To Chase A Dream

TaeNy

**chapter 1**

“KIM TAEYEON!”  
  
Several students jumped in their seats at the sudden yell. Heads turned towards the brunette with her head in her book and a small pool of drool under her slightly opened mouth. The girl didn’t move.  
  
The teacher sighed – used to the daily occurrence. She strode towards the desk and banged on it. The sleeping girl woke with a start.  
  
“Principal’s office after school.”  
  
The bleary eyed girl blinked and wiped her chin.  
  
“Now where was I…” The woman went back to the board. “Ah yes…” She continued the lesson.  
  
Everyone turned back towards the teacher except for a dark haired girl who kept staring at the yawning girl who was grimacing at the drool stained page in her book.  
  
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“Why do you keep staring at her like that?” She nudged her friend’s side.  
  
“H-huh?” The girl turned her head towards her questioning friend and realized that the mayo in her sandwich had dripped on her fingers. “Aish…” She reached for some napkins.  
  
“Seriously. Stop being fascinated by her. She’s a bad influence.” It was her other friend who spoke this time.  
She shrugged. “Everyone has a story, Yul. You can’t judge a book by its cover, remember?” She took another bite to quickly finish her lunch.  
  
“Can we judge it by its report card then? Because that clearly shows trouble as well.”  
  
“Or her tardiness record… or her trips to the principal’s office…” The other girl at the table commented – her mouth full of food.  
  
“Fine, fine. I get your point.”  
  
“So why do you keep staring at her like that?” The brunette beside her repeated her question. “You’re starting to resemble a stalker.”  
  
“I’m just…” She shrugged. “I don’t know… curious, I guess.”  
  
“What’s there to be curious about?”  
  
She slowed down her chewing. She wasn’t sure of that either. Kim Taeyeon was one of the school’s lowest ranked students. She always slept in class, rarely did her homework and was a frequent visitor to the principal’s office. She wasn’t rebellious; she never talked back to any teacher who scolded her and she never acted wild or broke any rules. To the other students, she was just lazy. Most of the teachers had given up on her. The only A in her report card was for music – the only subject she never fell asleep in.  
  
Tiffany had thought the same until that day she accidentally saw the short girl singing at the fancy restaurant her parents took her to for her birthday. She had to do a triple take to make sure that she wasn’t hallucinating – that it was really *the* Kim Taeyeon standing next to that piano; the ‘lazy’ girl that had been her classmate since freshman year. She never told anyone about this encounter – not even her closest friends. But since that night, she had found a growing interest in the girl.  
  
“Tiff…” She felt another nudge at her side and flinched. She suddenly realized that she had been staring at the girl at the far end of the cafeteria again.  
  
“Stop doing that, Jessi!” She slapped her friend’s arm.  
  
“Then stop daydreaming! What is it with you? Do you like her or something?”  
  
“Wha-…? Are you crazy?”  
  
“Then stop staring!”  
  
She sighed and finished the remaining sandwich in one bite.  
  
“What actually happened?” Sooyoung had finished her meal and was studying her while drinking slowly from her water bottle.  
  
“Nothing.” She wiped her mouth and hands and packed up her lunch box.  
  
“You know you can’t lie to us, right?”  
  
She ignored her tall friend and drank before standing up. She had noticed Taeyeon leaving and she intended to follow her. Today was the day she decided to start striking up a conversation with the short girl; just to satisfy her month-long curiosity that had reached its spilling point.  
  
“Whatever. I’ll see you guys later.”  
  
“Where are you going?!” Jessica called after her friend who didn’t hear her because she was already running out of the cafeteria.  
  
“What’s wrong with her?” Sooyoung asked.  
  
The other two shrugged and went back to finishing their lunch.  
  
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She rushed and ran after the disappearing back view of the girl. Turning a corner, she saw her going into a classroom - the music room.  
  
With furrowed brows she slowly approached the closed door and tiptoed to look through the glass pane. What she saw made her raise her eyebrows in confusion as Taeyeon seemed to do nothing but walk around the room; shaking her hands loose and flexing her shoulders and head. It seemed like she was warming up for something.  
  
She then saw the girl plugging her left ear with an earphone bud and turned on her iPod.  
  
A few seconds later and Taeyeon’s lips started to move.  
  
She knew that Taeyeon was singing.  
  
She kept watching and waiting to see what was going to happen next. Suddenly, the bell rang – signaling the end of the recess. She jumped at the sound and saw students rushing towards her. She didn’t realize that she had been standing there for at least fifteen minutes. She turned to look back through the glass when she saw a pair of eyes looking back at her from the other side.  
  
She let out a short scream before taking a step back.  
  
Taeyeon pushed the door open and shot her a clearly displeased look.  
  
She gulped and awkwardly tried to smile. “H-hello…” She could feel her cheeks blushing at being caught red handed like that.  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply her greeting. She simply kept staring at Tiffany and tilted her head.  
  
“I-I wasn’t spying on you or anything…” Tiffany stuttered. “I just t-thought-…”  
  
The second bell rang; signaling the start of their next class.  
  
Taeyeon simply walked past her.  
  
She stayed rooted in her place for a few more seconds before several running students made her side step and she realized that she had to rush back to her class as well.  
  
She quickly headed down the corridor.  
  
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A week had passed since that incident and Tiffany decided to not follow Taeyeon again for the time being.  
  
She had expected weird stares or maybe whispers of rumors between Taeyeon and her friends but, to her surprise, there were none. The way Taeyeon went around her days made it seem like nothing had happened at all. She was relieved but her curiosity had again become uncontainable. She had thus decided to try to at least apologize to the other girl.  
  
She finished her lunch in record speed – ignoring the questions and glares of her friends. She kept glancing at Taeyeon’s table; waiting for the moment when the girl would stand up and walk out of the cafeteria as usual.  
  
She finally saw Taeyeon leaving and followed her out amidst the headshakes and scolding of her friends. As expected, Taeyeon headed straight to the music room.  
  
She took a few seconds to calm herself down outside the closed door before knocking on it and pulling it open.  
  
Taeyeon ignored the visitor and kept doing what she was doing – relaxing and warming up her vocal chord a bit.  
  
Tiffany wanted to say something but didn’t want to interrupt Taeyeon’s concentration. She kept opening and closing her mouth like a goldfish – searching for the right time to speak.  
  
“What do you want?”  
  
The sudden sentence surprised her.  
  
Taeyeon put one of the earphone buds in her ear and scrolled through her mp3 player to find the right song. When she didn’t hear a reply, she decided to turn around to look at the nervous girl near the door.  
  
“What do you want?” She repeated her question.  
  
“I-…” Tiffany gulped and cleared her throat. “I-I… wanted to apologize.”  
  
“For?”  
  
“For… last week.” She looked down at her shoes.  
  
“Only for last week?”  
  
“Huh?” She looked up in surprise.  
  
“Aren’t you going to apologize for the other days as well?”  
  
Tiffany was left speechless.  
  
“It wasn’t the first time you followed me around or stared at me, right? It wasn’t the last either.”  
  
She blushed a bit and fiddled with the hem of her vest. “Sorry for that…” She waited for a response but when she heard a song instead; she was surprised and looked up at a Taeyeon who had begun singing with her back turned to her.  
  
She wanted to leave and give the girl some privacy but the same attraction to that voice she had heard that night froze her in place. She found herself staring at Taeyeon until the bell rang.  
  
Taeyeon stopped her singing and heaved a sigh as she pulled the earphone out of her ear and wound the cable around her iPod. She turned to see Tiffany still standing in the same place and lifted her eyebrows.  
  
“You’re still here?”  
  
“U-uhm… you didn’t actually accept my apology so…” She gulped.  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Fine. Apology accepted.” She then walked towards the door and pushed it open – leaving Tiffany alone in the room.  
  
Tiffany followed her out and quickened her step to be able to walk alongside her. “Your voice is really good, you know.”  
  
“…”  
  
“Do you always spend recess in the music room?”  
  
“…”  
  
“Where did yo-…”  
  
“Taeyeon-ah!”  
  
Tiffany stopped her sentence midway to see Taeyeon’s short friend approaching her. She knew the girl – having worked on a group project together once.  
  
Taeyeon acknowledged the greeting with a tilt of her chin and quickly turned right and went inside their classroom.  
  
The girl sighed, “Now what’s wrong…” She then looked at Tiffany and raised her eyebrows.  
  
Before Tiffany could say anything, she heard their teacher’s voice behind her.  
  
“Uhum…” He cleared his throat and the two girls ran inside.  
  
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Another week uneventfully went by and Tiffany had been spending her days watching Taeyeon practice her singing in the music room during recess.  
  
Taeyeon never told her to leave so she took it that she didn’t really mind her presence. They never talked though. Taeyeon would go about her practice and she would just sit down and listen.  
  
That day Taeyeon didn’t come to school. Tiffany had thought that the girl was late. It wouldn’t be the first time that happened so she kept looking at the door – expecting to see the girl walking in any moment. When half of the day had passed and there was still no sign of Taeyeon, she was busy thinking of ways to approach and ask Sunny – Taeyeon’s friend – about the girl’s whereabouts when an opportunity presented itself.  
  
“Hwang Tiffany.”  
  
She heard the deep voice and turned to look at the front of the classroom.  
  
“You have been staring at that door the entire class. Did you even hear anything I said?”  
  
She gulped. “I did, Mr. Lee.”  
  
“Really? What was the last thing I said?”  
  
She knew she was in trouble and quickly tried to save herself. “Err… a project?”  
  
He lifted his eyebrows and smirked. “Not bad. Yes, there is a project I want you to do. And since you obviously didn’t hear whom I partnered you up with…” He looked at the paper in his hand. “… I’m switching it. Maybe you’ll pay more attention to the lesson after this.”  
  
He scribbled something and looked at another student. “Jessica, you can team up with Sunny and Tiffany will work with Taeyeon.”  
  
Jessica shot Tiffany a disapproving glare and the latter could only mouth a quiet apology to her best friend. Not that they minded working with other people. It’s just that they were so used to work together. It wouldn’t take much effort to get good grades for any assignment because there’s no need to adjust to the other person. They already had their own well-oiled system.  
  
“Now that that’s settled…” The older man paused and put the paper down. He picked up his whiteboard marker. “Let us continue with the lesson. I hope you’ll find me more interesting than the door this time, Tiffany.”  
  
She nodded and straightened up. Her mind, though, was busy telling her to not smile and jump in joy at the new arrangement. She now had a legitimate reason to spend time with Taeyeon and to satisfy her curiosity.  
  
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The bell rang and everyone rushed out of their seats.  
  
“Sunny!” She called out to the short girl who was about to leave the classroom.  
  
The girl turned and tilted her head. “Yes?”  
  
“Can you help me with something?”  
  
It took a few seconds before Sunny reacted. “Err… I guess so.” She sensed that Tiffany didn’t want anyone else to overhear so she turned to her friend. “I’ll meet you in the cafeteria, Hyoyeon-ah…”  
  
“Okay.” The other girl took the hint and coolly picked up her bag and walked out of the room.  
  
Tiffany waited until everyone has left the room – including her puzzled looking friends. She gestured for them to go ahead.  
  
“How can I help you?” Sunny asked.  
  
“Err… as you have heard… I’m supposed to be working with Taeyeon on this project.”  
  
“So?”  
  
“So…” She tried to formulate her question as careful as she could.  
  
“Why are you so intrigued by Taeyeon anyway?”  
  
The question caught her off guard. “H-huh? What do you mean?”  
  
“Cut to the chase, Tiffany. I’m hungry and it’s lunch time. You have been following Taeyeon and watching her practice. And before that, I noticed that you have been staring at her or stealing glances at her when no one was looking… well, when you thought no one was looking anyway.” She folded her arms. “What’s the deal?”  
  
“There’s no deal…”  
  
“Then what are you doing?”  
  
“I-…” She sighed. “I don’t mean any harm…”  
  
Sunny waited for her nervous classmate to explain more.  
  
“It’s just…” She looked at the girl standing before her and wondered whether she could be trusted. Her past assignment experience taught her that Sunny was a down-to-earth girl who was smart and rich yet quite mature and confident in her own way. She was not the gossiper nor did she hang around the popular girls. She was always around Taeyeon and Hyoyeon and never seemed to mind other people’s business. Tiffany knew that Sunny was one of the nicer kids in school. She concluded that it might be alright to trust the short girl.  
  
She took a deep breath. “Can you promise me not to judge me or tell anyone what I’m about to tell you?”  
  
Sunny raised her eyebrows. “That depends. If you have any ill intention towards my best friend-…”  
  
“No, no!” Tiffany quickly interrupted; her hands waving in an attempt to reassure her classmate. “I swear I don’t have any hidden agenda.”  
  
“Then what is it?”  
  
She sighed again. “I heard her sing… at a restaurant… more than a month ago?” She paused. “And…”  
  
“Taeyeon has a great voice.”  
  
Tiffany nodded in agreement.  
  
“I see.” Sunny tried to suppress a smile. “You’re curious.”  
  
“Huh? What? No!”  
  
“Yes, you are.”  
  
“I’m not!”  
  
“How long have you known her?”  
  
“Err… since freshman year?”  
  
Sunny nodded. “And how many times have you talked to her?”  
  
“Err… twice…?” She winced.  
  
“You’re curious.”  
  
Tiffany deflated.  
  
“Who told you about her training?”  
  
“Huh? What training?”  
  
“You don’t know that she’s a trainee?”  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “What trainee?”  
  
Sunny suddenly looked confused. “You really don’t know? Then why are you…” She furrowed her brows.  
  
“Look. I don’t know what training you’re talking about and yes, I admit it might sound strange… I mean… that’s why I asked you not to judge me…”  
  
A low growl suddenly cut her thoughts and Sunny blushed a bit. “Sorry. I had to skip breakfast because I woke up late today.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “I’m sorry for keeping you from lunch.” She then gestured for them to walk out of the classroom.  
  
“You haven’t told me how I can help you.” Sunny said; prying her lunch box open and stuffed a slice of kimbab into her mouth to appease her empty stomach.  
  
“Can you tell me more about her?”  
  
Sunny stopped in her tracks and hurriedly chewed and swallowed before talking. “Why don’t you just ask her yourself?”  
  
“She might think I’m creepy…”  
  
Sunny couldn’t hold back her laughter. “You *are* creepy.” She started to walk again. “Asking her yourself – getting to know her – will be more natural since you guys will be working together anyway. Asking me? Now that’s creepy. It’s like you’re digging up information on a crush or something…”  
  
Tiffany’s eyes widened. “It’s not like that!”  
  
“Relax, I’m just saying.” She smiled and put another slice of the rolled rice in her mouth. “Tell you what…” She covered her mouth with her hand to prevent the bits of food from flying out. “How ‘bout you try to ask her first then come to me when she won’t answer?” She tried to grin with her full mouth. “I can’t promise you I’ll answer everything – there are secrets I’m sworn to keep for life, you know. But I will try my best.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “THANK YOU!” She then hugged the chewing short girl by reflex.  
  
Sunny coughed as she almost choked due to surprise of the sudden act.  
  
“Oh, sorry!” Tiffany let go and patted Sunny’s back. “Thanks. I owe you.”  
  
“No problem,” she answered after she had managed to swallow her food safely and calmed down. “Just… don’t expect too much okay? And you might want to… err…” She changed her mind. “Never mind.”  
  
“Huh? What do you mean?”  
  
She smiled kindly. “Nothing.”  
  
They entered the cafeteria and parted ways – each going to her friends.  
  
Tiffany couldn’t help but wonder what Sunny meant with her last and unfinished sentence but decided to shrug it off for the time being. She was bombarded with questions and scolding from her three friends and had to suffer their wrath until the bell could save her.  
  
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“Stop being so stubborn and LISTEN TO ME!!”  
  
She pulled the phone away from her ear. “YAH! Don’t yell at me!”  
  
“Then stop being so stubborn and get some rest!”  
  
“I have practice!”  
  
“I know but you’re sick!”  
  
“I’m not! I was just tired after yesterday’s showcase and I’ve slept all day, okay?”  
  
Sunny sighed. She didn’t like being the nagging one but she had to. Someone had to talk some sense into Taeyeon from time to time so she took up the role.  
  
“So what happened in school today?” Taeyeon held the phone between her ear and shoulder while using her hands to pull up her sweatpants. She was getting ready to go to practice.  
  
“Well… we got a new assignment. A science project.”  
  
She groaned. “Group project?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“Are we in the same group?” She tried to zip up her hoodie.  
  
“Nope.”  
  
She groaned again – holding the phone with one hand while the other snatched her keys.  
  
“Don’t worry. I think you might like this project, for once.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Your partner.”  
  
“Huh? Who’s my partner?” She placed the phone between her ear and shoulder again while squatting down to tie her shoes.  
  
“You’ll find out soon enough.”  
  
“Just tell me!”  
  
“Now where’s the fun in that?”  
  
She sighed and straightened up. “At least a hint?”  
  
Sunny started to sing a trot song and she grimaced. “Yah! Why are you singing?”  
  
She heard a giggle and froze as she thought of the title of the song she was hearing. Sunny’s continuous singing brought her back to her senses and she yelled again. “YAH! I don’t have a crush on her!”  
  
“Yes you do.”  
  
“No, I don’t! I’ve told you that a million times!”  
  
Sunny sighed. “Whatever…”  
  
“I don’t like girls! I call one person gorgeous and you immediately assume that I have a crush on her!”  
  
“You were practically staring at her everyday during freshman year while in class. Admit it!”  
  
“Is it wrong to admire someone’s beauty every now and then?”  
  
“No. I understand your crush…”  
  
“It’s not a crush!” She face-palmed.  
  
“Sure, Taeng. Sure…” Sunny snickered. “Your two-and-a-half years wait might be over soon.”  
  
“Sigh… Fine. Say what you want. I need to go now.” She put on her jacket – switching the hold on her phone from one hand to the other.  
  
“Don’t push yourself too hard. You’re still exhausted and there’s school tomorrow.”  
  
