



Again.
by:you mean yes

Again. (Part 1)

[2:53:14pm] **The Kwonster**: And then the big bad wolf blew and blew till her brand new Gucci lipstick flew right off her duck lips and splattered the boss in the eyes so he woke up and realised she was just a fake who was kissing ass to get a raise. And the two little piggies, Taeyeon and Sunny, and their good-looking friend Yuri lived happily ever after on the fifth floor now freed from the tyrant.

[2:58:48pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: I don't want to encourage your stupidity by acknowledging this thing, but how long did it take you to write that whole story?

[2:59:32pm] **The Kwonster**: Why, I'm glad you asked, smallest piggy. Two wonderful fun-filled hours. It was amazing.

[3:01:26pm] **Taengrrr**: Ew. You sound like that time you had that sexy dream at work and kept telling us about it for days.

[3:02:26pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: You just had to remind her of that again didn't you. (-_-)

[3:02:57pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: And what do you mean I'm the smallest piggy?!

[3:03:25pm] **The Kwonster**: Trolololol~

[3:03:51pm] **Taengrrr**: Okay break it up kids, let's not make a mess here.

[3:04:09pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: (=_=) I'll get you after work, Kwon.

[3:04:20pm] **The Kwonster**: (^_^)v See ya~ Mwah!

Taeyeon looked up from her laptop screen to smile at her friends. Yuri gave her a cheerful wave before poking her tongue out at Sunny, who met her with a glare before rolling her eyes playfully at Taeyeon. It was just another day at work as far as they were concerned. The tyrant of the fifth floor, the big bad wolf, remained oblivious to their interactions as she stood by the water-cooler against one wall and waited for their boss to walk past so she could pounce on the chance to pour him some water. Taeyeon idly wondered if Yuri had perhaps tampered with the water cooler again, as she was akin to do when she had seen the big bad wolf standing there for two days in a row.

The clock ticked loudly from its place on the wall right beside her. She glanced at it, watched the hands travel for a while, and started to do some stretches to revive her neck and shoulder muscles from the strain of office work.

[3:10:33pm] **The Kwonster**: I am seriously bored.

[3:11:01pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: You could try working for once. What do you even do here?!

[3:11:30pm] **The Kwonster**: I am in charge of looking good. It's the most important factor for this business.

[3:11:58pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** (-_____-)

[3:12:16pm] **The Kwonster:** That's a wide mouth you've got there. How unfortunate for your face. :/

[3:12:40pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** YOU ARE SO DEAD YURI. SO DEAD. YOU WILL DIE IN YOUR SLEEP TONIGHT.

[3:13:04pm] **Taengrrr:** Guuuuyyyssss come oooooonnnn. You are being so boring right now. I need entertainment!

[3:13:16pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** (-_-)

[3:13:28pm] **The Kwonster:** (o_o)

[3:13:42pm] **Taengrrr:** K Whateverrr. I'm going to that café down the street. Laterzz haterzzz.

Taeyeon was almost out the door when the big bad wolf pounced on her.

“Where are you going, Taeyeon?”

Taeyeon smiled at the woman. She wasn't as bad as Yuri painted her in her little story. She just spent more time seemingly trying to suck up to the boss instead of typing away at her desk. They hadn't gotten to know each other much in the two months since Taeyeon started working at the office, but personally she thought the woman was quite nice. Sunny had quietly implied that Yuri and the big bad wolf had something of a past between them. Taeyeon hadn't asked for further details, but at the sight of the woman in front of her wearing a smile that seemed to appreciate her acknowledgement, Taeyeon wondered if she should find out.

“I'm going to the café down the street. Want to join me?”

Before she could get a reply, a door on the other side of the room opened and a tall man stepped out, his attention buried in the stack of paper in his hands. The big bad wolf was gone in a flash, reaching his side with an offer to help him. Taeyeon watched her, curious, wondering again about her motives. She saw Yuri out of the corner of her eye and observed the expression on her face.

“Hmm.”

She turned and made her way out of the office, filing a mental note to find out about the history between Yuri and her big bad wolf, Jessica.

In the café, Taeyeon gazed at the menu. There were five variations of herbal tea. Presumably each had

some unique power. She rolled her tongue in her mouth as she contemplated the state of the modern world where there were five variations of herbal tea available at a coffee shop and a bunch of things that were supposed to be coffee, but no actual plain coffee. She crossed her arms over her chest. She tilted her head to one side.

“Can I just get a coffee?”

The young girl behind the counter gave her a Look, raising one eyebrow. “Hmm, that might be difficult; this is a *coffee* shop after all.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking,” Taeyeon muttered, eyes still on the board above the kid.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she said blankly. She looked at the girl. “I think you and me have different definitions of coffee.”

The teenager blinked. “Okay,” she replied disinterestedly. “Are you gonna order or what?”

Taeyeon glanced behind her. The café was nearly empty, with only a single person seated by the large glass windows and sipping an herbal concoction while reading a thin book. Taeyeon turned back to the girl.

“Maybe,” she stated cryptically, and flicked her eyes back to the menu. She heard the girl sigh. She smiled a little.

She wondered if she had ever stood there, a teenager with a part-time job, trying to be patient with these customers when all she wanted was some cash to buy a phone or a car or spend with her friends. She wondered if she’d ever needed the money badly, working hard to keep her ailing family afloat. She wondered if she’d even needed a job or if she was filthy rich with old money and snobbish parents.

She wondered if she had even liked coffee, in the Time Before.

Her psychiatrist had worked with her to think of the right name for it. The Time Before. The time before her accident, the time before the physical damage to her body, the time before the mental destruction to her brain, the time before the moment she woke up with a clean, blank, empty, pale white slate for a life and nowhere to go, nowhere to have come from.

“Coffee,” she said firmly, eyes locked forward, “black.”

She listened to the hissing of the coffee machine as her order was prepared, and fiddled with some cash in her hands, idly counting it out. Her fingers traced the coins, feeling the ridges and cold metal. She crinkled the notes. This money was familiar. She knew what it was, knew its purpose and history and everything. She didn't know if she'd held it before that moment, what she had done with it, nothing.

The coffee was bitter and she savoured it. It gave her a particular sensation in her mouth, down her throat, warm and harsh, a kick she needed to be reminded of the present.

She sat at a small round table, and placed the cup of coffee on its surface. She stuck her hands in the pockets of her pants, and slouched a bit in her seat. She crossed her legs beneath the table. Stared into the small circle of blackness before her.

When they had found Taeyeon, frail and weak, half-falling out of her car from the smashed door, she had only her driver's license in her pocket. No wallet, only a single car key without a key-ring, absolutely nothing else. The car was clean, not sterile-like but just tidy, and had nothing in it. The further in-depth police investigation had found only traces of Taeyeon in the car, as if no one else had ever been in it. So she had only a pair of jeans, a set of underwear, a plain t-shirt, a thin hoodie, a pair of purple socks and white sneakers, and the thin plastic card with her face and name on it, when she woke up in a white hospital room all alone.

"Excuse me..."

Taeyeon looked up. The woman who stood before her was the same one who had been reading her book by the window a few minutes ago. As their eyes met, the stranger grinned at her.

"You're Taeyeon, right?"

Taeyeon froze. Her eyes widened. Her lips parted. Her heart felt as if it had been shocked and now stood still as she stared at this woman who knew her name, this stranger who did not see her as a stranger.

"You know me?"

The stranger nodded happily. "Of course! You were in my class last year, that Business Administration course."

Taeyeon's heart fell. This was not a person from the Time Before. Taeyeon had taken the Business

Administration course so that she could get a job, after waking up in the hospital, after being informed that she had nowhere to go and no life to pick up. She sighed.

“Oh, right,” she said disinterestedly. “Nice to see you again...?”

“Tiffany. Tiffany Hwang.”

They shook hands lightly and Taeyeon gestured to the chair across from her. “Care to join me?”

“Thanks.”

Taeyeon watched as Tiffany pulled the chair out and sat on it, the way her black hair fell into her face as she moved, the smile that stayed on her face, the shiny surface of her nails. Taeyeon tilted her head. Tiffany was wearing a knee-length floral summer dress, with a cardigan that she carried in one hand along with the book she had been reading and the strap of her handbag and also her phone. As she settled into her seat, Tiffany flashed another smile that made her eyes curve. A lot.

“So how have you been, Taeyeon?”

“I’ve been well. I work at the business consultancy just down the road. How about you? What have you been up to?”

“Oh I’ve been doing an internship at an advertising agency,” Tiffany said dismissively, but from the flustered edge in her voice Taeyeon figured she was too stressed by it to talk about it. “We never really talked much when we were doing that course together, huh? Are you free to catch up now?”

Taeyeon checked the time on her watch. 3:45pm already. She pondered briefly, then shrugged. “Sure, let’s chat.”

Tiffany beamed. She shifted her chair closer, dumping her belongings on the table. “So, where did you grow up?”

“Uh...” Taeyeon began. “Um. Pass. Next question.”

Tiffany’s eyebrows rose in surprise and it made Taeyeon aware of the incredible shape of those eyebrows. “What? You don’t want to tell me?”

Taeyeon bit her bottom lip awkwardly. “Well. It’s not that I don’t want to tell you. Ah, um. I had a car accident a few years ago. I don’t remember anything from before then.”

The silence was palpable. Taeyeon could almost hear the faint static from the teenager's iPod earphones on the other side of the café. She waited patiently as Tiffany gawked and blinked, acquainted with the reactions to her statement from her experiences with Sunny and Yuri. She took a sip of her coffee.

“Oh.”

Taeyeon nodded in acknowledgement. “Oh, indeed. So how about you, where did you grow up?”

“But wait, even if you don't remember anything, couldn't someone tell you? Like, your official birth records and that kind of stuff?”

