you may or may not have given me a heart attack?” Baekhyun takes the smug little smirk on Chanyeol’s face as a yes. “Well… You’re not exactly swimming in money either.” He gripes, sinking into his seat.

“I have more money than you think.”

“You’re a freelance graphic designer.” He says with venom before innocently adding, “No offense.” Chanyeol laughs goodnaturedly. “At least I have a legitimate job, Mr. Unpublished Author.”

“Oh low blow, man. Low Blow.” Baekhyun narrows his eyes, speaking with a voice filled with mock anger.

“I’m a good saver,” Chanyeol continues on, making a left that is far smoother than the first.

“Is this your way of telling me you’re secretly a millionaire or something,” Baekhyun says. He
moves to lean up against the car door so he can gawk at Chanyeol. “Because I am okay with that.” He finishes with a sly grin that Chanyeol doesn’t see.

“Sounds like the words of a gold digger to me.” Chanyeol teases as he steals a quick glance to where Baekhyun is situated in the passenger’s seat. Baekhyun makes an obscene gesture and earns himself an amused chuckle from the younger.

Turning toward the window, Baekhyun cranes his neck to watch the street lights go by. “Marry rich. That’s the dream, isn’t it?” He muses comically.

Immediately, Chanyeol adds in: “Hate to break it to you but that’s one dream I can’t make true.”

“Then take me to a nice dinner and we can pretend to be kings for a night.”

Chanyeol chances just one more glance to the other. “And yet you were complaining about me taking myself out for my birthday.” He deadpans. In the window’s reflection though, Baekhyun can see just the traces of the amused smile that has settled on Chanyeol’s lips.

They arrive at the restaurant a couple of minutes later and while Baekhyun knew that Chanyeol was taking him out somewhere nice, he definitely wasn’t expecting this. It’s some French restaurant with a name that he can’t even hope to pronounce. He can practically smell the wasted money from within the car.

“Really?” He says, lifting an eyebrow. “Just flush some money down the toilet, why don’t you?”

“Okay okay. So it is a bit expensive.” Chanyeol ignores the unamused look on Baekhyun’s face. “It’ll be good, trust me.”

Baekhyun rolls his eyes but gets out of the car anyways, grumbling about wasting money. He doesn’t know how he manages to do it, but as soon as Baekhyun turns around to shut the car door, Chanyeol appears beside him and slings an arm around the older. “Are you cold?” He whispers into Baekhyun’s ear as he pulls him into his side.

“It’s like a five minute walk, I’ll survive.” Baekhyun grumbles as he burrows into his hoodie.

As grand as the exterior looks, the interior is about three times nicer. There’s a sizable glass chandelier hanging right above the waiting area and Baekhyun can’t take his eyes off of it. Vaguely, he hears Chanyeol talking to the waitress at the front.

“Right this way, sirs.” She says with a tightlipped smile, leading them farther into the restaurant. It’s when she and Chanyeol have taken a couple of steps forward when Baekhyun has to wrench his eyes away from the amazing floating death trap and hurry to catch up.

“Did you see the chandelier?” He asks in a whisper as he waddles up to Chanyeol’s side.

“Yes and I also saw you gaping at it with your mouth wide open.” Chanyeol chuckles and Baekhyun frowns.

It takes a couple of minutes to get to their table; the waitress brings them to a table on the second floor, way in the back. “Wow you reserved a window table?” Baekhyun asks incredulously, glancing at the lovely view of the skyline. “How classy.”

“Only the best for my Baekhyun.” Chanyeol winks and in the corner of his eye, Baekhyun can see the hostess trying (but failing) to keep her face stoic. Being the gentleman he is, Chanyeol immediately moves to pull out Baekhyun’s seat for him. Baekhyun graciously accepts, gracing
Chanyeol’s cheek with a kiss as a reward and watches as Chanyeol goes to his own chair. He shrugs off his jacket and hangs it off the back of the seat before sitting.

"Your waitress will be here shortly." The hostess bows before disappearing. They're left by themselves.

Baekhyun suddenly leans forward, giving Chanyeol a bewildered look. "I feel like everyone is looking at me." He says in a hushed voice.

"Wow that's a bit pretentious." Chanyeol comments with a grin, one side of his mouth raising higher than the other. "I mean I know you're highly attractive but still."

Baekhyun shakes his head and then quickly surveys the tables around him. Sure enough, many of them are watching him. "No I'm serious." His gaze returns to Chanyeol and he squints at him. "It's like I'm doing-- oh my god." He cuts himself off, his mouth dropping into an o. "Why didn't you tell me we are going to a fancy restaurant?!"

Chanyeol looks confused. "I did. Many times in the car. I recall we even had a conversation about how it's weird that I'm paying even though it's my birthday."

"Yeah yeah yeah," Baekhyun waves off. "But before! I would've dressed up, I mean I'm wearing skinny jeans for god's sake!"

Chanyeol shrugs, "You look good. What's it matter?"

"How the hell did we even get in here? This place probably has a black tie dress code."

Chanyeol shrugs again but something catches Baekhyun's eye. Hurriedly he pushes the vase obstructing his view and gapes.

"You're wearing formal clothing too!" Baekhyun hisses. "What kind of betrayal is this?"

Chanyeol only laughs, leaning back into his chair to hook his one of his arms around the back corner. "You didn’t notice before?" He makes a show of readjusting his silk blue tie.

"I don’t notice your clothes." He’s quick to justify with the smallest hint of a pout.

"Why? Too busy looking at my face?" Chanyeol smirks and Baekhyun doesn’t have a good response to that. Instead, he goes back to sitting upright and pretends to be too occupied unwrapping his silverware.

"So what do you want to eat?" Baekhyun says eventually, deciding to ultimately avoid responding by throwing another topic out instead. He opens his menu up, scanning over the choices and trying not to cry at the exorbitant prices.

Promptly, Chanyeol moves to shut Baekhyun's menu closed. Before Baekhyun can even protest, Chanyeol is pulling it out of his reach. "I already have the course planned out. Don't worry about a thing, darling."

He ends up buying a seven-course meal for the both of them and Baekhyun can't help but imagine how expensive the whole thing is going to be. The food is good, of course, but the wine is far more spectacular. Baekhyun’s not one who usually has a taste for class (usually, he’s the one to scour for the cheapest there is, looking to get his drunk on with paying as little as humanly possible) but he
knows a good wine when he tastes it and there’s nothing stopping him from downing glass after glass of the finest alcohol to grace his lips.

“This is so good,” Baekhyun leans in, whispering. They’re on their final course, a chocolate torte paired with the sweetest dessert wine he’s ever tasted. Baekhyun’s drained nearly half of his glass already.

“Maybe you should stop drinking so much,” Chanyeol advises helpfully as he sections off a spoonful of the dessert and pops it into Baekhyun’s mouth. The corners of Baekhyun’s mouth turn up happily as chews.

“Well, you apparently can’t get drunk.” Baekhyun says as soon as he swallows. “So I’m doing it for the both of us.” Baekhyun waves his hand in front of his face and he doesn’t quite know how the gesture is to help his argument but he does it anyways. Seconds later, Chanyeol bats it away with a look of an embarrassment.

“Yes but I’m driving.” Chanyeol points out helpfully and as Baekhyun’s hand goes inching back to his glass to wash down the decadent taste of chocolate, he moves quickly to slide in just a couple inches out of reach. “Seriously, I don’t want you passing out drunk and me having to haul your ass back up all those stairs.”

“I’m not going to pass out,” Baekhyun assures, sticking his tongue out childishly as if that proves his point. “Now give me back my glass or so help me God I will start drinking from the bottle.”

Chanyeol only gives a skeptical look before sliding it back over.

And true to his words, Baekhyun doesn’t pass out. Instead, he’s oddly awake on their way back, giddy even. He’s practically bouncing up and down in his seat, eyes flicking back and forth between Chanyeol and the outside view.

Chanyeol seems worried what with the way he's glancing over about every four seconds, but he doesn’t say anything, mouth pressed into a fine line in concentration as he maneuvers his way through the traffic.

They pretty much drive in complete silence, only the soft hum of the engine in the background, and somehow, Baekhyun hatches a brilliant idea. When Chanyeol's not paying attention, Baekhyun ventures a hand to Chanyeol's thigh, giving it a little squeeze.

Immediately the action has Chanyeol ripping his gaze away from the street to Baekhyun. "Keep your eyes on the road." Baekhyun teases and juts his chin forward in a gesture.

Chanyeol frowns but he turns back just seconds later as the car begins to veer slightly to the left. Probably not intentionally.

As soon as Chanyeol rights the car back into its proper lane, Baekhyun's hand starts to move. Up and down, just simply trailing along the expanse of the thigh. "What are you doing?" Chanyeol asks, not looking over at Baekhyun this time around.

"Nothing," Baekhyun answers back cheekily, but Chanyeol doesn't bother challenging it. Baekhyun takes that as the okay to continue on.

It's when Chanyeol takes the exit to a street that's particularly empty at this time of night that Baekhyun scoots in closer to the middle of the car, making for an easier reach for him to press his
hand into Chanyeol's groin.

"What are you doing?" Chanyeol repeats again; he keeps his hands clamped tight around the steering wheel.

“Nothing!” Baekhyun says innocently but palms at the area again. He has to bring his other hand over so that he can unbutton Chanyeol’s pants leaving him reaching across the center console. He catches Chanyeol’s eyes when he’s down there and the unreadable look in Chanyeol’s gaze has him leaning back into his own seat once he accomplishes his mission. His other hand remains there, though, kneading Chanyeol through the thin layer of cloth.

“You,” Chanyeol’s words are abruptly cut off with a groan, “Are so drunk.”

“I don’t know,” Baekhyun shrugs nonchalantly while exerting just a bit more pressure that has Chanyeol clench his jaw, “This seems like something I’d do if I was sober too, honestly.”

He can’t see the speedometer clearly from his angle but he does feel the car speeding up, Chanyeol’s jerky movements steering the car through the obstacles of the road. He knows the streets are empty though, knows that they’re really at no risk so he takes his chance to slip his hand underneath the waistband of Chanyeol's underwear and grasp at the heat that lies beneath.

"Fucking Christ, Baek!" Chanyeol exclaims just as he slams the brakes for a red light. As soon as they’ve fully stopped, Chanyeol wretches Baekhyun's hand out from his pants. "I swear if we crash because of you…” He exhaled and his eyes look just a bit wild, a bit bleary. “Just wait. Let's just wait until we're back at the apartment.”

Baekhyun hums in agreement, not even trying to cover his smug little smile.

It happens when they’ve finished and are collapsed onto a pile of limbs on the bed. "I'll go get a towel," Chanyeol announces and Baekhyun only makes a small sound in agreement, too tired, too boneless to come up with anything better to say.

As Chanyeol gets up, Baekhyun curls up into a little ball to conserve heat. He'd reach for a blanket if he weren't deathly afraid of dirtying the pristine fabric. When Chanyeol makes his way back, Baekhyun just turns onto his back and let's Chanyeol do all the work.

Chanyeol works in silence at first as he diligently cleans off Baekhyun but he breaks it when he asks, "You know how you didn't give me a birthday present?"

"You said you didn't want anything," Baekhyun protests, frowning. "I'm not a bad boyfriend, I swear!"

Chanyeol only chuckles, "I wasn't saying you are. And that's true, I didn't want anything then, but I want something now."

"Well I'm sorry but I do not have my wallet anywhere near me so you will have to wait until tomorrow for me to order it." Baekhyun says matter-of-factly but Chanyeol only laughs.

After he's cleaned up Baekhyun the best he can, Chanyeol proceeds to just fall on top of him, much to his protests. “You’re all sticky, this is gross,” Baekhyun complains, trying to push the other off of him, “Get off me--”

“I love you.” Chanyeol murmurs into Baekhyun’s ear and Baekhyun freezes.
He thinks it's unintentional. After all, Chanyeol does seem to let the words slip out every now and then but he usually realizes his mistake pretty early on. That doesn't seem to be the situation here as Chanyeol repeats, "I'm not kidding, Baekhyun. I love you."

His first instinct is to play it off as a joke. "What's with you and dropping the l word after we have sex?" Baekhyun laughs, but who is he kidding? Even a child could see through his shaky tone. He closes his eyes as he exhales, deciding to just nip all of this at the bud. "Stop it." He says, shoving Chanyeol off of him.

"I love you," Chanyeol says again and Baekhyun buries his face into the crease of his arm.

"Stop it." He growls but Chanyeol doesn’t get the message.

"I love you." Chanyeol tries again for the fourth time and Baekhyun's patience wears thin.

"Stop it!" He snarls, jerking his arms down in frustration to turn and glare at Chanyeol. He misses the flicker of hurt that flashes through Chanyeol's eyes as his own tear up. "Stop it, please," He repeats, his voice far softer than before, "I don't -- you don't deserve this kind of treatment."

"I," Chanyeol stops as he holds Baekhyun's face gently between his palms. "I love you so so much. Please just let me say it this one time. As a birthday present."

"How is this a birthday present if I'm the one receiving?" Baekhyun blurts out without actually answering the question at hand.

"It's a treat in itself to have you hear the words you deserve more than anything in the world."

Baekhyun's feels the tears begin to swell at the edges of his eyes, threatening to fall, and he immediately turns his back toward Chanyeol. He doesn't want Chanyeol to see him cry. "Okay." Baekhyun says quietly, after a while whenever he feels like he's not on the brink of crying anymore, "Just this one time."

There's not a sound from the other but he feels a weight slink over him, pinning him beneath his body. Chanyeol grabs both of his wrists and holds them over his head as he lowers himself down to press a kiss into Baekhyun's forehead. "I love you." He whispers against the skin. Immediately, Baekhyun averts his eyes. "I'm sorry." He says, avoiding Chanyeol's gaze. "I'm so sorry." And that's all he can say as Chanyeol repeats the three words over and over again.

He justifies his actions by saying that it was supposed to be his birthday present, but he ends up apologizing at the end of it anyways. "I'm sorry." Chanyeol says finally as he's running his hands through the silky strands of Baekhyun's hair. "I shouldn't-- I know you don’t want me to do those kind of things, I just… I just had to get it out there. I won't do it again."

Baekhyun peers up wordlessly at the other through his bangs. "Promise?" He asks softly, raising his pinky finger for Chanyeol to take.

Silently, Chanyeol twines his own little finger around Baekhyun's with a small smile. "Yeah. I promise." He whispers back.

Chanyeol doesn't break his promise.

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And after that, things are fine on the Chanyeol front. No more random conflicts, no more accidental words. But with Baekhyun’s luck, just as one thing finally clears up, something else fucks up.

He hears it when he’s supposed to be sleeping. Minseok’s at the dining table as always, working on whatever, Lu Han is just quietly watching TV, while he’s napping. Sometime while he’s sleeping, Lu Han decides it’d be cute to go over to Minseok while he’s supposed to be typing up an essay and bother him in some way, shape, or form. Baekhyun doesn’t really know what Lu Han ends up doing but he does awaken to the sound of Minseok’s hysterical laughter.

And really, he has half a mind to go back to sleep; he’s seen enough of Lu Han and Minseok being all cute.

But just when he’s teetering on the edge of consciousness, he hears something.

“Minseok,” He hears Lu Han quietly sigh out, “Let’s get married.”

He doesn’t hear a reply back for a while until Minseok laughs. “Well that was out of nowhere. I think you’re skipping a couple of steps there.”

To Baekhyun’s surprise, Lu Han laughs as well and when he answers, there’s not even the slightest note of pain or disappointment. “True.” Lu Han says, “Then how about this. Move in with me?”

And that’s when the carefree atmosphere turns tense as Minseok hesitates. “You know I can’t do that, Han.”

“Why not?” Lu Han says, but it's hardly even a question. Something in the slight edge in his voice makes it seem as if he already knows the answer.

“Han,” Minseok repeats softly as if that’s reason enough. And usually, it is. Whenever Lu Han is being particularly aggravating, usually Minseok’s soft calling of his voice is enough get him to stop. But not this time.

“No, Minseok.” Lu Han snaps. “That’s not going to work this time. I’ve been asking for a while and I think I finally deserve to hear the reason from your own mouth, not just some shitty repetition of my name.” Baekhyun has to stop himself from gasping aloud. Lu Han cusses, sure, but he’s never actually directly cussed at Minseok -- not that Baekhyun knows of at least --, much less used that kind of tone of voice either.

“Lu Han… You know I…” Minseok begins but Lu Han cuts him off with a scoff.

“Is it really because of Baekhyun?” He laughs mirthlessly and Baekhyun’s blood runs cold. “Is your stupid little friend really the one holding you back from being with me?”

Minseok’s quick to quiet him. “Don’t speak so loudly!” He hisses, “He’s right there.”

“The fucker is asleep.” Lu Han snorts. “And answer me, Minseok. If you could only choose between him and me, who you choose?”

“You know that’s not very fair.”

“Me. Or him.” Lu Han snips out and although he tries his best to keep his voice level, even, the seething anger is hard to conceal.

“Don’t make me do this.” Minseok pleads, “How can you expect me to pick between my lifelong
“I like how I don’t even deserve a title; you just call me ‘you’.” Lu Han snorts in a condescending manner.

“You know that’s not what I mean, Lu Han.” Minseok answers quietly and with the way that there is no response, Baekhyun can only guess that Lu Han’s just staring, anticipating an answer. He gets his answer just thirty seconds later when Minseok says, in a louder, more confident voice, “You’re the love of my life. So let me rephrase: How can you expect me to pick between my friend since childhood and my soulmate?!?” His volume edges louder and louder but he’s still nowhere near yelling.

“Why is it so difficult to pick between us? Shouldn’t the answer be clear?” Lu Han exclaims and he’s quick to stop himself before he gets to far.

“Are you,” Minseok begins, drawing a shuddering breath, “Are you asking me -- no, telling me to ditch my best friend for you?”

Lu Han groans, “No that’s-- That’s not what I meant.”

“Then what the fuck do you mean?”

Lu Han sighs again. “I don’t have a problem with you being friends with him -- you should know that. Otherwise, I would’ve complained about him long ago. No no, the problem lies in the fact that he is not a child anymore. No matter how much you seem to think he is, Baekhyun is an adult; he knows how to live his life and he doesn’t need you.”

“No,” Minseok protests and it sounds pitiful, really. “He still--”

“He doesn’t.” Lu Han cuts in, “If anything, having him mooch off of you and your apartment like a damned leech is bad for him. Bad for both of you, really, because money’s beyond tight for you and he’s never going to learn how to get back on his feet and move on with his fucking life.” And Baekhyun didn’t know this. He didn’t know that Minseok was having a hard time paying the bills. He could’ve helped. He could’ve contributed if only he’d known what was happening and--

He has to cut his own thoughts off when Minseok responds. “You don’t know what he’s been through, Han.” And Baekhyun swears he hears just the slightest bit of animosity twisted through the words. “Don’t act like you have any idea of what he went through.”

“I don’t know.” Lu Han readily admits, “I don’t know the full thing because no one’s ever bothered to tell me but I know about most of it, pieced it together through the tidbits of information you let slip out every now and them, and it’s not nearly as dramatic as you make it out to be. He had his heart broken. That happens to everyone. There’s no need to baby him; he’s not a child. He. Is. Not. Your. Responsibility!”

Minseok doesn’t take Lu Han’s natural pause to reply so Lu Han only continues. “I don’t have anything against Baekhyun personally, but I do have something against his presence. You’re holding yourself back because of him -- don’t even act like you don’t. You make so many sacrifices for him, cutting down your meals to save some extra money so that the fridge is always stocked for him to snack, working yourself to the bone to do all the housework so he doesn’t have to worry. This is your last year in graduate school. You don’t have the time nor energy to be worrying about Baekhyun like this.

“Minseok, I love you. I really do. Do you have any idea how aggravating, how heartbreaking it is to
watch him take advantage of you like this? To see you stretch yourself so thin that you’re about to snap, all for this guy? So no, I don’t give a shit about whether you two stay friends. I honestly do not care whether or not you hang around him, but I don’t want you to give yourself up for his sake.”

“He’s…” Minseok says softly, “He’s my best friend…”

“And that makes it all the more worse.”