“Sure.” Her mind was clearly elsewhere now. “See you tomorrow.”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
“Bye.” She hung up and walked out of the dorm towards the elevator. She pushed the button and put her phone in her pocket. She silently resented her best friend for being so persistent with her teasing. She admitted to admire Tiffany’s beauty ever since the first time she saw her but that didn’t mean that she was having a crush on her. She was just admiring from afar. Even when Tiffany had started to steal glances in her direction and even followed her during recess; she never expected to be friends with the girl. And although she couldn’t understand the sudden change of behavior, she didn’t mind having Tiffany around during her lunchtime practices.  
  
The elevator dinged and the doors slid open.  
  
She stepped in and pressed a button. She exhaled and leaned sideways on the metal wall – silently telling herself to get a grip and to focus on her upcoming practice.

**chapter 2**

She was about to put another chopstick full of rice into her mouth when she heard the voice.  
  
“H-hi…”  
  
She closed her mouth and turned to see Tiffany standing next to her table.  
  
“Hi.” She gave a flat reply and took the bite before the bits of rice fell back into her bowl.  
  
“I-… err…” Tiffany cleared her throat. “I’m your science project partner.”  
  
“I’ve heard.”  
  
She felt Sunny kicking her under the table and glared at her best friend. She sighed and scooted – making room for Tiffany to sit down next to her.  
  
Tiffany understood and slowly sat down. “I’ve finished my lunch. I just… wanted to ask whether… I mean when we could… err… get started on the project…”  
  
“Oh.” She continued eating.  
  
This time it was Hyoyeon who kicked her leg. “Ow!” She kicked her friend back and saw the two girls glaring at her from across the table. She sighed and put down her chopsticks before turning to look at the nervous girl.  
  
“When’s the deadline?”  
  
“I think we have about three weeks…” Tiffany turned to Sunny for confirmation and the latter nodded.  
  
“Almost a month, actually. He’s pretty relaxed… doesn’t rush us that much, thankfully,” Sunny said.  
  
“We have plenty of time then,” Taeyeon nonchalantly commented and picked up her chopsticks again.  
  
“B-but… we don’t even know what to make yet…” Tiffany didn’t like to procrastinate her schoolwork; especially when she had never worked with her partner before.  
  
Taeyeon shrugged.  
  
“Taeng, it’s not just your grade at stake here. Please be considerate.” It was Hyoyeon’s turn to speak.  
  
Tiffany was silently grateful for the two girls. She had a feeling that this project would be mostly a solo effort considering how Taeyeon was behaving. Her admiration for the girl took quite a hit. She was sure that Taeyeon was not a mere lazy student – but her behavior was saying otherwise.  
  
Taeyeon finished her lunch quietly and finally turned to look at Tiffany again. “I don’t have much free time after school so the best we can do is make use of the recess and lunchtime.”  
  
“How about weekends?”  
  
Taeyeon shook her head.  
  
Tiffany was about to ask why when Taeyeon suddenly stood up.  
  
“Let’s just start now then if you’re so worried about it…”  
  
“Huh? What about your… err… practice?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “I can practice later.” She started to walk away from the table.  
  
Tiffany turned to the two friends at the table but both merely shook their heads. She sighed and followed Taeyeon out of the cafeteria.  
  
“Where are we going?” She finally caught up with Taeyeon.  
  
She didn’t reply so Tiffany decided to just follow her and see for herself. She started to worry about the way they were communicating. Taeyeon seemed so unpredictable and indifferent to everything around her.  
  
She was almost out of breath – following Taeyeon who was endlessly climbing the stairs. She finally saw the girl pushing a heavy door open and knew instantly where they were heading.  
  
“The roof?”  
  
“A quiet place to talk.” That’s all Taeyeon said as she started to climb the final flight of stairs.  
  
She stopped at the top of the stairs and tried to catch her breath.  
  
Taeyeon, however, leisurely moved to one side and sat down on one of what looked like old lawn chairs. She took out her mp3 player and plugged an earphone bud into one of her ears and started to hum along with the song.  
  
Tiffany finally calmed down and went to sit at the other chair after dusting it off a bit.  
  
“You come here often?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Sometimes.”  
  
Tiffany didn’t know what else to say for a moment.  
  
“So what’s the project about?” Taeyeon finally asked.  
  
“Err… Mr. Lee said we could do anything we want as long as it’s related to earth.”  
  
“Earth?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Yes, so a mock up of the constellation is out of the question.”  
  
Taeyeon scoffed. “That’s grade school stuff anyway.”  
  
“Just giving you an example, that’s all.” She was getting irritated by Taeyeon’s unenthusiastic replies. “Look…” She took a deep breath. “I’m just as unhappy as you are with this assignment, okay? I wish I got another partner too.”  
  
Taeyeon slightly raised her eyebrow.  
  
“But let’s just try to make the best out of this. I don’t want my grade to suffer and I hope you’ll at least put in enough effort to make sure we pass.”  
  
The other girl didn’t answer. She leaned back and started staring at the sky.  
  
Tiffany was waiting for a reaction and when a few minutes passed without even a small movement from Taeyeon, she felt her anger rising. She was about to scold the other girl for not seeming to care when Taeyeon suddenly spoke.  
“What about a global warming related topic? It seems to be a pretty relevant issue. There’s bound to be plenty of information about it online.” She then moved her head back to look at a surprised Tiffany. “Why are you so shocked? Bad idea?”  
  
“N-no! I just thought…” She stopped herself before she said anything that could hurt Taeyeon’s feelings. She wasn’t expecting her to be thinking. “That sounds good actually.”  
  
“I’m not sure what we should do specifically though…”  
  
“Well, we could brainstorm at the library? Use one of the computers…”  
  
Taeyeon nodded then looked at her watch. “Is tomorrow okay? The bell’s about to ring.” She pulled the earphone out of her ear and wound the cable around her music player.  
  
Before Tiffany could answer, she heard the loud sound signaling the end of their lunchtime. “Fine. Tomorrow at the library. Same time?”  
  
Taeyeon stood up. “Sure.” She waited until Tiffany stood up as well before moving towards the open door.  
  
They made their way back down hurriedly.  
  
“Are you sure you’re okay with the time?” Tiffany finally asked when they reached the corridor.  
  
“What time?”  
  
“This… after lunch.”  
  
“Why shouldn’t I?”  
  
“Your singing practice…”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged and said nothing else as the bell rang for the second time – just as they reached their class entrance. She kept walking towards her desk and sat down, leaving Tiffany staring at her from the doorway before slowly going to her desk as well.  
  
She caught Sunny’s gaze and looked away – pretending to be busy with preparing her books for the next lesson.  
  
She saw Tiffany talking to her friends and silently sighed. That girl is indeed gorgeous… and nice too, she said to herself before furrowing her brows in an attempt to clear her head. And for the first time in her life, she was actually glad to see the teacher walking into the class and quickly got ready to teach.  
  
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“You haven’t changed, have you?”  
  
“What are you talking about?” She turned the page of her book and stifled a yawn.  
  
“You’re always so cold towards the people you like…”  
  
“What are you implying?”  
  
“Do you want me to sing again?”  
  
She groaned. “No thanks. I need my ears. And I don’t have a crush on her.” She quickly added the last part before her best friend could accuse her of liking Tiffany in that way.  
  
“Whatever, Taeng. You know I’m always right.”  
  
“Nosy is more like it.”  
  
Sunny ignored the comment. “Have you done the math and English homework?”  
  
“I’m doing it right now, Mother.”  
  
“Just trying to help here, Taeng.”  
  
“Then stop nagging!”  
  
“It’s for your own good.”  
  
She sighed. “I can’t wait to get out of school.”  
  
“Just six months to go. You’ll live. Make sure you pass the final exams though…”  
  
“You know I always pass.”  
  
“With good grades, Taeng. Not just your usual minimum effort.”  
  
“Hey! I passed didn’t I?”  
  
“Yes but your report card looks so discouraging.”  
  
“I don’t need it anyway.”  
  
Sunny sighed. She had had the same conversation with her friend for at least a hundred times. “You know what I’m about to say next, right?”  
  
“Yeah, yeah… School is important, Taeng… what if you don’t become a singer? What if you need to find a normal job instead? You need the proper qualifications. Plus, you’re not stupid, Taeng… you’re just lazy…” She repeated the words she had known by heart in a mocking imitation of Sunny’s voice.  
  
“Yah! You know I’m right.”  
  
“Yes, Mother.”  
  
She sighed again. “Taeng…”  
  
“See you tomorrow okay?”  
  
“Fine. Try not to be late?”  
  
“We’ll see.”  
  
Sunny didn’t want to argue anymore. “Right. Bye then.”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
She hung up and put both her phone and pencil down. She buried her head in her palms. She was tired from the long practice and all she wanted to do was sleep. But she knew her friend was right. She had to at least pass her final year with better grades than her previous years. She groaned and straightened up – grabbing her pencil again and quickly tried to focus so she could finish her homework and go to bed as soon as possible.  
  
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“Excuse me, Mr. Lee…” Tiffany approached the man who was gathering his papers and books.  
  
“Yes, Tiffany?”  
  
“I have a question about the project.”  
  
He straightened up. “Oh? What is it?”  
  
“Can we measure air temperature with an ordinary thermometer?”  
  
He chuckled. “What do you think?”  
  
“I… don’t think we can…”  
  
He nodded.  
  
“So what should I use?”  
  
“What’s your topic?”  
  
“Global warming. We’re thinking of proving the effect of carbon dioxide on environmental temperature… it’s what makes the earth warmer, right?”  
  
He smiled a little. “That’s right. If you could prove it, that is. It’s a good topic. You came up with it?”  
  
Tiffany knew the insinuation behind the question. “Actually, it was Taeyeon’s idea.”  
  
His eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Really?”  
  
She nodded. “Yes. She thought that since global warming has been a hot issue lately, it would be easier for us to find references and resources on the matter.”  
  
“I see…” He then paused. “Where is your partner then?”  
  
She hesitated. “I think she’s sick…” Taeyeon didn’t come to school again that day.  
  
He decided to not discuss the matter anymore. “You can use an infrared thermometer to measure air temperature within a confined space. I assume you’ll be using some kind of sealed container?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Aquariums, Sir.” She suddenly realized that she didn’t know what an infrared thermometer was and how it looked like. “Err… where can I buy this infrared thermometer? And is it expensive?”  
  
“The price varies. I suggest you go to the hardware store and ask around. Take your father with you.”  
  
“I see. Okay then.” She smiled. “Thank you, Mr. Lee.” She bowed a little and left the classroom.  
  
He sighed and hoped that his decision to mix these two together would somehow help Taeyeon improve her grades. He was worried and pessimistic about her contribution to the project but after hearing Tiffany’s words, he was a bit relieved to know that at least that girl was trying.  
  
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She woke with a start at the sound of the buzzer. She groaned and refused to move – hoping that one of her roommates would open the door.  
  
When nothing happened after the third buzz she slowly threw her covers aside and dragged her feet towards the living room.  
  
She approached the small screen and squinted. She was surprised to see the familiar face and quickly lifted the receiver. “Tiffany?!”  
  
“Taeyeon? Hi!” The face in the screen smiled.  
  
“What are you doing here?”  
  
“I heard you’re sick. Are you okay?”  
  
“I’m fine.”  
  
“Oh.” For a second, the girl didn’t know what to say or do. She then lifted the plastic bag in her hand. “I have food… have you had lunch?”  
  
Frankly, she hadn’t. But she didn’t want to trouble her classmate. “I have.”  
  
“Oh well, then you can eat this for dinner.”  
  
She didn’t reply.  
  
“Taeyeon? Still there?”  
  
“Err… yes?”  
  
“Can I come in? I asked Mr. Lee about our project…” She thought using schoolwork as an excuse might help her cause.  
  
She hesitated and sighed. “Fine.” She buzzed the building door open and put the receiver back in its place. She then waited until the doorbell rang before opening the apartment door and letting Tiffany in.  
  
“Wow… so many shoes you got here…” Tiffany commented as she took off hers and stepped inside.  
  
“They’re not all mine, you know.”  
  
“Oh?” She looked at them and noticed that none were men’s shoes. “These are your mother’s and sister’s?”  
  
Taeyeon shook her head and walked into the living room – throwing herself on the couch. She was still feeling weak and unwell. “Do you think my mother would wear colorful sneakers?”  
  
Tiffany grinned. “Well, no… but…” She wasn’t sure she understood.  
  
Taeyeon finally sighed. “They’re my roommates.”  
  
“Oh?” She was surprised at the revelation. “You live alone? I mean… away from your parents?”  
  
“Yes.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Why do you need to know?”  
  
“Why are you so rude and unnecessarily defensive?”  
  
Taeyeon sighed again and closed her eyes. Her head felt heavy and she didn’t need the argument.  
  
Tiffany realized that it might not be the best time to argue considering Taeyeon’s health. She looked around and saw the dining table. “I’ll put the food here, okay? Make sure you take some medicine too.”  
  
The girl on the couch didn’t reply.  
  
It was Tiffany’s turn to sigh. “Anyway, Mr. Lee said we can’t use an ordinary thermometer to measure air temperature.”  
Taeyeon opened her eyes.  
  
“We need an infrared thermometer.”  
  
She turned towards the standing girl. “A what?”  
  
“An infrared thermometer.” Tiffany opened her bag and took out a book. “I’ll ask my father to come search with me. Mr. Lee said we can buy one at a hardware store.” She then walked towards the couch and set the book on the coffee table. “Mrs. Park returned our workbooks. I thought I’d bring you yours. We need to complete exercise 5 until 10 next. It’s due on Wednesday.”  
  
“Oh.” Taeyeon could only stare at the book.  
  
“So once we get the thermometer, we can start the experiment?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded. Her eyes were still on the table.  
  
“When are you available? I assume it won’t take long… an hour to set up and an hour to observe… more or less. We’ll do the second experiment some other day.”  
  
Taeyeon stood up and went inside what Tiffany assumed was her room. She came out with a long rubber hose and a blue desk lamp. She set the items on the coffee table and went back inside her room. She then walked out with two more desk lamps; one pink and one white. “Got the hose and the lights.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “Nice!” She then took out her notebook and started to cross the items they had off her list.  
  
“Just make sure we don’t break the lamps. My roommates would kill me.” She sat back down on the couch.  
  
“Don’t worry. We only need them during the experiments. They won’t have to part with their lamps for long. Let’s just leave them here for now.”  
  
“Did you find the aquariums?”  
  
She nodded.  
  
“And the soil?”  
  
“Yep. My mother took me to this garden depot thing yesterday. We have a huge sack of soil at our disposal.” She closed her notebook. “All we need now is the thermometer, some duck tape and plastic sheets and we’re ready to go.” She smiled.  
  
“Okay.” That’s all Taeyeon said. She wanted to go back to sleep.  
  
Tiffany noticed. “Have you taken any medicine?”  
  
“No need. I’ll be better in no time.”  
  
She sighed and walked towards the couch. She sat down next to the surprised girl and put her hand on Taeyeon’s forehead.  
  
“Yah!”  
  
She ignored the objection and frowned. “You’re very warm.”  
  
“I’ll be fine.” Taeyeon moved her face away from Tiffany’s hand – feeling her cheeks slightly blushing at the contact.  
  
“Do you have any cold medicine?”  
  
“I think so.”  
  
“Then take some! Eat, drink lots of water and get plenty of rest.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed and muttered under her breath. “Oh great… another nagging ahjumma…”  
  
“What did you say?”  
  
“Nothing.”  
  
Tiffany didn’t say anything else and wondered whether she could ask some of the questions that had been occupying her mind. They had been working together on this project for more than a week yet she still didn’t know much about her partner. Taeyeon was reserved. So much so that Tiffany had to beg Sunny to tell her where Taeyeon lived and why she didn’t come to school that day.  
  
“One question.”  
  
“W-what?” Taeyeon’s voice startled her.  
  
“You get one question a day. And I reserve the right to not answer you.”  
  
“What are you talking about?”  
  
Taeyeon turned to look at her. “You’re curious, right? I’m giving you a chance to ask. Use it wisely because the offer expires as soon as we’re done with this project.” She then leaned back and closed her eyes again. “So go ahead. Ask. Then please let me go back to sleep…”  
  
Tiffany felt a bit guilty for keeping Taeyeon away from her bed. She also felt embarrassed for being so transparent about her curiosity towards the other girl. The chance was too good to pass up on, though.  
  
“Fine. Why don’t you live with your parents?”  
  
“Because they live in Jeonju.” Taeyeon stood up. “Please make sure that you close the door properly when you leave?” She picked up the rubber hose. “You want to bring this back home or leave it here?”  
  
“That wasn’t a proper answer.”  
  
“It was. You asked me and I answered.”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “An explanation would be nice… like why you live in Seoul while your parents live all the way in Jeonju.”  
  
“One question per day.” She pointed at the hose in her hand. “The hose?”  
  
“You’re so stubbornly annoying.” Tiffany couldn’t help but pout. She then grabbed the hose. “I’ll bring it home in case you forget to bring it later.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply and started to walk towards her room instead.  
  
Tiffany gave up and decided to just leave before she started to scold a sick person. She couldn’t figure out why Taeyeon’s so cold towards her.  
  
“Get well soon, okay?” She stood in the room’s doorway and saw two bunk beds. Taeyeon was lying down in one of them – on the lower bed. Tiffany noticed the room’s somewhat messy condition and made a mental note to ask Taeyeon about it tomorrow – after careful formulation of her question. She then turned around to leave after she didn’t get any reply from the other girl. She shook her head; exasperated at Taeyeon’s behavior but powerless to argue.  
  
Tiffany made sure the apartment door was closed properly before pushing the elevator button. She had just pushed the building door open when she heard her phone’s alert tone. She saw the incoming message and smiled.  
  
“Thanks, by the way, for the food and the book. Let me know when you’ve arrived home.”  
  
She knew it was weird how such a simple message from Taeyeon could erase every annoyance and anger she felt towards her otherwise cold partner. It was why she still managed to stick with her. Taeyeon always made up for her ignorance one way or another.  
  
She quickly replied the message.  
  
“No problem. Get well soon, okay?”  
  