Taeyeon shrugged. “They ran my name and information from my driver's licence through the system. Not much came up. Just my address, phone number. Useless stuff, as it turned out. Guess my parents never got around to filing my birth certificate or something. If I even had parents.”

Tiffany looked thoughtful. “Huh.”

“Yep. Huh. Are you okay with this? You look kind of weirded out. I usually don't tell people so suddenly like this.”

“No, I'm fine,” Tiffany said hurriedly, sitting up straight and moving around in her seat. “I was just, I was just surprised. I've never talked to someone in your situation before. What's it like?”

Taeyeon's thoughts stalled. She watched this woman in front of her, her bright expression looking curious and even somewhat excited. Poor Tiffany, she thought, she meant well, she was interested, amazed, it seemed like she had no idea how much pain there was.

She took another sip of her black coffee and shrugged again. “I don't know. It's okay I guess. Do you mind if we don't talk about it? I don't have much to say.”

“Oh, sure, of course, I'm sorry. I got a bit carried away.” Tiffany gave a nervous laugh and even blushed slightly, which amused Taeyeon for some reason.

“It's fine,” she said softly. “Let's just talk about something else. How about pets, do you have any? I have a little dog.”

Tiffany's eyes lit up. “Yes! I have a little dog too. He's so cute! Let me show you.”

They shared pictures of their dogs and laughed together about silly antics their pets got up to. It was

almost the end of the working day when Taeyeon noticed the time and she bolted upright.

“I have to get back to work! Tiffany, give me your number, I’ll call you!”

Tiffany grinned widely as she scribbled her phone number in a little notebook and ripped out the page. Taeyeon matched the grin and waved goodbye as she took the paper, and rushed out of the café.

“What are you talking about?”

As Taeyeon reached the office, she paused by the door at the sound of Jessica’s voice. The woman sounded tense and anxious. Taeyeon frowned.

“I just want to know if he’s responded to any of your advances, that’s all.”

Taeyeon frowned even more. It was Yuri, sounding soft and nervous.

“Can you just stop? Stop talking to me, stop looking at me. You’re the one who said it was all a misunderstanding in the first place. In fact, those were your exact words. ‘Sorry, Sica, it was all just a misunderstanding.’ Well, that means we’re different now and I want you to leave me alone.”

“Please, Sica...” Yuri pleaded. She sounded truly desperate. “Please...”

“Shhh, don’t be like that,” Jessica said suddenly, the tension gone from her voice. Taeyeon heard a rustling noise, and imagined that Jessica had wrapped her arms around Yuri comfortingly.

“I know you’re struggling, Yuri. But don’t be like this anymore. Okay? You might cause another misunderstanding between us. Right?”

“...Okay. Just give me a minute.”

There was a long silence. When it had stretched on for so long that Taeyeon was being driven crazy by the now seemingly loud sound of her own breathing, she leaned forward to peek into the office. Standing by the water-cooler was Jessica, who tightly held on to Yuri in the otherwise empty room. They were barely moving. Yuri’s arms were circled around Jessica’s waist, hands resting on her hips, and she moved her fingers in a slow stroking motion.

“I miss you.”

Taeyeon pulled back at the sound of the voice. She wasn’t sure which one had whispered so quietly.

“I miss you too.”

But it didn't matter anymore which one had said it first. Taeyeon leaned back against the wall by the doorway. She turned her gaze up to the ceiling.

Not for the first time, she wondered if she had ever been in love.

[1:11:20am] **Taengrrr**: Hey... are you guys still up?

[1:12:09am] **Bunnyrabbitz**: Well I'm up now. Fell asleep on my laptop. What's up buddy?

[1:13:12am] **Taengrrr**: Never mind. Go back to sleep. I'll see you at work.

[1:13:36am] **Bunnyrabbitz**: Ok.....

Taeyeon tapped her pen on her desk absently, listening to the clacking sound it made and staring blankly at the wall. The clock on the edge of her vision ticked away to 1pm. The weather was unexpectedly warm, resulting in all the windows in the office being opened and an electric fan settled in one corner of the room. Every now and then, the big bad wolf Jessica would float over to it from her desk and just stand there with her eyes closed, letting the pores of her skin absorb the cool air it produced. Yuri's head was pointedly stuck in a pile of paperwork, her back towards the fan. Sunny's fingers tapped away at her keyboard rapidly. Taeyeon sighed.

She shifted in her chair, twirling the pen in her hand for a moment. Then she dropped the pen on the desk. From the top drawer, she pulled a small piece of paper, and shifted herself in front of the phone. After dialling, she listened to the ringing sound it made in her ear, and stared blankly at the wall again.

“Hello?”

“Ah, hi, Tiffany? This is Taeyeon...”

“Oh hey Taeyeon! What's up?”

“Um, nothing, really. I'm just at work. Uh, I was wondering if you're free later? Maybe we could get some coffee again? Or something a bit less warm.”

“Sure! That would be great. What time would be good for you? I'm pretty flexible this afternoon.”

“Hmm, let's say just after 5? We can meet at that café again, it'll take me just a few minutes to get there from here.”

“Awesome! I’ll see you then. Don’t get too bored at work, okay?”

Tiffany laughed at her own words and Taeyeon grinned like a madwoman as the sound trickled into her ear.

“I’ll do my best. See you later.”

Taeyeon spun around in her office chair after she put the phone down. When the swivel was complete, she was met with the stares of her co-workers. She stared back. After a while, Jessica turned back to the fan, Yuri went back to scribbling on her paperwork, and Sunny rolled her chair over in the direction of Taeyeon.

“So, who was that?” she asked sweetly.

“Tiffany. We met again at the café yesterday, she was in the same class as me for my BA course last year.”

Sunny nodded. “Okay, I see. Well. Seems like you two get along well.”

“Yeah, guess so.”

Sunny just kept nodding. Eventually she rolled back to her desk. Within moments, her fingers flew across her keyboard again.

[1:22:08pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: Guess what! Taeyeon has a girlfriend~

Yuri looked over at her laptop screen as it flashed a notification.

[1:22:30pm] **The Kwonster**: Oooh, spill the beans, Taengie! Who’s the girl?

[1:23:08pm] **Taengrrr**: (-_-) Back off, guys. I barely even know her.

[1:23:29pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: But you guys did that course together, right?

[1:24:20pm] **Taengrrr**: Yeah, but we didn’t even talk to each other. She’s not my girlfriend. (= _ =)

[1:25:01pm] **The Kwonster**: Does she know about your thing?

[1:25:23pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: LOL way to make it sound shifty, Yul.

[1:25:44pm] **Taengrrr**: Haha. Yeah, she knows.

[1:26:12pm] **Bunnyrabbitz**: And she’ll get to know you even better during your next date!

[1:26:30pm] **The Kwonster**: So Taeng, is she cute? Or pretty? Or hot? (* _ *)

[1:27:03pm] **Taengrrr**: ...

[1:27:08pm] **Taengrrr**: Perv.

[1:27:15pm] **Taengrrr:** She's gorgeous. (>_<)

[1:27:35pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** Taeyeon has a crush! TAEYEON LOVES hey what's her name?

[1:27:40pm] **The Kwonster:** omg~

[1:27:58pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** Tiffany, right? I think that's what I heard you say.

[1:28:28pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** Taeyeon and Tiffany, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G

[1:28:32pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** ;)

Taeyeon turned away from her laptop. She shot her friends a look, to which they replied with wide grins. With a playfully exaggerated sigh, she got up and went to the water-cooler. Five o'clock seemed very far away and she somehow had to manage to do some work before then so that she hadn't just spaced out the whole day.

As she sipped from the polystyrene cup, she observed Jessica. Jessica had never been included in their little chats; in fact, Jessica almost didn't interact with them at all. She greeted Taeyeon sometimes, with a friendly smile, but Yuri and Sunny seemed to ignore her. Except, Taeyeon thought, remembering what she had seen the day before, the moments they shared in secret. She wondered how many other such moments there had been. Jessica seemed lonely, not obviously but it still showed on the fringes of her appearance, as she stood by the electric fan and idly inspected her nails.

"Hey Jessica."

Jessica looked up as Taeyeon wandered over to her, and the surprise was clear on her face for a moment before she switched into a pleased smile.

"Hi, Taeyeon! How are you?"

"I'm good, thanks," Taeyeon replied, sharing the smile with her. "So, I was thinking of having a bit of a lunch thing at my house this weekend, a little gathering of people from the office, you know. Are you free on Saturday?"

A brief glance from Jessica flickered in the direction of someone behind Taeyeon, and she knew Yuri had overheard them and sent the same glance in their direction. Jessica shifted awkwardly and cleared her throat as she looked at the floor. She gracefully tucked some of her hair behind one ear before replying.

"Ah, I'm not sure, I might be busy on Saturday, sorry Taeyeon. Well, I need to get back to work. See you around!"

Taeyeon sighed, watching as Jessica practically flew away. Despite using her work as an excuse, she didn't even go to her desk, making a beeline for the bathrooms instead. Yuri seemed oblivious, but the way her pen hovered shakily over a blank piece of paper suggested otherwise, and Taeyeon took a moment to ponder a few different tactics to deal with her friend before deciding to leave it for another day.

After all, it wasn't really her business anyway. But something in Taeyeon lamented the way Yuri and Jessica were treating each other and she wanted to see them reconcile. She knew exactly what this something in her was, and thought again about the question she had asked herself all night.

When the accident had occurred, no one came looking for her. No one wondered where she was – or so she thought. Surely if anyone had been missing her, they would search for her, and there had been no sign of anyone like that. As far as the world was concerned, Taeyeon was as much a stranger to them as they were to her, and that fact made her feel some phantom loneliness from the Time Before. No one had loved her at all, it seemed. So she wondered again if she had ever felt love for any of the blank-faced strangers in the world she was now re-discovering.