“What do you expect me to do, then?” Minseok pipes in after a minute or so.

“In a perfect world,” Lu Han starts, “I would want you to dump his sorry ass. Kick him out, force him to find his own footing in the world and meanwhile, you’d move in with me. I have enough money to support the both of us so you’d finish graduate school without having to worry about finances. You’d graduate. We’d marry and then we’d live happily ever after.

“But we both know that’s not going to happen.” He says, voice solemn, “You’re too compassionate, too kind to do anything like that. So, knowing you, nothing’s going to happen; nothing’s going to change. He’s going to continue to stay here, completely depending on you. You’re going to continue to take care of Baekhyun until he decides himself that he wants to leave you. And I’m going to continue to pretend I’m okay with all of this. Like I approve of all of this and can accept the fact that while I would rip out my heart if you asked for it, in your mind, I will never be your priority. I’m second and I have to pretend that I am okay with that.”

And Minseok doesn’t deny it; he can’t deny it because it’s the truth. Neither of them say anything for a while, a tense kind of silence rushes over them until Lu Han lets out a particularly loud exhale. “I need to go.” And all of a sudden there’s the quick sounds of someone (Lu Han) scrambling to his feet, hastened but heavy steps to the door.

“Lu Han.” Minseok calls out but from the sounds of it all, he hasn’t moved a centimeter, probably still rooted in his seat, following Lu Han’s hasty movements with his eyes. “Lu Han please.” The word sounds utterly pitiful when they contrast with the sounds of the opening door and the resounding thud as the footsteps come to a halt.

“I’m sorry,” Lu Han is quick to apologize. “I’m sorry, Minseok, but I need some time alone.” And with that, the front door slams shut.

Three minutes later, the sound of Minseok typing away on his computer resumes.

From his position on the couch, Baekhyun squirms in place. It seems a bit inappropriate to just suddenly get up and announce that he’s been conscious throughout their whole argument so Baekhyun lies low for a while. He lies there motionlessly for about an hour as he closes his eyes and tries to go back to sleep despite the twist and turning of his stomach and the soft sounds of sniffling coming from the other side of the room.

Sometime while he’s pretending to sleep, he actually slips back into an unconscious state. When he awakens, the sun has set, the room significantly darker than it was before. Lu Han’s still not back yet.

He rolls off the couch, throwing off the blanket that he knows wasn’t on him just a couple hours before. Minseok must’ve put it on him while he was sleeping.

Speaking of Minseok, he's still on his computer, typing away at whatever he's supposed to be working on. It seems as if he hasn't moved an inch. "You're awake?" Minseok asks without looking up from the screen whenever Baekhyun gets up and approaches him.
"Yeah," Baekhyun answers, "But hey, Minseok?"

Minseok looks up and he's smiling. It's small and gummy but it's there and it's fake. Baekhyun doesn't miss Minseok's slightly puffy eyes; they're still just the slightest bit red.

Apparently, Baekhyun takes too long to continue so Minseok prompts, "What is it?"

"Well I--" He cuts himself off. It'd be the right thing to tell Minseok that he heard it all. And then from there, they could talk about it, decide what to do about this whole situation, but something holds Baekhyun back. Call him selfish, but he's afraid of broaching the subject, he's afraid of possibly convincing Minseok that he shouldn't take priority because deep down he knows he needs that. He knows that he needs to feel as if he's important, irreplaceable to the other.

"I'm gonna go over to Chanyeol's." He blurts out instead and Minseok's eyebrows furrow just a bit.

"Okay?" Minseok says, a bit confused. And then he's laughing -- forcing out a laugh, more like it -- and it it reveals a bone-deep tiredness that seems to settle in behind Minseok's eyes. Baekhyun can't help but feel guilty "Don't worry, you have my permission."

"Yeah." Baekhyun nods before rushing out of the apartment as fast as he can.

He doesn't have time to text Chanyeol about his sudden arrival. He's lucky enough to find the front door unlocked so he just barges in, quickly shucking off his shoes before moving into the apartment to find Chanyeol.

Chanyeol's in the kitchen. Baekhyun's presence seems to startle him what with the way his shoulders visibly flinch. In his tear-distorted vision, Baekhyun just barely makes out Chanyeol slowly turn around, closing whatever he had been eating, and sticking it back into the fridge. Baekhyun doesn't really know what Chanyeol was eating, nor does he really care. Instead, he's rushing toward the other, quickly grappling his arms around Chanyeol's waist and hugging it close.

"Something wrong?" Chanyeol asks, a bit confused, encircling Baekhyun with his own arms.

Baekhyun doesn't say anything, doesn't really want to say anything, but he really can't help the way his shoulders jerk up with each muffled ragged sob. "Baekhyun?" Chanyeol says, a sense of urgent concern settling into his voice. "What's wrong?"

"Minseok and Lu Han fought today," Baekhyun answers vaguely.

"Why are you crying then?" Chanyeol asks, rubbing his hands across Baekhyun's back in a manner that's supposed to be comforting. "Did something really bad happen? Did... Did they break up?"

Shaking his head furiously, Baekhyun repeats. "Minseok and Lu Han fought today. And it was all because of me." And before he can stop himself, the details of the argument are falling out of his mouth faster than he can process.

“I’m the one holding them back. I’m the one keeping them from happiness.” He finishes with a sob, burying his face into Chanyeol’s shoulder. “And I feel bad about it, I really do but it’s so f***ed up. I’m so f***ed up. I can’t stand the thought of losing someone like Minseok even if it’s for his own happiness.”
“You don’t have to lose him, you know,” Chanyeol answers back, squeezing Baekhyun just the slightest bit tighter, “Just because they move in together, because they marry, that doesn’t mean that you’re out of the picture. You can still be friends with them, he’ll still care for you.”

“But that’s how it begins,” Baekhyun mumbles, “You drift apart slowly, at first until the bond is stretched too far and breaks.”

“Why?” Chanyeol questions, “Don’t you believe in long distance relationships?”

“No,” Baekhyun answers point-blank. “They don’t work. Anything without face-to-face interactions, nearly daily meetings is bound to fail.”

“Well, that’s not going to happen with you and Minseok. Your bond is too strong.”

“That’s what happened after high school.” Baekhyun snips. “That’s proof enough that our bond, even at it’s strongest, couldn’t even -- can’t even -- pass the test of time.” He asserts, resting his forehead on Chanyeol’s shoulder.

“Baekhyun,” Chanyeol says softly, beckoningly, but Baekhyun refuses to lift his head. Chanyeol calls his name again, until he eventually just takes action, gently gripping Baekhyun’s chin and lifting it so that Baekhyun has no choice but to look at him.

He tries not to, though. As he averts his eyes, his gaze unconsciously trails down to Chanyeol’s mouth and has his blurting out, “Why are your lips so red?”

And Chanyeol seems to tense. He’s quick to wipe the colour off his lips with the palm of his hand. Afterwards, he admits, “You caught me at a bad time. I was eating a cherry popsicle.”

“It’s like December, why are you eating a cherry popsicle?” Baekhyun has to question and he already feels himself calming down from his little bout of hysteria.

“Cherry popsicles are great,” The other defends, his expression looking a bit at ease but about what, Baekhyun doesn’t know.

“Can I have one?” Baekhyun asks earnestly but Chanyeol immediately shakes his head.

“I ran out. That was my last one.”

“I just saw you put something back in the fridge. So there should be some of yours left over, can I have that?”

Again, Chanyeol shakes his head. “There was only like a bite left and I freaked when you came and put it in the fridge; it’s probably melted by now.”

“Why did you freak out, it was just a popsicle.”

“Because,” There’s a hesitation before Chanyeol gives his answer. “I knew you’d question me about why I was eating it and just wanted to avoid a conversation like this entirely.”

And the reasoning is so shaky, suspicious even but before Baekhyun can say anything, Chanyeol continues on, his voice far more serious than before. “But stop. We’re getting off topic and this is probably your plan to stall for time, avoid the topic.” Baekhyun can’t exactly deny that as Chanyeol continues, “Minseok didn’t forget you in college.”

And Baekhyun’s face hardens, “Yes he did. After we went our separate ways to college, he just
stopped hanging out with me, stopped coming to see me, stopped contacting me in general.”

“Can you honestly tell me that you tried to keep in contact? That you also put some effort into
keeping your relationship alive and healthy?” Chanyeol only watches as Baekhyun’s mouth opens to
reply but quickly hinges shut. “I don’t want to lecture you but you know that you only get out as
much as you put in.”

“But that’s how it had always been. He’s the one that always reaches, always apologizes first after a
fight; it’s how our friendship works.”

“Did you ever think that’s not how friendships are supposed to work?”

“Shut up, we aren’t talking about the past.” Baekhyun cuts in, the frown on his face deepening as the
seconds tick by, “We’re talking about now and what I should be doing.”

“But it’s not the past.” Chanyeol says, “It’s not the past because you’re still like that. You expect him
to be the one that sacrifices everything for you -- even if that means screwing up his own relationship
with his lover. You’re being selfish.”

“I am selfish, in case you haven’t noticed. You’re supposed to be on my side!” Baekhyun cries out,
pushing Chanyeol back none too gently. “You support me and my decision, no matter what!”

“There are no sides in this. It isn’t a matter of choosing ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, it’s about choosing
wisely and quite frankly, you’re being fucking stupid!” Chanyeol yells and Baekhyun flinches back.
It’s the first time he’s ever seen Chanyeol angry. It doesn’t last long because Chanyeol quickly
mollifies, his face contorting into a look of worry, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to yell. I just… I get a bit
cranky when I’m hungry.”

Baekhyun hesitates before he deadpans, "But you just ate a cherry Popsicle."

Chanyeol blinks at him. "It wasn’t enough," he snorts seconds later and the tension dissipates as a
smile makes its way onto Chanyeol's expression. "No but really--"

"I know, I know," Baekhyun interrupts, comically rolling his eyes. "I need to let Minseok go, let him
be happy, all of that stuff... I know that already. I was just being stupid before; crying makes me
revert back the mentality of a seven year old, all stubborn and childish."

"You are a child." Chanyeol smiles affectionately and moves to ruffle Baekhyun's hair.

Baekhyun's quick enough to bat it away, though. "I'm 26. And you're younger than me."

"Still a child." Chanyeol murmurs.

"But as much as I do want Minseok to be happy, to go get himself married and live with the love of
his life, I do still need Minseok." When Chanyeol opens his mouth to say something, Baekhyun
effectively stops him with a raised hand. "And no, before you say anything about distance not being
a problem so long as you put effort into the relationship, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about
financially. As much as I hate to admit it, I am almost completely financially dependent on Minseok
at this point in time."

"Why don’t you move in with me, then?" Chanyeol suggests quickly after, so nonchalant.

"Well that," Baekhyun says, at a loss for words "That was certainly… sudden."

“I don’t mean now. I mean like when -- if Minseok moves out, you could always just live with me.”
Chanyeol says.

“Yes but…” Baekhyun doesn't straight out say it but the skepticism in his expression is enough to tell he’s not entirely comfortable with the way the conversation is going.

“No it won’t be weird, I swear!” Chanyeol reads Baekhyun’s mind, protesting his internal hesitancy toward moving in before offering, “I… During Christmas and New Years, come live with me for a week or two. I’m sure Lu Han and Minseok would love the alone time, and it can be like a sort of test run to see how it’d be like living with me. If you don’t like it, then no commitment, you’ll just continue to live with them. If you’re okay with it, then you can give Minseok the okay. You can tell him that even if he decides to live with Lu Han, you’ll be okay. Make the decision entirely about what he wants, not what he thinks is best for you.”

“I don’t know…” Baekhyun says quietly, trying to ignore the familiar ache of the knot in his stomach. “I feel like this is happening too fast.”

Chanyeol seems to understand his worry and he begins to slowly stroke Baekhyun’s hair again. “I mean you already stay over every now and then,” He says in a soothing voice, “It won’t be too much of a change to just live here for a week or two. Plus, don’t you think Lu Han and Minseok deserve some time to themselves. Especially for the holidays. Especially after this kind of argument.”

Baekhyun looks up at him uncertainly. Chanyeol’s eyes are practically pleading and Baekhyun can’t take that kind of pressure. He presses his face into the Chanyeol’s shoulder again to hide himself.

“Can you… Can you give me some time to think about it?” He asks softly, mouthing the words against Chanyeol’s clavicle.

“Yeah.” Chanyeol breathes out, “Take your time. You have all the time in the world.”

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It doesn’t take long to come to his decision, only about half a day of Lu Han’s accusatory glares and offside jibs has Baekhyun texting Chanyeol the okay. The attacks are subtle, though; if Baekhyun hadn’t overheard Lu Han and Minseok’s arguments, he probably wouldn’t even have noticed them. But he had, so Lu Han’s actions are glaringly obvious.

And it isn't as if they're outright offensive -- really there just extensions of Lu Han's usual humour just targeted more directly at Baekhyun -- but as they add up, insult after insult, Baekhyun just can't take it anymore.

He stands up abruptly in the middle of dinner and wordlessly walks to his room. He doesn't look back but from the sounds of it, Minseok's chair squeaks back and he's just about to follow the other when Lu Han stops him, saying, "Let him be, Minseok."

Baekhyun shuts his door before he can hear anything else.

He spends his night stuffing clothes into his luggage he'd found buried in his closet. The next morning is when he drops the news.

“I'm going to just live with Chanyeol for a bit.” Baekhyun announces as he rolls his luggage into the living room where Minseok and Lu Han are sitting. Minseok’s head jerks around to look at Baekhyun.

“What do you mean?”
“Just for a week or two,” Baekhyun rolls his eyes. Just as he sees Minseok’s mouth fall open for the obvious question of why, Baekhyun cuts in. "I’m really serious about," He swallows, trying to play this off as nonchalantly as he can, “About Chanyeol. I… I really am thinking of going the next step and living with him. I want this to be like a test run.” He ends with a forced smile.

The look of concern that lies heavy on Minseok’s face doesn’t dissipate. “Are-- Are you sure?” He asks skeptically.

“Of course!” Baekhyun says, faking the cheery tones in his voice, “I erm… really like Chanyeol! I think that… That he could be the one!” He has a feeling that the smile that he has plastered on his face is too wide, too fake but he doesn’t let it fall.

“But weren’t you worried that--” Minseok rushes to say but Baekhyun interrupts.

“No no, that’s all in the past! I’m not worried about anything that’s all old news.” He exaggerates and he really hopes that Minseok will just drop the damned topic before he starts to question himself. Again.

Thankfully, it’s Lu Han who intervenes. “I think you should let him. It’s his life, I think you should leave him alone to do whatever he wants with his life.” And It isn’t hard for Baekhyun to pick out just the slightest bit of venom in Lu Han’s voice. But it’s hard for Minseok, apparently, who glances over at him with a worried look.

"But don't you think it's too soon? You've dated him for less than a year."

"People have moved in after less." Baekhyun shrugs.

"What's it matter to us?" Lu Han snorts, "He's a grown man, he can go sell himself to a whorehouse if he really wants to."

Minseok’s expression clouds, eyes furrowing at Lu Han's remark, but he doesn't call him out on it. Instead, he turns back to Baekhyun, "I'm not sure about this..."

"What Lu Han said, what's this matter to you? I don't need your permission, you know." Baekhyun says and he thinks he says it lightheartedly but apparently his delivery comes out differently than he'd expected as Minseok's expression crumples.

And though Lu Han seemed annoyed by Minseok's hesitancy to let Baekhyun move out, he looks as if he's ready to kill Baekhyun when he speaks, when Baekhyun only adds to Lu Han's original point. Baekhyun's not exactly sure what to make of this.

“I.. I suppose so.” Minseok relents, forcing himself to quirk into a tiny smile. "Go ahead, have fun with Chanyeol."

“I’m just going across the hall, not moving across the world.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes and he doesn't miss how Lu Han's glaring at him.

x x x

Just as Chanyeol had said, it’s really not all that difficult to transition into having him by his side 24/7. For the most part, it’s with ease that they learn to work around each other; the only problem that Baekhyun has is finding a good area to write.

His biggest concern is Chanyeol, really. The apartment is fairly big, spacious in a sense, but it's pretty difficult to find an area where Chanyeol won't easily find him. His best option so far seems to be the
closet and he's just about to slip in there, his hands already resting on the doorknob, when Chanyeol stops him. "What are you doing?" Chanyeol asks, looking a bit spooked.

He doesn't exactly recall when Chanyeol entered the room; he certainly wasn't there about three seconds prior. Baekhyun tried not to disclose anything, instead trying to hide his computer behind his back. "I just... Wanted to check if you had any extra... Uh shirts for me to wear."

There's uncertainty resting on Chanyeol's brow that translates into suspicion in his voice. "Are... You out of clothes?"

"Ye-yeah..." He answers, "Or at least I will be soon. I'm just... Thinking ahead."

"Okay." Chanyeol eventually says after a long, long beat of silence. "But my shirts are in my wardrobe, not in this closet."

"Oh." Reluctantly he lets go of the doorknob as Chanyeol waves him over to the wardrobe on the other side of the room. He takes hesitant steps, afraid to reveal what's in his hands behind him but Baekhyun can already feel the computer beginning to slip from his finger. It takes a bit of jostling to keep the device from its inevitable death and he can only hope that Chanyeol doesn't notice.

Chanyeol does, though. Quite frankly, it'd be far more difficult not to. "Why do you have your computer behind your back?" He asks point blank and Baekhyun doesn't know what to say, his mind blanking on excuses, so he doesn't say anything. "Were... Were you going in there," Chanyeol starts with a pursed expression, "to write?"

"No," is Baekhyun's instinctive answer but he finds himself amending his words just seconds later. "Okay yes. I just... I don't want you around when I'm writing." He brings the computer out of hiding, hugging it into his chest.

"Why?" Chanyeol asks, not at all offended by the words. But as the words set in, the crease in his brow deepens. "Wait. Are you afraid I'm going to read it?"

Again, Baekhyun's instinctive denial comes out but he refutes it soon after with a blush tinging his face. "I just... Really don't want anyone to read it. Especially you."

Chanyeol laughs. "I'm not going to read it! I told you that already." He grins but as the seconds go by, the smile begins to fade. "Or do you not trust me?"

And the blush deepens as Baekhyun begins to gnaw at his lip. "I do." He confirms, "But I don't know. I'm just afraid. Curiosity is pretty hard to ignore."

The smile returns to Chanyeol. He steps forward towards Baekhyun, taking the computer right from his hands. "Look. I promised you, didn't I?" He says softly, "I won't read it without your permission. I would never do anything without your permission. Now how about you just write in the living room, I'll be busy with my work and you'll be busy with yours; we'll both just do our own things."

He contemplates it. Considers saying no but how could he to Chanyeol's pleading face. "Okay." Baekhyun finally exhales. He lets Chanyeol lead him into the living room with a smile.

"You take the couch," Chanyeol smiles, ushering him over to the left side of the familiar brown couch. He then walks over to the opposite side of the coffee table in front of the couch and drops to the floor, stretching out before grabbing his computer from off of the table. "I'll be over here. See! There's no way I'll be able to read anything you write!"

At first, Baekhyun stays close to one side of the couch, his knees close to his chest as he keeps his
computer extremely near him, screen facing into him. As the hours pass, though, Baekhyun begins to take up more of the couch until he’s completely splayed out over the couch, stomach faced down into the seat and computer balancing precariously on the arm of the sofa as he types away. His gaze flicks back to see Chanyeol still on the floor, worrying his bottom lip through his teeth as works on whatever assignment he’s on now. Baekhyun flashes a smile that goes unnoticed.

Sometime during his stay, Baekhyun grows comfortable enough to even sit next to Chanyeol and work side by side.

It gets to the point where Baekhyun's comfortable enough to even work on it even in bed. And it’s when he’s sprawled across the expanse of the bed, surrounded by the first couple of printed chapters of his novel that he actually falls asleep, hard at work.

It’s only around 8 when he falls asleep on top of his mountain of papers but he awakens nearly 3 hours later to find himself tucked into the bedsheets in a way he was most certainly not in when he first closed his eyes. What’s more mysterious is that his papers are gone and he freaks, throwing the covers off of him and rushing throughout the room to look for the missing papers.