She didn’t expect a reply so she pocketed her phone and made her way home – skipping lightly every few steps with a smile on her face.  
  
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“So what’s her story?” Jessica stopped her typing.  
  
“What’s whose story?”  
  
“Your friend, Taeyeon.”  
  
Sunny didn’t turn to look. “Why do you want to know?”  
  
“Because I don’t want to see my best friend get hurt.”  
  
She stopped reading. “What do you mean?”  
  
“Oh come on. We both know that Tiffany has this… uhm… curiosity… about Taeyeon.”  
  
“So? That’s her own business, right?”  
  
“Yes but put yourself in my shoes. How would you react?”  
  
Sunny sighed. “Contrary to popular belief, Taeyeon’s not a bad kid…”  
  
Jessica lifted her eyebrows but didn’t say anything.  
  
“She’s not! She’s just… distracted.”  
  
“Distracted?”  
  
“She has other things in mind besides school, okay? She’s not dumb nor is she lazy on purpose.”  
  
“She’s not exactly trying to prove otherwise…”  
  
“Look, I know you’re trying to protect your best friend and I appreciate that. But can you do it without insulting my best friend?”  
  
“Sorry… didn’t mean to do that. It’s just that…” She couldn’t finish her sentence. “Is it true? She’s training to be an idol?”  
  
“A singer. She’s training to be a singer.”  
  
“What’s the difference?”  
  
Sunny sighed again. “She doesn’t want to be an idol. She wants to sing. She has a great voice, for your information. She won the best singer contest at the agency she’s training. That’s how she entered the program.”  
  
“Oh…” Jessica felt a bit guilty. “But the rumors…”  
  
“Yeah, I’ve heard the rumors.” Sunny continued to read the book in her hands. “Whether she’ll become an idol or not, the decision isn’t exactly hers. It’s her agency’s.”  
  
“I see.”  
  
Jessica was still curious. She wanted to know more; just for the sake of her best friend.  
  
“All she ever dreamed about was to become a singer. That’s her goal in life.” Sunny said as she turned the page. She knew what her classmate was thinking about. “And unfortunately, that’s the reason why she doesn’t pay enough attention in school. The life of a trainee isn’t exactly fun and games, you know. It’s hard to balance. We get off school and go home. She doesn’t. She goes to another ‘school’ that sometimes ends well after midnight.”  
  
“R-right.”  
  
“And if you’re wondering why she’s so quiet and distant all the time…” She turned to look at the other girl – her face impassive. “It’s because of all the people who want to hang around her just because she happens to be a trainee and has a chance to be famous one day. Taeyeon detests such fake people. And so do I.”  
  
“I’m only asking these questions because of Tiffany, you know.” Jessica somehow resented the insinuation. “Trust me, I couldn’t care less if she were the president of the United States.”  
  
Sunny held back her smile. “I know. But in case you and your friends are wondering why she’s behaving that way…” She sighed. “She’s a good kid, okay? People tend to misunderstand her and I also wish she would care more about school but I can’t blame her for being so determined to fulfill her dream.” She paused and smiled freely, “I even envy her actually…”  
  
“Huh? Why?”  
  
“Don’t you wish you know exactly what you want to do or to be in life? And just do everything – focus everything – to get there? Instead of wondering which major to take after this and what kind of job you would want to do later on?”  
  
Jessica thought for a second. “I see what you mean…”  
  
Sunny went back to her book. “So now you know. And I hope you won’t tell anybody about this. Taeyeon doesn’t like to brag.”  
  
“I won’t. Thanks for telling me.”  
  
She shrugged. “I figured I could trust you… since you’re Tiffany’s best friend and she’s a nice kid.”  
  
Jessica smiled. “She is. Although I don’t know why she’s so fascinated by your best friend…”  
  
“Tell me about it.” Sunny rolled her eyes and suddenly thought of something. “Did she ever tell you her reason? For following Taeng around and all that?”  
  
“Taeng?”  
  
“Oh. That’s our nickname for Taeyeon.” She grinned.  
  
“Ah.” She then shook her head. “She never told me, us, anything. We don’t understand it either.”  
  
“I see.” Sunny paused to think before shrugging. “Oh well…”  
  
Jessica went back to her laptop and continued to search for more project resources. “By the way… should Tiff ask about Taeyeon… can I tell her what you told me?”  
  
“Depends…”  
  
She stopped clicking and turned. “On what?”  
  
“On whether it’s necessary to do so.”  
  
“Ah… I see what you mean.”  
  
Sunny nodded and Jessica decided to drop the matter for now and focus on their project instead.

**chapter 3**

“Taeyeon!”  
  
She balanced the empty fish tank in her arms and quickly went after the short girl. She saw Taeyeon turning left at the end of the corridor and broke into a run to follow her.  
  
“Taeyeon?”  
  
She heard the sound of a heavy door closing shut. She picked up her pace again.  
  
She tried to open the door with one hand and saw a long flight of stairs going up and the view of Taeyeon’s back disappearing into the light at the end of it. She immediately climbed the stairs.  
  
“Taeyeon!”  
  
She tried to catch her breath once she reached the top.  
  
“What are you doing?”  
  
She saw Taeyeon standing in the middle of the roof; slowly unwinding the cables from the rectangular object in her hand and plugging both ears with her earphone.  
  
“Hey! We’re supposed to be working on our project!”  
  
Taeyeon ignored her and she began to get angry.  
  
She stepped up to the girl but stopped in her tracks when she heard Taeyeon’s voice. The same strangely soothing and melodious voice that had seemed to entrance her over and over again. She forgot what she was about to say and stood listening.  
  
Taeyeon suddenly turned around and their eyes met.  
  
She could feel her heart racing at the piercing gaze.  
  
Taeyeon stopped singing and took a step forward. Then another and another – until they were just one step away from each other.  
  
She gulped.  
  
She saw Taeyeon’s hand reaching out and touched her cheek before it went into her hair at the back of her head.  
  
The next thing she knew, there were soft warm lips upon hers.  
  
She knew that it was wrong but she had somehow lost the ability to fight. She found herself responding instead; slipping her arms around Taeyeon’s small waist.  
  
She felt Taeyeon’s other hand sneaking its way around her back and she gasped.  
  
The kiss was starting to increase its intensity and she could’ve sworn she felt Taeyeon’s tongue when a loud ring woke her up with a start and she gasped loudly. Her eyes shot open and she saw a ceiling.  
  
Her breath was shallow and her heart was still beating too fast for her liking.  
  
It was just a dream, she realized a few seconds later.  
  
She took deep breaths to calm herself down and reached to slam the annoying alarm’s off button.  
  
She lay in the silence and replayed what just went through her mind.  
  
Her fingers unknowingly went to her lips.  
  
It felt so real.  
  
She could feel her stomach lurch at the thought of Taeyeon’s soft lips on hers.  
  
What am I thinking?! She fiercely shook her head and sat up – trying to get rid of the images and the uncomfortably warm feeling that lingered. She quickly went out of her room and into the bathroom. She hoped a cold shower could set her mind straight again.  
  
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“Are you okay?”  
  
“H-huh?” She snapped out of her daze and looked to see three pairs of concerned eyes staring at her from across the table.  
  
She heaved a sigh. “I’m fine.” She put down her fork and lost all appetite.  
  
“You’re not fine. You’ve been quiet all morning,” Yuri said. “What’s wrong, Fany-ah?”  
  
“Nothing’s wrong.” She took a sip of her drink – trying to hide her face behind the glass.  
  
“Oh come on. Enough already.” Sooyoung dropped her chopsticks.  
  
They all knew it’s serious when the tallest let something interrupt her eating.  
  
“You’ve been acting strange for almost two months now! You follow that kid everywhere! You disappear on us everyday, right after lunch. You never told us why and we had stopped asking because we respect your privacy. And now that you’ve been strangely quiet and distracted all day; don’t you think it’s about time you start talking to us? Tell us what on earth is going on with you? If you still think of us as your best friends, that is.” The last sentence came out in a hurt tone. “If not, then fine. I’ll live with that.” She harshly picked up her chopsticks again and shoved the food into her mouth – chewing angrily.  
  
The table was quiet for the next few seconds.  
  
“Sorry…” She looked down on her half empty plate. “I didn’t mean to make you guys feel that way.”  
  
“We’re concerned, Tiff.” Jessica gently spoke. She was poking her food with her spoon. “We care. We want to help. But you’ve been so distant… we don’t know what to do.” She sighed. “You don’t even hang out with us much outside of school lately. We all have the same science project going on but you seem to spend all your free time hunting for equipment or material or whatever. Not that it’s wrong, of course… but come on. I don’t think this project takes up that much of your time, does it? I mean… *we* still manage to see each other…” She gestured towards the silent Yuri and the fervently chewing Sooyoung.  
  
“Sorry,” she apologized again. “I know I’ve been… distracted.” She looked around the table apologetically. “But I’m fine. I really am. I just… didn’t get much sleep last night, that’s all. Bad dream and stuff. Nothing serious.”  
  
“Why are you so fascinated with that Kim Taeyeon, then?” Sooyoung spoke again. She was through being subtle.  
  
“I-…” Tiffany wasn’t sure how to explain it.  
  
“I never expected you to be one of them, you know.” Yuri said.  
  
“Huh? One of who?” She looked at her tanned friend questioningly.  
  
“One of those groupies who stick to anyone popular or famous… or who might become popular or famous.”  
  
“What?!” Her eyes widened. “Groupies?! What are you talking about?”  
  
“You don’t know?”  
  
“Know what?”  
  
“You never heard the rumors?” Yuri was surprised at her friend’s obliviousness.  
  
“Taeyeon’s training to be a singer.” Jessica calmly stated.  
  
Her eyes grew even wider.  
  
“So you don’t know.” Yuri exhaled in relief. “Thank goodness… I was afraid that I was wrong about my best friend. That would’ve sucked.” She smiled a little. “Glad to know you haven’t changed, Fany.”  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “Wait a minute. I’m confused.” She paused to digest their conversation. She remembered Sunny’s words and suddenly, it all made sense. “You think that I’m *that* kind of person?” She pointed her finger at Yuri. “Three years of friendship and you think I’m THAT kind of person?!” Her volume increased and several heads turned towards their table.  
  
Yuri quickly apologized. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it that way. But you were not telling us anything. What was I supposed to think? What other reasons are there behind your sudden interest in her, huh?”  
  
Her anger receded a bit. “I’m disappointed in you, Kwon Yuri. But I guess you’re right. My fault for not telling you guys anything.”  
  
“Glad you realize that.” Sooyoung had finally finished eating. “So can you tell us the real reason now?”  
  
She realized that she couldn’t get away from it and took a deep breath. “Please don’t think I’m weird or anything?”  
  
“You’re already weird from the first day I met you.” Jessica said.  
  
She grinned. “Likewise, Jessi.” She then turned to look at her two other friends and gulped. “I-… saw her… heard her… singing at this restaurant my parents took me to for my birthday…”  
  
“Huh? Her as in Kim Taeyeon? Our lazy classmate Kim Taeyeon?”  
  
“She’s not lazy, okay?” She instinctively defended her project partner.  
  
Yuri ignored the defense and asked again. “Are you sure it’s her?”  
  
She nodded. “I didn’t believe it myself. I even asked one of the waiters. It was her.”  
  
The other three waited for her to continue. Unfortunately, she wasn’t sure how.  
  
“So it was her voice?” Jessica suddenly broke the silence.  
  
Tiffany nodded slowly.  
  
“Fany-ah…” Yuri gently called her and she met her friend’s gaze. “I’m sorry to say this but… how is that different from any of her other groupies? I mean… you like her because of her… voice? You’re her fan?” She grinned at her last words.  
  
The others grinned as well. It was funny to imagine Tiffany being Taeyeon’s fangirl.  
  
“Maybe…” Tiffany finally answered. “I’m not sure about it myself. The way she sang… it was so different, so full of emotion. I’ve heard a lot of great voices but hers…” She looked down on her plate again. “Hers was different… *is*different.”  
  
No one said anything.  
  
Someone suddenly cleared her throat and they all jumped. Four heads turned to see Taeyeon standing next to their table – fidgeting nervously with her earphone buds. “Excuse me… Sorry to interrupt…” She then looked at Tiffany. “You still want to go ask Mr. Lee about the project?”  
  
Tiffany felt a bit awkward as the memory of her dreams flashed in her mind. She decided to forget it and focus on the real world instead. “I almost forgot. Yeah, we should go find him while he’s free.”  
  
“Finish your lunch first.” Taeyeon glanced at the plate.  
  
“I have.”  
  
Taeyeon lifted her eyebrows but said nothing. “I’ll wait for you outside.” She awkwardly nodded towards the other three and left.  
  
Tiffany was about to leave the table when Jessica suddenly spoke. “I hope you grow to like her for who she is, not only for what she has, Tiff.”  
  
It was spoken softly but it was enough to make everyone at the table tense, including Tiffany who had stopped moving.  
Jessica looked at her now standing friend. “You know how much it sucks to be surrounded by insincere people who seem to only want something from you. Don’t be one of those people.” The brunette thought about her conversation with Sunny and decided that she had to say this now – for her best friend’s sake and for Taeyeon’s sake.  
  
Tiffany felt a little offended but she knew the kind intention behind her friend’s words. “Don’t worry, Jessi.” She patted her best friend’s shoulder. “I like having her as a friend. She’s nice.”  
  
“Good. Remember that.”  
  
She waved goodbye to her friends. “See you guys later.”  
  
Yuri exhaled after she saw Tiffany walked out of the cafeteria. “What has gotten into that girl?”  
  
Sooyoung shook her head. “Let’s just hope curiosity doesn’t kill the cat.”  
  
“Taeyeon’s not a bad kid.” Jessica said. “Her best friend told me so.”  
  
“I’m not saying she’s bad. I’ve never seen her treating anyone harshly, including Fany.” Yuri said thoughtfully, “It’s just… weird.” She couldn’t find any other word to describe what was happening to her best friend.  
  
“I know.” Jessica sighed. “Let’s just let her be for now. We can still watch over her from a distance. Besides, with Sunny as my project partner, we have the ability to get more information on what they’re doing. Taeyeon’s friends are just as worried as we are – although for a different reason, of course.”  
  
They quietly ended their conversation and hoped that all this would blow over soon and no one would get hurt in the end.  
  
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“Take this with you!” The woman forced the cupcake into Taeyeon’s hand and the girl stuttered.  
  
“T-that’s fine, Mrs. Hwang.”  
  
“Mommy! Leave Taeyeon alone. We have an experiment to do.”  
  
“I know, I know. Another cupcake wouldn’t hurt. A little sugar will help the brain juices flow better.” She smiled.  
Taeyeon couldn’t help but grin at the logic. “Thank you, Mrs. Hwang.”  
  
“You’re too skinny, Taeyeon. You should eat more.”  
  
Taeyeon was still grinning. “I’m fine, Mrs. Hwang.”  
  
“Mommy!” Tiffany pouted.  
  
“Fine. Go on.” She dismissed them. “Eat the cupcake, okay, Taeyeon?”  
  
“Yes, Mrs. Hwang. Thank you.” She bowed a little before turning around to follow her partner out the door.  
  
“Ready, Princess?” The man who was squatting near the back of the car stood up.  
  
Tiffany groaned and blushed a little. “Stop calling me that, Daddy!”  
  
“Right. Sorry.” He grinned and went inside the car. “Let me know when you’re ready!” He yelled from the open window.  
  
“Princess?” Taeyeon couldn’t help but commented – holding back her laughter.  
  
“Don’t. Just don’t.” Tiffany warned sternly and moved to check on the equipment.  
  
She made sure that the plastic bag and hose were securely fastened and the empty fish tank perfectly covered with the plastic.  
  
Taeyeon watched while chewing on her cupcake. “Be careful. When the car starts, it will get very hot. Don’t touch the exhaust.”  
  
Tiffany straightened up. “I won’t.” She then yelled. “We’re ready, Daddy! Start the car.”  
  
The man gave a thumbs-up and started the engine.  
  
They waited a few minutes until they’re sure that the fish tank was filled with the exhaust fume.  
  
“That’s enough, Daddy. Thank you!” Tiffany yelled again and he turned off the engine.  
  
Taeyeon quickly and securely removed the tube from the tank – sealing the plastic cover with the duck tape and lifted the tank onto a table in the garage. She positioned the desk lamp at a certain distance above the tank and turned it on.  
  
Tiffany came to stand next to her with the infrared thermometer in hand. She measured the temperature and shook her head. “Not yet. Pull the lamp down a bit to speed things up.”  
  
Taeyeon did as requested and took a step back to observe. She saw Tiffany preparing her notebook and the stopwatch. She then started staring at the tank before measuring its temperature again – her brows creasing and her lips slightly pouting due to her seriousness.  
  
Great. She’s being cute again, Taeyeon inwardly cursed and leaned on the car.  
  
“Ready!” Tiffany turned off the lamp and called out to Taeyeon who stepped forward to reach for the stopwatch.  
  
She started the timer and returned to her position.  
  
Tiffany grabbed her pencil and absentmindedly started tapping the table with it.  
  
“Time for my daily question?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Sure.”  
  
Tiffany took her time to think. The daily question thing had given her a lot more insight on Taeyeon although not as much as she had wanted. She now knew that Taeyeon had been living alone in that dorm – with her fellow trainees – for almost three years. She started to understand why Taeyeon often slept in class and was often late, and why she only hung around Sunny and Hyoyeon who were the first friends she made when she transferred to this high school; before anyone knew she was a trainee. She also came to know Taeyeon’s favorite color, songs, food and how many siblings the girl had. She knew her birthday too. Although there were questions that Taeyeon refused to answer like why she was willing to move all the way to Seoul on her own at such a young age; or why she used her lunchtime to practice singing; or what her training regime was like… Tiffany was sure that Taeyeon was slowly opening up to her. She even asked her a few questions of her own – although always in a cool and nonchalant manner.  
  
“Explain in more than one sentence why you’re willing to move all the way to Seoul – alone – at such a young age… just to become a trainee.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Sounds like an exam question.”  
  