“Hey, you okay?”

Taeyeon looked up and met the concerned eyes of Sunny, who stood before her. Her good friend Sunny, who had been welcoming and friendly and even without constantly mentioning Taeyeon's situation she was able to give her some sense of comfort. Taeyeon turned away for a moment to throw her empty cup into the rubbish bin before giving Sunny a small smile.

“I'm just tired.”

“Well, that's bound to happen when you stay up until one in the morning and send random messages to your friends. What's up with that, by the way?”

Taeyeon shrugged. “Nothing. Just couldn't sleep. Hey, are you free on Saturday? We should all have lunch at my house.”

Sunny chose to say nothing about the deliberate change of subject, and nodded. “Sure, that would be great. I saw you trying to invite Jessica...”

“Yeah, yeah, let's not talk about that right now,” Taeyeon said, waving a hand dismissively. “There's no hurry. I'll finish sorting out the whole thing some other time. Right now, I need to do some work before

they realise all I ever do here is play online games and mess around with you two.”

The working day slowly ticked to a close, and Taeyeon spotted the time on the clock as she did one last stretch. Snapping into action, she closed all the applications on her laptop, shut it down, shoved it into its bag and tidied up her desk. Sunny and Yuri noticed this and shared a glance. They mirrored each other’s impish grins. Then they made their move.

“Going somewhere, Taeyeon?”

“In a hurry there, I see. Something you’re eager to do – or *someone*?”

“Ooh, nice one Sunny, good wordplay.”

“Thanks, I’ve been working on that one all day.”

They high-fived and Taeyeon rolled her eyes. She continued packing up, collecting all her things, pointedly ignoring the two people who stood by her desk with wide smiles and a mischievous glint in their eyes. Taeyeon slipped the laptop bag’s strap over her shoulder and made her way to the door, followed by her friends.

“Oh, let me get the door for you Taeyeon, wouldn’t want you to sprain yourself before your big date!”

“Here, I’ll take care of your laptop for you, Taeng. Otherwise it might be in your way while you’re flirting with that girl, and that would totally kill the mood!”

“Now remember the ABC’s of dating – Always Be Cute – I think you should be able to handle that, just change your face completely and you’ll be halfway there –”

Taeyeon rolled her eyes again when they reached the elevator, but a smile tugged at her mouth and she watched her friends as they laughed.

“Thanks, guys,” she said with only a little sarcasm, stepping into the elevator. “It’s not even a date. I’ll talk to you later, okay? And I mean a stern lecture.”

She gave them a stern look to accompany the promise, and the doors closed. The elevator began to move. Taeyeon tilted her head up to watch the numbers above, letting the smile that had been pushing at her lips finally take over. Truthfully, she thought, even if no one had loved her in the Time Before, she was grateful to have Sunny and Yuri in the present.

Despite having never really discussed relationships or even sexual preferences, her friends had gone directly into joking around with her as if she didn't have the cloud of a hidden past hovering over her head at every moment of every day. Was she gay? She had no idea. But judging by the lack of lovers who were with her now, she decided that the past made little impact. As for her present, and her future, she would just go with the flow.

Her thoughts turned to Tiffany, whom she was about to meet again, and she wondered what they would talk about. It wasn't a real date, no matter how easily her friends teased her, because Taeyeon didn't know if the interest she had in Tiffany was romantic or just something else she was not familiar with. And she had no idea what Tiffany thought of her beyond the natural curiosity about her condition.

"Oh well," she muttered to herself. "Live and learn."

Tiffany was already there, idly toying with a little packet of sugar, when Taeyeon arrived. They smiled awkwardly at each other and Taeyeon took her time to get settled at the table. There was a brief silence as they both waited for the other one to think of something to say.

"Um, hello," Taeyeon said suddenly. She laughed. "I just realised I haven't even said hello. Well, hi, how are you?"

Tiffany grinned. "We're so silly... I'm good, Taeyeon, and you?"

"Yeah, I'm good," Taeyeon nodded.

They smiled at each other, a little less awkward, but the silence soon rested over them again. Taeyeon cleared her throat and shifted in her seat.

"So, what would you like to drink?" Taeyeon ventured. "Coffee, or tea, or... it's a bit hot today, something iced maybe?"

Tiffany just watched her for a moment, smiling happily. Then she leaned forward conspiratorially.

"Well, there's something I was going to suggest, I hope you're up for it..."

As it turned out, Tiffany had a friend of a friend who was somehow involved in a popular singer's latest album recording, and Tiffany had been very excited at the offer of a visit to the recording studio where it was all happening. Taeyeon followed her warily into the studio, completely out of her element in the new environment, and watched as Tiffany greeted every person they encountered like a long lost friend.

The way these people reacted to her sparkling smile was akin to awe, and Taeyeon was impressed.

“My friends couldn’t be here today, but we have a free pass to look around. Wanna go check out the main recording booth?”

And just like that, Taeyeon was swept up in Tiffany’s excitement, walking through the studio as if she was in Narnia and twiddling with just about everything until she almost broke it.

Tiffany stepped up to the microphone in the booth, beaming like a small child on Christmas morning in front of the Christmas tree.

“Don’t you think it’s wonderful, Taeyeon?”

The way Tiffany gazed at the microphone made it seem as if it was alight, glowing with an inner fire, perhaps of dreams that lay in her heart and once tried to push higher. She reached out and traced the object, treating it like a delicate flower, completely absorbed in all its connotations.

Taeyeon blinked. “Yeah...”

It was amazing how a single moment in someone’s life could say so much about them. From this sight of Tiffany and the microphone, Taeyeon felt as if she was seeing the deep, inner workings of Tiffany’s heart and soul. Tiffany had wanted to be a singer. It was clear in her gaze, the light in her eyes, the way she stood, the excited blush on her cheeks – it made sense that she had seemed almost dismissive and avoidant of talking about her current job that was so far from the dream she had harboured. It made Taeyeon almost painfully curious; was Tiffany not the kind of person who would fight to fulfil her greatest desires? She wondered what could have happened to keep Tiffany chained to the spot where she was now instead of reaching higher to where her heart was waiting for her.

“What do you think you wanted to be when you were a kid, Taeyeon?”

Taeyeon blinked again. “What?”

Tiffany turned to face her. Something was different about her expression; her smile was tinged with a heavy sadness, her previously glittering eyes now seemed more like they were glistening with trapped tears.

“When you were little, do you think you wanted to work in a business consultancy?” Her voice was frail. She was trying to reach the same bright heights she usually did her with voice, but some weakness

kept her small.

Taeyeon shrugged. "I don't know. I can't even guess."

Tiffany nodded absently, looking at the ground beneath their feet. "Lucky you."

Taeyeon tilted her head to one side. She opened her mouth to respond, hesitated and let out a sigh instead. With deliberate steps, she moved closer to Tiffany and her hand came to rest on Tiffany's shoulder where she gave a light squeeze.

Their eyes met. Taeyeon pointed at the microphone.

"Sing."

Tiffany shook her head immediately, gave a nervous laugh, and stepped back. "No, I couldn't possibly _"

"Singing," interrupted Taeyeon, "is defined as the act of producing music using the voice. You have a voice, therefore you can sing. I don't care if you think you're bad or whatever, singing is singing. And I can tell that you want to sing, even if you think that's not what you want or that you can't. So, sing."

Tiffany watched Taeyeon for a long time. Then she looked away again as a blush flourished on her cheeks, and she took a shaky breath.

"Okay," she whispered. Her eyes flicked to the microphone. "But don't laugh or anything, okay?"

Taeyeon smiled warmly. "Okay."

Tiffany locked her gaze onto the microphone and took long, slow breaths for a while. She gulped nervously. Then, after a quick shake of her head, she started to sing.

"You had my heart, and we'll never be worlds apart

Maybe in magazines, but you'll still be my star

Baby 'cause in the dark, you can't see shiny cars

And that's when you need me there

With you, I'll always share

Because when the sun shines, we'll shine together

Told you I'll be here forever

Said I'll always be your friend
Took an oath, I'ma stick it out to the end

Now that it's raining more than ever
Know that we'll still have each other
You can stand under my umbrella
You can stand under my umbrella..."

Taeyeon's jaw dropped and she gaped. Tiffany had let her voice fade out into silence, and she bit her bottom lip as she stared at the microphone with half-lidded eyes. After a moment, she turned her head.

"Um, how was it?" she asked quietly.

Taeyeon waved her hands in the air frantically. "Keep going!"

Tiffany blinked in surprise, and at last a genuine, happy smile lit up her face once again. She giggled. "Really?"

Taeyeon nodded rapidly. "Really, really. Go on!"

Tiffany bit her bottom lip again, looking at Taeyeon with the brightest eyes she had shown yet. It seemed like she wanted to say something, but instead she turned back to the microphone and did as Taeyeon requested of her.

"These fancy things will never come in between
You're part of my entity, here for infinity
When the war has took its part
When the world has dealt its cards
If the hand is hard, together we'll mend your heart

Because when the sun shines, we'll shine together
Told you I'll be here forever
Said I'll always be your friend
Took an oath, I'ma stick it out to the end

Now that it's raining more than ever
Know that we'll still have each other

You can stand under my –”

Tiffany broke off. She took a shaky breath, swallowed anxiously, and looked at Taeyeon worriedly.

“Are you sure I sound okay? You’re not just being nice, right?”

Taeyeon laughed briefly. “Tiffany, you’re amazing. I love your voice. And I may not have known you for long, but it seems to me that when you sing, you are at your most beautiful. You make it seem as if you are living in heaven with every sound you make.”

Tiffany stared at her. It didn’t take long for Taeyeon to feel the growing awkwardness, and she coughed. It was the first time (that she could remember) that she had spoken to anyone like that.