He doesn’t manage to find them so his next course of action is to go ask Chanyeol if he knew what happened to them. In the dining room, that’s where Baekhyun finds Chanyeol flipping through the pages of his unfinished novel. “What are you doing?” Baekhyun asks, his blood beginning to boil.

Chanyeol freezes, setting down the stack of papers back on the table. “I’m--”

But Baekhyun doesn’t let him finish. “You’re reading my novel, that’s what you’re doing. You’re reading my *fucking* novel!” He screams, scrambling over to snatch his bundle of papers.

“Baekhyun--”

And again, Baekhyun cuts in, clutching the stack near this chest. “How far did you get?” He hisses out, eyes slit into a glare. “How much do you know?”

Before Chanyeol even begins to answer the questions, Baekhyun interrupts once more, “Why the hell did you do that? You promised me that you wouldn’t read it. What the *fuck* are you doing breaking your promise?! You said--”

This time around it’s Chanyeol who interjects. “Baekhyun!” He exclaims, finally getting his first word out. Baekhyun obediently quiets but his lips are still contorted into a hard-pressed line. “I didn’t read it.”

“How far did you get?”

“Don’t you trust me?” Chanyeol asks abruptly and his eyes are stormy with a challenge.

“Yeah,” Baekhyun says, sucking in a deep breath. As he exhales, he feels his head clear, the irrationality draining from his system. “I do. I just… you know how protective I am over my novel.”

“I know,” Chanyeol nods, understandingly, “And I guess I shouldn’t have touched it. It probably wasn’t the smartest things to do but I swear I didn’t read it.”

“What were you doing with it then?” Baekhyun asks. He tries his best at keeping any kind of accusation from seeping into his tone.
“Organizing. You fell asleep on top of the papers and made quite a mess of them. After tucking you into bed, I first just put them on the bedside stand, but when I went in to check on you, I thought you’d be frustrated to see them all out of order so I took it upon myself to just properly arrange them.” Chanyeol gives a little chuckle, “Looking back now, I guess I should’ve just let them be.”

“How’d you organize them without reading the pages?” Baekhyun blurts out his question.

“There are page numbers in the top corner of each page. So I just used those.” He answers and suddenly Baekhyun feels like a jerk for getting so worked up over Chanyeol’s action. It was all just a good deed, a favour to him, and yet he had gotten so angry.

Sheepishly, he averts his gaze to the ground. “So you don’t know anything about it?”

“Apart from that the novel begins with the word ‘It was when...’ and that the main character’s name is Sehun,” Chanyeol pauses, the corners of his mouth quirking up into a smile, “I swear on my life that I saw nothing.”

Baekhyun mirrors the grin. “Well, good.”

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Apart from that one conflict, the rest of Baekhyun’s stay passes without incident. The days pass quickly, peacefully; it seems like the Christmas gift exchange (he gives Chanyeol a scarf; Chanyeol somehow gets him a Rolex. How’s that for fair?) and the welcoming of the new year is just a blink of an eye apart. Soon, too soon, is the end date for the little test is coming to an end.

About a week into January, Baekhyun returns to Minseok’s apartment. And it’s not because of some big fight or because of an intolerance to Chanyeol as a roommate but rather because it’s the end of the trial period.

He loves living with Chanyeol, really, loves being there, waking up to the sight of a sleeping Chanyeol, wrapped in the warm embrace of the younger. He loves the sense of comfort that Chanyeol brings him, how at ease he feels around the younger, but he can’t escape the feelings of dread that come as a result of thinking of it as a permanent situation, of thinking of Chanyeol as a permanent fixture in his life. So he does the next best thing.

It's a bit of a stretch to say that he returns to live with Minseok. Instead, he spends about two nights in that apartment, the other five in Chanyeol’s. It's kind of cheating, in a sense, since he's essentially living with Chanyeol at this point, but is still away just enough of the time to claim that his life is not completely entangled with Chanyeol. So long as he doesn't cross that line, he's good.

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On one of the five nights he's sleeping over at Chanyeol's, Baekhyun hears Chanyeol’s phone ring in the middle of the night. It wakes him up; it'd be hard not to with Chanyeol’s obnoxious pop song ringtone blasting at full volume. It doesn’t seem to bother Chanyeol, though, who seems to be peacefully sleeping through it. Baekhyun is just about to reach across and answer it for him when he feels Chanyeol jolt awake. He doesn’t know why, whether it be out of instinct or surprise, but he immediately closes his eye and pretends to sleep.

The obnoxious ringing of the phone quiets when Chanyeol accepts the call and Baekhyun can feel it as Chanyeol gets up off the bed. There’s a couple of footsteps away from the bed as Chanyeol settles against, or so Baekhyun guesses, a wall. “Now?!” Chanyeol hisses out before lowering his tone to a whisper, “Really?!”
There's a muffled response from the other side of the line but Baekhyun can't make it out. All he hears is Chanyeol's soft groan before he starts to walk again. There's the sound of the door being opened and then there's a beat of silence and Baekhyun can't help but sneak a peek from under his eyelids. He sees Chanyeol glancing back at him, already halfway through the doorway.

He scrunches his eyes closed and if Chanyeol notices that Baekhyun is awake, he doesn't show it as he just exits the room, closing the door with a soft click.

Baekhyun's practically itching to get up and find out what Chanyeol's doing. And it's not that he doesn't trust Chanyeol; he does. So much that it almost scares him sometimes. He's just curious.

And the curiosity drives him to slip out of bed and press his ear up against the door in hopes of listening in to figure out what Chanyeol is up to. From what he can hear, someone has entered the apartment. "Hey," It's Jongdae. Baekhyun can distinguish his voice immediately. "Sorry to come so late but it's important."

"What's so important that couldn't wait until morning?" is Chanyeol's reply and Baekhyun can practically see his look of annoyance.

"They're catching on. They actually confronted me about it." Jongdae says and before Baekhyun can even hope of piecing together exactly what that means, Chanyeol replies back.

"What does that mean for me?"

There's a hushed silence and Baekhyun tries to calm himself by holding his breath, afraid their soft voices will be drowned out by the sound of his thudding heart. He hears a sharp exhale before Jongdae speaks again.

"Nothing. I can still do it. We'll have to just lay down low for a while before we can start it up again." Yet another pause before Jongdae whispers, "Is that okay?"

"It's going to have to be okay." Chanyeol sighs. "About how long until you can get me the next one?"

"I'm thinking about a month or two. I mean I denied everything but they're still really suspicious."

"I think I can last. Just... when we start up again, how often do you think...?" He doesn't finish the thought, only letting the words die on his tongue.

"I don't know." Jongdae confesses, "Maybe once every two weeks? Maybe even less often... It depends on how it goes. As time goes on, we can really start picking it back on but the next couple of months are gonna be a struggle."

"Okay." Chanyeol says quickly before repeating again, a bit slower this time around, "Okay. I can handle it."

"You sure?" Baekhyun can hear the concern dripping into Jongdae's voice. "I-I can..."

"You can what?" Chanyeol interrupts, his voice grave as he gives a bitter laugh. "I don't want you to lose your job for me. I don't deserve it."

"The job isn't important, you are important." Jongdae argues halfheartedly.

"I'll be fine." There's a hesitation and then Chanyeol continues, "It's not like I'll die from it."
From the tone of Chanyeol’s voice, from the way the two crack up in a quiet laughter, it’s obvious that it’s an inside joke of some kind. Baekhyun just can’t figure it out at the moment.

“No but seriously,” Chanyeol starts again, “I’ll be okay. It’s nothing I haven’t been through before.”

“Oh but last time--”

“Stop.” Chanyeol cuts in sharply, “It’s late and I think you should go home.”

“It’s late and I think I should stay here. Because it’s late.” Jongdae whines but then stops, “Oh my god wait is Baekhyun staying over again?”

“Maybe… Okay yes. Stop looking at me like that! Just… go away before you wake him up.” Chanyeol hisses but it’s harmless, missing any sort of edge.

“Okay okay man,” Jongdae laughs and then there’s a fluster of movement in what Baekhyun can imagine to be Jongdae shoving his feet back into shoes and pulling back on his jacket to brace the cold of the night. “You children have fun!” Jongdae sings out before Baekhyun hears the front door close. That’s his cue to get back into bed, huddling the blankets around him carefully and flipping to his side before shutting his eyes, pretending to sleep.

It’s not long before Chanyeol returns to the room. As he slips back into the covers, he softly calls out, “Baek?” and before Baekhyun can stop himself, he gives a sound of affirmation.

Chanyeol instantly freezes. “You… You’re awake?”

Baekhyun’s blood runs cold, his heart beating faster as he tries to come up with a viable reason as to why he was awake, one that does not have to do with the fact that he’s been eavesdropping. He gives another sleepy sound as he slowly turns to Chanyeol, hands coming up to wipe at his eyes. “I am now. You just woke me when you opened the door.” He lies, careful to avoid eye contact with the man staring intently back at him.

“Oh.” Chanyeol says, “Just now?”

“Yeah.” Baekhyun answers quickly before snuggling into Chanyeol to hide his face. “What’d you do, go pee or something? You practically slammed the door on the way back in.”

Chanyeol chuckles before finally letting himself lay back onto the pillows. “Sorry about that.” He begins to slowly run his hand through Baekhyun’s hair.

Baekhyun’s quiet for a while, just cuddling into the warmth of Chanyeol and enjoying his touch. “Hey, this is gonna sound really weird,” He murmurs, “But I could’ve sworn I heard Jongdae’s voice just now.”

He doesn’t know where he’s going with this. He doesn’t know what kind of answer he’s expecting but he really just wants an affirmation of the meeting, proof that Chanyeol isn’t hiding something from him.

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The hand in his hair stops and he hears Chanyeol swallow. There’s a laugh, shaky and awkward as Chanyeol answers, “You must’ve been dreaming.”

Baekhyun hesitates, “Yeah. I must have been,” He says slowly, keeping his voice steady in contrast to the rage, the disappointment that’s boiling inside. He tries to swallow it down; he’s being unreasonable. There’s no reason why he should be getting so angry over one little lie -- it’s not like he’s even given Chanyeol sufficient time to explain himself.
But he can't help it, he feels the pit of his stomach only tighten with anxiety and he doesn't know how to make this all go away.

Ultimately, he flips to his other side and keeps his back to Chanyeol, too frustrated with Chanyeol and himself, for overreacting like this. This is nothing. He trusts Chanyeol. This should be nothing.

There’s no more words exchanged between them for a while. Baekhyun is slowly being coaxed into sleep even with the tension hanging in the air. It must’ve been 15 minutes, 30 minutes maybe -- his sense of time is thrown out the window as he sways between consciousness -- before Chanyeol says something.

"Do you believe in fate?"

Baekhyun's eyes pop open and he can't control the bitter laugh that bubbles at his throat, "Now's a weird time to ask, don't you think?"

He ultimately rolls around to look at the other, surprised to still find him staring up at the ceiling. "I suppose now's a good a time as any." Chanyeol shrugs which comes out to be a rather odd looking gesture with his current positioning.

Baekhyun expects him to elaborate on it but he's met with silence. "Where'd this come from?" He asks and he filters out the teasing edge in his voice as he watches Chanyeol's serious expression.

"I'm just thinking of one of our first conversations," Chanyeol replies dazedly, almost like he's transfixed in his thoughts. "You said we were soul mates. Do you believe in that kinda thing?"

There's a certain thickness in the air that comes along with the seriousness in Chanyeol's tone. One that's uncomfortable, suffocating in the silence of the night.

"You didn't think to bring this up before during, I don't know, our first conversation when this topic was relevant?" He chokes out, trying to play off his tension with a joking manner, trying to ease the tense atmosphere and will down the unease weighing down his chest.

It works, thank goodness, and Chanyeol laughs, breaking his gaze with the ceiling to turn onto his shoulder and look Baekhyun straight into the eyes. “I don’t know, it would’ve been weird if I just suddenly asked your opinion over fate and destiny when we didn’t even know each other. It would’ve seemed like I was making a move.”

“Maybe you should have made a move.” Baekhyun comments, grateful for the opportunity to change the topic. “I thought you were dating Jongdae for fuck’s sake.”

Chanyeol makes a face and even though only about half his face is illuminated by the moon’s light, Baekhyun still giggles at his expression. “Why would you ever think that?” Chanyeol laughs.

“Because you’re so gay together,” Baekhyun deadpans, “I’m still afraid you’re going to run off with him in the middle of the night.” Unintentionally, his voice comes at harder than intended and that unsettling feeling is back.

Chanyeol doesn’t seem affected by it, though. “Why would I go off with him when I have you?” He whispers as he lifts a hand and runs a thumb over Baekhyun’s cheek slowly.

Baekhyun leans into the touch, his eyes falling close as the feeling dispels all other unsettling thoughts taking root in his mind.

He’s relaxed, soothed by Chanyeol’s gentle touch, but Chanyeol has to persist. “But really, I want to know your thoughts.”
“Okay,” Baekhyun sighs, “Okay. Well I don’t think it exists.”

He can see the slight downturn of Chanyeol’s frown and feels the need to elaborate. “I mean, it’s nice to think that there’s something out there. Something that binds us all together and is there to help us back up once we’ve fucked up everything.” He pauses, drawing a breath, “But I don’t believe in it.”

Chanyeol’s silent, only gazing into Baekhyun’s eyes with the silent beckoning to go on. “I just--” Baekhyun stops himself to collect his thoughts, “Yes, it’s nice to think that there’s something to guide us back to the ‘right’ path but it’s also nice to think… To think that no matter how much we fuck up, it’ll get better, because something’s out there that has your back, that is making sure you’re doing the right thing.”

Chanyeol nods along and Baekhyun continues, “But at the same time, that makes it surreal, to think that we don’t have any control in our life.”

Briefly, Chanyeol opens his mouth, as if to speak, but hinges it closed when he realizes that Baekhyun is not quite done with expressing his thoughts. Baekhyun quiets for a second, and then motions for him to speak. “But we do have control,” Chanyeol rushes out, as if he has something to prove. “It’s… It’s just that there’s something there to protect us if we really mess up, if we really need help…”

“And that’s why I don’t believe in it. Or at least don’t want to believe in it.” Baekhyun cuts in, “To think that there’s always something to bring us back to the correct path, I think that’s wrong. Or maybe that all of the bad things that happen are actually a part of the correct path; I think that's wrong too. That would mean we can’t seek things out for ourselves, forced to stay on this stupid predetermined path that some sick celestial being just planned for us.” Baekhyun heaves a sigh, “Believing in fate is like admitting we’re game pieces: We can’t seek our own happiness. We can’t choose who we love. We can’t even fucking ruin ourselves!” And by the end his breathing has picked up as he practically spits the words out.

It’s quiet for a bit after that, only the steady sounds of staggered breaths filling the air. “Okay.” Chanyeol says after a while. “I’m sorry for bringing that up. I didn’t realize that you… that you felt that way.”

“Sorry I just… I don’t know what came over me.” Baekhyun apologizes and then offers Chanyeol a slight smile, “So what do you think about it?”

Chanyeol laughs, breaking up the tense atmosphere, “My views seem a bit inappropriate after what you just said.”

Baekhyun nuzzles into Chanyeol’s side. “Tell me,” He murmurs, just barely audible. “I want to hear.”

“I believe in it.” Chanyeol states, point-blank. “I think everything in our lives are predetermined and we just have to wait for things to play out. There’s something out there that plans it all out for us, bounds us to certain people so that certain things, certain events play out the same way throughout lifetimes.”

“You optimist…” Baekhyun mumbles under his breath, and he thinks he says it quietly enough but then Chanyeol replies.

“What’s wrong with being an optimist?”
“Nothing.” Baekhyun murmurs, “It’ll just hurt like hell when the universe shits all over your sunny plans.”

Chanyeol laughs, the low rumble of his chest resonates throughout Baekhyun. “But isn’t that the good thing about being an optimist? You take the universe’s shitting as just another blessing.”

Baekhyun snorts and they lapse into a comfortable silence as Chanyeol moves his arms to wrap around Baekhyun, pulling him as close into his body as possible. Baekhyun accommodates by slipping his own leg between Chanyeol’s, entangling their legs so that they’re both more comfortable. For a while, there’s just the sounds of soft, shallow breaths that fill the room and Baekhyun’s mind is blank, too busy trying to comprehend the sheer amount of Chanyeol that floods his senses.

“Remember that time you asked why I was so persistent in making this work?” Chanyeol asks softly after a while, and Baekhyun remembers. Of course he remembers.

Chanyeol continues on without a noise of affirmation from Baekhyun, “I feel like we’re fated to be together. Like there’s a driving force that keeps us together, like we’re bound together across lifetimes.”

Chanyeol takes a breath. “I know that you aren’t ready yet. And maybe it’ll take you an eternity before you’re truly ready but that’s okay. I can wait forever for you. I’m meant to wait forever for you.”

Baekhyun doesn’t know what to say to that, really. He hates himself for feeling even the slightest bit happy at Chanyeol’s words, words that he’ll probably never be able to say back.

The silence is sombering, it has Chanyeol snapping out of his musing. “I’m sorry if that made you uncomfortable.” He’s quick to apologize. “I’m sorry. Just… just forget I said all of that.”

Baekhyun doesn’t forget.

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Baekhyun doesn’t like to admit it but he thinks about Jongdae and Chanyeol’s middle of the night conversation far more that he’d like. His mind fills in the circumstances with outrageous scenarios; he can’t help himself.

It doesn’t help when Jongdae just so happens to appear around the apartment less and less.

“Jongdae doesn’t seem to be around as often,” Baekhyun points out when he’s over one day.

“He got a promotion.” Chanyeol answers quickly and Baekhyun tries not to notice the way his eye twitches. “Business is probably picking up at the hospital. He’s probably too busy to come by as often as before.”

Baekhyun only hums noncommittally. He drops the conversation.

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Chanyeol seems to be taking them out of the apartment more and more often. Whether he takes Baekhyun out to the forest, to the cafe, or to some random restaurant, Baekhyun is noticing a significant increase in legitimate outings.

And had this been before, he wouldn’t have thought much of it, but ever since that midnight
conversation Chanyeol had with Jongdae, he’s beginning to view everything with a bit more scrutiny. Suddenly keeping Baekhyun out of the apartment, almost like he’s hiding something in the apartment, calls for suspicion.

He makes an effort to spend more time in the apartment, tries to make every excuse to stay in, but Chanyeol always seems to have a reason to get them out.

“Baek!” Chanyeol says excitedly, shaking his shoulders back and forth and soon as he has him cornered against one of the countertops. “We need to go the rooftop!”

Baekhyun groans, thinking that it’ll probably be another one of Chanyeol’s weak excuses to get them out of his apartment. “Do we have to?”

Chanyeol only nods excitedly. Grabbing one of Baekhyun’s wrists, he tries his best to tug him toward the doorway.

“We just ate.” Baekhyun argues, keeping his feet rooted to the ground. “There’s no way we’re going to a restaurant or the cafe. And if you’re trying to bring me to the forest again, I’m tired. I really don’t want to go on any hour long walks…”

Blinking at Baekhyun with an indistinguishable look, Chanyeol quirks his mouth to the side. “Since when did the places I take you become so easily categorizable?”

“Well I’m not wrong, am I? You only take me to like three kinds of places.”

“Today’s different, I swear.” Chanyeol affirms with a smile and Baekhyun can only relent.

He doesn’t, actually, bring them to a restaurant, cafe, or even a forest. Oddly enough, he brings them upstairs. To the rooftop. Where there’s a blanket and a bottle of wine lain out.

“When did you even have time to set this up?” Baekhyun gapes as Chanyeol brings him over to the outspread blanket and sits him down.

“Uh, sometime before dinner,” Chanyeol shrugs, “I just stepped out of the apartment for a second and laid out a blanket -- not that difficult.”

“And wine,” Baekhyun reminds him, picking up the bottle to inspect it. “What would’ve happened if someone stole it while it was just lying out here?” He comments offhandedly as he scans the label. Cabernet sauvignon. He has no idea what that means.