Tiffany grinned. She had learned to use the ‘explain in more than one sentence’ part when she realized that Taeyeon didn’t really like to elaborate her answers.  
  
“Not gonna answer.” Taeyeon checked the stopwatch in her hand.  
  
“Not fair!”  
  
“I told you I reserve the right to not answer your question.”  
  
“But this has been the second time I asked you this one. At least a short explanation?”  
  
“Nope.”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “Why are you so stubborn?”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply. She didn’t want Tiffany to know about her dream to become a singer. She didn’t want Tiffany to know everything about her. She thought it was to protect herself while in truth, she was hoping that not giving Tiffany all the answers she was looking for might keep her interest and, in turn, her presence close. Although she didn’t want to admit it, she always enjoyed Tiffany’s company. She happened to like music too so they had started talking about it every now and then.  
  
She took another look at the stopwatch in her hand. “10 minutes.”  
  
Tiffany measured the fish tank temperature and noted it down in her book.  
  
“I’ll switch questions then.”  
  
“What? One question per day, remember? You can’t ask another until tomorrow.”  
  
“I don’t care. You kept refusing to answer that one so you owe me at least one more.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. The cupcake Tiffany’s mother gave her earlier had sedated her will to argue.  
  
When she didn’t hear Taeyeon speak, she quickly took it as a chance to ask her second question. “You said you’re always busy on weekends. Why are you suddenly available today, on a Sunday?”  
  
Taeyeon contemplated for a while.  
  
“And use more than two sentences, please.” Tiffany added.  
  
She sighed. “You are so annoying sometimes, you know that?”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “Your fault for always being so cold.”  
  
Taeyeon paused again and peeked at the stopwatch in her hand. “Hang on. Two more minutes.”  
  
They waited and Taeyeon signaled for Tiffany to jot down the numbers.  
  
“So?”  
  
“Sundays are usually reserved for showcases…” She saw Tiffany’s lost look. “It’s where the trainees get the chance to show off the result of their practice. Kinda like quizzes or mini-exams at school.”  
  
“Ah. I see.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t continue.  
  
“That’s it?!”  
  
She rolled her eyes. “What more do you want? That’s the reason.”  
  
“So there’s no showcase today? That’s why you’re able to make it?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“Why?”  
  
She shrugged silently. She didn’t know the answer to that question either.  
  
“Time?” Tiffany asked after another pause.  
  
“Five more minutes.”  
  
She nodded and continued. “What happens if you mess up during the showcase?”  
  
“Which part of one question per day don’t you understand?”  
  
“Stop whining. My mom will give you more cupcakes to compensate for my questioning.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed for the umpteenth time in the past 26 minutes. She glanced at the stopwatch.  
  
“So?”  
  
“So what?”  
  
“Answer me!”  
  
“Now you’re just plain bossy.”  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “You’re too stubborn, Kim Taeyeon. I don’t understand why you’re like this. Am I not nice enough to you?”  
  
Taeyeon lifted her free hand and silenced Tiffany. She then showed her the stopwatch.  
  
Tiffany muttered under her breath and did her task.  
  
“It’s not that you’re not nice…” Taeyeon said after Tiffany finished writing in her book.  
  
“But?”  
  
“Sigh... When you mess up during an important showcase, you might get cut. There. Happy?”  
  
“Oh…” Tiffany calmed down. “Cut as in kicked out of the training system?”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“That’s… harsh.” She now understood why Taeyeon always practiced so hard. That short girl must really want this badly, she realized.  
  
They continued the experiment in silence. Tiffany’s mother came and brought them drinks and more cupcakes.  
  
When the other two tanks were measured and they were done with their first experiment; Tiffany suddenly spoke. “You want to be a singer that bad, huh?”  
  
Taeyeon was picking up the used plastic and scrunching them up in balls. She didn’t reply.  
  
“I admire you for that, you know.”  
  
Taeyeon stopped what she was doing.  
  
“I mean… at our age… to be able to have as much discipline as you do… well, when it comes to singing anyway… not your schoolwork, unfortunately…” Tiffany poured the soil from the last fish tank back to the huge sack.  
  
Taeyeon stifled a chuckle and continued cleaning up.  
  
“Yeah… admirable…” Tiffany was mumbling to herself now.  
  
They finished cleaning up and Taeyeon took the tray with the empty glasses from Tiffany’s hands. “Let me.” She quickly walked away from the garage and into the house.  
  
Tiffany was surprised at the gesture and smiled to herself.  
  
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The science project was over and Taeyeon returned to spending her lunch break practicing her singing.  
  
Instead of keeping her distance from the girl, Tiffany also returned to her old routine of watching Taeyeon practice. Although her curiosity was almost fully satisfied, she still found it hard to stay away from Taeyeon. They both had grown a lot more comfortable with each other and even used Taeyeon’s practice time to talk in between her singing.  
  
“Tiffany and Taeyeon…” Mr. Lee called out both girls as he walked towards Tiffany’s desk and placed the bundle of paper on it. He smiled. “Well done.”  
  
Tiffany saw the grade and shouted in joy. “Woohoo!!” Her fist was high in the air. “Taeyeon-ah!” She turned to the girl several desks away and passed her the paper.  
  
Taeyeon’s eyes went wide at the large red letter. She couldn’t believe it. Her first A in a subject other than music. Her jaw dropped.  
  
“Taengoo.” Sunny nudged her friend and smiled. “You’re going to drool at this rate.”  
  
The girl quickly closed her jaws and grinned. “Assa!” She gave Tiffany two thumbs-up and they laughed.  
  
“Do keep up the good work, Taeyeon.” Mr. Lee said – smiling as he returned to his desk at the front of the class. “It’s nice to see you work hard for a change.”  
  
“Yes, Sir.”  
  
Jessica lifted her eyebrow at Sunny and smirked while the latter shook her head slightly; grinning a little.  
  
Yuri and Sooyoung looked at each other while Hyoyeon quietly observed Taeyeon and Tiffany.  
  
The bell rang soon after and everyone piled out of the classroom.  
  
“B+ is not a bad grade, you know.” Jessica approached Sunny.  
  
“Yeah. I know...”  
  
Jessica nodded and they left the room – discussing the result of the project further with their friends walking behind them.  
  
“Hey.”  
  
Taeyeon looked up to see a smiling Tiffany. She had always admired that smile. “Great job, partner.”  
  
“You too, partner.”  
  
Taeyeon stood up after taking her wallet, phone and iPod out of her bag. “Hungry?”  
  
“Yeah. Oh, my mom baked cupcakes again yesterday.” Tiffany took out a lunchbox from the bag she was shouldering. “This is your share. She kept nagging me about you being too skinny. It’s not like it’s my fault you’re malnourished…” She shoved the box into Taeyeon’s hands and the latter laughed. Tiffany was surprised at the uncharacteristic laugh she hadn’t heard before. It made her smile wider.  
  
“Tell her thanks.”  
  
She nodded. “I will.”  
  
They walked in silence as Taeyeon took out a cupcake and started to eat it.  
  
“You know… I can help you with your schoolwork if you want…” Tiffany carefully said.  
  
Taeyeon turned to look and swallowed before talking. “What do you mean?”  
  
“Well, it’s obvious that you can easily get good grades if you’re only willing to work at it.” She cleared her throat. “And since I think we make a pretty good team…” She lost her courage.  
  
Taeyeon understood the kind offer and smiled. “Thanks but you know I don’t exactly have a normal routine. Might be difficult to find time to actually sit down and get things done.”  
  
“We got the project done.”  
  
She took another bite of the sweet chocolate treat. “Well, that’s true…”  
  
“I know your singing practice is important but… what if we use that time to catch up on stuff that you have problems with?”  
  
“Would that be enough?”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “Probably not… but it’s better than nothing. We can try to find other timeslots too – whenever you’re free. I don’t have much to do after school anyway.”  
  
“Hmm…” Taeyeon thought again. She had to admit that the feeling of getting a good grade was very satisfying. She had forgotten how it felt to achieve something at school. “Fine. Let’s give it a try.”  
  
“Great!” Tiffany couldn’t hide her excitement. Compared to her sincere intention to help Taeyeon, the thought of getting to spend more time with the girl excited her at least a hundred times more. “Let’s start tomorrow. There’s that math exam on Friday.”  
  
Taeyeon almost choked on her last bite. “M-math exam?” She coughed. “There’s an exam on Friday?!”  
  
“You don’t know? How come you don’t know?!”  
  
“I…” She blushed a little.  
  
“You fell asleep in class again, didn’t you?” She sighed. “Did you at least do the homework last week?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“What grade did you get for it?”  
  
She flinched. “D.”  
  
Tiffany sighed. This would be a lot harder than she had previously thought. “Bring your lunch to the roof tomorrow then. We’ll start right away.”  
  
“W-what? It’s not warm anymore, in case you haven’t noticed. We’ll freeze to death!”  
  
“Well… where can we eat while studying then?”  
  
Taeyeon furrowed her brows in thought. “The gym?”  
  
“Eh?”  
  
“At least there’ll be a roof over our heads.”  
  
“Sigh… fine. The gym it is.” Tiffany started to walk again. They had unknowingly stopped while talking. “Bring your math books, okay?”  
  
“Yes, Miss Hwang.” She grinned and was about to bite her second cupcake when a hand suddenly snatched it away. “Yah!”  
  
“Don’t ruin your appetite. Eat your lunch first.” Tiffany took the box from Taeyeon’s hand and put the cupcake back inside it. She then placed the box in her bag. “I’ll give this to you after lunch.”  
  
Taeyeon muttered under her breath and stomped away to where Sunny and Hyoyeon were sitting. She stopped in her tracks when she saw Jessica, Yuri and Sooyoung sitting with her friends. She couldn’t believe her eyes.  
  
Tiffany came to a halt not far from her – also staring at the unlikely group sitting at one table.  
  
“What’s going on?”  
  
Sunny and Jessica stopped their discussion and looked up.  
  
“What?” Jessica coldly asked her stunned friend.  
  
“Unlike some people who got an A, we would like to know what exactly went wrong although we’re not very disappointed with our B+,” Sunny said.  
  
A sudden laugh came from Sooyoung and the rest turned to see the tall girl leaning against Yuri while pointing at Hyoyeon who was calmly resuming her lunch with a mischievous glint in her eyes.  
  
“That was hilarious, Hyoyeon-ah!” Sooyoung said as she tried to stop her laughter. “I never knew you have this kind of sense of humor.”  
  
Hyoyeon shrugged. “I have an infinite amount of hidden charms.” She winked in an exaggerated and greasy way and the whole table burst into laughter.  
  
Taeyeon and Tiffany looked at each other and shrugged. Tiffany sat down next to Sunny and Taeyeon went to get her food.  
  
It was the start of what would become the daily habit of the seven girls for the rest of their senior year.

**chapter 4**

“And that’s how you get the value of the x.” Tiffany finished scribbling and turned to see a sleeping Taeyeon next to her – head propped on her hand. She poked Taeyeon’s forehead with the butt of her pencil and the girl groaned.  
  
“I hate it when you do that…”  
  
“Then stop falling asleep!” She poked harder.  
  
Taeyeon ignored her and didn’t open her eyes. “I only slept for two hours last night. Got another showcase this Sunday.”  
  
Tiffany sighed. She understood but couldn’t help but worry about Taeyeon’s grades. Although it had showed a little improvement since she started helping her friend, she knew that they didn’t have much time left before they had to take their final exams – the head bursting and fear inducing final hurdle of their secondary education. For her and many other students, it was the defining moment for their future. Taeyeon, however, didn’t seem to care that much.  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
The sleeping girl didn’t move.  
  
She sighed and threw her pencil down. She grabbed her soda can and took a sip; watching the sleeping Taeyeon who had begun to snore lightly.  
  
She chuckled at the cute sight. Her eyes went inadvertently to Taeyeon’s slightly parted lips and she gulped. She remembered that haunting dream she had almost two months ago. She still couldn’t shake the feeling off every time she thought of it. She leaned forward a bit and Taeyeon snored again.  
  
Holding back her laugh, she slowly reached out and tried to steady her index finger as it hovered just above Taeyeon’s unsuspecting lips. She really wanted to touch them – to find out whether they were as soft as in her dream.  
  
She held her breath and was about to close the final miniscule gap between her finger and Taeyeon’s upper lip when she heard a scream.  
  
“TAEYEON-AH!”  
  
She jerked in surprise and her finger poked Taeyeon’s nose instead.  
  
“Ow…” Taeyeon blinked and grimaced. She rubbed her nose – still half asleep.  
  
Tiffany quickly pulled her hand away and turned to see Sunny running up the bleachers to approach them.  
  
“What are you two doing?”  
  
“What does it look like we’re doing?” Tiffany calmed herself down and pointed at the open math books.  
  
“Well, that one looks to be sleeping.” Sunny gestured towards the stretching Taeyeon.  
  
“So what else is new?” Tiffany nonchalantly replied as she picked up her pencil and book and pretended to try to solve one of the problems.  
  
Sunny tilted her head and decided to keep the questioning for later. “Mrs. Park wants to see you, Taeng.”  
  
The girl groaned. “What now…”  
  
“I don’t know.”  
  
“Sigh… Fine. I’ll go see what she wants.” Taeyeon stood up and lazily made her way down and out of the gym.  
  
Sunny waited until she was sure that Taeyeon had left before turning to the still pretending-to-be-serious Tiffany. “Fany-ah…”  
  
“Hmm?”  
  
“What were you doing?”  
  
She turned to look at her short friend. “Err… math homework?”  
  
“Don’t play dumb with me, Tiffany. I saw you trying to touch Taeyeon’s face.”  
  
“What on earth are you talking about?”  
  
“Do you like her?”  
  
“Of course I do! She’s my friend… our friend.”  
  
“You know I don’t mean it that way.” Sunny snatched the book away from Tiffany’s hands.  
  
“Yah!”  
  
“Be honest, Fany. I know I’m not your best friend or your close friend but I’d like to think we’re good friends now. I swear I won’t tell Taeyeon.”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “I don’t know… I don’t think I do.”  
  
“Then why were you trying to touch her face? I mean, I know she has a very nice complexion but come on… you have to admit that what you did was creepy.”  
  
Tiffany was relieved that Sunny didn’t know which part of Taeyeon’s face was she really aiming for.  
  
“I honestly don’t know.”  
  
Sunny stayed silent and finally closed the book in her hands. “We better get back. The bell is about to ring soon.” She stood up and waited for Tiffany to gather her and Taeyeon’s stuff before they both made their way down.  
  
“Please don’t tell Taeyeon about what happened?” Tiffany said as they stepped out of the gym.  
  
“I won’t.” Sunny paused. “But you might want to start figuring out why you did that.”  
  
Tiffany didn’t reply. She knew her friend was right.  
  
They continued to walk in silence.  
  
“Oh and just so you know…” Sunny said as she stopped when they had reached their classroom. The bell interrupted her sentence and she waited – stepping aside; closer to Tiffany to let the running kids through. She lowered her voice. “There’s nothing wrong with being honest.” She smiled. “You might not be the only one feeling that way.”  
  
Tiffany was confused and was about to ask what Sunny meant when the second ring echoed through the corridor and she saw Taeyeon walking towards them with a clearly unhappy face.  
  
She was about to step forward and approached the distracted looking girl when she saw Sunny already side-hugging Taeyeon; attentively asking what was wrong and what their teacher had said.  
  
The two best friends entered the classroom and she saw Taeyeon saying something to Sunny but she couldn’t hear her words. She walked behind them and watched as the two short girls took their seats – still talking in an inaudible voice with each other.  
  
“Please take your seat, Tiffany.”  
  
She jumped at the voice coming from behind her and turned to see their teacher. “Y-yes, Mrs. Park.” She quickly went back to her seat and sat down. She took another glance at Taeyeon and saw that she was now resting her head on her palms. Sunny was talking to Hyoyeon and the latter was frowning.  
  
“Okay. Settle down, class. Let’s continue our lesson. We have two months before the finals – excluding Christmas break – and I need to finish our material quickly. Next month will be filled with plenty of exercises and mock-tests to prepare you for the real thing.”  
  
The class groaned.  
  
Tiffany was worried about Taeyeon and felt sad that it couldn’t have been her that comforted Taeyeon first. She wished she were the one sitting next to Taeyeon. She wished she were the one whom Taeyeon would turn to and share her burdens with. She took a deep breath as Sunny’s words echoed in her mind. Is this the start of being honest? She wondered and shook her head – choosing to focus at the board and the talking woman standing in front of it.  
  
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“Here are your books.” She gently put the books down on Taeyeon’s desk.  
  
Taeyeon still had her head buried in her palms.  
  
“Taeyeon? Are you okay?” She pulled the chair in front of Taeyeon’s desk and sat on it; facing the immobile girl.  
  
“See you tomorrow, Taeng.” Sunny stood up and patted her best friend’s shoulder. She waved at Tiffany and left the two of them.  
  
“Fany-ah… you coming?”  
  
She turned to see Yuri and Jessica standing at the doorway. She shook her head and pointed at Taeyeon. The two girls understood and waved goodbye before leaving the now empty classroom.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
Taeyeon heaved a deep sigh.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah… what’s wrong? What did Mrs. Park say?”  
  
Taeyeon mumbled something from her palms and Tiffany leaned closer.  
  
“What? I can’t hear you.”  
  
She finally removed her face from her palms. “She said that unless I get at least a C+ on every subject, I might not be able to graduate this year. My GPA basically sucks.”  
  
Tiffany never knew that it was that bad.  
  
Taeyeon looked at the other girl with sad eyes. “So I have to ace the final exams or my parents would kill me.”  
  
Tiffany tried to cheer her friend up. “Don’t worry, I’m pretty sure you’ll be able to do that. C+ would be easy for you. You’re not dumb, Taeyeon-ah. Just need some extra hours cramming.” She put on a smile. “I’ll help! I’m sure we all will. Sooyoung’s an ace in social subjects and Jessi’s a whizz in English. Yuri’s surprisingly good in biology and I know Sunny’s good with science and Hyoyeon’s smart too. I’ll stick to helping you with math and we’re good to go. Heck, I’ll even make sure Mom bakes constantly so you’ll get plenty of sugar supplies for your brain juices.”  
  