“You can run into my arms

It’s okay, don’t be alarmed, come in to me

There’s no distance in between our love

So go on and let the rain pour

I’ll be all you need and more...”

Tiffany turned to her with tears in her eyes. “Thank you, Taeyeon.”

She was promptly wrapped up into a tight, almost ferocious hug which she managed to kind of reciprocate after letting out a distressed squeak.

“Thank you,” Tiffany repeated in a breathless whisper. “It’s been so long since I’ve felt so strong singing in front of someone else. It’s been a long time since I’ve sung in front of anyone, actually. So I want to thank you for helping me open my wings again.”

Taeyeon smiled and closed her eyes. She felt warmth in the very core of her heart, hearing such things from Tiffany. For once, she did not wonder if she’d felt this way before or if she’d heard these words in her previous life; instead, she just held on to Tiffany and smiled.

[4:57:02pm] **Taengrrr:** Hey, do you guys mind if Tiffany joins us on Saturday?

[4:58:06pm] **Bunnyrabbit:** (0_0) Introducing her to your friends already?! Your 2nd date was only 2 days ago!

[4:58:50pm] **Taengrrr:** It wasn’t a date, and she isn’t my girlfriend...

[4:59:30pm] **Bunnyrabbit:** Sure, sure, whatever. But still, it’s quite early isn’t it...? You just properly met her a few days ago...

[5:00:30pm] **Taengrrr:** We've been talking quite a lot since we last met. I think we're pretty close now. So, you wanna meet her on Saturday?

[5:01:01pm] **Bunnyrabbitz:** Definitely!

[5:01:20pm] **Taengrrr:** Yuri?

Yuri was sitting at her desk, staring out the window. She clearly wasn't paying attention to anything much at all. Her usual pile of paperwork rested peacefully on one side of the desk, accompanied by neatly organised pens and pencils. Her laptop lay closed and sleeping on the other edge.

"It's a pretty simple tale, really."

Taeyeon looked up as Sunny perched herself on the edge of her desk, crossed her arms and eyed Yuri.

"She and Jessica got along well," Sunny continued. "*Very* well, actually. They just clicked right away, natural spark and all that. And things went great. They were madly in love and everything was wonderful."

Sunny hesitated. She turned to look at Taeyeon with an indecipherable expression.

"Until Yuri had a bit of a breakdown. She freaked out about what her parents would do if they found out, what would happen to her and Jessica in the future, what all of this meant about who she was – you know, was she wearing the 'gay' label now. It built up for a couple of weeks and then she just snapped. Everything changed. Suddenly, she and Jessica weren't in a relationship, the whole thing was just a 'misunderstanding' and through Yuri's denial-tinted eyes, everything was fine. Needless to say, Jessica was hurt. Badly."

Taeyeon gulped. She glanced over at Yuri, who was still spaced out, and took a peek at Jessica in the far, far corner of the room.

"Jessica had already gone through the whole identity crisis thing, you see," Sunny said softly. "So she had come to terms with herself before she even met Yuri. And, I guess, her experience made her a little more understanding of Yuri's dilemma. Yuri's reaction was extreme, and I don't think Jessica will ever really recover from that, but she doesn't hate Yuri for it. She could never hate Yuri."

Taeyeon nodded slowly. "And now? I suppose you've noticed how Yuri's been acting... think she's regretting it?"

"I think she certainly wishes she had never lost Jessica."

They sat together in silence for a moment. Out of the corner of her eye, Taeyeon could see Jessica moving every now and then as she worked away in her little area. Yuri had stopped staring outside, and half-heartedly patted her pile of paperwork. There were dark rings beneath her eyes, and she moved sluggishly, her mind clearly somewhere else no matter how hard she tried to focus on her work.

“For my part, I try to stay out of it,” Sunny concluded. “Yuri can get pretty jealous sometimes, and Jessica plays it up with the boss out of some desire to push the feelings out of Yuri. I think she’d like to get her Yuri to come back, but by getting Yuri to open her eyes.”

Taeyeon sighed. “Ah, my poor heart-broken friends. I must force them both to come on Saturday so that they can stop being so sad and foolish already.”

Sunny smirked. “Oh, I see. Now that you’re so happy with your girl, you want to spread the joy, right? This always happens when someone gets in a relationship.”

“You really need to find something new to tease me about, Sunny. I’m not sure how many more times I can say ‘Tiffany is not my girlfriend’ before my tongue falls out.”

“Well, I wasn’t going to mention your haircut, but if it’s what you really want -”

“What?! What’s wrong with my haircut?”

Sunny winked and abruptly returned to her desk, leaving Taeyeon to grumble under her breath about her annoying little friend. But she was soon grinning again.

She was starting to feel like the new life she was building for herself wasn’t too bad at all.

Again. (Part 2)

“Hey! I hope I’m not too early...”

“No, no, it’s fine. Come on in!”

Taeyeon’s heart was beating at a rate slightly faster than usual. She could feel it, at first, as a light vibration in her chest. It started about a second after she saw Tiffany on her doorstep and it seemed well-set to continue for a long, long time.

“The others might be a little late.”

“Ah, okay. Um, so what’s the plan for lunch? Need help setting up?”

Her hands shook for the first few minutes as Tiffany joked around and chatted happily with her in the kitchen. She almost dropped the ingredients a few times, but finally she got more used to the reaction she had to Tiffany’s presence. She even managed to chop some of the vegetables without injuring herself.

“I’m really looking forward to today,” Tiffany said as they covered the bowls of prepared ingredients.

“I’m sure we’ll all have fun.”

The remark put a smile on Taeyeon’s face. She, too, was looking forward to the afternoon; these were the people who were most important in her life right now, and she was determined to make it a memorable time. She wanted something she could remember for the rest of her life, no matter what happened; something she had clearly been lacking in the first part of her life – or rather, someone.

Looking at Tiffany now, humming to herself as she tidied up in the kitchen, Taeyeon knew that this was a person she wanted to be able to think of forever. Despite having only properly met Tiffany less than a week ago, something about her infectious happiness, warmth and friendliness felt so familiar to Taeyeon that it was almost as if she was a part of her life already and would be for a long time.

Such thoughts were perhaps a little intense in usual new relationships, and Taeyeon was well aware of it, but she kept an eye on Tiffany with an almost expectant interest.

“You okay there?”

Taeyeon blinked. Tiffany was done, and was watching her with her hands on her hips and the beginnings of an amused grin on her lips.

“Ah,” Taeyeon said, realising she had been caught staring. “Sorry, I just spaced out for a minute there.”

The way Tiffany raised her eyebrows and nodded confirmed that it had indeed been a minute. A blush lit Taeyeon’s cheeks and she abruptly turned to lead the way to the living room. Tiffany spent a good few minutes intently examining her DVD collection, humming appreciatively at a few.

“You should let me borrow some of these sometime,” she remarked, tapping her finger on the DVD in her hand. “I’ve never heard of them, but they seem good.”

Taeyeon could not deny it; she liked that Tiffany was taking an interest in her interests. It gave her heart a light, fluttering feeling and at the same time, she felt like melting. She figured this was something akin to the experiences of first love that she had seen and read about, and that thought alone made her feel weird about the process of starting her life again at her age.

But she simply dismissed it. She was already well used to the special world she inhabited. The sound of her doorbell ringing gave her a pleasant distraction, and she went to greet her friends.

The first thing she noticed was that Jessica and Yuri were standing within a one metre radius of each other. This in itself was a rare sight; she hadn’t seen them so close since the time she stumbled upon their private moment. Now, here they stood, with only Sunny between them, on the same doorstep of her home. Sunny was beaming.

“Hi!”

Before Taeyeon even had a chance to return the greeting, Sunny shot inside and headed straight for the living room. She was no doubt hunting for Tiffany. Yuri and Jessica shuffled awkwardly, staring at Taeyeon.

“Hi, guys,” Taeyeon greeted.

“Hello,” Jessica replied tightly. Yuri just nodded, and gulped; it seemed she was too petrified to speak.

“Well, come on in.”

Taeyeon stepped aside and watched with great amusement as both of her guests waited for the other to go first. They each made halting little twitches when it seemed like the other wasn't going to go, before waiting again, and twitching again, until finally Jessica clicked her tongue in frustration and strode through the doorway.

Yuri and Taeyeon both watched her go before looking at each other.

Taeyeon smirked. "Hey Yuri."

Yuri glared, and pushed past Taeyeon. As she closed the door, Taeyeon smiled to herself; maybe she could get some teasing done – as long as Yuri didn't totally freak out.

A small dog had taken the living room as his new playground when Taeyeon returned to her guests. The little ball of curly black fur hopped around the humans, tongue wagging as he entertained his new friends. She stood by the doorway and watched for a while as Tiffany and Sunny laughed and played with her pet, while Yuri and Jessica sat on opposite ends of the couch and stared off into space. It was quite a scene, after all. There was a great contrast between the excited playing on one side of the room and the dull silence on the other.

Taeyeon sighed. She had her work cut out for her.

"This little guy is so cute!" Tiffany cooed. She ruffled the dog's fur and blew him a kiss. "What's his name?"

"Ginger," Sunny answered before Taeyeon had even opened her mouth. "Don't ask me why, I used to wonder if Taeyeon was colour-blind when I first heard it. Anyway, he's being all cute and cuddly now but he can be a real little rascal. Right, Taeyeon?"

Taeyeon shrugged and smiled sheepishly. "He has his mischievous moments."

"Oh, I know exactly what you mean," Tiffany enthused. "My little puppy acts like a total angel at times and then he goes and pees on the carpet or chews my shoes. They're real little imps. But I think they'd get along well together!"