Out of nowhere, Chanyeol pulls out two wine glasses and a wine opener, holding out a hand as a silent gesture for Baekhyun to hand over the bottle. “Wine is nice and all,” Baekhyun starts out as he tilts his head back to look at the pitch black of the sky. “But why are we up here? Atmosphere? To serve as some kind of inspirational muse again?”

“Well that,” Chanyeol pauses as he finishes the final twist on the cork opener and then begins to pour them into the glasses. Quickly, he hands one off to Baekhyun. “And there’s something else but we might have to wait a while.”

“What is it?”

The only answer Baekhyun gets is a cheesy wink and cryptic words: “You’ll see.”
He does, indeed, see but it takes hours for them to finally appear. It’s freezing cold and Baekhyun has taken to rolling himself up into a ball to conserve heat, but it’s worth it when he begins to see the stars fall. “Meteor shower?” He asks, watching the falling streaks of light paint the night sky.

“Yeah it’s the quadrantids. Comes around this time of the year every year. Pretty cool, right?”

Baekhyun hums appreciatively, unable to think of any words to describe the pure beauty of the meteoroids in the night sky. Instead of even trying to convey exactly what he feels, he thoughtlessly says, “Make a wish.” He hears a scoff to his side and that has him glancing over at Chanyeol for just a second.

“Makeing wishes is stupid.” Chanyeol rolls his eyes, “It’ll never happen.”

“What, so you believe in destiny but not wishes?” Baekhyun asks teasingly.

“It’s different.” Chanyeol replies and Baekhyun can practically hear the pout in his words. “Destiny, you can observe. Wishes you cannot.”

“And how does one observe destiny?” Baekhyun laughs good-naturedly, turning to glance at Chanyeol. When he lays eyes on the solemn expression on the others face, he stops.


Baekhyun rolls his eyes, snuggling just a bit closer into the warmth of Chanyeol. “Whatever you say.” He whispers, pressing a kiss on Chanyeol’s chin.

“Don’t you trust me?” Chanyeol laughs.

“I do,” Baekhyun insists, “But with something like this--”

“Then, just trust me.” Chanyeol interrupts, wrapping the blanket around them just a little bit tighter. “Believe me.”

x x x

It’s later that week when he finds it.

Chanyeol is out for one of the rare occasions where one of his employers actually wants to discuss with him in person and Baekhyun, sexiled from his own apartment as per usual, decides that it’d be cute to fix something for them to eat for dinner.

It’s when he’s rooting through the fridge that he finds it.

It’s wedged somewhere way in the back of Chanyeol’s jam-packed fridge, behind the piles of leftovers, of random ingredients, of cartons of juice and bottles of water. And he supposes it’s weird how he’s never found it before given that he’s been going to this apartment for about ten months, slept over for many nights, and even lived with Chanyeol for a couple of weeks, but what’s weirder is the fact that it’s almost like someone tried to hide it. What with where it’s shoved into the back corner of the fridge, obscured by countless items, and even stacked beneath a couple of things, it only makes the situation all the more suspicious, all the worst.

It’s already difficult enough not to jump to conclusions when you’re holding your boyfriend’s packet
of human blood.

He supposes that it doesn't necessarily have to be human blood as he rolls the packet around in his hand, sickened by the way it moves. It could technically be deer blood, blood from some random animal, but the way that it's stored in those bags hospitals usually put donated pints of blood in points otherwise.

He honestly doesn’t know how to react, how he’s supposed to react to a situation like this. But before he can really put any thought into it and figure out what to do with this new information, it suddenly hits him. He has an eery feeling that this one can’t be the only one in the apartment and he sets off to go find them.

Another appears in the the depths of the fridge, hidden in some imaginative way in the way that it is shoved in the empty spaces between the bottles on the highest shelf of the fridge. It’s opened, drained about halfway of its content and Baekhyun really doesn’t want to think about what happened to the rest of the blood.

He moves onto the trashcan, determined to find something and he does: a couple of empty transfusion packs scattered throughout the content of the trash.

It’s only when he has dug through everything, found everything that there is to find, that he starts to think. It's only when he's sitting up against the fridge, the packets of blood in hand and the empty transfusion packs lying in front of him, does he realize just how absurd this whole situation really is. It finally sinks in what all of this might mean and he doesn’t really know what to make of it.

And all he can think about is of the other night, of Chanyeol’s warm breath puffing gently against the shell of his ear. Just trust me. Believe me.

So that’s what he does.

He loses his appetite after seeing the packs in the fridge. More importantly, he loses his motivation to even cook, to even incite the suspicion in Chanyeol that he may have seen that he shouldn’t have. So instead he orders takeout.

Chanyeol’s face is just as excited to see the food laid out on the table, Baekhyun waiting for him in one of the seats. “You’re here.” Chanyeol greets with a smile, shrugging off his coat and haphazardly just throwing it toward the general direction of the couch. It misses, falls to the floor, but he doesn’t seem to mind.

Baekhyun only hums in agreement, standing up to hand over one of the plates to Chanyeol and then opening up the takeout. It’s gone cold in the time he’s waited for Chanyeol but it’s nothing the microwave can’t fix.

It’s only once they’ve heated up their food and sat back down at the table to eat that Baekhyun even thinks of broaching the subject. And whether it be for Chanyeol’s sake or for his own sanity that he takes the round-about way of doing it.

“I was going to cook you something,” Baekhyun brings up randomly, slyly, and Chanyeol’s reaction is instantaneous. He freezes, chopsticks about midway to his mouth.

“Were you?” He asks quietly.

“Yeah.” Baekhyun nods with a pleasant smile pasted on his face. “I was going to. Took the
ingredients out and everything. But then I realized that I suck at cooking.”

Chanyeol laughs but the sound is shaky, the attempt at nonchalance far too obvious. "D-did you really? Well..." And he trails off because he doesn't know what else to say, what else he should say to help the situation.

No one says anything at first and Chanyeol goes back to eating. Baekhyun waits about a minute for the atmosphere to settle before he tries again. “I found something interesting in the fridge.”

And this time Chanyeol’s hands clench. Hard. Hard enough to break the chopsticks. The metal chopsticks. “Wow, these chopsticks most have been getting old,” He huffs out a laugh, immediately getting up to throw away the snapped utensils. “I mean... L-look at how easily they broke. I’m going to get another pair.” He finishes abruptly and scrambles into the kitchen.

Now, Baekhyun’s heart is beating, thudding faster than it ever has before. “Chanyeol,” He starts out slowly while Chanyeol is still out of sight, “Why do you…” But he cuts himself off. He doesn’t want to know. He doesn’t want to find out the truth, doesn’t want to put an end to this fantasy so instead he changes his words at the last moment. “Why do you have banana milk in your fridge? That shit’s for children.”

“Oh.” is all he hears from inside the kitchen but seconds later, Chanyeol comes back out with a fresh pair of chopsticks. There’s nothing blatantly different about his expression, but rather something more subtle. The tension’s bled out of his shoulder, and his eyes no longer seem to be alight with fear. “It’s not for children.” Chanyeol frowns. “I like it.”

“Because if you like it, then it’s obviouslyyyyy not for children.” Baekhyun deadpans but breaks out into a smile seconds later. “Now let’s eat.”

The rest of the meal is peaceful, and it’s only when they’ve finished eating and have begun clearing the table that Baekhyun tries to bring it up again.

But he chickens out again. This time, only getting as far as getting Chanyeol’s attention before he stops himself. Chanyeol’s still watching him, though, eyes alert as he waits for Baekhyun to finish what he was going to say but Baekhyun can’t do it. So instead, he just says: “Promise me you’ll never lie to me.” It’s more of something he blurts out, rather than something he actually means to say, and it seems to unnerve Chanyeol -- it would unnerve anyone really.

Chanyeol recovers from it fairly quickly, his face breaking into yet another jovial smile. “Of course. Why would I ever lie to you?”

x x x

He tries not to think about it, about the blood transfusion pack and what exactly Chanyeol does with them, but it still breaches his thoughts every now and then. He can’t help it, he’s curious. Scared. Concerned.

“So are you free tomorrow?” Chanyeol asks when he’s in the kitchen, cooking up two packets of ramen.

Baekhyun steals a glance at the date on his phone. It was actually one of the days he was planning to go back home but... “Valentine’s Day? I think Lu Han’s planning some bigass romantic dinner for Minseok so yeah, I’m going to have to be hiding out here whether you like it or not. And plus,” He adds as an afterthought, “When am I ever not free?”

“Nice to know that you’re only hanging out with me so you don’t third-wheel, and not because -- oh,
I don’t know -- we’re dating?” Chanyeol deadpans but the playful undertones shows that he’s really not taking any offense to the situation.

“Well yeah, isn’t this how this relationship works?”

“True.” Chanyeol says as he approaches the dining table, the large pot of ramen in hand. “Put out the thing that you have to put a pot on.” He instructs.

Baekhyun can’t help but laugh at Chanyeol’s elementary level vocabulary but he follows the orders regardless. “You mean a trivet?”

“Oh, well look at you and your fancy culinary terminology.” Chanyeol teases as he sets down the pot and then disappears into the kitchen to retrieve some bowls and two pairs of chopsticks. When he returns, he hands off a set to Baekhyun who accepts graciously.

“Thank you for the food!” Baekhyun grins, going in to take the first grab at the noodles. Chanyeol lets him.

“You know, I could do some bigass romantic thing for you too.” Chanyeol points out as he rolls around the chopsticks in his hand, waiting for Baekhyun to finish getting his share.

Baekhyun stops for a second and looks up at Chanyeol. He raises a questioning eyebrow. “You could. But do I want you to?”

“Yes?”

Baekhyun quickly crosses his arms to form an x and makes an accompanying buzzer-like sound. “Nope. You’re wrong. Better luck next time.”

“Come on,” Chanyeol whines, “It’d be fun and so romantic.”

“If you haven’t noticed by now, you’re the only one in it for the fun and romance in this relationship.” Baekhyun rolls his eyes as he backs off the steaming pot of ramen for Chanyeol to take his part.

“So what are you in it for?” Chanyeol asks distractedly as he hurries to get the rest of the noodles.

“For the sex.” Baekhyun smirks and Chanyeol drops his chopsticks into the pot.

_I’m sick_, Chanyeol texts early in the next morning.

_It’s Valentine’s Day. Way to be romantic_, Baekhyun texts back as he’s on his way down to get his mail. He’s not exactly sure how he’s going to actually open it without the help of Chanyeol.

And as he expected, it’s nearly impossible to get it open and he has to employ the help of a random young boy who looks like he’s on his way to grade school. The boy gives him a weird look but helps him regardless. He has to stand on the tips of his toes but still manages to get it open anyways. He hands over the mail to Baekhyun and then leaves, only sparing one look of complete and utter condescending pity before going.

Whenever the boy’s left the building, Baekhyun flips his middle finger in the direction of the door before looking down to inspect what’s come for him today. It’s a couple of advertisements for a nearby restaurant and some letter from Minseok’s parents but at the very end is a square piece of
paper folded in half and sealed shut with a cheesy little heart sticker. On the front is *From: Your Secret Admirer* scrawled out in the front and though Baekhyun would’ve guess Minseok as the culprit for this little gesture, the handwriting says otherwise. Without a doubt, it’s Chanyeol’s quick and precise strokes that wrote this out.

Making sure not to rip the paper, he pries it open and is met with a terribly large picture of a heart printed in an obtrusive shade of red. *Did I just sneeze?* reads the card in a fairly girly computer font, *Because god just blessed me with you.*

He actually laughs at loud, but he’s unsure whether he’s laughing at the sheer cheesiness of the pickup line or if he’s laughing because the line is oddly endearing. It’s original, at the very least, and actually just a tad clever.

Baekhyun’s just about to put the card away in his pocket but he finds a small message on the top right corner of the backside. *Take the back staircase up,* it says. The back staircase. The one that virtually no one uses. Shrugging, Baekhyun decides to go along with it, shoving the rest of the mail in his pocket while keeping the little valentine in his hands.

It takes a bit longer to actually get to the back staircase; he has to actually venture into the long hallway of the first floor to get to it and when he finally does, he finds a little green sticky note stuck to the door. *Make sure you have your keys!!* it says and instinctively, Baekhyun grips at the keys in hand. Taking the note off the door and sticking it to the backside of the valentine, Baekhyun ventures onto the staircase.

And it isn’t that there is something inherently bad about the staircase that makes it so unpopular amongst the residents of the building complex, but it is an outdoor staircase. Caged into the building by sheets of red, rusting metal, the staircase does seem a bit unsturdy and it’s not nearly as welcoming as the apartment’s front, carpeted staircase complete with adequate lighting and a handy handrail. Baekhyun’s just about to question why exactly Chanyeol had him come out but a bright yellow sticky note stuck precariously on the handrail holds the answer to his question.

*Sor**ry I had you come out here. I know it’s shady but had I had you gone anywhere else, these would have been stolen.* And then there’s a tiny little arrow pointing downward to where there’s a Hershey’s kiss sitting on the step.

He hurries to pick it up, unwrapping the piece of chocolate before popping it in his mouth. As he chews at the chocolate, a silver sparkle catches his eyes just two steps above. It’s another piece of chocolate. He steps up to go to pick that one up just to find another one, two steps above.

This goes on all the way until the 4th floor. By that time, Baekhyun’s already sick of the taste of chocolate, instead opting to pocket the numerous candies instead. Right next to the final chocolate, there’s yet another sticky note. *This is the last one for now because if I put it in the hallway, some idiot is sure to take them. No worries, I have a surprise for you back in the apartment!*

That’s his cue to make his way his way back into the building. It’s a bit difficult. The stairwell’s door is heavy, hard to open, and for a second, Baekhyun almost thinks he’s locked out. Luckily, the fifth time’s the charm and he manages to force it open. As soon as he slips back inside, the door slams shut and he scurries to the apartment.

The door to Chanyeol’s apartment is already unlocked when he comes to it so he takes that as an open invitation to just barge in. Chanyeol’s waiting for him as soon as he gets into the living room.

“So you successfully found the notes?” Chanyeol says, skipping over an actual greeting.
“Yeah,” Baekhyun affirms, emptying out his pockets full of chocolates onto the kitchen side counters. “When’d you even have the time to set all of this up anyways?”

“Don’t you worry your pretty little butt about that,” Chanyeol gives a knowing smile, “Now ready for the surprise?”

“No offense but if the surprise in chocolate, I will actually throw up.”

Chanyeol only laughs, “No worries, it’s something much better.” And from behind him, he pull out a bottle of wine and two glasses.

“It’s a little early to be drinking, isn’t it?” Baekhyun laughs but he plucks a wine glass from Chanyeol’s hands anyways. “Nice glass, by the way.” He comments offhandedly as he admires the way that bowl of the glass is almost as big as his hand. “Since when did you have these?”

“Since always. They were just hidden.” Chanyeol laughs goodnaturedly, moving over the kitchen counter to retrieve the corkscrew. He adds, “There’s a lot of things you haven’t seen in my apartment.”

His words are meant to be a joke, Baekhyun supposes, but they rub him the wrong way. Makes him think back to exactly what he has found hidden in this apartment. So he keeps quiet, only bowing his head in thanks whenever Chanyeol goes to fill his glass.

“It’s from Portugal. Vintage Port. 1943,” Chanyeol says to fill the air as he’s filling his own glass.

“I don’t know what any of that is supposed to mean but wow, 1943? That means it must be good, right?” Baekhyun asks, carefully swirling around the red mixture in his glass before going to sip it.

“Well it better be,” Chanyeol shrugs, plugging the bottle back up with a stopper. “I blew about $1500 on this bottle.” And he says it so nonchalantly. As if that wasn’t a small fortune. Baekhyun would spit out his wine but it’s much too precious to waste like that.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” He hisses out only after he swallows. And he has to admit, it’s good. Really good. But still not anything he would be willing to fork over over a thousand of dollars for. “Why the hell are we drinking something like this for something as mundane as Valentine’s Day?!”

“I swear it wasn’t that bad,” Chanyeol laughs, obviously amused by the Baekhyun monetary concerns. “I bought it when it first came out so it was really cheap.”

“When it first came out? Back In 1943? I’m sure you were alive then.” Baekhyun jokes.

Baekhyun doesn’t miss how the edge of the wineglass is already settled onto the plush of Chanyeol’s lip, the liquid just about to spill into his mouth when he suddenly stops. The way that Chanyeol’s forehead creases for just a second, the way that there seems to be a look of utter confusion present in his eyes before it quickly dispels; Baekhyun doesn’t miss it. Chanyeol brings his glass back down slowly.

“Oh,” Chanyeol chuckles and Baekhyun doesn’t know if it’s just him but it sounds weird, strained even. “Yeah. I didn’t mean it like that. I meant when I uhm, first saw it in the stores. Something like in 2009. The retail prices were really low then. Only about $300 a bottle.” Chanyeol rushes out with a lopsided smile. “Still kind of expensive, I guess, but cheers!” And with that, he’s moving to clink the edges of his glass and Baekhyun’s glass together before taking a sip.

Baekhyun so hesitantly takes another sip at his as well.
Apart from the wine and the chocolate, Chanyeol doesn’t really have anything else planned for the rest of the day, which is fine by Baekhyun. He’s completely satisfied with just laying around on the sofa watching some cheesy Valentine’s Day chick flick with his legs draped over Chanyeol’s lap. They make a game out of it, taking a drinking every time someone declares their undying love for another. They drain the bottle of wine fairly quickly.

Sometime after once they’ve finished all the alcohol and are just making snide comments at the heroine’s acting, Baekhyun gets up.

“I’m going to get something to drink.” Baekhyun says and he watches Chanyeol’s expression carefully. Only after he had found the blood in the fridge had he begun to realize how peculiar Chanyeol’s, and even Jongdae’s, behaviour was toward the fridge and letting Baekhyun rummage in it. It seems weird that Chanyeol isn’t rushing to stop him this time around.

“Go for it,” Chanyeol nods, his eyes trained on the TV.

“Where else?” He laughs, finally allowing his gaze to slide from the screen to Baekhyun. “I think there’s some soda in there way in the back. You might have to dig.”

“Oh. Okay.” Baekhyun nods uncertainly.

He’s a little nervous to open the fridge, considering what had happened last time. But when he finally works up the courage to do so, there’s nothing out of the usual. Just a freshly renewed supply of groceries and the leftovers from yesterday’s dinner.

And he wasn’t intending to go searching through the fridge to look for it but his curiosity gets the best of him.

It takes him a good ten minutes to physically remove every single item from inside the fridge and yet he still can’t find the transfusion pack. They’re all gone, every single one of them.

“What are you doing?”

The sound of Chanyeol’s voice startles Baekhyun as his muscles tense and his pulse speeds up. Slowly, he turns around to look at Chanyeol, heart thumping rapidly as he realizes how suspicious it must look to find your boyfriend sitting on the kitchen floor with the entirety of your fridge’s content arranged in a haphazard circle around him.

Chanyeol’s leaning up against one of the kitchen’s counter with a bemused smile twisting at his lips. “What are you doing?” He repeats.

“I’m uh,” Baekhyun stammers intelligently as if he wasn’t being conspicuous enough. “Just, uh, looking for something to drink.

Surprisingly enough, Chanyeol doesn’t question it. It’s as if he’s actually believing the half-hearted lie as he goes to sit down next to Baekhyun, scooting some of the surrounding cans of soda and egg carton out of the way so he has a place to plant himself on the cold floor of tiles. “Well,” He says seriously, eyes sweeping over the selection, “You’ve got your choices all lined up here.” Reaching over, Chanyeol brings out all of the drinks in the pile to form a line of choices. “We have milk, orange juice…”
He continues to list off the drinks but Baekhyun’s not really paying attention, too surprised by the fact that Chanyeol’s not freaking out over him clearing out his fridge.

“So which one?” Chanyeol asks, drawing Baekhyun back into their conversation.

“Uhm,” Baekhyun draws out, filling the silence as he looks over the line of drinks Chanyeol’s created. “I kind of want water.” He admits and immediately, he regrets his words. The fridge has a water dispenser. There was absolutely no reason for him to have been rummaging through the fridge.

But Chanyeol doesn’t comment, only giving Baekhyun a little smile before saying, “Okay. I’ll guess we just have to put all of this stuff away first.”

And so that’s what they do. They spend the next fifteen minutes carefully putting things back into the fridge.