Taeyeon couldn’t help but smile a little. “You’re infectious.”  
  
“Huh?”  
  
“Your positivity. It’s kinda infectious.”  
  
“That’s a good thing, right?”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t answer but her smile grew wider.  
  
Tiffany almost blushed. She quickly looked down at the book she had placed on the table and flipped it open.  
  
“Finish the exercise, okay?” She folded the edge of the page she was referring too. “And call me if you get stuck. No matter what time it is.” She closed the book again and pushed it towards Taeyeon – trying hard not to meet the shorter girl’s eyes.  
  
“Why are you so nice to me?”  
  
The question caught her off guard and she looked up by reflex to see a frowning Taeyeon. The smile had disappeared.  
  
“What are you talking about?”  
  
Taeyeon leaned forward, reducing the distance between their faces.  
  
“Why are you so nice to me?” She repeated her question. “I’m a nobody, Tiffany. I’m not popular, I’m not smart and I’m not good in sports. I don’t have any friends except those two shorties and I’ve been to the principal office more often than you have visited the gym.” She tilted her head. “Why?”  
  
Tiffany finally blushed as she realized how close their faces were. “W-why can’t I be nice? You’re not a bad kid…”  
  
“Yes but…” Taeyeon hesitated. “I’ve been wanting to ask you this from the very first time you started following me around – even before we became friends.”  
  
Tiffany nervously fiddled with the pages of the book in her hands.  
  
“Why did you do that, Fany?”  
  
She weighed her options. She didn’t want to sound like another groupie or fangirl who only wanted to get to know Taeyeon because of her singing ability – although it was the source of her initial attraction. Her eyes went wide as she repeated the word in her head. Attraction. Am I attracted to her? In *that* way? She gulped. Do I like girls now?  
  
The memory of her dream resurfaced and she blushed even harder.  
  
“Tiffany…”  
  
Taeyeon’s voice was gentle.  
  
She finally sighed. “Can you promise to listen until I finish talking?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
She took a deep breath and summoned up all her courage. “I-I… It started… I mean…” She paused and steadied herself. “I saw you singing at that restaurant… around four, five months ago?”  
  
Taeyeon furrowed her brows as she tried to think of the restaurant in question.  
  
“That fancy one at that five star hotel?”  
  
“Ah!” She looked at Tiffany in surprise. “You were there?”  
  
She nodded. “My parents took me there for my birthday.”  
  
“I see.” Taeyeon had a sinking feeling that she was going to be disappointed but kept her promise to at least hear Tiffany out.  
  
“I-I thought… and I still think… that you have an amazing voice. I’m not sure how to explain it… It’s just… the way you sing…” She faltered.  
  
“So it’s because I can sing…”  
  
“N-no! Please don’t misunderstand me. I mean yeah… it was the initial… err… point of interest… especially because you’re very low profile… I mean… I didn’t even know that you could sing until that day…” She gulped. “I guess… I got curious.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t move. She kept watching Tiffany until the latter started to shift uncomfortably under her gaze.  
  
“So that’s it?”  
  
“I have grown to like you for you, you know…” Tiffany tried to look up and saw Taeyeon’s sad eyes. “I’m being sincere here, Taeyeon. I couldn’t care less whether you become a famous singer or not… or whether you start sounding like a frog squished under a truck starting tomorrow…”  
  
Taeyeon chuckled.  
  
She smiled. “I mean it.”  
  
“Okay.” Taeyeon finally nodded her head but didn’t pull back. “I guess it’s only fair if I come clean too…”  
  
Tiffany lifted her eyebrows. “What do you mean?”  
  
Taeyeon tilted her head and grinned – showing her chin dimple.  
  
Tiffany almost forgot to breathe at the sight of the cute smile.  
  
“There’s also a ‘point of interest’ of yours that I’ve noticed since the first year of high school… the first time we became classmates.”  
  
“Oh?”  
  
Tiffany was surprised. She thought Taeyeon didn’t even know she existed until she started following that short girl around.  
  
“Why did you think I let you watch me practice back when we didn’t even know each other?”  
  
“I admit that was kinda strange.” Tiffany grinned. “I thought you were just too lazy to get rid of me.”  
  
“That’s half of it…”  
  
Tiffany slapped Taeyeon’s arm and the latter laughed.  
  
“What’s the other half?”  
  
Taeyeon grinned and finally leaned back in her chair – much to Tiffany’s dismay.  
  
“That’s for me to know and for you to find out.” She started to put her books and pens into her bag.  
  
“That’s not fair!”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged and continued what she was doing. She looked at Tiffany after she zipped her backpack and saw the pout. She had to laugh.  
  
“The important thing is that I’ve also grown to like you for you.”  
  
Tiffany didn’t react.  
  
“And that I couldn’t care less whether you grow a beard or whether you start looking like a frog being squished under a truck starting tomorrow…” Taeyeon laughed out loud.  
  
Tiffany blushed as she realized what Taeyeon was implying. So the attraction is… mutual… somehow? She thought with a gulp.  
  
“Come on.” Taeyeon stood up and extended her hand to the quiet girl. “I can’t be late for practice today. Got that showcase on Sunday, remember?”  
  
Tiffany hesitated but since Taeyeon didn’t pull her hand away, she slowly reached out to hold it. The warmth and the touch made her stomach lurch again – just like that morning after she woke up from her dream. She stood up and let Taeyeon pull her out of the classroom.  
  
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“So what’s the verdict?”  
  
Taeyeon lifted her hand and gave a thumbs-up before dropping it back on the table and continued snoozing – her face buried in her book.  
  
“They said it was the last showcase for now, though.” She finally sat up after a while. “Which is weird since I’m not even sure they’re going to debut any of us soon.” She wiped the small trickle of drool at the corner of her mouth.  
  
“Seriously…” Sunny took out a pack of tissue from her backpack and threw it at her best friend. “Wipe your drool! What if Fany sees you like this?”  
  
“She’s seen it plenty of time.” Taeyeon wiped her drool with a tissue.  
  
“And she still hangs out with you? Wow. She must really like you.”  
  
Taeyeon froze. “What did you say?”  
  
“Oh stop being so blind.” Sunny reached out and snatched her tissues back. “You both know you like each other… yes, in that way.” She emphasized her point when she saw Taeyeon still staring at her.  
  
The shorter among the two rolled her eyes and picked up her pencil. “Now finish your homework, Taeng. We don’t have much time left. Your practice starts in one and a half hour.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed and slowly picked up her pencil as well. She tried to focus on the physics problem but her mind kept repeating her best friends words. We *both* know? Tiffany knows that I like her? Does she like me too?  
  
An eraser landed on her forehead and she blinked.  
  
“Yah! Stop throwing things at me! You’re worse than Fany!”  
  
“Well, sorry for not trying to touch your face instead.”  
  
“What?”  
  
Sunny realized her mistake and silently cursed. “Finish your homework, Taeng! This one is not that hard to solve.”  
  
“Stop trying to change the subject. Fany did what?”  
  
“Nothing.” Sunny tapped the book with her pencil. “Homework. Hurry!”  
  
Taeyeon closed the book and grabbed Sunny’s pencil. “She tried to touch my face? When?”  
  
Sunny sighed. “Please don’t tell her that I told you. I swore I wouldn’t. It was a stupid slip of my tongue, okay?”  
  
“I promise. Now spill! When did this happen?”  
  
“Last week at the gym… before Mrs. Park called you to see her.”  
  
“Wh-what?”  
  
“You were sleeping – as usual – and I accidentally saw her trying to touch your face with a finger. Maybe she was just trying to poke you until you wake up… but the way she slowly inched forward was kinda… creepy…”  
  
“How creepy?”  
  
“It was like she was afraid to wake you up instead… and I think she was aiming for your chin… or your… nose? Wait… that’s weird… why would she want to touch your nose…”  
  
Taeyeon thought about what her best friend had just said. It was indeed strange to her but she couldn’t help but feel happy at the thought that Tiffany might really be harboring the same feelings towards her.  
  
“You’re sure about this?”  
  
“She accidentally poked your nose when I yelled and startled her.” Sunny grinned.  
  
“Ah. I remember that part.”  
  
“Now can we please get back to your homework? We’ll discuss your love life later.” Sunny grabbed her pencil back from Taeyeon’s grip.  
  
“Fine.” Taeyeon grumbled and tried her best to focus on the physics problem in front of her. She couldn’t help but smile all throughout the study session though.  
  
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The bell rang and Tiffany closed her book in relief. Her head was starting to hurt from all the information her teacher was trying to stuff in it. She stretched and turned to look for Taeyeon but the other girl’s seat was already empty.  
  
She lifted her eyebrows and searched for Sunny instead. The short girl was huddling with Hyoyeon while curling their fingers and giggling. She then turned to find Jessica and saw her three friends doing almost the same thing at the other side of the classroom. She was beyond confused.  
  
It was Monday and that meant it was her turn to tutor Taeyeon with math. She grabbed her books and her small bag filled with lunchboxes and stood up – approaching the snickering trio first.  
  
“Why are you guys snickering like that?”  
  
The three straightened up and tried to put on a straight face.  
  
“Who’s snickering? We’re not snickering.” Sooyoung said as she looked away – out the window.  
  
“Not me, for sure.” Yuri pretended to search for something in her bag – hiding her face.  
  
Tiffany heard a “Pfftt…” from her tanned friend and glared.  
  
“Don’t you have tutoring to do? It is Monday, you know.” Jessica coolly stated.  
  
She was about to retort when her phone vibrated in her pocket. She read the incoming message.  
  
“Where are you? I’m already at the gym.”  
  
She sighed and replied.  
  
“Hold your horses. I’ll be right there.”  
  
“Taeyeon?” Jessica asked.  
  
“Yeah.” She put the phone back in her pocket.  
  
“See? Go tutor her! You wouldn’t want to waste her precious time. Her life, her future depends on you.” The brunette knew she was exaggerating and Sooyoung’s funny expression almost made her laugh.  
  
Tiffany pointed her finger at her friends. “I’m watching you. Just wait. I’ll interrogate you later. I’ll use torture if I have to.”  
  
They dismissed her and she turned to see Hyoyeon and Sunny giggling at her and running out of the classroom.  
  
She ran after them and shouted at their backs. “That goes for you too, shorties!!”  
  
Sunny waved and Hyoyeon stuck out her tongue before they disappeared around the corner.  
  
She couldn’t help but feel left out as she made her way towards the gym.  
  
She entered and saw Taeyeon sitting at their usual place; at the bleachers. She climbed and approached the somewhat anxious looking girl.  
  
“What’s up with you?” She put her bag and books down on the bench and sat down. “First those brats and now you? What is wrong with the world today?! Why am I the only one acting normal?”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t answer.  
  
Tiffany sighed. “What’s wrong?”  
  
Taeyeon took a deep breath. “Can I ask you something?”  
  
“Sure?”  
  
“Did you mean what you say two weeks ago?”  
  
“About?”  
  
“That I could start sounding like a squished frog tomorrow and you’d still be here?”  
  
“What?!” Tiffany couldn’t help but raise her voice. “Of course I would! We’re friends, Taeyeon-ah! You should know better than that by now.”  
  
Taeyeon flinched and started to bite her nail.  
  
“Hey. Bad habit!” Tiffany slapped the hand away.  
  
Taeyeon looked at the other girl. “Friends? We’re… friends?”  
  
“Of course we are! Why are you acting so weird all of a sudden? I told you I like you for you… not for your voice.”  
  
Taeyeon deflated. “Friends, huh?” Her eyes fell on her shoes.  
  
“Err… yes?” Tiffany observed the quiet girl. “What’s wrong, Taeyeon-ah?”  
  
“Just friends?” She weakly asked.  
  
“U-uh… What do you mean?” She could barely recover from the shock of the sudden question.  
  
“What if… I mean… Do you think… I mean…” Taeyeon grunted and cleared her throat loudly. “Sunny said that you might like me as… more... than just… friends?” She had lost all of the confidence she had been trying to accumulate all week. She grimaced; waiting for the answer – bracing her heart for what might be the second heartbreak in her young life.  
  
Tiffany froze. She hadn’t expected the questions. The fact was, she wasn’t sure she was ready to acknowledge how she felt towards Taeyeon. Apart from the haunting and curious dream, she had been trying to tell herself to get a grip; especially in the past two weeks. That there’s no way Taeyeon liked her in that way or that she was falling for another girl. The attraction was just a silly admiration for one another, she figured. Like she admired Yuri’s athleticism or Sunny’s quick wit or Hyoyeon’s great sense of humor. Although she would never spend any effort to follow them around like she did Taeyeon.  
  
When Taeyeon saw and heard no reaction; she took another deep breath and exhaled in defeat. She was wrong. Sunny was wrong. Jessica was wrong. Everybody was wrong. Tiffany only saw her as a good friend. Nothing else.  
She felt embarrassed and quickly blurted out an apology and an excuse after picking something up from behind the bench and running down the bleachers and out of the gym. She ignored Tiffany’s calling and kept running.  
  
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“Have you guys seen Taeyeon?” A panting Tiffany burst into the cafeteria and practically banged their table.  
  
Five surprised girls jumped and practically everyone there turned to look at the girl.  
  
“Uh-oh…” Sunny said – sensing trouble.  
  
Jessica groaned. “What did you do, Tiff? What did you say?”  
  
She shook her head. “Where’s Taeyeon? Did you see her?”  
  
“Err… No. We thought she’s with you.”  
  
Tiffany cursed.  
  
“What happened?” Yuri stood up and tried to soothe her friend. “Did you guys talk?”  
  
“I-…” She suddenly remembered something and snapped her fingers. “Of course!” The only place she hadn’t searched because it was too cold outside. She quickly ran out of the cafeteria – leaving the five girls baffled at her strange and frantic behavior.  
  
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She slapped and kicked the railing over and over again. “So stupid. You’re so stupid, Kim Taeyeon! ARGH!” She threw down the CD case onto the floor and cursed some more. She wanted to flip the old lawn chairs and the discolored plastic table but decided that the janitor might resent her for that so she stuck to abusing the railing.  
  
“Ow!” Her big toe hit the steel and she grabbed it – still cursing while jumping in place. “Great! You can’t even kick properly.”  
  
She sat on the cold surface and lay down. “I’m so stupid.” She mumbled. “So very very stupid.”  
  
She wanted to cry but she couldn’t. It was too embarrassing. She wasn’t sure how she could face Tiffany now. She might lose a great friend and she resented that fact. And it wasn’t just any friend... it was Tiffany.  
  
She sighed and closed her eyes – not caring about the cold wind that was slapping her small body until her face and hands turned numb.  
  
“Babo!”  
  
“Wh-…”  
  
She felt a tug on her vest and opened her eyes to see Tiffany trying to pull her up.  
  
“You’ll get sick!”  
  
Tiffany pulled harder and Taeyeon had to stand up to avoid her vest from ripping.  
  
She then dragged Taeyeon inside the stairway and closed the door to the roof. She slapped the back of Taeyeon’s head.  
  
“What were you thinking?! You could get hypothermia or something! Use your brain, Taeyeon-ah!” She slapped her head again.  
  
“OW! Hey! I’m older than you!”  
  
“Doesn’t mean you’re smarter.” She folded her arms and frowned.  
  
Taeyeon rubbed the back of her head and looked away. She wasn’t sure how to react.  
  
Tiffany finally sighed. “Hear me out? Please?”  
  
Taeyeon slowly turned her head towards Tiffany.  
  
“Sunny… might be… right…” Tiffany said – her cheeks blushing and she looked down at her nails.  
  
Taeyeon was surprised but waited for the other girl to continue.  
  
“I still can’t fully understand it but… I think… yeah… she might be right.” She stole a glance at Taeyeon before looking down again. “I thought you only see me as a friend so I…” She gulped. “I tried to convince myself that it was nothing… that I just might be confused… or something…”  
  
Taeyeon took a step down to stand in front of Tiffany. She took a deep breath. “I like you.” Her pride had already gone out the window; she had nothing more to lose.  
  
The confession was so simple and straightforward that Tiffany was glad she was leaning against the handrail. She was sure she would’ve toppled down the stairs considering how weak her knees had become at the sound of Taeyeon’s voice and the sincere and gentle look in her eyes. She felt something weird coursing through her insides – something she had never felt before.  
  
Taeyeon stepped forward. “I like you more than just as my friend. That’s what I wanted to tell you today.” She grinned sheepishly. “Before you told me that you only see me as your friend…” She searched Tiffany’s eyes. “Do you?”  
  
“D-do I w-what?”  
  
“Do you see me only as your friend?”  
  
“I thought I told you that I might not…”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “A definite answer would be nice.”  
  
Tiffany suddenly realized how close they were standing when she caught a glimpse of Taeyeon’s chin dimple. She gulped as her eyes involuntarily went to Taeyeon’s lips and the same old dream flashed in her mind.  
  
“I-I…”  
  
Taeyeon noticed where Tiffany was looking and decided to just take the plunge. Another rejection wouldn’t hurt that much, she figured.  
  
She took another step forward and slowly closed the gap between them – letting her lips touch Tiffany’s gently before pressing them together.  
  
She was about to pull back when she felt Tiffany’s arms around her waist; pulling her closer. She smiled into the kiss. She then gently held the sides of Tiffany’s face and leaned in further – moving her lips ever so slowly with the other soft pair. She didn’t want to rush things.  
  
Tiffany was holding onto Taeyeon tightly. She was afraid she’d really fall down the stairs should she let go. Her knees were beyond weak and she shivered as she realized that she now fully understood the term ‘butterflies in one’s stomach’. She felt the cold metal of the railing pushing into her back but ignored the discomfort. This is a million times better than the dream; she said to herself and smiled at the silly thought.  
  
Taeyeon felt the smile and pull away – one hand still gently caressing Tiffany’s cheek while the other grabbed the railing behind the other girl to steady herself. “Why are you smiling?”  
  
“You smiled too.”  
  
“Can’t I be happy?”  
  
“Yes you can. Can’t I be happy?”  
  
“Yes you can.”  
  