Sunny smirked, precisely as if everything was going to some sort of plan, and glanced knowingly at Yuri. Yuri, on the other hand, looked painfully stiff as she attempted a flash of a smile in response. Sunny sighed and turned to give a different pointed look at Taeyeon.

Taeyeon rolled her eyes and clapped her hands together. “Okay, let’s start having fun!”

It started small, with pointed actions of avoidance whenever they ended up close to each other, and a rigid effort to look anywhere but each other. After only a short time cooking together in the kitchen, Yuri tried so hard to keep her distance that she dropped a bowl of chopped onions on her own foot. And that was when things started going downhill at a rapid pace. Yuri’s face was painted with a deep red blush of embarrassment and self-loathing as she cleaned up the mess, despite the light-hearted nature of the others, and while she was overly conscious of Jessica in that situation, Jessica was acting as if absolutely nothing happened. But the damage was done – Yuri was now so conscious of herself and Jessica that she burned her finger on the frying pan. This was followed by accidentally breaking the tap at the sink when she went to run cold water over her finger, which led to a great spray of water that completely soaked Jessica who had been right in the line of fire on one side of the sink.

In a way, Taeyeon mused half-heartedly, it almost represented the fall of their relationship.

Yuri was terror-stricken as she stared at Jessica. The water was still leaking from the broken sink, and Sunny leapt to it and began trying to repair the damage in any way possible. Taeyeon looked from Yuri to Jessica, eyeing the thin line of fragile tension that zipped in the air between them. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed that Tiffany was frozen as if she was unsure of the situation. Jessica blinked.

“Sorry,” Yuri blurted.

The sound of rushing water faded as Sunny managed to stop the flow. The following silence was only penetrated by a few feeble drips, and flavoured with an indecipherable iciness coming from the unspeaking Jessica.

“Sorry...” Yuri repeated, quietly, turning her eyes away from Jessica’s blank gaze. She shifted uncomfortably. “Sorry.”

Jessica inhaled and exhaled at a moderate pace. She waited another beat, and then she responded.

“It’s okay,” she said in a hollow voice. “It’s fine.”

Ginger chose that moment to leap into the kitchen, thinking the lack of activity meant that the humans were free to play with him now. He bounded over to Tiffany, who knelt down to pick him up and shush him softly, and she glanced furtively at the others before taking the dog with her into the living room.

The interruption went unnoticed by some; Jessica simply brushed her wet hair out of her face and kept her eyes sharply trained on Yuri.

Yuri tried to recover. She steeled herself. “I’m really sorry. It won’t happen again. Is there any way I can help you?”

Jessica raised an eyebrow. “Help me? No thank you. And don’t worry if it happens again. I’ll just forgive you again, like I always do.”

The look on Yuri’s face was truly pitiable. A frown clenched her brow and for a moment it seemed like she might cry, before she started trying to hide behind a mask of indifference. She turned away, busying herself with tidying up the kitchen.

“Taeyeon?” Jessica asked softly. There was the slightest note of a tremor in her voice. She cleared her throat. “Where’s your bathroom, please?”

Taeyeon regarded the scene quietly for a moment before stepping to the doorway. “I’ll show you.”

They left Sunny and Yuri behind, and Taeyeon knew Sunny was going to have a talk with Yuri. She glanced at Jessica beside her, and wondered what she should say. Was there any point in trying to talk to her now? For all she knew, the situation would get worse and worse until it reached boiling point if she tried to say anything about it now. Direct confrontation was perhaps a bit too soon. She sighed wearily as she opened the bathroom door and gestured for Jessica to go ahead.

“Sorry about this,” Jessica murmured, her voice muffled by the towel she used to dry her face. “I’m not sure why I came today. Sunny just kind of kidnapped me.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about, Jessica. I wanted you here, and I want you to stay. This was no big deal; the rest of the day will be fine. Right?”

Jessica just shrugged. She carried on drying herself.

“Listen, Jessica,” Taeyeon started hesitantly. “Sunny told me a little about what happened between you and Yuri.”

Jessica froze. Slowly, she looked at Taeyeon. “What?”

“Don’t be upset! I was worried about you both, and I still am. I just want you to be happy.”

Jessica didn't respond immediately. She carefully and neatly folded up the towel and placed it on the edge of the sink. Then she turned to fully face Taeyeon, her expression cold and empty.

"Taeyeon, I appreciate that you worry about us. But if you invited me here just to mess with our relationship, I would like to leave now."

The silence was tense. Taeyeon's eyes widened. She had in a sense invited Jessica here as part of her effort to repair their relationship. What had she been thinking? Even just after deciding that it wasn't her business, she had still taken their personal matters into her own hands as if she had a right to do so. No matter how much she cared about the happiness of her friends, she couldn't help but feel dread at the realisation that she had overstepped her boundaries.

She opened her mouth to respond but was interrupted by movement from the doorway. Yuri appeared, looking exhausted and grim. She kept her eyes locked on Jessica, paying no attention to her friend.

"Don't get mad at Taeyeon, she's just trying to help us."

Jessica sighed. "I know she is. I'm not mad. I'm just tired. I'd like to go home now."

Yuri nodded. "Sure, just run away again. That's all you ever do these days."

The air crackled. Daggers rose in Jessica's eyes and were aimed at Yuri with a cold, sharp edge. Taeyeon first wondered if she should try to leave, but Yuri was still in the doorway, and she didn't think it was really a good idea to leave them alone at the current time. Trapped between a rock and a hard place, she tensed herself to intervene if it got bloody – which, judging by the look in Jessica's eyes, was not entirely unlikely.

"What did you just say?"

Yuri wore her mask well. "You heard me."

Jessica scoffed, and the sound echoed faintly. "You're hardly one to talk to *me* about running away, after what you did."

Yuri shrugged. "It's true for both of us now, don't you think?"

"Hardly. I'm still here. I was always still here, standing and waiting for you. Can't you see?!"

"I see," Yuri replied, sounding strained. She started shaking, as if the mask she wore was about to crack

already. “I see that you think you should hurt me in order to get me back. You’re running from me, poking me with a stick from a distance. Why could you never just come up to me and tell me directly? If I’m going through so much pain, is hurting me more really the answer you choose?!”

“I have no choice! I *lost* you and I didn’t have any choice about that either!”

They were shouting now, screaming. Every now and then a splinter of pent-up pain would slice along the edges of their words. It was really happening, Taeyeon thought, they were really going to lay it all out at that exact moment and let loose. On the one hand, she figured it would be healthy for them. But on the other hand, it would be make or break. Any hope for reconciliation was faced with a chance of total desolation. Above all, she wished she didn’t have to be awkwardly standing off to one side with no escape.

“Are you really trying to make it sound so easy?” Jessica continued, stepping closer to Yuri. “Do you think it could be easy? Are you capable of that?”

A deep sigh racked Yuri’s body, and she deflated, letting her mask drop. “I don’t know. And that’s just the problem. I don’t know anything at all right now. But I’ll be succinct; it’s an improvement, don’t you see? I used to think I knew something. Now I’ve accepted that I don’t.”

Jessica frowned, but not because she was angry or confused. It was the look of someone who was absorbing an important fact that changed everything. Eventually, Jessica hung her head and relaxed her shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

Yuri didn’t hesitate; she stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Jessica in a tight hug as they shared their feelings without words.

Taeyeon blinked. Her head felt incredibly heavy, and a dull pain was starting at the base of her neck. She squeezed her eyes shut and massaged her brow, trying to make the thick thumping cease, but it grew stronger as she stood in the resounding silence. She cracked her eyes open again to look at Yuri and Jessica – over Yuri’s shoulder, she spotted Tiffany. Tiffany, who stood there uncertainly, met her gaze.

The air snapped and changed.

Yuri shoved Jessica away again. “It’s too late!”

Tiffany was pushed out of the way as Yuri stumbled past. The front door smacked against the wall as Yuri fled the house.

It didn't take long for Jessica to follow; whether she was intending to go after Yuri or not, she stormed past Taeyeon and Tiffany before they had recovered and disappeared out the door.

Taeyeon ran after them, but at the door she was held back by a grim-faced Sunny who met her confused expression with a sigh of reluctance.

"I'm sorry, Taeyeon, but you shouldn't run after them," she said softly. "Just leave it."

"Leave it?! I can't! It's my fault they got into this fight; I have to go after them –"

"Don't, Taeyeon. Please. I just don't want you to end up in the same situation as Taeyeon and Tiffany."

"I-" Taeyeon was about to try to free herself from Sunny's grip when the words sunk in. She frowned deeply. "W-What? What did you just say?"

"I said, I don't want you to end up in the same situation as Yuri and Jessica," Sunny replied sadly.

Taeyeon blinked. Her body went slack, causing Sunny to let go of her arm and give her a solemn look. But Taeyeon just blinked again, and shook her head slowly.

"Yuri and Jessica," she echoed. "You definitely said Yuri and Jessica. For some reason... I don't know... I thought you said... But no, you said Yuri and Jessica."

It was Sunny's turn to frown. "What? Are you okay?"

"Y-Yeah, I'm fine. Um. I'm fine. Look, I'll go talk to Tiffany, she must be feeling kind of uncomfortable. Can you just make sure they get home safe?"

Sunny eyed her for a moment longer before nodding. "Okay."

The door clicked shut behind Sunny and Taeyeon stood alone in the silent hallway of her house. Sunny's words were echoing around her mind – not only did she mishear the names, but she also couldn't understand what Sunny was trying to say. The same situation? She and Tiffany were nowhere near anything like Yuri and Jessica's level of relationship complexities. For one thing, they had only known each other for a week.

In fact, now that Taeyeon thought of it, she didn't remember much of Tiffany from her time in the BA course. She threw her mind back to the previous year, searching for a sighting or a mention of Tiffany Hwang.

She found no such recollection.