Baekhyun still can’t find the packets of blood.

x x x

Although he had lied about it on Valentine’s Day, Chanyeol does actually get sick a couple weeks later.

And it really shouldn’t have come up as a surprise. The days prior, Chanyeol had seem a bit shaky, paler than usual. They hadn’t gone out in days, sticking to the confines of Chanyeol’s apartment.

He’d asked about it many times, but Chanyeol had always tried to avoid the topic, passing it off as just a cold or something. “Even if it is just a cold,” Baekhyun says, gently stroking the bangs out of Chanyeol’s forehead before laying his hand on it, checking for a fever. There’s nothing out of the usual. He draws his hand away, resting it on Chanyeol’s thigh instead. “Don’t you think you should be resting? So you get better faster? I don’t think me being here really helps you heal.”

“That’s what you think,” Chanyeol cracks a smile and attempts to wrap Baekhyun into a hug. His movements are a bit slow but Baekhyun lets himself get captured easily, laughing as he does so.

“No really,” Baekhyun chuckles, wriggling a hand out of Chanyeol’s grip to ruffle his hair. “You shouldn’t force yourself to hang out with me.”

As a response, Chanyeol only burrows himself further into Baekhyun. “You think I’m forcing myself? You’re like medicine to me!” He says, but his words are muffled by Baekhyun’s chest.

And Baekhyun lets him be for a bit, feels the younger grow more relaxed, practically boneless in his grip as he slowly runs his hands up and down Chanyeol’s back. “What if I moved in for a while?” Baekhyun decides to ask, “You’re sick -- don’t even bother to deny it. You might not be deathly ill but you’re still not completely well -- and maybe it’s be best if I stay around for a while. You know, be here to nurse you back to health.”

Chanyeol hesitates. He usually never hesitates to let Baekhyun stay over. “Okay.” He says after a while, “I guess that’s the best solution.”

Once again, Baekhyun makes for a temporary move into Chanyeol’s apartment. He gets weird looks from Minseok, knowing ones from Lu Han (who has finally begun to let down his guard around Baekhyun again, finally begun to act normal around him) since he’s actually formally packing before staying over at Chanyeol's but he tells them that he’s just sticking around because Chanyeol’s sick.
But he apparently doesn't do his job all that well. No matter how much he makes Chanyeol eat, sleep, rest, the younger just seems to grow weaker and weaker. At a certain point, Baekhyun had began to realize that this is something that he can’t help, that’s out of his hands but whenever he tries to offer to take Chanyeol to the doctor, he refuses. He insists that his home is the best place to be.

He starts coughing a couple days later, his body suddenly seizing into loud, harsh-sounding fits of coughing. Chanyeol does it while they’re watching a movie on Baekhyun's computer while they're sitting in bed and Baekhyun can’t do anything but run his hands down the younger’s back and watch him helplessly. “I can mix some hot water, honey, and lemon.” He offers, “I heard that helps with coughing.”

“I don’t--” He manages to say between the coughs, “I don’t think I have lemon. Or honey.”

“I can… I’ll just run by the store and get some.” Baekhyun offers.

Chanyeol whines in response. “Don’t leave me.” He pouts before breaking out into another coughing fit.

“Seriously, I think I should go to the store,” Baekhyun says, carefully watching as Chanyeol pounds his chest. “I think I need to pick up some medicine for you.”

“No,” comes as Chanyeol’s immediate reply. “I’ll be fine. Just stay with me.”

Chanyeol’s stubborn but Baekhyun gets up anyways. Swiping his jacket from off the bed, he makes his way out of the room. Behind him, he hears Chanyeol protests, hears him call him to come back but Chanyeol’s too weak to even come after him.

When he comes back about twenty minutes later, he’s surprised to see Chanyeol up. If you can call it up. It’s more as he finds Chanyeol leaning up against the fridge, looking awfully pale. He looks like he’s about to collapse, honestly, and he shakes as he pries open the freezer, beginning to poke through the contents.

“You’re up.” Baekhyun notes as he pads up to Chanyeol. Chanyeol shuts the freezer door with more force than it seems possible for him to conjure up at this point in time.

“Yeah,” He whispers out; his voice is hoarse like hasn’t had anything to drink in days. “I’m just… thirsty.” His grip atop the fridge fails him and he loses strength in his knees, almost toppling to the floor before he manages to catch himself on the counter. Baekhyun rushes to him immediately.

“How about,” Baekhyun says softly, wrapping one of Chanyeol’s arm around him to hoist him up. “We get you back to bed?” And though it comes out as a question, Baekhyun doesn’t care for an answer; he’s already walking Chanyeol back to his bedroom before he has a chance to reply. “I bought some things, so give me a second and I’ll make you something to drink.”

Chanyeol just nods.

When he comes back, Chanyeol’s in the middle of another one of his coughing fits. He politely waits for it to pass over before he moves closer to Chanyeol. "Take this," Baekhyun says as he offers him the mug.

Chanyeol bows his head in thanks before gripping the cup with both hands. Slowly, he brings the drink up to his lips and drinks. Baekhyun watches Chanyeol gulp down the drink thirstily, moving to take a seat on the side of the bed.
“Chanyeol,” Baekhyun whispers as Chanyeol’s vigor starts to die down; he's back to slow, quiet sips of the concoction, “Don’t you think we should go the doctor? Get some medicine?”

And like every other time Baekhyun had broached the topic, Chanyeol adamantly shakes his head, “I don’t want to go. Plus, you bought some cough medicine. That should be good enough.”

“No. I meant like real medicine. Medicine that does more than just suppress the cough.”

Chanyeol only shakes his head with a small smile. "No. I'll be fine."

But he's not fine. He's anything but fine when Baekhyun awakens one night to the horrible retching sounds of Chanyeol. He rushes over as quickly as possible.

Chanyeol's not just throwing up. He's throwing up blood, thick, nearly black clumps of blood with each upheaval. Baekhyun's first reaction is to move over to where Chanyeol is draped over the toilet, run a gentle hand up and down the expanse of his back until he finishes.

It's only when Chanyeol seems to be done that Baekhyun's scrambling to his feet, panic finally beginning to kick in.

“Dude, we have to go to the hospital. You need help.” Baekhyun urges, attempting to pull Chanyeol up.

“N...No.” Chanyeol rushes out, rubbing the back of his hand against his mouth but only managing to smudge the blood across the sides of his mouth. “I can’t.”

“You are vomiting blood. You have to.” Baekhyun says, moving to wet a paper towel and gently clean off the blood staining his mouth.

“I--” Chanyeol stops himself and turns himself back to the toilet to retch once again. “I don’t have health insurance.” He gasps out.

“Now is hardly the time to care about insurance!”

“I don’t… It matters for poor people like me.”

It seems like an inappropriate time to laugh so Baekhyun tries his best to stifle the urge. “You’re hardly poor.” He tries to say as calmly as he can.

“Still,” Chanyeol groans, “I can’t.”

“You can and you will because this could be serious.” Baekhyun heaves Chanyeol up by the arm and wraps his arms around his waist to steady him. “Now come on, I’ll get Lu Han to drive us.”

“I’m not going!” Chanyeol exclaimed before launching into a coughing fit. “Don’t argue me with this.” And his eyes are firm and they shut Baekhyun up.

“Okay.” He breathes out, “Okay. What do You want me to do?” He asks, guiding Chanyeol back to the bedroom.

Chanyeol silent as Baekhyun helps him back onto the bed. He sinks into the mattress, groaning. “Just. Just call Jongdae.”

Baekhyun freezes, “Jongdae?”
“Jongdae.” Chanyeol affirms and closes his eyes, “Tell him to hurry.”

He’s a bit confused as to why Chanyeol is asking for Jongdae instead of going to a doctor but he just goes with it because Jongdae is a doctor. Sort of.

Despite being at an ungodly time in the morning, Jongdae picks up after 2 rings. “I don’t think you have ever called me before. Who should I--”

“Chanyeol’s sick.” Baekhyun interjects before Jongdae gets any further. “You still here?” He asks when the voice on the line quiets.

“Yeah yeah.” Jongdae rushes out, his voice noticeably more shaky than before. “What do you mean by sick?”

“He’s… He’s throwing up blood.”

“Oh.” There’s the sound of quiet breaths in the receiver. “I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

“Wait does this happen--” Jongdae hangs up and Baekhyun’s subjected to the grating noise of the dialtone. “Often…?” He finishes before taking a deep breath. He returns to Chanyeol.

True to his words, there’s an insistent knock on the door about ten minutes later and a flustered Jongdae. Without even a greeting, Jongdae brushes past Baekhyun. He doesn’t remove his shoes and practically marches into Chanyeol’s room. Baekhyun follows close behind.

He’s just about to follow Jongdae into the bedroom when Jongdae suddenly stops him. “I need to talk to him.” He says seriously.

Baekhyun shrugs, “Okay then talk to him.”

“Alone.” Jongdae punctuates before closing the door in Baekhyun’s face.

Any other day, Baekhyun might’ve protested, forced his way into the room alongside Jongdae but today’s different. There’s a sense of seriousness, of authority and with that, Jongdae goes into Chanyeol's room, firmly shutting the door behind him. Baekhyun sighs as he moves back, letting himself slide down against the wall across from the bedroom door until he's sitting on the ground. He hugs his knees close.

Jongdae comes out after what seems like an hour and he looks relieved, his shoulders lacking their previous stiffness. The pointed look is still there, though, and it looks misplaced. With a silent gesture of fingers, Jongdae leads out Baekhyun out of the apartment. To talk, Baekhyun supposes.

“Baekhyun,” Jongdae starts as soon as he shuts the door behind him. His tone solemn, a stark contrast to his normal joking self. “I need you to leave.”

“Okay…?” He nods slowly, “I’ll be back tomorrow then.”

“No.” Jongdae replies, looking Baekhyun straight in the eyes. “I need you to move out and stay out. You cannot live with him.”

“Nothing.” Jongdae says quickly, a little too quickly, “Nothing.” He reaffirms but it only makes it all the more suspicious.

Baekhyun frowns, “Are you sure? It seemed pretty serious. I think we should bring him to the hospital.”

“It’s not as bad as you think. It’s really nothing.”

“He was throwing up blood,” Baekhyun narrows his eyes, “That’s hardly nothing.”

Jongdae doesn’t answer for a while before he lets out a sigh. “Okay. It is something.”

“No shit,” Baekhyun scoffs but Jongdae’s piercing gaze has him shutting up.

“But it’s nothing that you need to be concerned with.” Jongdae finishes, “It’s something that’s happened before and it’s nothing that you need to be concerned with. Now please leave.”

“If it really is something then I, as his boyfriend, should be in there, helping him.” Baekhyun bites out.

“Did you not understand anything I just said?”

“Did you not understand anything I just said?” Baekhyun parrots.

“You don’t understand.” Jongdae’s running his fingers through his hair irritatedly. And it’s not so much the words he’s saying that’s bothering Baekhyun (though that is still a part of it), but rather it’s the way that Jongdae’s looking at him. Like he’s irrelevant, as if he has no place in any of this. That’s what has Baekhyun’s blood boiling.

Baekhyun’s eyes narrow and he’s this close to just punching Jongdae in the face. “Then why don’t you tell me so that I can understand. From what I’m getting, you’re just keeping him away from me out of your own spite.” He fumes and he doesn’t miss how Jongdae’s eyes darken.

“You’re not good for him.” Jongdae spits out, and he’s seething now. Eyes looks like he’s set to kill. “Now get out and stay the fuck away from Chanyeol before my patience wears thin.” He punctuates his words by shoving Baekhyun into the wall behind him with unprecedented strength and then turning around to go back into Chanyeol’s apartment. He slams the door behind him and Baekhyun can hear the distinct click of the lock.

Baekhyun doesn’t know what to do.

He could try his his hand at insistent knocking, at trying to cause enough of a racket to get Jongdae’s attention but the chances of Jongdae actually letting him in are low. The chances of him letting him go see Chanyeol in his state is even lower.

He hates himself for doing it, but he just scurries away with his tail between his legs.

x x x

“You haven’t been to Chanyeol’s lately,” Lu Han comments when he sees Baekhyun pitifully splayed over the couch, “Lover’s spat?”

“Jongdae’s there. And he’s being an ass.” Baekhyun grumbles. Lu Han’s nosy so he’s not surprised when the older takes a seat on the floor in front of him and gives him a look that beckons for details.

“Chanyeol’s sick.” Baekhyun continues as per Lu Han’s silent nudgings, “Like really sick. Like
throwing up blood sick.”

“Shouldn’t he go to the hospital, then?” Minseok suggests out of nowhere.

Baekhyun jolts up into sitting position, “Right?! That’s what I said but then Jongdae…”

“Jongdae?” Minseok asks as he comes to sit next to Lu Han on the floor, both watching Baekhyun with a look of concern. “What’s he got to do anything with this?”

“The little asshole refuses to let me see him,” Baekhyun rolls his eyes, “Says I’m bad for him or some shit like that.”

“Maybe he’s onto something.” Lu Han pipes up and continues, despite the death stare Baekhyun’s shooting at him. “I mean he is a doctor.”

“He’s an anesthesiologist.”

“You do realize that is a doctor,” Lu Han says, squinting, “And even if he’s just a nurse -- which would be called an anesthetist, thank you very much -- that’d still mean he’s been to medical school. I, for one, think that you should listen well to him.”

“I don’t,” Minseok muses, “I mean yes, I do think Jongdae might be the most informed about what’s happening but I don’t think there’s any reason as to why he should stop you from letting him see Chanyeol.”

“It could be something serious. Maybe it’s something that’s contagious; he doesn’t want Baekhyun catching it,” Lu Han suggests, adamant to defend Jongdae for reasons unbeknownst to Minseok and Baekhyun both.

“Well how long has it been since you’ve tried to to see him?” Minseok asks instead.

Baekhyun looks down to where he’s wringing his hands together. “Uhm. Like two days…”

Minseok looks alarmed by the response. “Well that was two days ago! Maybe he was just being irrational. If you go now, he may have changed his mind by now.”

He’s a bit hesitant to go. To say that he was offended by Jongdae’s words is an understatement. To say that he’s embarrassed by what he’s been reduced to in front of Jongdae’s refusals is also an understatement. He’s humiliated, scared to show his face around there again, honestly. But at Minseok’s insistence, he goes.

It takes about three minutes for Jongdae to answer the door, but he definitely doesn’t look happy as he pulls open the door. “You’re back,” Jongdae states plainly, face arranged in obvious distaste.

“Can I just… Just see him?” Baekhyun says. His voice is practically begging at this point but he doesn’t care -- he’s desperate. “Even just for a second. I need to know that he’s gonna be okay.”

And then there’s a pause. Jongdae purses his lips, sucking his teeth in thought, and for a second, Baekhyun actually thinks that there’s a chance that Jongdae might pull that stick out of his ass and let him in. His hopes are dashed as soon as Jongdae opens his mouth in the obvious shape of a “No”. The hard set lines of Jongdae’s expression seem to soften when he sees Baekhyun’s face fall. “Not now at least.” Jongdae quickly amends. He heaves a sigh and raises a hand to his mouth in thought, as if this is actually a fairly difficult decision to make. “Three or four days.” Jongdae says eventually, his lips ground into a thin line. “I’ll let you see him in three to four days.”
“Why are you stopping me from seeing him now?!” Baekhyun snaps but he realizes his mistake as soon as his words come out and Jongdae’s frown deepens.

“Because he’s sick. And your presence isn’t going to magically improve the situation.” His voice is cold now, lacking in any sort of sympathy that had been there just seconds earlier.

“Well it isn’t going to worsen it either, now is it?”

“It might.” Jongdae cuts in, “Scratch that. It will.”

“How? How the hell will me visiting him affect his health in any way--”

“I don’t think you understand how severe this situation is.” Jongdae says, his voice slowly escalating in volume. “This isn’t some stubborn ass cold; it’s a fatal, life or death kind of thing and nothing good will come out of your perpetual pestering to see him!”

“Then why the fuck are you not bringing him to a hospital?!” Baekhyun shouts back, “If it’s so fucking deadly why the fuck are you not getting him better medical attention?!”

“It’s complicated.” Jongdae replies oh so vaguely. “He can’t.”

“If he can’t pay for it then I’ll pay for his treatment myse--”

“It isn’t a matter of money,” Jongdae cuts in, “You should know that he’s pretty well off financially. It’s something deeper than that. Bad experiences, that kind of thing.”

“Don’t you think that maybe this is something more important? That even if he is afraid of going to hospitals, maybe it’d be best to still take him to a hospital -- if he’s really doing as badly as you claim, I mean.” And as much as he tries to be civil about this because he is genuinely concerned, because he does want the best for Chanyeol, he can’t help but let some of his skepticism about the whole situation into his voice.

The expression on Jongdae’s face only sours. “The situation is bad but I don’t think think it warrants dragging Chanyeol to the hospital.”

“But if it’s really that bad--”

“Then nothing good will come out of forcing Chanyeol into a stressful situation.” Jongdae finishes for him.

“This sounds awfully like an excuse to keep me out…” Baekhyun mumbles just barely under his breath but Jongdae still manages to pick it out, manages to flare up in anger as soon as he hears it.

“Do you think everything is about you?” Jongdae grits out, voice dropped to a mere hush. “Do you really think that I’m making up all of this up just to keep you away?”

“Well yeah… I mean…” Baekhyun stammers and as soon as he says it, he’s conscious of how petty, how stupid this might sound to anyone, everyone else, but he can’t help it. He can’t help but feel insecure, helpless about this whole situation.

“Do you really think that I care enough about you and your stupid relationship with Chanyeol to go to such an extent, to make you worry so much just to spite you? Do you think I’m making up this whole situation where Chanyeol is fucking deteriorating to stop you from meeting? Are you really fucking belittling the situation at hand to make it revolve around yourself?” Jongdae stops himself. He takes just a second to close his eyes, exhale, before breathing out. “You’re so damned self-
Before Baekhyun has a chance to defend himself (and he really wasn’t going to, he knows he’s selfish, but it still hurts being told point blank like this), Jongdae continues on with a scoff. “Sorry, love, but this isn’t a joke. Chanyeol’s taken ill and you’re the poison.”

The next thing he knows, he’s being shoved out of the apartment, the door slamming shut once again.

x x x

He’s not proud of what he decides to do next. It’s just that he’s worried. Curious. To the point of insanity.

It takes him a while to find the spare keys to Chanyeol’s apartment, but after rooting through his room for a while, he finds it in the inner pockets of one of his jackets. Exactly where Chanyeol had slipped it in whenever he first offered it. He’s never really had a need for the keys; Chanyeol’s always there to let him in if he ever wants to come over.

Figures that the first time he’s using it is to sneak into the place.

But it’s not like he’s planning some big excursion. He’s just going in and out, just to make sure Chanyeol’s doing alright. Technically speaking, it’s Baekhyun’s right to be able to enter into the apartment as he pleases. That’s the reasoning he uses to justify his actions.

Retrospectively speaking, his plan is pretty stupid. He’s just going in without any sort of concise plan as to how he’s going to avoid Jongdae, how he’s going to manage to talk himself out of the situation if he’s caught by Jongdae. But it’s not like he really cares at this point.

It’s oddly dark when he steps in. All the lights are off; the blinds are shut, the curtains drawn, and not a single ray of sunlight manages to slip into the apartment. The only source of light comes from the sliver of brightness that manages to slip through the crack of the open door of Chanyeol’s room. Baekhyun quickly walks over.

The way the door opens (out, not in) lets Baekhyun peek into the door without the people inside being able to see him so he presses himself up against a wall, ready to look in.

And when he finally does chance a glance, he sees something that makes his stomach drop.

Standing right next to the foot of the bed with Jongdae’s back to the door, there they are pressed together close, impossibly close. Chanyeol’s arms are wrapped around the small of Jongdae’s waist; Jongdae’s are in turn looped around Chanyeol’s neck. Jongdae has his neck bared toward Chanyeol and Chanyeol’s there, his eyes shut as he stands there sucking at his jugular.