“Then allow me to smile.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed at the sight of the wide eye-smile. “I’ve always thought that you have the most beautiful smile in the world.”  
  
“Wow. Not even ten minutes into this and you’re already so corny.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “Into what, exactly?”  
  
Tiffany’s smile faltered as her cheeks blushed and she looked away. “I guess… it’s safe to say that I like you too?”  
  
“I gathered as much.” Taeyeon was still grinning. “But are you sure about this?”  
  
Tiffany quickly turned to look at the now concerned Taeyeon. “Why are you asking me that? I thought you want this.”  
  
“I do. But do *you* want this? I mean… for sure?”  
  
Tiffany pulled the waist that was still in her grip and leaned down to kiss Taeyeon again. She could’ve sworn she heard Taeyeon whimper. She pulled back and smirked. “Does that answer your question?”  
  
Taeyeon gulped. “P-pretty much.” She was still trying to recover from that last kiss.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “You’re too cute.”  
  
“Thank you. So are you.”  
  
They smiled at each other and enjoyed the moment for a few more minutes before they heard the bell rang.  
  
They jumped and laughed nervously.  
  
“I almost forgot we’re at school,” Taeyeon said – letting her hands drop to Tiffany’s hips and taking a small step back.  
  
“Yeah, me too.”  
  
“Oh! Wait here.” Taeyeon suddenly ran back up to the roof and returned a few seconds later with something in her hand. She was about to give it to Tiffany when she realized that it was quite an embarrassing thing to give. She hid it behind her back.  
  
Tiffany saw what Taeyeon did. “What are you hiding from me?”  
  
They heard the second ring.  
  
“We need to get to class.” Taeyeon quickly pulled Tiffany’s hand and half ran down the stairs.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah!”  
  
Tiffany ran as best as she could and they made it back to the class just a few seconds before the teacher came in.  
  
Each girl quickly went to her seat and saw their friends staring at them.  
  
Tiffany saw her books and lunchboxes on her desk and turned to mouth a silent thank you to her three friends.  
  
Sooyoung shot her a questioning look complete with hand gestures.  
  
She grinned and gave her a thumbs-up.  
  
The three friends made fists and clapped silently.  
  
Tiffany had to stifle her giggle and was glad that the teacher had her back turned to her.  
  
She looked to the other side and saw Sunny patting Taeyeon’s cheek and Hyoyeon doing weird moves.  
  
She caught Taeyeon’s eyes and smiled.  
  
Taeyeon grinned at her and Sunny gave her two thumbs-ups while Hyoyeon continued moving weirdly with her arms flailing in the air.  
  
“Kim Hyoyeon.”  
  
They froze.  
  
“What are you doing?”  
  
The girls couldn’t help but laugh as Hyoyeon stuttered to explain that she was just flexing and stretching to get ready for their lesson.  
  
The two girls couldn’t feel happier. They wished time would zoom past and the dismissal bell would ring so they could be with each other again.

**chapter 5**

“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“Hmm?”  
  
“Focus!”  
  
“I am focusing!”  
  
She finally put down her pencil and turned to push Taeyeon away.  
  
“Aw come on…” Taeyeon pouted.  
  
“Since when does focusing mean messing up my face?” She used one hand to wipe the slightly wet trails on her cheek and jaw.  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Well excuse me for having a little fun.” She swatted Tiffany’s hand away from her shoulder and grabbed her pencil and book – sulking like an elementary school kid.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “First things first, Taeyeon-ah.” She was amazed how open Taeyeon had become towards her. That girl no longer seemed to hide or hold back anything she was feeling or thinking. It was a nice change.  
  
They spent the next few minutes working on their homework with Tiffany helping Taeyeon during parts where the latter had fallen asleep in class. As hard as Taeyeon tried to stay awake, the exhaustion from late night practices was still a big problem to her. It was somehow a relief that there would be no more showcases so Taeyeon could use her weekend to catch up on her studies – or go on short dates with Tiffany.  
  
“So x equals… 3/5?”  
  
Tiffany grinned. “Well done!”  
  
“Oh yeah!” She threw her pencil in the air.  
  
“See? You’re not dumb, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
She grinned and leaned forward. “Do I get a reward then?”  
  
Tiffany sighed.  
  
“Oh come on! This is the only tutoring session I’m looking forward to. I can’t do this with the others, can I?”  
  
Taeyeon almost choked as Tiffany grabbed her collar. “Do this with any of them and I’ll make sure you’ll be known as the lipless singer.”  
  
She laughed. “Scary! So reward me already!”  
  
“No.” Tiffany let go of the ruffled shirt.  
  
“WHAT?!”  
  
“There’s one more question.”  
  
Taeyeon groaned loudly.  
  
“I’ll make sure it’s worth your while.”  
  
“You better!”  
  
She searched for her discarded pencil and muttered under her breath while roughly pulling her book to start working on the last question.  
  
Tiffany watched in amusement as Taeyeon frowned, squinted and bit her lower lip while trying to solve the problem. She couldn’t help but think how cute and – strangely – sexy a hardworking and concentrating Taeyeon looked.  
  
“Okay, I’m stuck.” The girl finally exhaled and ruffled her own hair in stress. “This is as far as I get.” She showed Tiffany her workbook.  
  
Tiffany smiled. “And that is as far as you can get. That’s the answer.”  
  
“This is the answer?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“For real?”  
  
“Yep. Read the instructions. You need to break down the equation to its simplest form.”  
  
“Assa! Homework’s done!” She quickly closed her book and Tiffany’s book and gathered their pencils and erasers – stuffing them inside their pencil cases. She checked her watch. “Ten – no eleven – whole minutes before the bell rings! Make out session RIGHT NOW! N.O.W NOW!”  
  
Tiffany laughed out loud. “You’ve been hanging around Jessi too much.”  
  
“You promised.” It was borderline whining. “You haven’t kissed me for days!”  
  
“Who was too busy last weekend?”  
  
“I didn’t ask for the extra vocal training, okay? And my dance instructor was suddenly so cranky… I had to practice and get the dance right to avoid his wrath.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged and almost shrieked when she was pulled at the collar.  
  
“Two can play at this game, Hwang Miyoung.” Taeyeon smirked. “And you promised.” She closed the gap between them before Tiffany could come up with a reply.  
  
She smiled and relented – draping her arms around Taeyeon’s neck and pulled her closer.  
  
A few minutes later and she was lying down on the bench with Taeyeon on top of her – lips stuck on her neck.  
  
“YAH!”  
  
They heard the shout and Taeyeon quickly got off Tiffany who sat up and frantically tried to tidy her hair and uniform.  
  
They heard laughter next and realized that it was only their friends.  
  
“God! Seriously! Get a room or something!” Jessica shook her head and folded her arms.  
  
The two girls blushed.  
  
“This is way too open, you two. What if anyone walks in here or one of the teachers happens to walk by? You’d be dead meat!” Sunny said.  
  
“Nice move though, Taeng.” Hyoyeon grinned and got punched in the arms by some of her friends. “Ow! Hey! I was just being honest. Stop it, Shikshin!” She glared at Sooyoung.  
  
“Whatever. Come on. The bell’s about to ring.” Yuri gestured for the two tomato heads to come down.  
  
“Why are you guys here anyway?” Taeyeon said as she held Tiffany’s hand – guiding her slowly down the steps.  
  
“Well, Christmas holiday is coming and my parents and sisters are here. They’re planning to go skiing and invited all of you to come along. I thought I'd asked you two now so I can confirm with my family as soon as possible. Holiday's just a week away, you know.”  
  
The seven girls started to walk slowly out of the gym.  
  
“Oh? That’s nice. Your parents don’t mind the cold?”  
  
“Not really. They’d probably just laze around the cottage or go to the spa or something. My sister and my brother-in-law are the excited ones. And since I’ve recently had a niece…”  
  
“Ah… you need an excuse to avoid babysitting and thus proposed the idea of inviting us?” Taeyeon grinned.  
  
“Such a smart kid this best friend of mine is… sometimes. Ow!” She stuck her tongue out at the fellow shorty who had just punched her arm. “So are you two coming or not?”  
  
Tiffany looked at Taeyeon and the latter shrugged. “You know I don’t exactly get long Christmas breaks, Sunny-ah…”  
  
“Well, at least get one weekend off? We’ll just spend the weekend there and head back. The rest of my family can stay longer if they want to.”  
  
“I don’t know…” She felt a squeeze in her hand and turned to look at an excited looking Tiffany. “You wanna go?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “I think it’ll be fun with all of us there. Plus, we can get some stress relief before the hell of final exams.”  
  
The rest groaned in harmony at the mention of the dreaded exams.  
  
“Fine. If you really want to go, I’ll ask my trainer for permission.” She then turned back to Sunny. “Do you have a fixed date?”  
  
The five girls were snickering and grinning and Taeyeon frowned.  
  
“What?”  
  
“I have a new English word to add to your vocabulary, Taeng.” Jessica said. “Whipped.”  
  
The snickering turned into laughter as Tiffany blushed and Taeyeon was left alone in confusion.  
  
“Wha-…?”  
  
Yuri took out her phone and opened her dictionary application. She searched for the right translation and showed it to her short friend.  
  
“Yah! I’m not ‘whipped’!” She said in her cute accent.  
  
“You are. But don’t worry, we still love you.” Sunny grinned.  
  
The bell rang and they quickened their steps.  
  
Taeyeon was still sulking so Tiffany pulled her back and gave her a quick peck on the cheek.  
  
She instantly smiled.  
  
“Don’t worry. You’re not whipped that badly.”  
  
She sighed. “Oh well. As long as you’re the one doing the whipping…”  
  
They laughed and broke into a run as the second ring echoed through the building.  
  
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“This is so awesome, Soonkyu-yah!” Hyoyeon threw herself on the large bed.  
  
“Call me that again and I’ll make sure you sleep outside with the bears or whatever.”  
  
“Sorry.” Hyoyeon grinned and rolled around happily.  
  
“Such a kid.”  
  
Sunny was about to leave the room when two tall figures dashed passed her and jumped on the bed next to Hyoyeon. Sooyoung and Yuri began jumping on the bed and she had to use the pillow to hit them before they calmed down.  
  
She shut the door and heard screams again. She sighed; knowing that those kids were probably back to jumping on the bed.  
  
“Sunny-ah!”  
  
She heard the voice and stopped to turn into another open room. She saw Jessica lying comfortably on one of the twin beds.  
  
“Yes?”  
  
“Who are you rooming with?”  
  
“Don’t know yet.”  
  
“Can we just let the crazy trio room together? I need peace and quiet.”  
  
Sunny laughed. “I was just thinking the same thing actually. So you’ll room with me? Since those love birds would obviously want to room together…” She stopped at the thought and suddenly grimaced.  
  
“Stop!” Jessica said. “Don’t think about any of that! Think other thoughts! Ski! School! The hole in Mr. Ahn's pants! Your niece's dirty diaper!”  
  
Sunny shook her head and exhaled in relief. “Thanks. Let’s not talk about this ever again, shall we?”  
  
“Deal.”  
  
She left the room and went outside – to her family’s cottage right next door.  
  
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“Well this is nice.” Taeyeon sat on the bed and bounced on the mattress.  
  
“Yeah. It’s nice that Sunny’s family is letting us have a cottage all to ourselves for the entire weekend.”  
  
Tiffany lay down at the other side of the bed and stretched – feeling sleepy after the long drive. The warmth of the bed made her want to slowly close her eyes.  
  
She was about to drift into sleep when she felt something warm and soft on her cheek. She suppressed a smile and turned on her side – away from Taeyeon.  
  
She then felt warmth on her back as an arm and a leg were draped around her. Taeyeon was hugging her from behind. She kept her face expressionless when she felt the other girl starting to trail kisses from the back of her head all the way towards her cheek.  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
She didn’t move.  
  
Taeyeon kissed her ear.  
  
“Fany… wake up…”  
  
She winced as the warm breath tickled her ear.  
  
“I’m sleepy, Taeyeon-ah. Leave me alone.”  
  
“A whole weekend without school, parents or practices… with me at your full disposal… and you’re like this? Really?”  
  
She finally chuckled. “I’ll just nap for a few minutes, okay? Before those three loudmouths come and destroy the peace.”  
  
“Darn! I forgot about them,” Taeyeon groaned. “Can we just stay inside and let them go ski without us? I don’t want to risk an injury. My cranky dance instructor would kill me if he sees me limping back to practice on Monday.”  
  
“Well, that’s a valid reason, actually.” Tiffany turned around to see a grinning Taeyeon. “At least hide your happy smile, you little Byuntae.”  
  
“Hey! I’m not a pervert!”  
  
“Yes, you are.”  
  
“No, I’m not!”  
  
“Who was practically begging for a kiss this entire time?”  
  
“Asking for a kiss from your girlfriend is a perverted act now? What has this world become?” Taeyeon dramatically shook her head.  
  
Tiffany laughed and lifted her head to meet Taeyeon’s lips.  
  
“There. Happy?”  
  
“THAT’S IT?!”  
  
“See? Now this is why you’re a pervert.”  
  
“Sigh… never knew life could be this hard…”  
  
“Stop exaggerating!”  
  
Tiffany pulled Taeyeon by the neck – making the shorter girl lose her balance and fall on top of her. She started to kiss her and felt Taeyeon repositioning herself with her hands slowly wedging themselves between Tiffany’s back and the mattress.  
  
She managed to pull Tiffany’s sweater up a bit and slipped her hand under the fabric. Tiffany gasped at the contact and arched her back by reflex.  
  
“Your hand is cold.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned, “Sorry.”  
  
She was thinking of ways to warm up her hands when a knock came from the door.  
  
They groaned.  
  
Taeyeon turned her head and yelled. “Who is it?”  
  
“The owner of this cottage. And I will open this door in five seconds. If I see you two in any compromising position, I’ll tell my parents about you! Five… four…”  
  
Taeyeon quickly rolled off Tiffany and sulked while she fixed her hair and clothes.  
  
“… One. I’m coming in!” Sunny pushed the door open and the two saw their short friend closing her eyes.  
  
“What are you doing?” Taeyeon asked.  
  
Sunny peeked and finally opened her eyes fully. “Whew. I wanted to spare myself from nightmares and psychological trauma.” She grinned. “The loudmouths wanna go skiing. You want to come along?”  
  
“I can’t risk it,” Taeyeon said. “My dance instructor would kill me if I injure myself. He’s been on my case almost during every class. I can’t ignore his warning. He wasn’t actually pleased to know where I was going.”  
  
Sunny knew that that was true but she also knew the other reason behind Taeyeon’s words.  
  
“Right, Taeng. Like I don’t know your perverted mind.”  
  
“What!? I’m telling the truth!”  
  
“I’m not saying you’re lying. It’s just that I know you well enough to know how your brain works.”  
  
She then turned to look at Tiffany. “Please be the more mature one and make sure that nothing crazy happens here? My parents are just next door. Don’t disgrace me, okay?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Don’t worry. I’ll make sure shorty here doesn’t attempt anything perverted.”  
  
“Yah!”  
  
Sunny ignored her best friend’s protest and turned around to leave. “I’ll see you guys later then. The fridge is full if you’re hungry. Or go out to one of the restaurants if you feel like it.” She closed the door.  
  
“Yes!” Taeyeon made a fist and turned to pounce on Tiffany.  
  
“I thought you’re not supposed to get yourself injured.”  
  
“The mattress is soft. I’m sure I’ll be fine.” She grinned.  
  
“See? Perverted.”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Whatever.” She leaned down and kissed Tiffany again.  
  
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“Ah, Taeyeon! Come on in.”  
  
She bowed to the president of the agency and slowly and carefully made her way into the large meeting room. She saw the trainers and instructors gathered around the large table as she joined her roommates and other fellow trainees at the back of the room.  
  
A few more trainees came in next and they all stood huddled together – not knowing why they were all called to gather like this.  
  
The man looked around. “Is everyone here?”  
  
Some of the other men nodded.  
  
“Okay then.” He stood up and smiled kindly at all of them.  
  
“I guess most of you are wondering why we’ve gathered you here this morning.” He paused. “I know that some of you are busy preparing for your final exams and I’m sorry to have to add this to your plate.” He looked at the trainees standing around Taeyeon. “But unfortunately, this month will be the last month you’ll be able to receive training here.”  
  
The young kids’ faces were painted with shock.  
  
“I’m sorry, kids…” He apologetically smiled at them. “But the financial situation of this agency has deteriorated in such a way that we could no longer afford to keep it up. I’ll be declaring bankruptcy and your seniors – the existing groups – have all signed with other companies.”  
  
They were still too shocked to give any kind of reaction.  
  
“I’m truly sorry. You can audition at other companies – I contacted some of them and they’re willing to meet with you. I’ll give you their contact numbers.”  
  
He then said some other words about living arrangements for those currently staying at the dorm and that he would make sure to contact their parents; but Taeyeon’s mind was already elsewhere. It had, in fact, gone blank. She felt her world come crashing down. Her dream was shattered in an instant.  
  
The road she had paved so diligently had been reduced to nothing. All her years worth of effort had gone down the drain. She might not ever debut.  
  
It hit her hard.  
  
She was lost in her own shock and thoughts when a pair of hands on her shoulders shook her awake. She found herself staring at the fatherly face of the president.  
  
“Taeyeon, are you okay?”  
  
“Y-yes, Sir. I’m o-okay.” She gulped and realized that almost everyone had left the room.  
  
“You don’t need to worry, Taeyeon. You have one of the best voices I’ve ever heard. You’ll become a singer for sure. I’ve contacted several agencies and they’re waiting to see you come and audition for them. I’ll make sure you get their contact numbers and it will all be fine, Taeyeon. Don’t worry.” He smiled again. “I’m truly sorry about all this. I’ll contact your parents and tell them about these other agencies too so you don’t need to worry.” He paused for a bit. “Do you happen to have any other place to stay in the mean time? I mean, you still have one month at your dorm but…”  
  
She slowly nodded. “I’ll think of something, Sir.”  
  
“Good. Let me know if you need anything, okay?” He patted her head. “You’re a good kid. You’ll be successful one day, Taeyeon-ah. I’m sure of it.”  
  