Her mind was spinning. There was too much going on; the conflict between Yuri and Jessica, the strange confusion of names amongst Sunny's other baffling words, and the overwhelming feeling that something was wrong, that something wasn't right with her sparse collection of memories. Something was missing, and something else was hiding just on the edge of her mental vision. She felt almost as if it was all a dream, and its borders were getting blurry –

“Taeyeon?”

The ruckus in her head stilled. She turned her head. Tiffany stood there, at the end of the hallway, one hand still on the doorway she had just passed through. Her face was beautiful, the perfect expression of concern, confusion, wariness. Taeyeon got hung up on the way her lips were parted, and finally realised that the faded foundations of her world had solidified again with the colour of Tiffany.

She smiled. “Yeah, I'm fine.”

Tiffany returned the smile a little hesitantly. “Sure?”

Taeyeon nodded. She waved her hand dismissively. “I'm fine.”

Tiffany smiled a little stronger, and straightened up. She started fiddling with her hands, and Taeyeon remembered how awkward she was likely feeling after witnessing the explosion of Yuri and Jessica.

“Sorry about that,” she apologised sheepishly. “I didn't mean to make this an uncomfortable day for you. I just wanted to help them sort out their problems, but I guess I greatly underestimated everything.”

“It's okay,” Tiffany responded. “It's fine. Maybe I should go home, so you can help your friends.”

“No! I mean, no, you don't have to go. There's not much I can do for them right now anyway, I should give them some time to cool off. Stay a little while longer. If you don't mind... We can even watch one of those DVDs you were looking at.”

Tiffany's eyes curved as she replied, "Okay. Okay, I'll stay with you."

Taeyeon expected a lot of tension at work after that weekend. She arrived on Monday with the hope of establishing the situation before approaching either Yuri or Jessica, but to her surprise she found only Sunny there.

"Uh, where are the others?"

Sunny looked up from the magazine she was flipping through. "My guess is Yuri thought Jessica would show up so she stayed home and Jessica thought Yuri would show up so *she* stayed home. These foolish kids."

Taeyeon was relieved by Sunny's light-hearted attitude. "So... how bad is the damage from Saturday's fallout?"

Sunny whistled. "It's pretty bad, my friend. Don't think you're getting off the hook easily. You should have heard some of the things Yuri said about you on her way home."

"So they got home safely, then? Both of them?"

"Yeah, I dropped Jessica home first because she lives closer, and then I circled back to find Yuri stomping all over the streets. They're quite a pair, those two."

Taeyeon hummed absently. She unpacked her things and settled at her desk. As she booted up her laptop, she glanced over the edge of the screen, eyeing the two empty desks on the office floor. She sighed. Thinking back to all the fun times she'd had with her friends, she could only hope that she hadn't ruined the friendships she felt lucky to have.

[9:12:09am] **Taengrrr:** Yuri? How are you?

She didn't expect a quick reply, or any reply at all. But she figured it was worth trying, and if no conversation came of it, at least her message would show Yuri that she cared.

A beep brought her attention to her phone.

09:14am

Tiffany:

Hey... are you at work yet?

09:14am

Taeyeon:

Yeah... what's up?

09:15am

Tiffany:

Just wondering if your friends are okay... I saw how torn up you were over what happened on Saturday.

Taeyeon took a moment to smile quietly to herself. Talking to Tiffany really could make her feel better about anything. There was just so much to love about her.

0

9:16am

Taeyeon:

They're not here... :/ I sent a message to Yuri, but I'm not getting my hopes up. I think I'll call them both later... is that a good idea?

09:16am

Tiffany:

Ah, asking my opinion? >_<" I think you should do what you feel is best. I'm sure that wouldn't hurt.

^ _ ^

Taeyeon bit her bottom lip to keep from grinning.

09:17am

Taeyeon:

Can I call you?

09:18am

Tiffany:

Right now?

09:18am

Taeyeon:

If you're free....

09:18am

Tiffany:

Okay... :3

Taeyeon jumped up from her seat, which naturally caught Sunny's attention, but she dodged any questions and stepped out of the office to lurk by the elevator as she tapped the 'call' button.

“Hello?”

“Hey.”

“You really called me at work... is this part of your job, young lady?”

Taeyeon grinned. “Of course. It’s the most important factor for this business. What are you doing?”

“Ah, I’m just kind of sitting in my car, prolonging my free time before I go to work. Well, I’m already late so I guess it isn’t really *free* time, but I’ll take what I can get.”

“Having a tough morning?”

“Mondays are always tough... It’s so hard to get started. I just... Well, I guess I can talk to you about it, I think you’d understand...”

“Go ahead!”

“Ever since we went to that recording studio, and you encouraged me to sing... I’ve been thinking about it constantly. I finally managed to stop thinking about that and then you came along and just brought it all out of me again.” She laughed briefly. “I never would have guessed this would happen. Here I am, finally settling into the life I have to lead and then I’m just totally disarmed by you. Isn’t that crazy?”

“I don’t think so,” Taeyeon murmured. “Tell me about your dream.”

“You even know which buttons to push... Okay, I’ll let myself talk about it just this once. You’re really something, you know, Taeyeon. So, when I was a kid, I wanted to be a singer. Simple enough? But my father disagreed, and... well, at first I fought back, but... you see, my mother died when I was young. It was a very hard time for me and my father. And something about the look on his face when I was fighting back against his wishes just really got to me. How could I do that to my own father, who’s been through so much?”

A heavy, heart-filled sigh reached Taeyeon’s ear through the phone. She clutched the device tighter, and frowned. Phone calls had never been so impractical before; she strongly wanted to see Tiffany face-to-face.

“So I ended up here,” Tiffany continued. “Now I’m sitting outside an office building, dreading the day ahead and it’s only the start of a week full of days like this, followed by weeks more of this and months

and years...”

She went totally silent, and Taeyeon knew she was holding back her tears.

“Listen, Tiffany,” she said firmly. “Take a deep breath for me. Now listen. Your father wanted what he thought was best for you, and you wanted what you thought was best for you. I... look; it’s hard to say this properly over the phone. Just... Hang in there? At least until I can see you again. Can you do that?”

Tiffany chuckled lightly, and sniffed. “Yeah, I can. Thanks, Taeyeon. Thanks for trying. Are you free tonight?”

Taeyeon relaxed. Tiffany was strong. “Of course.”

Sunny’s face when Taeyeon returned to her desk was mischievous to say the least. She acted indifferent at first, but the second Taeyeon sat down, she shot over and perched herself on the edge of the desk with an impish smile.

“Early morning phone call, huh? Who with?”

Taeyeon clicked her tongue. “None of your business.”

“My dear little friend, you should have known that those words would only confirm that you were talking with Tiffany. If it was Yuri or Jessica, you would have told me.”

And there was no one else it could have been, Taeyeon added in her mind. She just shook her head, smiling slightly, and started to get her things ready to do some work.

Sunny drifted back to her desk, singing “Taeyeon has a girlfriend” just loud enough for her to hear.

Taeyeon laughed quietly to herself. She shuffled her paperwork and turned to face her laptop.

[9:25:02am] **The Kwonster:** I’m fine. I’m just going to spend all day sleeping.

Yuri’s reply curtly rejected any conversation, but Taeyeon was relieved that she was okay. And the fact that she had responded at all seemed like a good sign in terms of the status of their friendship.

Ginger was pleased beyond belief when Taeyeon came home and immediately put him on a leash. He bounded around, yapping happily, as she drove him to the river, and he leaped out at high speed when she opened the door for him.

Tiffany was already waiting, with a tiny bundle of white fur in her arms, on a bench further along.

“Ginger, meet Prince Fluffy.”

Taeyeon couldn't help but laugh at the name, but the seriousness of Tiffany's demeanour brought her to a standstill.

“Seriously? His name is Prince Fluffy?”

Tiffany cradled her puppy closer and snuggled him. “Don't listen to her, Prince, you have a lovely name.”

Taeyeon snickered. “Sure, sure.”

Tiffany poked her tongue out at Taeyeon. “You called your dog Ginger with no clear motivation at all!”

“Ask any dog on the street, they'd rather be called Ginger than Prince Fluffykins.”

“It's just Fluffy! I call him Prince all the time, anyway.”

Prince took this opportunity to wiggle out of Tiffany's arms and plop on to the ground. He approached Ginger slowly but confidently and the two dogs became acquainted.

Taeyeon unclipped Ginger's leash, setting him free, and watched the two little animals race away.

“They grow up so fast,” Tiffany sighed wistfully, watching them play.

Taeyeon chuckled as she sat down beside her on the bench. “Oh, so you're one of those people who treat their pets like their own children, huh?”

“Oh and I suppose you don't?”

“Of course not, I'm much too young and hip to be Ginger's mother.”

“Right.”

They watched the dogs for a while longer, smiles on their faces, before Taeyeon spoke again.

“So, how was your day?”

Tiffany shifted, brushing off lint from her pants and crossing her legs. “It was okay.”

Taeyeon eyed her intently for a moment. “Wanna talk about it?”

She took a breath, and turned to face Taeyeon, as if she wanted to say something, before she stopped and just smiled again. “Yeah, I want to talk about it. But not yet. Not right now.”

Taeyeon nodded. “Alright, I understand.”

She was wrapped in absorbing warmth. Tiffany was hugging her, as her arms came around Taeyeon’s shoulders and squeezed her gently. Taeyeon closed her eyes and returned the embrace immediately, a blissful feeling washing over her.

It was a warmth she had not experienced before.

Looking back on her past didn’t take Taeyeon very long. There was only so much to see when she looked. But sometimes Taeyeon would stare at the horizon of her memories, back where it all started, the moment her eyes snapped open and the blackness dissolved to show the dim, discoloured hospital ceiling at night. With a turn of her head, she had felt the fear seep in and begin to crackle and hiss. It was worse than just waking up with no idea of where she was. It was waking up with no idea of anything at all. A complete emptiness. It was waking up a hollow wreck, alone and afraid and seeing no beginning. Where did safety lie in a situation like hers?