Before Baekhyun knows it, he’s pushing the door open, stepping forward to get a closer look because something seems off, something feels off, but he’s not being quiet, he’s not being careful. Chanyeol’s eyes snap open and widen as soon as they see Baekhyun inching closer to see if he’s just imagining the way Chanyeol seems to be baring his teeth into Jongdae’s neck. Slightly, just barely does Chanyeol relax his bite on Jongdae’s neck but it’s enough for Baekhyun to see the oversized incisors pull out just a bit and blood begin to spill from the bite marks.

It’s something in the way that Chanyeol’s gaze seems fearful, seems practically petrified that sets Baekhyun off. Before Chanyeol can say anything, before Jongdae can even turn around and realize that Baekhyun’s there, Baekhyun dashes out of the apartment.
And maybe it’s not so much the fact that Chanyeol is in there, doing *something* with Jongdae that bothers Baekhyun. Chanyeol’s not cheating on him -- that much Baekhyun knows for sure. It seems more like Chanyeol was biting him, *sucking his blood* and maybe that’s the main reason why Baekhyun is furious. The fact that Baekhyun’s known something was up for a while but he gave Chanyeol time to explain, far too much time to explain. The fact that Chanyeol’s kept this hidden for so long. The fact that it’s never gone through Chanyeol’s mind that maybe he should’ve told Baekhyun about all of this. Whatever this is. It’s not fidelity that’s the problem. It’s trust; it’s not being able to share secrets, not being able to confide. The moment he returns to his room, he smashes his lamp into the floor.

*I know you must be confused right now but I can explain,* Chanyeol messages him about two hours later but Baekhyun deletes it and turns off his phone before chucking his phone against his wall.

In his fit of rage, in his moment of clouded thinking, Baekhyun finally picks up his phone, decides to turn his phone back on and reply to Chanyeol. As soon as he begins typing his own message, Chanyeol’s begins to shoot off his own texts.

*It’s not what you think*

*I can explain.*

*Please believe me.*

*We need to talk.*

Baekhyun only replies back with, *Let’s break up,* before turning off his phone again.

x x x

It’s one-sided, yes, seeing how Chanyeol never formally agreed to the actual break up but Baekhyun’s adamant in freezing their relationship, adamant in pretending not to seeing the other whenever their paths cross, adamant in averting his eyes and bolting whenever Chanyeol appears, trying to talk to him.

It’s not hard for him to cut Chanyeol out of his life.

He was never in love with the first place. He refused to be in love.

Their separation should be clean and painless.

x x x

He knows Lu Han and Minseok -- well, Minseok more so than Lu Han, to be perfectly honest -- have been trying to be considerate to him because he no longer has a place to escape to when they… do things, but one can only fend off Lu Han for so long.

It’s when Baekhyun steps out to pick up some milk for some cake Minseok is making for his friend’s birthday does Lu Han strike.

There’s a note on the door when he returns. “I’m sorry, just eat out tonight or catch a movie. I’ll make it up to you…” is written in Minseok’s neat strokes. “Don’t come in.” is scrawled right under
in Lu Han’s barely legible writing.

He wants to feel offended, furious at them for leaving him out like this to fend for himself but he can't bring himself to do it. He doesn't blame them, really. Even he's grown tired of himself after all of this reclusive behavior.

Almost like second nature, he finds himself staring at the door across the hall before he shakes off the thought. He can’t go back now. He won’t be going back for a while. Instead he decides to head out to that restaurant a couple of blocks away he’s heard about, but his eyes can’t help but linger on Chanyeol’s doorway before he begins his descent down the stairs.

He studies the menu, scouring the prices for the cheapest thing to eat.

"Hey."

Baekhyun looks up and then quickly looks back down. Of course the one time he leaves his apartment, someone finds him. He tries his best to just ignore the others presence but apparently, Jongdae is not well-informed on manners and proceeds to just slide right into the booth across from him.

"What do you want?" Baekhyun growls, keeping his gaze fixed on the list of entrees.

"Why aren’t you talking to Chanyeol anymore?" Jongdae says point-blank and Baekhyun makes the mistake of looking up. His eyes are narrowed; Jongdae looks irritated.

The waitress comes around just then and Baekhyun places his order for a panini. To his surprise, Jongdae pipes up right after, ordering some steak that's priced unnaturally high for a little diner. The girl shuffles away immediately after, promising to bring back their order as quickly as she can.

As soon as she’s out of earshot, the younger repeats himself, "Why aren’t you talking to Chanyeol anymore?" The words have a bit more edge than before, certain words holding a kind of stress that only punctuates Jongdae’s anger.

"Isn’t that what you wanted?" Baekhyun’s words come out with a bit more bite than intended. But it’s not like he doesn’t mean it.

"No, I didn’t." Jongdae immediately denies despite Baekhyun’s strikingly clear memories of him to stay away from Chanyeol. Jongdae’s quick to answer but he’s also quick to amend. “Okay. So maybe I did but I didn’t mean that, you misunderstood.”

“Oh?” Baekhyun asks with feigned innocence, “S-so I misunderstood what you meant when you said ‘you’re not good for him’, ‘get out and stay the fuck away from Chanyeol’, and ‘you’re a poison?’” His voice is light but he lays on the sarcasm thick, impossible to mistake.

Jongdae winces at the sound of his words being thrown back at him. “I didn’t mean it.” He says before qualifying his words, “Or I did. But only because it was such a dire situation and I was freaking out. I wasn’t thinking straight.”

“A dire situation that apparently wasn’t dire enough to tell me about it.” Baekhyun sniffs, eyes narrowed into slits.

Baekhyun can clearly see how Jongdae's jaw clenches. His gaze is intense and it takes a bit of time before the younger replies but when he does, he changes topic. "You need to go see him."
"Why?"

And Jongdae doesn’t offer an explanation, only repeating again, “You need to go see him.”

"I don't need to see anyone."

"Look, you little--" His volume borders that of a yell but Jongdae cuts himself off quickly just as the waitress makes her way back to set down a basket of bread before disappearing once again. Baekhyun watches as the other takes a couple of deep breaths to calm himself. "He misses you." His voice is softer than what Baekhyun expects, a complete 180 from the harsh tone he had taken just seconds earlier.

Baekhyun is silent.

"Whatever you saw, it's not what you think." Jongdae continues, his eyes wide and pleading.

“Do you even know what I saw?” Baekhyun hisses.

There’s a hesitation before Jongdae admits, “I’m not sure to what extent you saw but I have an idea. I’m sure it’s not as bad as you’re making it out to be,” Jongdae reaffirms and earns himself a pinched frown from Baekhyun. “Nothing that shouldn’t be at least talked out with Chanyeol.” He amends after seeing Baekhyun’s face.

Jongdae babbles on, filling the air with sweet lures to go back to Chanyeol but Baekhyun won’t fall for them. He refuses to fall for them.

"We promised to never keep secrets between each other." Baekhyun whispers and it sounds petty even to himself but it means a lot him. Meant a lot to him to think that maybe Chanyeol was someone he could trust, was someone that could trust him. It’s hurt to see that he was wrong.

"This isn't something you can tell to just anyone--"

"I'm not just anyone."

"This isn't the most normal situation."

"Then all the more reason to tell me what all of this is about."

“It’s not something you can just say.” Jongdae reiterates, “This isn’t the most normal situation.”

"Then,” Baekhyun narrows his eyes, his voice dropping to a growl. “Why don’t you tell me what this situation is."

"I--" Jongdae falters, "it's not my secret to tell."

There’s a silence that hangs in the air before Jongdae hurries to amend his words, “But that doesn’t mean that it’s something bad. It’s not what y--"

"He’s a monster, isn’t he?" Baekhyun cuts in with a question, his lips curled up into a rue smile. “I saw what he was doing to you. He’s a monster.”

Jongdae practically jumps up from his seat, slamming his hands on the table. "YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING, YOU FU--" His face is so expressive, the anger manifesting easily in the accusatory eyes, the clenched fist -- everything.

The waitress, with her great timing, comes at that exact moment which has Jongdae clamoring back
to his seat, red-faced and pissed. The girl seems to notice that she’s come at an unfortunate time as she sheepishly sets down the meal in front of them before leaving them to their own devices.

Not a word is spoken for while; Jongdae has his eyes closed, calming himself down, and Baekhyun just doesn’t want to do anything to tick the other off again.

"You know what?" Jongdae begins, his voice cold and clipped, “Fuck you, you don't deserve his heart."

Jongdae gets up and just leaves.

Baekhyun is stuck with the dinner bill.

“The milk spoiled,” are the words that greet him when he comes back somewhere around midnight, a bit more tipsy than he'd care to admit.

“Fuck off.” Baekhyun grumbles and stumbles to his room.

x x x

Unsurprisingly, it's Minseok's that convinces Baekhyun to finally pay Chanyeol a visit. Minseok is the one that sits him down after dinner. He's the one who kneels down onto the floor and rests a hand on Baekhyun's knee. For comfort, Baekhyun supposes.

"You miss him." Minseok whispers. He gives Baekhyun a meaningful look that only has Baekhyun snorting.

“I don’t miss him.” He denies with a shake of his head, “I’m angry. I kinda don’t ever want to see him again.”

“You’re more angry at Jongdae than you are at Chanyeol, though, aren’t you?” Minseok asks quietly, using his thumb to rub comforting circles into the meat of Baekhyun’s thigh. “And if you are truly mad at Chanyeol, do you really have a reason to be?”

Baekhyun opens his mouth to interrupt, to protest, but Minseok only shakes his head and continues on. “Look. I don’t know what exactly happened -- and I’m okay with not knowing because I get it, it’s personal -- but I do know the timeframe in which this all happened. You came back. You received a text from Chanyeol about two hours later. You proceeded to break up with him over text and then turned your phone off.” Minseok breaks eye contact for just a second, quickly glancing to beside Baekhyun as his eyebrows furrow. “It’s still off, isn’t it?”

Baekhyun nods and Minseok gives him a little frown but goes on anyways. “From then on, you avoided him. You haven’t given him any time, any opportunity to explain himself.”

“He could’ve come over here.” Baekhyun frowns, crossing his arms. “He could’ve made the opportunity to come and explain himself.”

“In the hallways, you’ve avoided him. Anytime he so much as makes eye contact with you, you bolt off. Be honest with me. If he came over here, would you really have let him in and given him the opportunity to explain himself? Or would you have just slammed the door right in his face as soon as he came in?”

Baekhyun doesn’t answer the question. All of his actions seem childish whenever Minseok picks it
apart like that. “Still…”

“It’s only been about a week and a half, Baekhyun, maybe two.” Minseok says, “I know for you, this seems like the end of the relationship, but to him… To him this might just seem like another fight and he’s giving you space to cool down before approaching you.”

“He’s giving me a stupidly long amount of time to cool down.” Baekhyun mutters, “At this point I’m starting to get even more pissed off than I was before.”

“Isn’t this a problem, though?” Minseok comments offhandedly, “The fact that you think it’s his responsibility to come and apologize to you, to come and fix everything for you while you just sit around and wait.”

Baekhyun’s eyes narrow into slits. “Are you or are you not on my side?” And this situation, this argument sounds so eerily familiar.

Maybe it’s the venom in his voice or maybe it’s the realization that this topic is treading on thin ice for Baekhyun, but Minseok backs down, dropping his eyes to the floor. “I am. I’m sorry.” He says quickly, flicking his gaze up to Baekhyun with large, apologetic eyes. “But maybe he realizes how badly he fucked up and he’s afraid to approach you, afraid to see just how mad you are.”

Baekhyun doesn’t say anything, only offering a noncommittal shrug as a response even though it does seem to be a viable option. Slowly, Minseok rises to his feet and Baekhyun’s eyes follow him as he stands up. “Baekhyun.” Minseok says even though he already has Baekhyun’s full attention. “I know you’re too stubborn to admit this, but you do miss him -- I know you do. Maybe it’s time for you to make the first move.”

And before Baekhyun can say anything, he leaves.

x x x

As much as he hates to admit, Minseok’s advice resonates with him. Maybe he really is being childish; maybe he really is overreacting. The point that strikes a chord, though, is the idea that he really hasn’t given Chanyeol an opportunity to explain himself, to explain the whole damned situation.

This kind of reasoning has him lingering in front of Chanyeol’s apartment, hand poised just inches away from the door, ready to knock. It takes him a bit of time to solidify his resolve and even when he does, it’s still pretty shaky. He mentally promises himself that he’ll only knock a total of four times and if Chanyeol doesn’t answer within five minutes, he has all the reason to just turn tail and go back to his own apartment.

He counts the seconds as soon as he knocks three times and he’s approaching his 300 second before he can bolt when Chanyeol opens up.

Chanyeol looks pretty good, actually. Not that Baekhyun was expecting (hoping) that Chanyeol would be a wreck after his impromptu breakup.

As compared to before, the slight rosy glow has returned to his skin, the sharp shadows that were previously cast before by jutting cheekbones and deathly pale skin have softened. The only thing that hasn’t really changed from before is the uncharacteristically dead look in Chanyeol’s eyes. Baekhyun can’t help but take some sort sick satisfaction in at least that much.

"Let’s talk.” Baekhyun says quickly, eyes shifting down to study the ground, avoiding eye contact with the other.
He's lead into the apartment, shepherded into Chanyeol's room wordlessly. Baekhyun tries not to take notice but the apartment is a wreck; the dishes are piled high in the sink. Though not the tidiest person in the world, Chanyeol had never been like this before and it’s worrisome.

The room, though, is surprisingly clean. The bed is made, the floors clear of clothes. The whole room looks untouched and Baekhyun can’t help but blurt out his observation. He watches as Chanyeol’s face falls and his eyes turn down toward the floor. “I can’t stand being in this room,” He says, voice barely over a whisper that Baekhyun has to strain to hear, “It smells too much like you.”

“Oh.” Baekhyun mumbles and he continues to stand around awkwardly as Chanyeol goes to sit on the bed. The bedroom door is left wide open and it’s a gesture that stabs at Baekhyun’s heart.

“What do you want to talk about?” Chanyeol asks, slumping over as he sits on the bed. His eyes look up to Baekhyun and Baekhyun can see the weariness, the tired ache that sinks in bone-deep behind his gaze. "If it's about the time you saw me with Jongdae..." He trails off, gnawing at his lip the way he always does when he’s trying to come up with something to say, when he’s trying to come up with some lie. "I'm sorry, it was just... Just a heat of the moment kind of thing. I didn't mean to kiss him."

"You weren't making out with Jongdae," Baekhyun replies point blank and he sees Chanyeol's eyes quiver with fear. "I saw you."

"I-I don't know what you're talking about..." Chanyeol forces out a shaky laugh. "If I wasn't kissing him what else would I be doing?"

"Drinking blood." Baekhyun answers back, his eyes narrowed.

"Wha-- what?!" Chanyeol coughs out, his voice blasphemous. "Why would I do that? I cheated on you, Baekhyun. I'm sorry but can you just accept it so we can move on? You being in denial, acting as if I did something as illogical as drink blood... That's not normal!"

"Is this so bad that lying to me about cheating is a better alternative than the truth?" Baekhyun says incredulously, shaking his head slowly.

"Why do you think I'm lying? Please just accept--"

"You have fangs." He cuts in and Chanyeol immediately shuts up and shrinks back, a flicker of fear dancing in his eyes. "I've seen the blood transfusion packs from before and I saw you drinking from Jongdae. If it was something as simple as cheating, then this would be easy. I'd just leave and never come back. But I know this is something else, and that's why I'm here. To hear your explanation." Baekhyun swallows. "What are you?" He asks slowly, straight to the point.

Chanyeol locks his gaze with Baekhyun before dropping it to his twiddling fingers. “You won’t believe me.”

Under Chanyeol’s breath, Baekhyun swears he can make out the words: “You usually never do,” but that wouldn’t make sense. “Tell me.” He pushes as he crosses his arms.

“No.” Chanyeol says immediately and Baekhyun narrows his eyes.

“Tell me.” He repeats, stepping just a step closer to Chanyeol.

Chanyeol stays quiet as his hands unclasp and go to grip his hair. Frustrated, he runs his hands
harshly through his hair a couple of times before gripping the strands with all of his might.

“I really can’t, Baekhyun.” Chanyeol says softly, his voice strained. “I can’t afford to lose you.”

Beneath his breath, Baekhyun swears he can hear Chanyeol end his sentence with the word “again.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Chanyeol.” Baekhyun replies back and he knows he’s not being persuasive enough, not being soft enough to coax the answers out but he’s never been good at this kind of thing. Even when Chanyeol’s eyes flick up to look at him with a look of challenge, Baekhyun can’t do anything but weakly nod, hoping that maybe, just maybe, that’ll be enough reassurance.

“I love you.” Chanyeol whispers and Baekhyun’s face twists, his stomach immediately dropping in dread. Chanyeol only forces out a bitter laugh. “Sorry, that was a mean trick to pull but you can’t even offer me, promise me that much. How am I supposed to trust you with something like this?”

And it really is a stab at Baekhyun’s heart. He tries to force it out but the words gets trapped in his throat, mutating into a weird kind of inhumane sound instead of legitimate words. He shakes his head, giving up on the effort. “But that doesn’t have anything to do with this,” He says, trying to come up with a way to twist this into his own favour. “You’re the one saying that you love me, that you’ll wait for me forever, and you can’t even offer me this much. How am I supposed to requeue your feelings if I don’t even know if they’re true.” And he feels absolutely disgusting for saying this, for twisting Chanyeol’s sweet promises into a weapon against him; the words leave a bitter taste in his mouth.

“That’s a low blow, Byun.” Chanyeol says and his eyes look so sad, so tired. “You know I’d do anything for you. I love you more than anything else in the world.”

“Then tell me this. If you’d do anything for me, then explain all of this to me.”

Chanyeol glances up to Baekhyun once again, his expression so conflicted, before he drops his gaze to the ground once again. “I can’t.” He says. Baekhyun only watches as Chanyeol presses his palms into the sockets of his eyes, pressing his fingertips into his head, and shaking his head repeatedly.

“Then do you really love me?” Baekhyun barks out a laugh and he hates himself for being like this, for trying to coerce Chanyeol like this, but it’s something he has to do. “Tell me.”

“I can’t.”

“Then was all of those ‘I love you’s’ that you told me, that you forced me to listen to until I was sobbing, begging you to stop. those were all lies? You can’t even do this much for someone you supposedly love?”

“I fucking can’t!” Chanyeol yells over Baekhyun’s raised voice.

And right before Baekhyun can say anything, push any further, Chanyeol’s gripping at his hair so hard in a way that looks painful, whispering “I can’t” over and over again like a mantra though the words seem to be more of a way to fill the air rather than an actual response.

It’s scaring him. Baekhyun has never seen him like this before, breaking down and crying, and he doesn’t know how to deal with him right now. He settles for stepping forward to rest a hand on Chanyeol’s shoulder in a way that Baekhyun hopes is comforting, soothing. It’s the wrong move. It becomes apparent when Chanyeol jerks away from the touch and leans down to cradle his head between his arms, rocking back and forth.

Chanyeol is sweet, gentle. Easy going.
He’s the strong one. The rock in the relationship that is supposed to piece Baekhyun back together when he’s broken. Not the other way around.

Seeing him fall apart like this is terrifying.

“I can’t tell you. I can’t. I love you so much, so much more than you’ll ever know but I can’t.” He says a bit louder, the words actually being directed at Baekhyun. “But I’m sorry, I can’t.” His voice is strained, almost cracking with the last words. He mumbles something else but the words are abruptly cut off with a soft hiccup.

“Don’t hate me.” He picks up again, “I love you. Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me. Don’t leave me.” He rambles on, repeating the same three words and Baekhyun is frozen, guilty and unsure about what to do.

“It’s okay,” Baekhyun says after a while. Baekhyun has never been good at comforting people -- that’s always been Minseok’s job. He may not be the best, but he knows that at this point, it’d be best not to try to push anymore. He wraps his arms around Chanyeol and tucks him into his body. “It’s okay. You don’t have to tell me now.” He cooes and waits for Chanyeol’s tears to stop.

x x x

He’s avoiding the topic. He’s acting like nothing’s wrong, like Baekhyun didn’t see him break down right before his very eyes.