He let go of her shoulders and walked out of the room.  
  
Taeyeon finally lost all strength in her legs and she fell back against the wall. The president’s words felt empty to her.  
All she wanted to do at that moment was run away. Run far away; as far as she could.

**chapter 6**

Taeyeon didn’t come to school for three days and Tiffany couldn’t contact her. Her phone was always off and her best hope for information – Sunny – had also been absent along with her best friend.  
  
She was about to pay Taeyeon a visit after school that day when she saw the girl appearing in the classroom doorway and apologetically bowed to the teacher for being late.  
  
She saw the tired face and noticed the dark circles under the eyes.  
  
She kept staring and hoping that Taeyeon would turn to look at her but the girl went straight to her desk and sat down motionlessly after taking out her book.  
  
She lost all focus and impatiently waited for the recess bell to ring.  
  
The awaited sound finally came and while everyone quickly left the classroom, five girls went to sit and stand next to the silent and exhausted looking Taeyeon.  
  
Tiffany quickly pulled the shorter girl into a hug.  
  
She let go when Taeyeon didn’t respond. She was confused and worried.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah… are you okay?”  
  
Taeyeon finally moved; turning to look at Tiffany and tried to smile. Everyone could see how forced it was. The eyes were sad and empty.  
  
“Taeng…” Hyoyeon patted her friend’s head. “Talk to Fany, okay?” Sunny had told her what was going on but she didn’t want Tiffany to think that she was being left out. The usually cheerful girl then stood up and signaled for the other three to follow her.  
  
Jessica, Sooyoung and Yuri looked concerned and wanted to stay but they realized that it was better to leave the two alone. They silently followed Hyoyeon out of the classroom.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…” Tiffany hugged the lackluster girl again and this time Taeyeon responded – weakly wrapping her arms around Tiffany. She buried her face in the taller girl’s shoulder and exhaled. She couldn’t cry anymore. She had run out of tears days ago.  
  
“What’s wrong? Where were you? What happened?” She gently stroked Taeyeon’s hair.  
  
Taeyeon reluctantly let go of the warm comfort of Tiffany’s arms. “I’m sorry I disappeared like that.”  
  
“It’s okay…” Tiffany fixed Taeyeon’s bangs gently.  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “The agency has gone bankrupt.”  
  
Tiffany’s eyes grew wide with shock.  
  
“The training will officially end by the end of the month.”  
  
“Oh no…” She knew how much Taeyeon wanted to become a singer. This must be devastating for the girl.  
  
“My parents came to talk things out with the president and to settle a few things. Then I had to find a new place to live because I don’t want to go back to Jeonju.” She continued explaining emotionlessly – like a robot that was programmed to distribute the information. “Sunny offered to take me in so she was helping me move and settle down at her place. Her house is big and it’s almost always empty anyway…” She deflated. “Sorry I didn’t tell you this earlier.” She looked at the sad pair of eyes. “I guess the frog has been squished by the truck for real.” She chuckled bitterly.  
  
“Don’t say that.” Tiffany hugged the girl again. “You’re not a squished frog!”  
  
Taeyeon’s chuckle made her realize how silly that sentence was.  
  
“You know what I mean. This is not the end, Taeyeon-ah… You’ll find another agency. You’re too good to not sing. You’re born to sing.”  
  
Taeyeon smiled into the comfortable shoulder she was leaning on and tightened her arms around the other girl. “Thanks.” She didn’t let go. “I missed you.”  
  
“I missed you too. I was very worried about you.”  
  
“Sorry about that.” Taeyeon finally let go. “It got too hectic and…” She gulped and contemplated on telling the other girl her other fear. She looked down.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…” Tiffany gently brushed Taeyeon’s cheek. “It’s okay… I understand.” She wished that she had been included earlier – like Sunny was – but she knew that it had just been a month whereas Sunny had been Taeyeon’s best friend for the past three years. She inwardly sighed. She couldn’t believe she was feeling jealous of Taeyeon’s best friend.  
  
“Look at the bright side though…” Taeyeon spoke again – trying her best to smile. “I can focus more on the final exams now and get this whole school thing over with.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “That’s true.” She kissed the soft cheek. “It’s okay, Taeyeon. You’ll get through this. There are other agencies – bigger agencies – that will fight to sign you. You’re too great of a singer.”  
  
Taeyeon was grateful for Tiffany’s effort to console her and gave her a quick peck. “Thanks, Fany-ah. Let’s hope so.”  
  
“I know so.” Tiffany nodded firmly. “I mean, I heard you sing once and I instantly turned into a stalker who ended up dating a girl. I’m pretty sure that indicates total irresistible awesomeness that’s bound to be noticed by those agencies…”  
  
Taeyeon laughed for the first time in days. “That’s one funny logic but I’ll take it.”  
  
Tiffany grinned; glad to see Taeyeon feeling better. “I’m always here for you, okay?” She rubbed Taeyeon’s back. “Always.”  
  
“Thank you.” She smiled – glad to put her small fear to rest for now. “Sorry for not telling you about this sooner.”  
  
“It’s okay. I understand. We haven’t been together for that long so it’s okay…” She hid her disappointment.  
  
Taeyeon leaned in to kiss Tiffany gently. “You’re important to me. Please remember that. It doesn’t matter how long or how short we’ve been together.” She gently caressed Tiffany’s cheek. “Okay?”  
  
The taller girl smiled – relieved. “Okay. So are you to me.”  
  
Taeyeon nodded. “Wanna help move the rest of my stuff later?”  
  
“I thought Sunny has helped you…” Tiffany pouted slightly.  
  
She grinned. “Don’t be jealous. I can’t possibly show up at your doorstep and asked your parents whether I could move in, can I?”  
  
“Why not? They like you.”  
  
“Err… if they find out about us…”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “Right.” It was complicated; she realized that.  
  
“We’ve only moved the large stuff and most of my clothes but I still have a lot of stuff that I need to pack. So, you wanna help?”  
  
“Of course!”  
  
“Good.” Taeyeon was already feeling better. She regretted that she didn’t talk to Tiffany sooner. It was pretty obvious to her now that Tiffany had somehow become a very important part of her life and that no one could comfort her like she did.  
  
“I’m hungry. Let’s go have lunch.” Tiffany said and stood up – holding Taeyeon’s hand and pulling it.  
  
Taeyeon followed the pull and stood up; watching Tiffany returning the chair she was sitting on back to the desk next to hers.  
  
“Come on.”  
  
Tiffany was about to start walking when Taeyeon pulled at the hand. She gave the taller girl another peck on the lips.  
  
“What’s that for?” Tiffany smiled.  
  
“For simply being here.”  
  
“Glad to be here.” She returned the peck and quickly pulled the hand again. “Now come on! I don’t wanna miss lunch. You need food.”  
  
Taeyeon chuckled and let herself be dragged all the way to the cafeteria.  
  
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“You know… for someone who has only lived in Seoul for three years… you have a lot of stuff!” Tiffany kicked another full box to the corner and sneezed at the dust.  
  
“That’s why I’m throwing away half of them. I don’t even remember why I have them in the first place.” Taeyeon dragged the large trash bag and started to put things in it.  
  
Tiffany pulled a plastic box from under Taeyeon’s bed. “Your CD collection?”  
  
“Huh?” Taeyeon looked at the box in Tiffany’s hand. “Oh. Yep.”  
  
She opened the box and fingered through the cases. Her brows creased as she pulled out a thin transparent case with a rewritable CD in it. Her name was written on the silver disk.  
  
“Why is there my name on this one?”  
  
“What?” Taeyeon looked up and saw the case in Tiffany’s hand. She was shocked to see the thing that she had long forgotten about. She made a dash for it. “Give me that!”  
  
Tiffany quickly ran out of the room with the bounty safely clutched in her hand. “Now I’m curious!”  
  
She searched for the CD player she thought she saw earlier and tried to insert the disk in it while fighting Taeyeon off.  
  
“Back off, Taeyeon!” She hit the other girl’s hand.  
  
“It’s empty, okay?”  
  
“Right. Who would try this hard to snatch away an empty CD?”  
  
Tiffany finally managed to press the play button and turned up the volume.  
  
Taeyeon groaned and ran back into the bedroom – covering her red face with her hands. She threw herself on the mattress and covered her head with the pillow. She felt like dying with embarrassment.  
  
“Fany-ah…” Taeyeon’s voice echoed in the small living room.  
  
Tiffany grinned.  
  
“If you’re listening to this then it means you’ve accepted my heart.” Embarrassed giggles and a muffled “Aigoo…” were heard along with some rustling of the microphone. “My fingers are curling. Anyway… here’s something for days when you can’t stalk me. Sincerely from my heart.” Another round of giggles and scratching noises followed before Taeyeon’s voice was heard again. “I like you, Fany-ah. Kkkk~ Gah!! I can’t do this…” The voice faded out.  
  
Tiffany laughed out loud and clapped her hands in excitement.  
  
The music started. She heard Taeyeon clearing her throat before the voice she loved so much floated out of the speakers.  
  
“Can you feel them? The hope of those stars up above and my wide, open heart? Can you hear it? The sound of my heart and my high voice speaking. You bring me joy. You bring me love. A constant, unchanging love. You make me smile. You give me hope. We both knew, we both understand. We both know.”  
  
She smiled as she heard the cute English words and felt the meaning of the lyrics.  
  
“Do you believe in the voices in the heart of a small forest? If you look deep upon the jewel of my heart, you will be able to find my answer. You bring me joy. You bring me love. A constant, unchanging love. You make me smile. You give me hope. We both knew, we both understand. We both know.”  
  
She waited until the song was over before she ejected the CD and neatly put it back in its case. She put it in her bag for safekeeping and walked into the room to find Taeyeon on her stomach with her head buried under the pillow.  
  
She laughed and moved to lie down on top of the embarrassed girl.  
  
“Thank you.”  
  
Taeyeon only grunted.  
  
“No need to be shy, Taeyeon-ah… although I admit it was finger curling and somewhat cheesy…” She laughed. “But I love it! I can listen to your voice wherever I go now.”  
  
She felt Taeyeon relaxing under her.  
  
“You like it?”  
  
“What? I can’t hear you.”  
  
Taeyeon slowly pulled her head out from underneath the pillow.  
  
“You like it?” She still didn’t want to turn around to face Tiffany.  
  
“I love it!”  
  
“Really?”  
  
“Yes, really.” She tried to find the face buried under the hair.  
  
Taeyeon finally turned around – making Tiffany shift to her side. Her cheeks were still blushing furiously.  
  
Tiffany laughed at the cute sight.  
  
“I was planning to give it to you that day I told you I like you.”  
  
“Ah. So this was the thing you were hiding from me…”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“Why didn’t you just give it to me?”  
  
“Because it’s embarrassing! I don’t know what I was thinking when I recorded that. No wonder everyone was laughing at me.” She grinned at the memory of her seniors and fellow trainees before she remembered her current situation. The grin disappeared.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah… it’s going to be okay. Don’t worry.”  
  
She looked at the other girl and tried to smile. “Yeah, you’re right.” She sighed and got off the bed. “Let’s quickly finish packing then.”  
  
Tiffany watched the downcast looking Taeyeon going about the room and silently hoped that things would really be alright again. It hurt to see Taeyeon so broken and defeated. She missed seeing the passionate and confident Taeyeon.  
  
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“FREEDOM!”  
  
The short girl stood in the middle of the corridor with both fists high in the air and her head tilted back. Her eyes were closed and her expression resembled that of an Olympic athlete who just won the gold medal after a long and grueling match or a hero after defeating her mortal enemy.  
  
Three other girls joined in the celebration by doing weird dances around the immobile girl; making it look like some kind of tribal rain dance with Sunny as the totem pole and the noisy trio as the worshiping tribe.  
  
“Embarrassing.” Jessica shook her head and grinned at her friends’ behavior. She sneakily took out her phone and recorded the whole thing – snickering to herself.  
  
Taeyeon was still scrutinizing the book in her hands. She was checking whether her answers were correct.  
  
“Hey…”  
  
She felt a warm hand on her arm.  
  
“It’s over. I’m sure you did well.” Tiffany took the book from Taeyeon’s hands and closed it. “We’re done, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
She smiled. “Just wanted to make sure.”  
  
“I know. But there’s nothing more we could do but wait. So let’s just enjoy the free time.”  
  
Tiffany then pointed at the four dorks who had now broken out into weird shouts of joy and butt dances.  
  
“That’s a bit too much but you get the idea.”  
  
Taeyeon saw what their friends were doing and laughed out loud.  
  
“Yah! Stop that!” She stepped forward and pulled Sunny and Hyoyeon to the side – by their ears – before slapping Yuri’s butt and kicking Sooyoung’s. “Can’t you guys celebrate in a normal way?”  
  
“This *is* normal! We’re just dancing, you uptight little ahjumma!” Sunny stuck out her tongue and rubbed her ear.  
  
“I have to agree with Taeyeon on this one,” Jessica said as she pocketed her phone with a satisfied smirk on her face. “Either stop or I’ll upload your pictures and videos online for all to see.”  
  
“Gasp!” Sunny exaggeratedly exclaimed. “You wouldn’t!”  
  
“Watch me.” Jessica coldly replied.  
  
“Come on. Let’s go celebrate at my house. My mom’s baking again,” Tiffany said.  
  
“Yay! Cupcakes!” Taeyeon clapped and jumped up and down happily like a small kid.  
  
“Now who’s the embarrassing one?” Hyoyeon shook her head before running away. “Last one to reach the bus stop is shorter than Sunny!”  
  
“YAH!” The short girl in question went after her friend. “My driver’s picking me up, we can just take the car! HYOYEON-AH!”  
  
“I’ll never be shorter than Sunny anyway,” Sooyoung grabbed her bag. “BUT I DON’T WANT TO SIT AT THE BACK!!!” She ran after her friends – pulling Yuri along with her.  
  
“Oh my god. What is this… kindergarten?” Jessica sighed and walked towards the exit.  
Tiffany shook her head and laughed. She felt Taeyeon grabbing her hand as they made their way out of the building.  
  
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“So what’s your plan now?”  
  
Tiffany swung the hand in hers and fixed her hair with her other hand. The cold wind blew past them and she moved closer towards the other girl.  
  
“Not sure.”  
  
“I can’t convince you to take the college entrance exam, huh?”  
  
Taeyeon shook her head. “That’s not my path and you know it.”  
  
“Yeah… Couldn’t hurt to try though.”  
  
The shorter one grinned. “Thanks for trying but you don’t have to worry. There are a couple of auditions lined up for me starting next week. And I still have the gig at the restaurant… for now.”  
  
They walked on in silence. They were still wearing their uniforms under their thick jackets since they went straight to the river after the graduation ceremony.  
  
“By the way, you’re coming to dinner tonight.”  
  
“Huh? What dinner?”  
  
“Celebrating our graduation dinner. Mom’s orders.” Tiffany grinned. “From the smell of the kitchen this morning, I think she had also used this opportunity to bake you more sweet treats. Be prepared for boxes of cupcakes.”  
Taeyeon grinned. “Your mother’s cupcakes are the best! There’s always room for them in my stomach.”  
  
“I think she knows you’re her fan. I’ve never seen her bake this diligently before. She had produced more cupcakes in the past six months than she had ever done in my entire life!”  
  
The shorter girl laughed. “That’s a good thing, right?”  
  
“Only if you’re not living under the same roof. My jacket is starting to smell like cake.”  
  
“I don’t mind that at all.” Taeyeon turned and pulled Tiffany towards her; planting a gentle kiss on her lips.  
  
Tiffany smiled. “You know what?”  
  
“What?”  
  
“We’ve passed two months.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “Really? Why does it feel like two years… Ow!” She grimaced after the hit on her shoulder. “I meant that in a good way!”  
  
“Sorry.” Tiffany sheepishly grinned.  
  
“Give me a kiss and I’ll accept your apology.”  
  
“The begging for kisses is still a major turnoff, by the way.”  
  
“Liar. I know you like it.”  
  
Tiffany laughed again and kissed Taeyeon.  
  
“Thanks.”  
  
Taeyeon pulled Tiffany’s hand and they walked again.  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
“Hmm?”  
  
“Do your parents know about this? Us?”  
  
“Do yours?”  
  
Taeyeon slowly shook her head. “I haven’t told them. I don’t know how they would react.”  
  
“Same here.” Tiffany took a deep breath.  
  
They walked on in silence.  
  
Tiffany suddenly looked at her watch. “We should go back.”  
  
“Let’s stay out here just a bit longer.” Taeyeon found a bench and sat down – pulling Tiffany with her.  
  
The taller girl leaned her head on Taeyeon’s shoulder and wrapped her arms around her waist.  
  
Taeyeon kissed Tiffany’s forehead as she pulled her closer.  
  
They watched the waters and a few dedicated joggers who were puffing steam from their mouth while they ran in the freezing weather.  
  
“Is it too soon to wish that we could stay like this forever?” Tiffany suddenly broke the silence.  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “I think it’s fine. I don’t mind staying like this forever too. Although I hope it won’t be winter forever… my butt is already frozen.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “What a way to ruin the moment, Kim Taeyeon.”  
  
“It’s the truth.” She shifted a bit in her seat. “Yep. Frozen and numb.”  
  
They both laughed and stayed a few more minutes before deciding to head back and go to that dinner with Tiffany’s parents.  
  
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Tiffany spent the next month cramming for the college entrance exam while Taeyeon was busy going to auditions and finding part-time jobs singing at restaurants and cafes.  
  
One of her old vocal trainers asked her to do a duet for a song in his upcoming album and she gladly agreed.  
  
The pay wasn’t much but the experience rekindled the hope she had temporarily lost. Her passion started to burn inside her again and she was more determined than ever to make her dream come true.  
  
“Miyoung-ah!”  
  
Tiffany heard the shout and yelled back. “Yes, Mom?”  
  
“Taeyeon’s here to see you!”  
  
“Just send her up!” She quickly finished up her studying.  
  
“Wow… the women in this house are loud.”  
  
Taeyeon’s voice startled her. She swung around in her chair to see Taeyeon closing the door to her room.  
  