As she lay on her bed that night, she watched the ceiling above her. It was different. It seemed more solid somehow, less like an abandoned wisp of some departed cloud. Somehow she got a strange feeling; Tiffany. It was all because of Tiffany. Ever since she met Tiffany that day in the coffee shop, things had been changing. Her world seemed thicker, stronger, and more familiar. She had experienced a similar feeling before, when dreaming. This was the feeling that she got when she delved deeper and deeper into a dream, making it seem more and more as if it was where she belonged.

It was the feeling that came just before she desperately needed to wake up.

Again. (Part 3)

Taeyeon enjoyed standing by the river. She would let her feet make roots in the grass by the river bank and centre herself as she watched the water travel in front of her. A small smile developed on her face as she did so, growing from a thin line of lips to a mini quirked grin – the reasons were simple enough and over time she had figured it all out in her head. The constant, free movement of the river's water showed her that it stopped for nothing and pushed itself onwards no matter what lay behind it; it came from some spring somewhere and just went ahead without looking back. Wryly she would explain it to herself in her mind with the tone of a kindergarten teacher: keep moving forward, don't get stuck in the past, look ahead and put one foot in front of the other every moment of every day. These were things she had learned, things she taught herself.

"Such a kid," she muttered, and shrugged.

There were a few cynical notes of adulthood that followed – such as the fact that water couldn't look back anyway, since it was water, and the whole thing about a river's flow being determined by some minor scientific notions of gravity and the loss of potential energy or whatever – but Taeyeon liked to leave it more to her imagination. She was getting good at that. It made her world seem more normal; she had noticed that a lot of normal people loved to escape reality. She hadn't had much of a choice thus far but she was developing a rather neat little trick for making everything seem a little more magical, and it eased the pain at times.

Taeyeon shook herself thoroughly. "Okay, enough moping around for today."

It took her less than half an hour to reach Tiffany's house. She felt her palms get a little sweaty as she made her way along the stone path to the front door, and she glanced around at the neat, colourful flowerbeds and trimmed grass. She could easily imagine Tiffany spending her weekends in the garden, smiling to herself and maybe humming a little tune as she planted flowers, and Prince would hop towards her and make her laugh when he leaped on her with his muddy paws.

Taeyeon realised she had stopped in the middle of the path. She wiped absently at the corner of her eye, confused, and turned to carry on. Perhaps her imagination seemed too real.

Tiffany greeted her with a grin and a brief hug, and immediately ushered her inside with great excitement.

It was almost Christmas time. The months had flown fast, and Taeyeon half wished it had gone slower and half looked forward to the present and future that she could now encounter.

“Don’t you ever get tired of thinking so much about the same thing?” she muttered to herself. She was waiting in the living room, sinking into the well-cushioned couch and listening to the faint piano music coming from the stereo, while Tiffany was changing into her new dress. “Stop obsessing over how much your lack of a past makes your future so important.”

But she hardly had a choice in the matter. Obsessing over her past seemed to be her automatic, natural state. She rolled her eyes. She got up from the couch and stuck her hands in her pockets as she wandered around the living room. There were some rather pleasant paintings of city-scapes, and a cute sketch of a dog that looked kind of like Prince. She wondered if Tiffany was an artist. She also wondered what the music was, as she glanced at the stereo with a curious frown on her face, and at the same time a flicker in the back of her mind told her she should know all these things already; she ignored that.

There was a photo on the wall, in a dark frame, which showed an intently coloured image in a style that reminded her of movies from the time when colouring first became a thing. A little girl was in a big garden, standing on a wide lawn, but her foot was lifted like she was in the process of jumping and her face was beaming in a way that identified her as Tiffany without any room for doubt. Taeyeon smiled; Tiffany was a cute kid, not surprisingly. Her arms were splayed high in the air and Taeyeon could almost hear the click of a camera followed by the loud, playful laughter of a flying Tiffany.

“Taeyeon?”

She turned to see Tiffany standing in the doorway. To say she was gorgeous would be an understatement, Taeyeon immediately decided. Instead she said, “Woah,” in a wonderfully eloquent manner. Judging by the way Tiffany giggled it was still a coherent statement.

Tiffany stepped forward and spun around. “What do you think? Will it be okay for the office Christmas party?”

Taeyeon nodded, her eyes tracing every line of the dress. “It’s good for everything. You should just wear that every day.”

“Sure, I could totally imagine going grocery shopping in this dress or taking Prince for a walk, or even

gardening like this.”

Taeyeon smiled at Tiffany’s return of the joke, and moved closer. She reached out and lightly tugged at part of the dress, running her fingers down the fabric, and returned her hands to her pockets again.

“What’s this song?” she asked, meeting Tiffany’s gaze again.

Tiffany listened for a moment, her eyes cast towards the ceiling, before looking back with a happy smile. “It’s Satie’s first Gnossienne. It’s lovely, isn’t it? It has such a mystical feel to it. I put his Gymnopédie and Gnossienne on the same playlist because I think they go quite well together. Wait, I’ll play the third Gymnopédie again, it’s so romantic.”

Taeyeon watched as she went to the stereo and fiddled with it. “You know quite a lot about classical music, then?”

Tiffany shrugged. “Not a lot. I just hear songs that I like, find out a bit more about them, and listen to them again if I want to. I don’t know much about classical music in general.”

The song changed and she turned back to Taeyeon, twirling in her new dress again. She closed her eyes and listened to the music for a moment, lips curved.

“Beautiful, right?”

Taeyeon stared at Tiffany. She inhaled, and exhaled. “Right,” she said.

She listened to it again when she got home, searching it on the internet and pressing replay every two minutes and forty-five seconds. She closed her eyes, and dreamed.

Taeyeon and Tiffany stood in that luminous garden of her youth, Tiffany in her new dress and Taeyeon in the clothes she had worn at the start of her memories. Tiffany took Taeyeon’s hand without a word and brought her closer and closer, and Taeyeon looked down at Tiffany’s dress and then back at her bright eyes. They danced, there on the grass, following the beat of the piano’s tune smoothly, stepping a leisurely waltz with their arms around each other and their bodies close, changing the lead every other turn. And Taeyeon could feel the warmth filling her up to the brim, a grin shaping her lips and her eyes only for Tiffany. Tiffany’s eye-smile came and went; sometimes a beaming look and sometimes quiet, content little smiles with her warm eyes, always given to Taeyeon.

Taeyeon slowed their dance to a halt and held Tiffany even closer. Without a word, without a moment’s

hesitation, she kissed her.

The phone was ringing incessantly when she woke up. Her hand scrabbled over the table to get close to it, knocking over an empty glass and scattering a few pens.

“Hello?” she grumbled.

“Dude, where are you? Are you coming to work today?”

Taeyeon frowned, and looked at the clock. “Huh?”

“It’s Monday! Ten o’clock in the morning! That’s traditionally considered to be work time in our industry, you know.”

“Monday morning...?” She parted the curtain slightly and squinted at the sunshine that flooded in. “Oh wow. I thought it was still Sunday night. I’m late for work!”

“*Now* she gets it. Hurry up and go to work! We’ll cover for you for a little while longer.”

“We?”

“Yeah, Yuri is here today.” Sunny’s voice lowered. “So is Jessica. Get here fast, okay?”

Taeyeon was locking her front door when she thought about her dream again, one arm still half-way stuck in her jacket sleeve and a piece of toast dangling between her teeth. The click of the lock reminded her of a camera’s shutter, and it seemed for a moment like she was there again, standing on the grass with Tiffany, kissing her.

She stopped. She leaned her forehead against the wooden door and took a slow breath. “Idiot,” she muttered. “Just go to work. Be crazy later.”

But she ended up being crazy again while she drove to work, tapping her fingers on the steering wheel in a slow rhythm that was undoubtedly a waltz. She took another deep breath, tasting the fresh air of a garden and the glimpse of Tiffany’s scent. Her eyes were slipping shut, and she snapped them open again immediately, almost swerving the car.

She stopped at a red light and smacked herself in the face. “Come on you little weirdo, focus! Is this developing into an obsession over Tiffany? Because that would be considered creepy...” She sighed. “Ah, forget it. Let’s just go to work and do office things. And stop talking to myself.”

The office seemed unusually cold when she arrived, and it made her freeze midway through unbuttoning her coat as she stepped through the doorway. She ran her gaze around the office; taking in the desolate sight of Yuri slumped at her desk, and Jessica busily putting blank pieces of paper through the shredder. Sunny took a sip from her coffee cup and sent SOS signals with her eyes. Taeyeon shrugged off her coat, letting the cold bite at her, and went to her desk.

After pretending to work for a while with Sunny's eyes boring into her back, she awkwardly turned around in her chair a few times and went over to Yuri's desk.

"Hey, buddy," she greeted faintly. "How are you?"

Yuri didn't answer. Her empty eyes were fixed on some point in space. Taeyeon reached out and put a hand on her shoulder, wincing at the sudden shock of static electricity from the fabric, and squeezed.

"Wanna talk about it?"

Yuri shook her head. "I don't need to say anything to you."

Taeyeon frowned, wounded. "Look Yuri, I'm sorry if my stupid meddling offended you, I'm really sorry. But can't we still be friends?"

Yuri turned to look at her, eyes dark. "No. I mean, I don't have to say anything to you, because you already know. Don't you know?"

"...What?"

Yuri just blinked at her. Sunny appeared, taking Taeyeon's arm and gently guiding her away. "Just give her some time."

Taeyeon shook her head. "Sunny. Sunny, something weird is going on. I think I'm going crazy."