And Baekhyun doesn't want to be the one to instigate another one of those breakdowns. He'd like to say that he doesn't want to be the one to push. He doesn't want to be the one to force it when Chanyeol's been nothing but patient in their relationship.

But there's another reason, one that he's more hesitant to admit.

He doesn’t know how he’s supposed to deal with it all, with dealing with Chanyeol’s breakdown or getting Chanyeol to finally trust him. So he doesn’t deal with any of it.

They return to routine. Collecting their mail together, going out together, and sleeping together like everything is back to normal.

x x x

And Baekhyun’s not the most patient person in the world -- anyone could tell you that. He does try his best to steer clear of the issue, he truly does, but at some point, he can’t help himself anymore. The thought that Chanyeol’s hiding something from him, something big, the thought that Chanyeol can’t trust him eats away at his consciousness.

So, for some peace of mind, he tries the topic once again. Slowly at first, just subtle comments, jibs, to hopefully get Chanyeol to admit something, or at least let something slip. None of it works, though. Chanyeol’s always successful in waving off the comments or pretending not to hear them.

And so Baekhyun begins to take a more direct approach, more direct questions in order to get Chanyeol to say something but again, it doesn’t do anything. It only becomes glaringly obvious that Chanyeol’s trying his best to ignore Baekhyun’s advances completely.

So that's when Baekhyun resorts to cornering Chanyeol into a wall, backing him into the intersection of the walls, and demanding an answer to the question that's been on his mind for much too long.

"Don't you think it's time you told me?” Baekhyun insists. Chanyeol's face only remains blank and
unresponsive. "It's been long enough. Have I not proven my loyalty through choosing to stick by your side despite being knowingly being fucking lied to?"

"I never lied to you." Chanyeol answers quietly, meekly. "I would never lie to you."

“But you never told me the truth and that’s just as bad.”

And Chanyeol keeps his mouth shut for just a second, worrying his bottom lip through his teeth and if he’s actually contemplating whether he should say. At least they’ve gotten to the point where Chanyeol is actually considering, not just avoiding it point-blank. At least to that extent, there’s some semblance of improvement. “Why do you need to know so badly?” Chanyeol asks, his voice just barely over a whisper.

“I want to know that you can trust me. That I can trust you.” Baekhyun answers directly and Chanyeol looks wounded.

And he opens his mouth, as if he’s ready to finally admit and just for a second, Baekhyun’s heart sores, begins to beat faster in anticipation. But then he snaps it shut, cutting himself off before he even begins. “I can’t.” He sighs, letting out a shaky breath. “I… It’s not the right time.”

And Baekhyun’s been tolerant with Chanyeol for so long, much too long, but something about the way that he says it rubs Baekhyun the wrong way.

“And when is it going to be the right time?” Baekhyun says, his voice carrying a tone of barely concealed accusation. “Will there ever be a ‘right’ time?”

“Stop asking!” Chanyeol yells and Baekhyun can only stumble a couple steps back at the sheer volume of it.

Baekhyun can be patient. But only for so long.

“Why?!” Baekhyun practically screams and he knows for a fact that Minseok can probably hear the muffled sounds from across the hall. “Why won’t you tell me?! Don’t you trust me enough to tell me about this?”

“This isn’t about trust. This is about for what’s best.” Chanyeol replies steadily, his voice a lot quieter than before but all the more terrifying.

“And since when do you decide what’s best?” Baekhyun growls.

Chanyeol’s silent, only peeking from below his bangs with a look of absolute fury. Baekhyun pays no mind as he continues, “You said yourself, you optimistic bastard. We’re fucking fated together. I'm not going to leave you.”

“It’s fate,” Chanyeol bites, his eyes trained on Baekhyun’s and Baekhyun can swear he sees a swirl of color spreading into Chanyeol’s eyes but it’s gone in a blink of the eye, probably just an illusion of the light. “It’s fate but it’s not supposed to fucking happen this way. You’re not supposed to fucking know and we are supposed to just get on with our goddamn lives, happily and in love. You don’t know what happens when you deviate from the plan.”

“This isn’t a game, Park.” He practically spits the name, “There’s no fucking plan, no set way for this to go down. Get out of your head and stop with your preconceived notions about how I’m going to fucking react!”

"You don't understand," Chanyeol hisses, "I know what's going to happen."
"Really? Do you really now?" Baekhyun challenges as his eyes slant down, "Then you probably know that I'm not playing when I saw that I am done. I am done with you, with all of this fucking nonsense if you don't tell me what's going on."

There's only pure, unadulterated fear in the look that Chanyeol gives Baekhyun but Baekhyun steels himself. This is the only way to get Chanyeol to explain.

"I'll give you three days." Baekhyun ends as he spins around and leaves the room, slamming the door on his way out.

x x x

There’s not a trace of Chanyeol for the next couple of days. And this does a number on Baekhyun’s nerves. He tries to pass it off, pretend it isn’t affecting him as much as he would care to admit but it’s pretty easy to see through his terrible facade.

Baekhyun just flops around the apartment all day, only leaving the place periodically whenever he “thinks that the mail has come”. It’s a shoddy excuse for him to pace around the apartment building, scouring for any signs of Chanyeol or even Jongdae, but Baekhyun seems to think it actually works nonetheless.

“You need to get your mind off of this.” Minseok says just as Baekhyun’s about to “check on the mail” for the 5th time that day.

Baekhyun freezes and slowly turns around, a smile coupled with a crazed expression plastered over his face. “What- What are you talking about? Get my mind off of what?”

Minseok and Lu Han exchange a look before cornering Baekhyun, both weaving one of their arms into his own to lock him into place. “C’mon, let’s go get some coffee.” Minseok urges and begins to lead the way out of the apartment and down the stairs.

“But,” Baekhyun stammers, his eyes obviously trailing along the closed door of the neighbouring apartment, “I have to check the mail.”

“It’ll still be there when we come back,” Minseok says before he gives Baekhyun one last jerk that has him breaking his gaze with the other apartment.

The cafe is far enough that they have to take Lu Han’s car, a beat up blue Hyundai that he calls his “baby”. Baekhyun is disgusted but not nearly as disgusted as he is when he discovers an odd crusting white stain on the gray suede of the backseat. He doesn’t ask; some things are better left unknown.

It takes a grand total of fifteen minutes to arrive and it’s not bad, per say, but Baekhyun can’t help but skeptically compare it to the one he usually goes to with Chanyeol.

The ambience is completely different, this one seeming more geared toward couples and teenage girls with it’s all white furniture and bright pastel coloured chinaware. It’s far bigger the other one, replacing the cozy, homely atmosphere for one that’s far more industrial, less personal with how it’s all about churning out sweet concoctions than brewing quality coffee.

He follows Minseok and Lu Han to a table meant for four and settles down as Minseok then scurries toward the counter. “I'll order the coffee,” Minseok says before he leaves.
“I didn’t even say what I wanted.” Baekhyun shakes his head, muttering to himself.

Immediately, Lu Han pulls out his phone and starts playing some kind of app. He tilts the screen just the slightest bit toward Baekhyun so that he watches Lu Han move his dragon across multiple lanes of traffic with ease. Oddly, it’s fairly interesting to watch as Lu Han gains on his high score (727) and eventually surpasses it with each flick of his thumb. He’s fast approaching the 800s actually when Minseok returns, hands fumbling over the three cups of coffee, and Baekhyun watches in horror as Lu Han purposely throws his dragon into a car and puts his phone down to help Minseok.

“This is for you,” Minseok smiles as he hands over a mug filled to the brim with whipped cream and chocolate syrup. It’s amazing how he doesn’t manage to spill it despite how the drink threatens to slosh over the edge with each movement.

“What is it?” Baekhyun asks skeptically, accepting the mug nonetheless.

“Why don’t you try it?”

Baekhyun only takes a sip before he’s practically spitting out the offending liquid. “You call this coffee?” He chokes out as he tries to clear his mouth of that taste of what he’s pretty sure is pure sugar.

Minseok only shrugs, a little smug smile threatening to break out on his face, and Lu Han has taken hold of Baekhyun’s “coffee” and is now greedily gulping it down.


“I think it’s good.” Lu Han argues, the slight curve of his lips just barely visible behind the lip of the mug.

“You guys are a match made in heaven.” Baekhyun shakes his head, cracking a tiny smile of his own that has Minseok’s face brightening instantly.

“You finally smiled.” Minseok whispers and Baekhyun’s face falls for just a second before it’s plastered over with another facade, but a second is just enough for Minseok to read his face, his feelings as easily as he would a book.

“What are you talking about?” He laughs nervously, playing up the smile until it’s almost fake. “I’ve been smiling.”

Minseok gives him a look, “You don’t have to pretend this doesn’t hurt.”

They stare at each other just for a second, engaging in some kind of emotional staredown before Baekhyun lets up. “It’s okay. I’m okay. It’ll be over soon enough. Just a couple more hours and this will all be over.” He mumbles the last part almost as an afterthought and he’s surprised when Minseok actually says something.

“It doesn’t have to be.” Minseok says before dropping his eyes to his mug of coffee.

The tension’s broken whenever Lu Han somehow ends up knocking his (Baekhyun’s) cup of coffee all over the table. Baekhyun jumps out of his seat, yelling “Fuck!” a little louder than necessary and gaining a couple of worried glances from others in the coffee shop. He swears a couple more times as Lu Han lunges at him with a fistful of napkins, insistently rubbing at the hot coffee that’s slowly beginning to seep through the denim of his jeans. “Stop it,” He grumbles, snatching the napkins from Lu Han to clean up himself. “Just focus on cleaning the table. I’m going to the--” Baekhyun falters when he catches Lu Han’s eyes, when he notices the sharp look in Lu Han’s gaze. Something makes
Baekhyun think that maybe Lu Han wasn’t as clumsy as he thought.

“You’re going where?” Minseok asks and immediately, Baekhyun can see Lu Han’s face soften when Minseok glances over at him.

“To the bathroom.” Baekhyun finishes and scurries away to find it.

He’s never been in the coffee shop before but it doesn’t take very long to find it. It’s a one-staller and he’s lucky that no one else has snagged it just yet. There’s really not much he can do at this point apart from wiping the affected area down with water, hoping that his thigh won’t be too too sticky, but that doesn’t stop him from hanging out in the bathroom. Grabbing a handful of towels to futilely dab at the stain -- his pants are doomed to be coffee-stained for the rest of the day, he knows that -- as he leans up against the wall. From the look Lu Han gave him earlier, he knows it’s best to just avoid the older for a bit instead of trying to weather out the storm.

He really didn’t mean to sadden Minseok. Minseok just needs to face reality. And Lu Han needs to express himself in ways that don’t involve purposefully spilling hot beverages on a person.

A knock on the door has Baekhyun scrambling off the wall. “Someone’s in here!” Baekhyun calls out, rushing to dispose of his wads of paper towels.

“Let me in,” is the response and it takes a while for Baekhyun to recognize the voice as Lu Han’s.

“I’m sorry, I don’t let strangers into the bathroom,” Baekhyun deadpans, joking as a way of testing the waters.

“Let me in.” Lu Han repeats and Baekhyun moves to do so.

“Hello there,” He tries as Lu Han slips through the now-unlocked door before closing it. Locking it. “Fancy meeting you here. Not the optimal place for male bonding but whatever.”

Lu Han is not amused, narrowing his gaze as Baekhyun begins to rattle off. “Stop being like this.” He says, crossing his arms.

“I’m sorry, I’m just naturally pleasant.”

“Stop it.” Lu Han says, “Stop doing this. It hurts him, you know.”

Baekhyun considers making another joke; that is, after all, his go-to coping mechanism. He decides against it when he sees the hard line of Lu Han’s mouth. “It shouldn’t hurt him,” He says instead, “It has nothing to do with him.”

“And that’s what hurts him the most. The fact that you think that everything you do, everything you say is none of his business. The fact that you don’t feel as if you you can confide in him anymore.”

“And I’ll say it again. I shouldn’t have to confide in him. This doesn’t have anything to do with him.”

Lu Han gives him an incredulous look for a second before exhaling, letting loose a long string of Mandarin under his breath. Baekhyun, with his 3 years of high school Mandarin under his belt, can only make out the words ‘you’, ‘idiot’, and ‘damn on your second uncle’, but he can guess the rest from context.

Baekhyun opens his mouth to retort but Lu Han cuts him off, “I’m not going to argue with you. But you, your emotions, your wellbeing affects him more than you think.”
And with that, Lu Han slips back out of the bathroom.

It takes him just a bit longer to work up the courage to do it, but eventually Baekhyun returns to the table. He comes back just in time to hear Lu Han say, “The bastard was like shitting in there or something.”

“What are you talking about?” Baekhyun asks as he scoots into the opposite side of the booth.

“You.” Minseok replies with a grin, “Well, more specifically how you were taking too long in the bathroom.” He then turns to Lu Han, elbowing him in the rib. “Go, now’s your chance.”

“Nah. I’m good.” Lu Han says without breaking eye-contact with Baekhyun. “It should be fine now.”

Minseok looks a little perturbed by the answer. “You… sure?”

Lu Han gives one last little glare at Baekhyun before turning back to Minseok with a bright smile. “Positive. You want me to go get some more coffee?”

Minseok nods enthusiastically. “Yeah, that’d be great.” He glances over to Baekhyun, “And make sure to get the super bitter one that Baekhyun likes so much.”

Whenever Lu Han finally comes back with more coffee, they lapse back into conversation about really anything. Minseok keeps trying to loop it back to Chanyeol, though and Baekhyun notices right away; it’d be difficult not to. He just brushes the topics off at the first mention, sometimes offering some noncommittal answers and other times just straight ignoring the comments.

Baekhyun also doesn’t miss the scowls that Lu Han gives him every time he does this, but he finds he doesn’t really care.

Somewhere in the middle of their conversation, Baekhyun’s phone goes off and he freezes. He hasn’t checked but he feels like it’s Chanyeol; he knows it’s Chanyeol. A quick glance at his phone only confirms his suspicions.

Abruptly, he stands up, practically knocking the chair back as he does so. “I have to go.” Baekhyun announces and he’s scrambling to gather his things, shoving his phone back into his pocket and throwing on his jacket.

“What?” Minseok asks, putting a pause on his story as he watches Baekhyun up in confusion. “Where are you going?”

“I just,” Baekhyun says distractedly, already rushing to the door. “Chanyeol.” He says quickly and with that he’s leaving the coffee shop, sprinting back to the apartment.

He doesn’t seem to notice the footsteps behind him, even as they grow faster and faster, closer and closer. Only when there’s a grip on his arm, pulling him to a stop does he notice that Lu Han had been chasing him.

“Let me go!” Baekhyun huffs, trying his best to pull his wrist from the surprisingly strong grip of Lu Han. “I need to go!”

“Just,” Lu Han pauses to catch his breath. “Just don’t fuck it up. For me. For us. For Minseok.”
There’s so much emotion behind his eyes and Baekhyun can’t help but look away. “I’ll try.” And he adds as an after thought, “No promises.”

He rips his arm out of Lu Han’s grip and runs off.

As soon as he reaches Chanyeol’s apartment, he stops himself from immediately knocking on the door. Instead, he takes a couple of minutes to catch his breath, to fix his disheveled self. He had run back all the way from the cafe. And all the way up the stairs. But Chanyeol doesn’t need to know that. That would look desperate and Baekhyun’s not desperate. He’s the one who offered Chanyeol the ultimatum.

(But he is. He’s so desperate. He can’t let Chanyeol let him go. He can’t let Chanyeol walk out of his life all because he was too rash, too impatient.)

He runs his hands through his hair a couple of time, trying to look presentable, before knocking. He knocks about three times before the door swings open to reveal Chanyeol.

“Come in,” Chanyeol instructs. Completely bypassing any kind of greeting or other social niceties.

Baekhyun does just that, quickly toeing off his shoes before entering the apartment. As soon as he realizes that the apartment is in the same terrible condition as it was the other day, he makes his way to Chanyeol’s room and Chanyeol meekly follows him. “This is your house. Why am I the one leading us in here?” Baekhyun jokes, hoping to somehow ease the tension, but the dead silence from behind him only discourages him.

When they reach the bedroom, Baekhyun walks into the middle of it and turns around. Out of habit, he expects Chanyeol to move back to close the door but he doesn’t and for some reason, the open door bothers him more than it ever has before. This time, Baekhyun takes it upon himself to walk over to the door and push it closed. He returns back to his original position soon enough. “Are you ready to tell me now?” He asks, straight to the point.

“Look, Baekhyun,” Chanyeol sighs and he doesn’t even have the courtesy to look into Baekhyun’s eyes as he speaks. “I know what you said but I just don’t think that this is the best time for me to explain all of this. I just feel that this is something extraordinarily private, this isn’t something you tell just anyone.”

And Baekhyun doesn’t mean to put his barks out a mirthless laugh. “You’re the one who was telling me how we were meant to be forever. Am I really ‘just anyone?’”

There’s a look of desperation in Chanyeol’s eyes, of trepidation and utter uncertainty as to how to respond. “And what if me never telling you is the only way for us to live out that forever?”

“Than there’s something wrong with your grand plan. There’s no way I can pledge my forever to someone who can’t even tell me the truth.”

“But what if it’s—”

“I have an idea about what you are, about what all of this is,” Baekhyun cuts in. Even without Chanyeol voicing out his complete thought, he knows that it’s just going to be some excuse to not tell him what’s happening. “I just need to hear confirmation. I just need to know the exact reason why you’re drinking fucking blood, for the sake of my sanity.”

And it seems that cussing is the wrong way to go with the way that Chanyeol seems to flinch at the
“Isn’t it better to remain in a state of uncertainty?” is Chanyeol’s half-hearted argument. “That way you’re suspended in a situation where the best possible outcome and the worst possible outcome, they’re all equally as likely.”

“You tell me, wouldn’t it be better to get some peace of mind? To finally be able to eliminate the chances of worst case scenario completely?”

“And what if it is the worst case scenario?” Chanyeol counters.

“Is it the worst case scenario?”

“I don’t know. I can’t tell what your worst case scenario is.”

Baekhyun only blinks at him through squinted eyes. “Chanyeol.” He says, punctuating the name. “Literally shut up. I can tell what you’re trying to do here. You are not going to manage to shake me off, of distracting me from the matter at hand.”

“I’m not trying to.” Chanyeol amends his words as Baekhyun raises a brow at what he just said. “Okay. So maybe I was. But I don’t think you understand. I do trust you, I really do, but I… I just don’t want to fuck up this relationship.”

“You already fucked up our relationship, if you haven’t noticed already.” He points out.

“Yes, but I’ve fucked up worse, for so many more because of this one thing and I… I don’t know. It’s scary for me, really, and I know you’re frustrated but I really think that maybe we should wait. Wait for our relationship to become more stable. Wait for--”

“Damn it, Chanyeol,” Baekhyun interrupts, “I know you did not just call me over to tell me to back out of this.”

“But it’s just--” Chanyeol stammers.

“I love you.” Baekhyun blurs out and he doesn’t know where it comes from, what filter finally switched off in his brain, but it’s out there before he can stop himself.

“I love you,” Baekhyun repeats softly, swallowing back the heavy taste of his words as he watches as what he just said dawn on Chanyeol. As the words sink in, Chanyeol’s pitiful expression lets up as his eyes widen with surprise and just a little bit of fear. Inching just a bit closer, Baekhyun ducks Chanyeol head down and lifts his own head to connect their foreheads. “I love you, you fucking idiot.” He swallows, trying to keep the nerves at bay, “Don’t make me regret this.”

There’s so much fear, so much confusion in Chanyeol expression before his eyes drift close and he inhales. He pushes Baekhyun back lightly, leaving just about a foot of distance between them before slowly lifting his eyelids.

Baekhyun gasps.

It’s pretty, Baekhyun thinks as he watches the red diffuse in Chanyeol’s eyes. Sourcing from the black of the pupil, it spreads quickly, filling the usual near-ebony irises with the colour of blood. It’s frightening, to be perfectly honest, but Baekhyun suppresses his instincts to run and steps closer to close the gap between them.

There’s only the sound of their breaths that fill the air as Baekhyun begins to press into Chanyeol,
trapping him between the wall and his own body. He lifts his hand to Chanyeol’s neck, fitting his hand on against to the sharp of the jaw and using the fingertip of his thumb to grace over Chanyeol’s lips. He prompts them open by slowly pushing his thumb between the lips and Chanyeol reluctantly obeys, unhinging his jaw for Baekhyun to peer in.

Sure enough, there’s the uncanny sight of sharpened canines and with a shaky finger, Baekhyun begins to feel the teeth. On accident, he pricks the pad of his finger on one of the sharp points and draws the smallest bit of blood. He immediately hears the sharp intake of breath from Chanyeol.

As if scalded, Baekhyun retreats his hand to his side and takes a step back. “So you are a… vampire?”

“That’s a crude description; it’s far simpler than that, not as many stereotypes as what that word calls for. But yeah.” Chanyeol breathes out. “I drink blood and I live forever.”

Baekhyun really just wants to laugh. He wants to double over and laugh at the absolute absurdity of it all. His previous lover had left him at the first opportunity of normalcy, at someone better. His next had promised to never leave him but ended up being a damned vampire. Just his luck.

He doesn’t express any of this, though, instead subtly moving his hand down to the denim of his pants and pressing his pricked finger into the fabric to staunch the bleeding.

Chanyeol seems to take notice of the action in the way that his face falls. “I-- It doesn’t affect me, you know. I can control it.” He says dejectedly and his eyes look tired-- lifeless almost.

Baekhyun only hums, not sure what’s appropriate to say in these kinds of situations and an uneasy silence befalls over them. He hates how tense Chanyeol is, hates how he seems to be just waiting for Baekhyun to run off, but most off all, he hates how he doesn’t know how to reassure Chanyeol that he’s not going to leave -- not now, not ever.

“Baek, I--”

“Chanyeol--”

They say at the same time, both obviously finding the quiet absolutely unbearable. “You go first.” Baekhyun says with a small smile, using his hand to gesture for Chanyeol to go on.

And Chanyeol looks like he’s going to protest and let Baekhyun go first, but he only clamps his mouth shut, swallowing back the lump in his throat before trying again. “I understand if you want to leave. I get it. I-I,” He stutters on his words; he has to swallow past the lump in his throat before he can proceed. "I'm a freak of nature, a monster. I'm not normal. I get it. You have my full permission to just leave and act like you never met me if... If you feel disgusted or betrayed by me.”

“I’m not going to leave.” Baekhyun says before Chanyeol can say anything else.

“Are you not scared?”

Baekhyun forces out a laugh. “I’m a writer. I can’t be scared by things like this kind of thing, right?”

“But this isn’t a fantasy. This is reality. This is different.” Chanyeol presses on, a look of concern flickering through his eyes.

“I’m not scared of you.” Baekhyun answers solemnly. He hopes his voice isn’t coming out as shaky as it sounds in his head because he means it. He means every single word. How could he ever be scared of Chanyeol? “I’m just...” He inhales, stalling for time to come up with the correct word, the
correct phrasing to describe his current state of being. “I’m overwhelmed.” He settles on but as soon as he says it, he already knows that it’s not the right thing to say.

Chanyeol seems to deflate. "Okay. That’s understandable. It’s a lot to take in."

“For what it’s worth, it’s not like this was all of a sudden. I saw a lot of things and I kind of formulated a guess similar to this on my own.” Baekhyun sucks in a breath as his eyes focus on Chanyeol’s. “It’s just… Overwhelming to see that something that’s supposed to be fiction actually exists.”

A side of Chanyeol’s mouth quirks up in a half-smile. “I mean, the stories had to come from somewhere, right?”

“So are you saying that zombies also exists?”

“What? No. That’s just preposterous.” Chanyeol shakes his head, eyebrows furrowed in a way that seems much too serious. His expression relaxes back to normal when Baekhyun starts to laugh. “I’m sorry, though.” He apologizes, and Baekhyun’s stopped laughing as abruptly as he began.

“What’s to be sorry about? You finally told me. That’s what I wanted, what I tried to force out of you all of this time, isn’t it?” Baekhyun shrugs, trying to pass off with an air of nonchalance, of aloofness. Like he’s not affected by any of this.

“Maybe I should’ve tried harder to stop you from knowing. I shouldn’t have been convinced so easily. You’d be angry at me, sure, but at least you wouldn’t be scared of me.”

“I’m not scared of you!” Baekhyun insists.

“Maybe you’re not scared but you’re not as comfortable as before. That much I can tell.” Chanyeol shakes his head and then, more to himself than anything else, he murmurs, “I fucked up. I shouldn’t have done that. I shouldn’t have told.”

“You shouldn’t be sorry. You didn’t fuck up. If anything, things probably would’ve taken a turn for the worse had you refused to tell me.” And in a small voice, Baekhyun decides to add, "I was serious about leaving you were you not to tell me, you know."

Chanyeol grimaces, "I'm sorry about that too. That I lied to you."

"Before, you were saying how you didn’t lie and now you’re saying you did. What’s with the change of heart?"

"Because I did. Because I hid an important truth and that's just as bad."

“You didn't lie to me.” Baekhyun shrugs, "You can't lie to me if I never even asked. If I was too afraid to even ask.” And with that, he’s reaching up on his tiptoes, loosely looping his arms around Chanyeol’s neck as he aligns himself with the contours of Chanyeol’s body.

Chanyeol’s own arms moves to wrap around Baekhyun’s waist, moving him just a bit closer. “I love you.” He says with a crooked smile.

And though he had managed to say it earlier, Baekhyun still balks at the idea of answering when it’s posed so directly. When it’s expected like this. He’s hesitant. Hesitant to answer; hesitant to commit. The reply comes out anyways. Baekhyun let’s go of Chanyeol, lets the younger be the one supporting him as he cups Chanyeol’s face, gently thumbing at the soft skin of the cheeks. “I love you too.” Baekhyun answers back, voice just barely audible but it’s enough.
Baekhyun spends the night but for the most part, they just talk. They take the time to clarify the reality of things, to clear up any of the misconceptions Baekhyun has about all of this.

“Can I just,” Baekhyun begins uncertainly, looking down as he wrings his hands together, “Can I just ask you some questions about all this? It’s… it’s a lot to take in.”

“Yeah,” Chanyeol nods slowly, “It is a lot to take in but hey,” He reaches over to tilt Baekhyun’s chin up so that their gazes meet. He cracks a smile, “You’re doing better than before.”

“Before?” Baekhyun asks curiously.

Chanyeol stops for a second, trying to figure out exactly what Baekhyun is questioning. “Oh.” He says once he’s figured it out. He shakes his head. “I meant all the other times. Like your reaction is better than some of the other people I’ve told.”

“How many people have you told?”

“Many.” Chanyeol answers vaguely but Baekhyun gives him a look as to elaborate. “I don’t know. I’ve lost count but they’ve all… They’ve all passed on.”

Baekhyun inhales sharply. “Oh.”

“Except Jongdae,” He rushes to list an exception, “I think he’s the only one of this time that knows. Apart from you now.”

“Of this time,” Baekhyun repeats, “Just… Just how long have you been around?”

“A long time” is Chanyeol’s solemn answer and raises his fingers to count off. “Since about 1073, if I remember correctly.

“Damn.” Baekhyun breathes out, “That’s a long time.” And that’s all he says because he really doesn’t know how he -- how anyone follows up with that.

“Can I tell you a secret?” Chanyeol asks and Baekhyun immediately nods. Unnecessarily, Chanyeol leans over and presses his ears to the shell of Baekhyun’s ear in a way that makes him shiver. “I’m the hyung in this relationship.”

And that has Baekhyun cracking up into laughter, Chanyeol quickly following until they’re both clutching their stomachs in pain.

“So… That explains the garlic thing, then?” Baekhyun jokes, going along with the sudden break in tension.

“The… garlic thing? What garlic th-- Oh.” Chanyeol makes a face, “No, that’s just a personal taste. That stuff is disgusting.”

Baekhyun laughs and then pulls a look of fake disgust. “You don’t like garlic? I’m-- I’m sorry but I think this is the end of our relationship.”

He means it as a joke but Chanyeol’s not laughing. Instead, he’s watching Baekhyun carefully, as if he’s afraid that Baekhyun will flee at any second. “It was a joke.” Baekhyun clarifies and Chanyeol barks out an awkward sounding laugh.

“Too soon?” Baekhyun asks softly.
“Too soon.” Chanyeol confirms but cracks a smile. “But at the same time, it wasn’t soon enough.”

A night isn’t enough to go over the intricacies of Chanyeol’s existence, not nearly enough. So at a certain point, they make the collective decision to just stop. It's too much to share every last detail about his hundreds of years of life so they fall asleep with Chanyeol's promise of answering anything, everything that Baekhyun asks.

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It’s not what you’d expect; it’s not difficult to transition to dating a supernatural being.

And maybe it has something to do with the idea that Baekhyun is used to the world of the unknown, takes comfort in imagining what lies beyond the human scope of understanding.

Maybe it also has something to do with the fact that He loves Chanyeol. Loves him more than enough to let something like this wedge between them.

It takes a little while, but soon, sooner than you’d expect, everything pretty much goes back to normal. Falls back into the same kind of schedule as before.

Except this time, it’s not Chanyeol hiding. It’s not Chanyeol flinching at any and every word that might possibly allude to what he really is. It’s not Chanyeol living in fear of his secret being found out.

Instead, it’s Baekhyun helping Chanyeol retrieve the packets of blood from Jongdae. It’s Baekhyun hesitating just a bit, but ultimately reaching over and dabbing at the red that stains Chanyeol's mouth after a meal. It's eventually Baekhyun cutting out the need for Jongdae; it’s letting, trusting Chanyeol enough to drink the red straight from him.

It’s Baekhyun asking about every little detail of Chanyeol's life, of his existence.

It’s every night where they reserve a time for Baekhyun to ask just one question about Chanyeol, whether it be about what he is (which he doesn’t know all that much about, anyways), about who he is, about who he was.

And it might seem a bit useless to ask for just a single answer every night but it's enough. Because as the days go by, as the months add up, the information bides up, spins itself into an intricate story that Baekhyun still doesn't know the ending to. Will probably never know the ending to.

Through the nights, he learns that Chanyeol doesn't really remember how he became like this. He learns that Chanyeol was an ordinary human, once, way back when in the Koryo dynasty. Back when his family (whose faces, whose voices he can no longer recall) was struggling to get by on his father's meager salary as an artisan. Back when he was sent to be learned, to train to be a scholar because that was his father's dream. Back when he had become a scholar, worked his way into the house of royalty, and then forced down onto the bed of the crown prince. Back when he was discovered in the chambers the prince. Back when the prince’s fiance found him lying limp and naked in bed and promptly disposed of him.

Baekhyun learns that the next thing Chanyeol knew, he was in a ditch, bruises painting his body black and blue and a long thin scar across the expanse of his throat. He learns that overtime, the scar had faded into nothing, left not a trace.

He learns that the first time Chanyeol drank, he cried. That he still cries when remembering. That he
hadn’t meant to suck the human dry, but he was hungry. So hungry that he lost control, ended up killing the woman who had been kind enough to stop to ask if he needed some food or a place to sleep. Baekhyun learns that Chanyeol's jaws had snapped around her neck before she could even finish her sentence.

He learns that Chanyeol's had a long history with Jongdae's family. That somewhere way back when, he had befriended Jongdae's great-great-great grandfather. That through Chanyeol's generous donations to the man when he was going through a hard time left the family line supposedly indebted to Chanyeol and since then, they've always helped Chanyeol procure blood someway or another.

He learns that the Chanyeol had been aware of Baekhyun getting suspicious. That once the fridge incident occurred, he had relocated the blood transfusion packs to the freezer, sealed in a frozen dinner package way in the back. He learns that trying to freeze blood wasn't the best thing to do, that freezing the blood, especially without any previous preparation or preservatives, for such a long time compromised the integrity of the blood. That the reason why he got sick was because he still drank it anyways, had to still drink it because Jongdae couldn’t afford to get him something fresher. That the reason why he got sicker around Baekhyun’s presence was because he refused to drink with him near, refused to run the risk of being found out.

But most importantly, he learns about Chanyeol's past lives, past loves. He hasn't heard them all, probably not even a significant number of them since Chanyeol's been around for such a long time, but something in the way that Chanyeol tells the story, details the scene makes it all so vivid. Makes it feel like Baekhyun's been there, been through it all before. Each lover seems to have their own unique story, unique moments and Baekhyun is adamant on learning every single little detail.

Sometime, after a substantial amount of time, Chanyeol finally shows Baekhyun the final thing he’s been hiding.

“I have something to show you.” Chanyeol says randomly as he sits up when they’re cuddling on the bed, Baekhyun balled up to Chanyeol’s side.

“What is it?” is Baekhyun’s sleepy response as he wraps his arms around Chanyeol’s waist, trying to use his weight as leverage to keep Chanyeol from sitting up. It doesn’t work, though, and Chanyeol is soon using Baekhyun’s grip against him to heave him off the bed. “Chanyeol,” Baekhyun whines, drawing out the finishing syllable. “Do we have to do this now?”

“Now,” Chanyeol affirms

“It’s late though, can’t this wait until morning?” Baekhyun whines, but it’s already too late because Chanyeol is already hauling him up to his feet and wrapping his fingers around Baekhyun’s wrist.

“Now,” Chanyeol reaffirms and then grins, “Don’t worry, this’ll be good.”

Baekhyun doesn’t see where they’re going, too busy rubbing the bleariness from his eyes, but he knows from memory that they’re approaching the room’s closet. It’s when he hears a rustle of clothes and the distinctive sound of clothes hangers being pushed away that he knows something’s up.

“What are you--” He stops and closes his mouth. “What. The. Fuck.”

Chanyeol steps directly in front of Baekhyun, blocking his view of the wall. He tries to peer around Chanyeol to get a better look but it doesn’t work very well with Chanyeol’s superior height and insistence to obstruct Baekhyun’s view. “What is that?” Baekhyun says, finally giving up on trying to sneak a peek and opting for a more blunt way of gaining information.
“You know how I’ve been around for a while?”

“You know how I’ve been around for a while?” Baekhyun snorts, lifting a hand to squeeze at one of Chanyeol’s cheek, “Where are the wrinkles? This is unfair.”

Chanyeol grins, “Yeah well I want to show you something.”

“You said that like three minutes ago when you so rudely awoke me,” Baekhyun rolls his eyes, shifting his hand down to linger on Chanyeol’s neck. “What is it?” He asks, his voice softer.

“So I’ve had a lot of lovers in my lifetime.” Chanyeol starts. Baekhyun’s silent and Chanyeol takes this as prompting to keep going. “And I have pictures of all of them -- or at least for the ones that I had when cameras were a thing. I have drawings for the ones that go back older than that.”

Baekhyun narrows his eyes, “Is this some sick way of making me jealous?” He deadpans and Chanyeol’s face falls.

“What? No I just--” Chanyeol stops himself when he sees Baekhyun’s shoulders shake with laughter. “Why do you have to be like this? This is really cool, I swear,” He pouts.

“I know it’s cool. That’s why I want you to move out of the way so I can see it!” Baekhyun lightly pushes Chanyeol out of the way and Chanyeol lets himself stumble out of the way.

“Patient as always, I see,” He laughs as he relocates himself to Baekhyun’s side, slinging a lanky arm over Baekhyun’s shoulders.

Unlike usual, Baekhyun doesn’t bother with an eye roll or snarky remark; he’s too busy looking at all the pictures. Saying there’s a lot of pictures in an understatement -- there’s hundreds.

There doesn’t seem to be any logical order to the arrangement of the photos, just haphazardly stuck up on the wall so that there’s a weathered photo that looks like some relic from the 1800s pinned up next to a far more recent one. Near the sides are the drawings of people. Some crumpled, some where the lines have faded to only a faint outline of what it once was.

“You could arrange them based on date,” Baekhyun suggests, turning toward Chanyeol. “That would be pretty cool.”

With a hand gripping at Baekhyun’s chin, Chanyeol so kindly positions Baekhyun’s face back to look at the collage. “Yeah maybe,” He brushes off, giving the cheeks a short little squeeze with his fingers, “But what else do you see?”

“That…” Baekhyun stares at the pictures, determined to figure out exactly what Chanyeol wants him to see. “You have a type. apparently.” He finishes amusedly when he begins to notice that there are indeed similarities between all of Chanyeol’s companions: short, slight, and reserved compared to their energetic counterpart, but bright-eyed and happy nonetheless.

Chanyeol laughs. “Close, but not exactly what I’m trying to get at.”

“What am I supposed to be looking at? Give me a hint…” Baekhyun whines as he continues to glean over the many pictures.

“Describe my type.” are the only words that Chanyeol offers as a hint.

“Well that’s a shitty hint,” Baekhyun rolls his eyes but begins to anyways. “Okay well they’re all--” He cuts himself off. “Oh my god.”
“You got it?”

Baekhyun is not looking at Chanyeol’s face but he can practically see the amused smirk on his face. “I… I-- Oh my god! Are they…” Baekhyun draws in a sharp breath, his eyes searching through the photos, catching on the similar features of Chanyeol’s many partners. There are slight alterations but for the most part, all of Chanyeol’s partner have the same small hooded eyes, white, porcelain skin, and button nose. All of Chanyeol’s partners have the same features that seem eerily familiar. “There’s no way...” He trails off, his eyes wide and unbelieving.

“Yeah,” Chanyeol breaths out, “They’re all you. Different lifetimes. Same soul.” Chanyeol steals a glance at Baekhyun, silently egging him on to say something. Anything. Baekhyun can see the uncertainty settle into Chanyeol’s features as the corners of his mouth begin to turn down. “Baekhyun?” He calls out hesitantly.

“How?” Baekhyun finally answers after a beat of silence. “This is amazing. How did you do this?”

A smile, a bashful one at that, returns to Chanyeol. “For years, for lifetimes, you are the one I seek out.”

Baekhyun, in turn, immediately blurts out the first thing that comes to mind. “But why? Don’t you get tired of all of this?”

“I won’t say that we always get our happy ending; that would be a lie. There are times where you leave.” Chanyeol’s face twists into a wry smile, “You usually leave as soon as I reveal myself.” There’s a sharp intake of breath from Baekhyun.

“Is that why before you were so--” Baekhyun stops himself. He already knows the answer to that question. “How many times?”

“I can’t say. I’ve lost count. After a certain number of times, I had just stopped telling you altogether. That seemed to work the best.”

“I’m sorry.” Baekhyun apologizes quietly. “I’m so sorry.”

Chanyeol shrugs it off, “But that doesn’t matter. what matters is that you’re here now.”

“And I’ll be here forever.” Baekhyun adds softly. His words take a while to sink in in Chanyeol’s brain but as soon as they do, Chanyeol steps toward him, closing the gap between them. He snakes one arm around Baekhyun’s waist, the other behind his head, and he presses in for a kiss.

“I love you.” Chanyeol whispers against Baekhyun’s lips.

And his answer comes without hesitation. “I love you too.” Baekhyun replies, the words sliding right off of his tongue just as he goes back in to connect their lips.

Neither of them try to deepen the kiss, both content with the slow, languid nature of it. When they finally pull apart, there’s a silly grin plastered on Baekhyun’s face as his arms move down to wrap around Chanyeol’s neck.

“So maybe we really are soulmates...” Baekhyun thoughtlessly muses as he turns to give another look over the multitude of pictures with variations of the features he sees every day in the mirror.

He doesn’t think much of his comment until he finds Chanyeol staring -- no, more like feels the weight of Chanyeol’s gaze over the profile of his face. He immediately turns back to Chanyeol, misjudging the close proximity they are together and almost bumping noses. Immediately, he shifts
back, arms dropping to his side and breaking from Chanyeol’s grip, so that there’s an acceptable distance between them.

He means to ask Chanyeol what he’s looking at or if he’s has something on his face or something to that degree but he stops when he sees, really sees the way Chanyeol is looking at him: Jaw slackened, mouth slightly ajar, and pure adoration painted over his face.

There’s something else though, behind his eyes there’s a look of nostalgia, of reminiscence.

Chanyeol wordlessly moves to link their hands, intertwining their fingers until their palms are pressed up against each other.

“Maybe.”

End Notes

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