"Nonsense," Sunny said. Their steps echoed. "You're not going crazy."

Taeyeon's frown deepened. Why were their steps echoing? She realised they were in the stairwell, its bareness around her and metal steps beneath her feet.

"Sunny, where are we going? Sunny?"

Sunny just gave her a reassuring pat on the back. "Tell me about these weird things that are going on."

Taeyeon stared at her, almost misplacing her foot, and swallowed. “Um, it’s nothing. Nothing, I think I just need to take a break or something. Oh look, here we are in the carpark, that’s perfect, I’ll just go home -”

“No.”

“What? Sunny, you’re really scaring me!”

Sunny let go of her arm and turned to face her in the carpark, the soles of her shoes scraping on the ground.

“Taeyeon. Taeyeon, wake up. Then you can go home. That’s where your home is.”

Taeyeon’s head shook. She was breathing hard, gulping for air, staring at Sunny with wide scared eyes and her hands trembled.

“Go,” Sunny said, her expression urgent. “Go home.”

Home. Taeyeon whipped around, almost tripping, and smacked into her car. She needed to go to Tiffany. Tiffany would know what was going on, why her world felt like it was fraying again and flickering like a dying light, and Tiffany would make her safe again.

Her fingers slipped and stumbled as she started the engine, and her feet slammed against the pedals as she twisted the steering wheel.

The tyres screeched as they fought with the tar road but their protests fell on deaf ears. Taeyeon’s mind was spinning, she blinked rapidly to try to stabilize everything, and her grip tightened and went slack. There was a crash as the car pummelled through a railing and the car flew.

She drifted. Taeyeon felt weightless, immaterial, insignificant, an inharmonious leaf being ungraciously carried by an ill wind. Her eyes were closed; it was not that she was in total darkness, rather that her eyes were tightly closed, held closed by her own volition. She didn’t want to see what was around her as she tumbled, and floated, and fell. She squeezed her eyes shut even tighter, eradicating the sense of a world outside of her mind, and thought of Tiffany.

Tiffany. Dear sweet Tiffany, who was so warm and would laugh and smile and hug; her lovely Tiffany, who would hold her hand and wish her well.

It was an odd feeling when the tears started to build up. Her pain and sorrow gathered fast behind her eyelids and waited their turn, waited for her to open her eyes so that they could storm.

Her face scrunched up, she could feel the contortion, as she fought to keep her eyes closed forever. A sob escaped her throat, and she shut her mouth to muffle the next one.

“Taeyeon?”

And then it was all over, just like that. Her eyes snapped open. She had no choice any more. An ethereal voice had entered her world. Her body fell flat on a soft surface, a pillow at the back of her head. She inhaled a deep ragged breath desperate for air.

“Taeyeon!”

She felt her limbs as the numbness dissipated. Her eyes adjusted, slowly, to show her an all too familiar sight. The hospital ceiling. The image that always opened for her nightmares and sleepless nights.

She turned her head, feeling that friend of fear creep along the edges of her mind. Was it all happening again? Was everything a dream? Was...

“...Tiffany?”

She was looking through murky water, everything blurred and dim. She blinked, rapidly, desperately, and strained to hear that voice again. Her hands scrabbled, at the side of the bed, at the wall behind her head, searching for something to make the room visible.

Her fingers shakily raked over a plastic switch and her world was swamped in pale whiteness.

There was no one there.

She blinked. And blinked again.

Her eyes turned from the empty hospital room to look down at her hands. She turned her palms to face her. She wanted to convince herself that she was real, that those hands had touched Tiffany; that Tiffany was real and the room around her was the dream.

Jeans, a t-shirt, and a thin hoodie. Those same clothes that had been burned into her memory. The only trace of life she had when she first surfaced from the darkness.

But now they were different. She frowned. They seemed different. These weren't the clothes that she had started her life in; these were the clothes she had pulled on carelessly on a Saturday afternoon when she had been woken from her daze by a shrill phone call. The legs of these jeans had touched the seat of her car; the sleeve of that hoodie had brushed against the hospital door; these clothes were familiar.

The shrill phone call. The call that pierced her as she sat immobile on her couch in her pyjamas, contemplating the purpose of her existence.

"It's Tiffany..."

Tiffany.

"She's hurt. She's been in an accident."

Tiffany, Tiffany, Tiffany.

"You'd better come. She'd want you here, Taeyeon."

"Tiffany."

She was up and out the door without even blinking, stumbling over her own feet as she skittered down the corridor.

"Tiffany!"

Her hands slapped against another door, her arms shoved the wood until it moved, she burst through into the room beyond, and she fell to her knees.

"Tiffany?"

The figure that lay on the bed silent and unmoving was undoubtedly Tiffany's; the face that remained still and frozen in beauty was Tiffany's; the heart that beat slowly and unsurely as measured by the beeping of a machine was Tiffany's, which she had once given to Taeyeon in full bloom.

Taeyeon broke. Her own heart cracked anew, a long jagged line next to the shoddily patched fissure just off centre. Her soul wept and it was all her body could do to echo.

But this too was familiar. She had been in this position recently, curled on the cold hospital floor, watching her love falter in a hospital bed. And the arm that came around her shoulders and picked her up off the ground was familiar also, the reassuring comfort of her friend.

“You’re awake,” Sunny said. Her voice was blank, carefully so, and she looked at Taeyeon with hesitation. “How do you feel?”

Taeyeon looked back at her, conscious of how her soul was rushing out of the crack in her heart like sand through broken glass, and said, “I love Tiffany. I love Tiffany.”

“It’s okay,” Sunny whispered, the words as empty as they sounded, and she sat Taeyeon down on the chair by the wall and sat next to her. “It’s okay, honey. She will be fine.”

Taeyeon covered her face with her hands and breathed. “I dreamed.”

“Was it a really wacky dream? When the doctors gave you those sedatives they said you might have weird dreams.”

“It didn’t feel like a dream,” Taeyeon murmured. “You were there. Tiffany was there. And Yuri and Jessica.”

“Who?”

“Yuri and Jessica.” She realised, suddenly, that they didn’t exist in this world. “Oh, never mind. It was a weird dream, yeah. I loved Tiffany there, too.”

Sunny sighed, and wrapped her arm firmly around Taeyeon. “All we can do is wait.”

And they waited, for hours and hours, and Taeyeon spent as many moments as she could with Tiffany, sitting next to her and talking to her and watching her eyes flicker behind their lids. Sunny knew to leave them alone often, and the click of the door behind her started Taeyeon’s new day.

“Good morning,” she said to Tiffany, and kissed her on the forehead. “The weather today is looking good. Not a cloud in sight. I had jelly for breakfast, hope you don’t mind. Today I want to tell you about the dream I had of you.”

She settled on the edge of the bed and took Tiffany’s hand in her own.

“You know, I’m really stupid. And I hurt you a lot. And these things haunted me in my dreams. I think it’s all pretty well summarized in the drug-induced dream I had when I came here. You see, I’ve been thinking about that dream a lot, and basically... I am nothing without you.”

She stroked Tiffany’s hair and gave her a weary smile.

“When I ran from you, I crashed. I stopped. My world disappeared, because you are my whole world, Tiffany. I had nothing left, and I was nothing. And when I tried to rebuild my life, I needed you, because you are my life. It’s funny; I kept trying to give myself hints all throughout my dream. It was all so normal, the world I was in, but every now and then there would be a rebuttal, a glimpse of something else. It was like my mind was having a conversation with itself, or my heart was discussing it all with my mind. Anyway, I had these friends there: Yuri and Jessica. You would have liked them, they’re great. But you see they were us.”

Taeyeon chuckled and shook her head.

“Crazy. I was falling in love with you all over again while their parallel was showing me what really happened to us, and my new life wouldn’t stick, couldn’t be built solid, because it faltered without you until it stuttered to a halt and I was brought full circle back to you. Those sedatives are really something. You know why I needed sedatives, right? I exploded when I saw you like this; I shattered into tiny little fragments on the floor. My mind was racing so fast. I just kept thinking about all the things I hadn’t told you, about all the chances I would never get, about all the thoughts and feelings I’ve had for you and that I still have. Ah, I’m really stupid. I hated myself so much. I could feel myself tearing up my insides at the very image of you at the precipice of death. You... I kept remembering everything about you. Your smiles, your hugs, your kisses, your words, your thoughts, your feelings, your dreams, your warmth, your love. Everything that is you.”

She leaned forward and rested her forehead on Tiffany’s.

“Remember that summer night at your parents’ house? It was warm. You were wearing that dress and we were barefoot on the grass. I couldn’t stop grinning. You hummed Satie’s third Gymnopédie and we danced. I didn’t kiss you. I didn’t kiss you like I wanted to. Did I ever tell you that I wanted to kiss you that night? I’m stupid. I should have kissed you. I should have kissed you every time I wanted to and every time you wanted me to.”

Taeyeon kissed Tiffany, soft and light and sweet.

“I need to tell you. I need you. I need you to know this now whether or not I’ll ever see you again after this moment.”

She kissed her again.

“I want you. I need you. I miss you. I love you.”

She pressed their lips together and breathed, “I am sorry.”

Everything was real again. The texture of Tiffany’s lips, the sound of her breathing inside her body, the warmth of her skin, and then there was the beautiful bright colour of her eyes appearing from behind her fluttering eyelids like the rise of the sun. Taeyeon smiled. This was her world, this was her home, and this was Tiffany.

“I love you.”

And it didn’t matter which one had said it first. Taeyeon knew now that Tiffany was in love with her too; again.

Tiffany hummed Satie’s third Gymnopédie, and once again gave Taeyeon her heart that was no longer weak, and Taeyeon kissed her again. Tiffany didn’t need to wonder, and Taeyeon didn’t need to dream.



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