“Haven’t you heard of knock first before entering?” She smiled.  
  
“I was trying to catch you red-handed.”  
  
“Oh? Doing what?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged and approached the chair. “Maybe you’re hiding someone else in here…”  
  
“Gasp! Are you psychic?”  
  
Taeyeon lifted her eyebrows. “Not funny, Fany-ah…” She then walked to the closet and opened it – looking inside to make sure no one’s hiding there.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Why are you so paranoid all of a sudden? You started the teasing.”  
  
“Maybe there’s a good looking guy with a good GPA and a college education lying around and your parents decided that he’s the perfect one for you.”  
  
She peeked under the bed.  
  
Tiffany was still laughing. “Well then… I just have to tell my parents that I’m taken, don’t I?”  
  
“But he’s perfect!”  
  
“My Taeyeon is perfect for me.” She reached out and grabbed the shorter girl by the waist.  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “Record that sentence and send it to my phone please. I’ll use that as my ringtone, my message alert tone, my alarm to-…”  
  
Tiffany’s lips silenced her and she leaned in to deepen the kiss before pulling back.  
  
“Hi there, beautiful…” She smiled. “Long time no see.”  
  
“Hello there, cute one. Glad to see you again.” Tiffany grinned. “I missed you…” She pecked Taeyeon’s lips lightly.  
  
“I missed you too.”  
  
Tiffany let go of Taeyeon and sat on her bed; folding her legs under her. “How’re the auditions going?”  
  
“Meh…” Taeyeon shrugged. “They’re not the companies I want to be involved with. Some are just plain shady while some are looking for something that’s not really my style.”  
  
She sat down next to Tiffany.  
  
“But… I have something to show you.”  
  
“Oh?”  
  
“Ta-da!” She showed her the square object she had been hiding behind her back.  
  
Tiffany’s eyes went wide and grabbed the CD. “That album? Your duet?”  
  
“Yeap. The digital sale has been doing quite well, surprisingly. Although no one knows who I am, of course.” She grinned. “I’m just glad it’s well received.”  
  
“Are you kidding? Of course it will be well received! It’s your voice!”  
  
Taeyeon laughed, “Thank you, stalker girl. Your support means a lot to me.”  
  
Tiffany lightly slapped Taeyeon’s arm before moving to her computer and inserted the CD. A few seconds later and Taeyeon’s soft voice – combined with the deep male voice – filled the room.  
  
Tiffany sat back down on the bed and listened intently. She let herself be carried away by the perfect combination of the two voices and the lyrics. She got goosebumps and shivered. She then felt Taeyeon’s arms wrapping around her own.  
  
“Guess who I was thinking about when I sang this?”  
  
She heard the whisper and chuckled. “Do I know that person?”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“Lucky person.”  
  
“Nope. I’m the lucky one.”  
  
“Wow… you’re being extra cheesy today.” Tiffany turned in Taeyeon’s hold. “What has gotten into you?”  
  
Taeyeon frowned. “You don’t remember?”  
  
“Huh? What don’t I remember?”  
  
“What day is it today?”  
  
“Err… Thursday?”  
  
Taeyeon sighed and let go of Tiffany. She scooted away until her back hit the wall. She folded her arms and sulked.  
  
Tiffany turned off the music that had been looping and crawled next to the sulking girl.  
  
“I’m sorry… but I seriously don’t know what day it is today.”  
  
She tried coaxing Taeyeon with a kiss on the cheek. Taeyeon didn’t respond.  
  
“Just tell me?”  
  
“How long have you been living in Korea again?”  
  
“Err… ten years?”  
  
“Right. And you’ve never heard of the 100th day anniversary?”  
  
Tiffany gasped. “Ohmygod. I’m sorry, Taeyeon-ah. I totally didn’t realize that.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Today is our 100th day together, Fany-ah.” She then smiled a little. “Can you believe it? Not bad, huh?”  
  
“Not bad at all,” she smiled and gave Taeyeon another kiss on the cheek. “I’m sorry. I’ve never celebrated it before…”  
  
“Huh? I thought you had a couple of boyfriends?”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “Never lasted this long. Plus, we were just kids…”  
  
“Speaking like a true Miyoung.” Taeyeon grinned. “How old are you now, Miyoung?”  
  
“Don’t tease the name.” She punched Taeyeon’s arm. “You’ve celebrated one before?”  
  
Taeyeon shook her head. “Also never lasted this long.” She then grinned. “I’m glad this one does, though.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “Me too. Hoping it will last even longer.”  
  
“Yup. Let’s try to aim for another 100 days, shall we?” Taeyeon laughed.  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “Why not. Still have time while I wait for that perfect guy you mentioned.”  
  
“What about that whole ‘my Taeyeon is perfect for me’ thing? You didn’t mean that?”  
  
“Meh…”  
  
“Why you little…”  
  
Taeyeon tackled Tiffany down on the mattress and tickled her.  
  
“Y-yah! Stop it, Taeyeon-ah!” She tried to speak between laughing and slapping Taeyeon away. “M-my mom!”  
  
“Oh right!” Taeyeon immediately got off Tiffany.  
  
“Ha! Gotcha!”  
  
It was Tiffany’s turn to attack as she pinned Taeyeon on the bed and tickled her.  
  
“Y-yah! Fany-ah! What about yo-your mom!?”  
  
She stopped and looked at the clock hanging on the wall.  
  
“It’s time for her cooking lesson so she’s not even here.”  
  
“What?! You tricked me!?”  
  
“Yes, I did.”  
  
She grinned victoriously and leaned down to close the gap between them. “Happy 100th day anniversary, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
Taeyeon kissed Tiffany back – freeing her hand from Tiffany’s grip and running it along the other girl’s back gently. “Happy 100th day anniversary, Fany-ah.”  
  
She then pushed Tiffany off her after a few more minutes of reveling in each other’s kisses and touches.  
  
“I have something for you.” She sat up and reached into her pocket. “I don’t know if you’re familiar with the whole 100thday custom but…” She opened her palm and showed Tiffany the matching rings. Her cheeks slightly turned pink.  
  
Tiffany had to laugh. “You’re too cute, Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“Will you wear it?”  
  
“Of course! You got it for me so of course I’ll wear it. Proudly.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned and put one of the rings on Tiffany’s finger before wearing her own.  
  
“Assa!”  
  
Tiffany laughed again before she kissed Taeyeon’s cheek. “Thank you.”  
  
“You’re most welcome.”  
  
They gently kissed and Taeyeon finally pulled back a little – keeping her forehead on Tiffany’s and her hand on her cheek.  
  
“Can I ask you something?”  
  
“Sure.”  
  
“What if… What if I fail?” Taeyeon gulped. “What if I don’t become the singer that I’ve always dreamed to be and just end up a poor struggling café singer without a decent college degree?”  
  
“You won’t fail.”  
  
“What if I do?” She clenched her jaws. “Will you leave me?”  
  
“Don’t say that.” Tiffany pulled away and looked into Taeyeon’s sad eyes. “I know it’s hard for you right now but I mean what I said, Taeyeon-ah. I will not leave you. I know people will think we’re just being silly and that we’re too young and everything… but I won’t leave you just because you don’t become a singer.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply. She wanted to believe that but even at her young age she knew that real life would be much tougher and sometimes people just couldn’t fight reality.  
  
“If you cheat on me – or do something crazy like burn down someone’s house or curse my mom’s cupcakes – then yeah, I’ll leave you.” She grinned; trying to lighten the mood and console the other girl. “But not for such a silly reason like you not becoming a singer. Come on. I thought you know me. Give me more credit please.”  
  
She smiled a little. “It’s not that I don’t trust you…” She sighed. “It’s not looking good, Fany-ah. I’ve turned twenty. That’s pretty old in the current idol-ruled world. The kids these days debut when they hit seventeen or eighteen. And I don’t even have an agency. If I were to train again… how long would it take before I debut? That is *if* I ever debut…” She gulped.  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “So what? There are plenty of amazing solo singers out there that debuted way into their twenties. And I thought you don’t want to be an idol?”  
  
“I don’t if I can help it. But that might be the only way for me at this age.” She chuckled. “Ironic isn’t it, this whole age thing?”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “Don’t think about it too much, Taeyeon-ah. Keep looking and keep trying. Your time will come. I’m sure of it. This duet has put your name out there. Your dream will come true.” She encouragingly smiled. “I’m betting every cupcake my mom has ever baked and all she would bake in the future.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “That’s a lot of cupcakes. Even for me.”  
  
“Please don’t worry?” She kissed her. “I’m here. I’ll always be here. We’re going for another 100 days, remember?”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “Thank you.”  
  
“You’re welcome. Besides, you’d need at least one stalker so how can I leave you?”  
  
She laughed again. “That’s true.”  
  
Tiffany was relieved to hear Taeyeon’s laugh and the receding sadness in her eyes. She gulped as she realized something.  
  
The way her heart was beating every time Taeyeon’s near, how she wished for nothing but happiness for this short girl sitting in front of her, how she wanted to protect her and comfort her, how she was willing to fight for them should any of their parents find out and object… how she never wanted to lose her…  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
The gentle voice snapped her out of her thoughts.  
  
“Are you okay?”  
  
“I-I’m fine… Why do you ask?”  
  
“You look… distracted… all of a sudden.” Taeyeon searched her eyes. “Did I say something wrong?”  
  
“N-no! You said and did nothing wrong.”  
  
“Then what is it? I know something’s bothering you… I’m sorry if I sounded too insecure…”  
  
“It’s not that, Taeyeon-ah.” She smiled. “I’m glad you’re being honest with me.”  
  
“Then what is it?”  
  
“Kiss me.”  
  
“W-what?”  
  
She took Taeyeon’s hand. “Kiss me.”  
  
“Why are you asking this all of a sudden? This is so not you. You always said that I’m the one who’s always beg-…” And she was once again silenced by Tiffany’s lips.  
  
“Whoa…” Taeyeon was left in a daze after Tiffany broke their kiss. “T-that… Yeah…”  
  
Tiffany laughed at Taeyeon’s flushed face and her cute stutter.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
Taeyeon looked at her and smiled.  
  
“I think…” She gulped. “I think… I love you…”  
  
She quickly let go of Taeyeon’s hand and hid her face in her pillow – curling her fingers and toes after hearing what she had just said. She crouched on the bed; away from Taeyeon.  
  
Taeyeon was still frozen in place – her eyes wide and her mouth agape. She thought her ears were playing tricks on her. Did Tiffany just say…? Did she really say…? A wide grin started to spread slowly across her face. She did, didn’t she?  
  
She laughed when she saw what Tiffany was doing.  
  
“Yah!” She slapped her butt. “How could you say such a thing then hide like this? As much as I like seeing your butt, I’d rather see your face right now.”  
  
Taeyeon searched for Tiffany’s hand and pulled. “Come on, Fany-ah. Twenty year olds don’t behave this way.”  
  
“Look who’s talking…”  
  
Tiffany finally gave in to the forceful pull and sat up. She still didn’t want to face Taeyeon especially since the latter hadn’t said the three words back.  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
She felt Taeyeon’s hand on her chin, turning her face around. She saw Taeyeon’s grinning face.  
  
“Thank you.”  
  
“W-what?! That’s all you have to say?!”  
  
Taeyeon laughed and pulled Tiffany’s face in for another kiss.  
  
“How’s that then?” She grinned.  
  
“You want to be slapped, Kim Taeyeon?”  
  
“I’ve never been slapped by someone I love before…” She then shrugged. “Meh… Why not...”  
  
Tiffany blinked and froze.  
  
“And why are you so quiet now?”  
  
She saw Tiffany still not reacting and laughed again. “Okay, okay. Enough teasing. I love you too, Hwang Miyoung.” She smiled. “And you’re the first person I’ve ever said those words to.”  
  
Tiffany slowly returned to life. She smiled.  
  
“Same here, you know.”

**chapter 7**

“Kim Taeyeon?”  
  
She nervously stood up and smoothen her shirt before entering the room.  
  
She bowed towards the men and women sitting at the long desk and introduced herself.  
  
The man at the far right introduced everyone there and she learned that the president of the agency himself was sitting there – in the middle of the table.  
  
She gulped.  
  
“Ah… you’re the Kim Taeyeon who did that duet with Dowon-sshi?” Asked one of the men who was introduced as the producer.  
  
She nodded. “Yes, Sir.”  
  
“And you were a trainee at SM for… three years?”  
  
“Yes, Sir.”  
  
The president spoke. “Sooman Hyung himself recommended her to me. She won the best singer contest and got casted.” His eyes never left Taeyeon.  
  
They nodded and some flipped the pages of the papers in front of them while others scribbled down notes.  
  
“Right. Well, it’s safe to say that we’ve all heard what you can do – the song being number one on the digital charts for more than a week now – but do you mind singing for us live? Just a little bit?”  
  
“I don’t mind at all, Sir.” She smiled and cleared her throat. “Excuse me.”  
  
She then calmed herself down and took a deep breath.  
  
“Can you feel them? The hope of those stars up above and my wide, open heart? Can you hear it? The sound of my heart and my high voice speaking. You bring me joy. You bring me love. A constant, unchanging love. You make me smile. You give me hope. We both knew, we both understand. We both know.”  
  
She finished her song and took another bow.  
  
The men and women applauded.  
  
“As expected. Sooman Hyung always has a good eye,” the president smiled.  
  
The other people nodded and Taeyeon felt a bit relieved.  
  
“How do you feel about debuting as a group, Taeyeon?”  
  
“I don’t really mind, Sir. It would be fun to have constant companions; less lonely.”  
  
He smiled. “That’s true. But you do know that it can also be torturing if you don’t get along?”  
  
She nodded. “That will always be a risk. But I think if we all share a common goal and are willing to work hard, we could at least stay professional and work together as colleagues? I’m not here to look for a new best friend.”  
  
“Realistic. I like that.”  
  
The man paused and observed her for another minute. “What is your dream, Taeyeon?”  
  
She was taken aback by the deep yet seemingly simple question.  
  
“I-…” She cleared her throat again. “It’s quite simple actually. I want to sing, Sir.”  
  
“And be famous and have lots of money…”  
  
“No, Sir.” Taeyeon immediately cut the man off. “I’m sorry, I mean… those are all great, of course, but that’s not what I really want to do. I want to sing. I want to be able to communicate through music. I want to touch people’s heart like all those singers have touched mine.” She grinned nervously. “I know it’s stupid and cliché but if being a café singer could do that, then I’d gladly just stick to that, Sir. But unfortunately, we all know that in order to have a wider impact, one must somehow be out there.”  
  
He tilted his head in amusement. “That’s quite ambitious, Taeyeon… and innocent.”  
  
She smiled. “I know it’s a business, Sir. I’ve done my research before I decided to enter SM’s contest. And I’d be lying if I say that I’m not interested in the money at all. We all need to make a living somehow, right?”  
  
“Smart kid.” One of the men commented.  
  
“I run a business here, Taeyeon.” The president spoke again – leaning forward. “I need artists to perform and sell. We’re quite new, as you may have known. We have the funds but not the trainees. And frankly, I never intend to spend years training little kids – most of them won’t even debut anyway. That’s where Sooman Hyung and I differ. And that’s why he went broke and I’m still here. I need the talent that has been sculpted enough so all I need to do is put the finishing touches, provide it with good marketing and packaging… and sell it. We have the best composers, producers and designers working with us. We’ve signed over plenty of senior artists and I intend to keep each and everyone of them happy here. But you won’t see me investing in kids who barely knew how to dance. You get what I’m saying?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“And in case you haven’t noticed, I’m a very open and blunt person. You can ask any of my staff, artists or those I’m preparing to debut. I don’t hide anything – not even my expectations and certainly not my disappointments. There are rules to follow and when you’ve signed that contract, I expect you to follow them. Failure to do so will earn you the penalty as written in that contract. I expect my artists to work hard, to be passionate and to think realistically. Just like me. It’s what got me here in the first place.”  
  
Taeyeon digested all the information slowly with a growing uneasiness in the pit of her stomach. This man was nothing like the fatherly figure she had grown to admire as a trainee in those three years. This one was more of a ruthless businessman.  
  
“So.” The man leaned back in his chair. “I think you have what it takes – I can tell you that right off the bat. Everyone knows you can sing and since you’ve trained for three years at SM, I’m pretty sure you can dance. I’m preparing a new group – a trio. I have found the other two members and you can be the third. That means, if you agree to join us, you’ll debut as an idol.”  
  
Taeyeon had kinda expected it so she was able to hide her surprise quite well.  
  
“I’ll give you the weekend to think things through and you can call our talent manager on Monday to tell us what your decision is. Okay?”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t know whether she should be happy or not. She decided to go for the positive reaction and smiled widely before bowing ninety degrees. “Thank you, Sir.”  
  
“You’re welcome, Taeyeon.” He stood up. “A talent like you is hard to find. I do hope you decide to join us.” He smiled. “It would be such a waste to not sing with that great voice of yours.”  
  
The president left the room – followed by the other people.  
  
She kept bowing to everyone until they all left.  
  
She then slowly made her way out of the room and an assistant gave her the talent manager’s card with the number she needed to call on Monday.  
  
She put it safely in her wallet and made her way out of the building. She needed to get some fresh air.  
  
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She had turned off her phone all day while she took a very long walk along the river; trying to process everything that had happened. She knew of the risks of being an idol and it usually included not being able to date. She had had her share of helping her seniors meet secretly with their boyfriends of girlfriends and covered for them when their instructors or managers asked. It was okay to date as a trainee but once they debuted, there would be no chance for that whatsoever.  
  
To continue dating was always possible but since most rookies would have their phone confiscated, the relationship would slowly yet surely deteriorate and end. It was a matter of when, not if, the rookies would go back to being single.  
  
The senior ones were given more freedom to date – as long as they keep it a secret. Some of the rebellious ones would be forever kept under scrutiny but if you followed the rules and did well, you would be rewarded accordingly.  
  
At least that was how it worked at her old agency. Judging by the current president’s view on the whole matter, she knew it would be more strict and risky.  
  
She could reject the offer, of course, and waited for a better opportunity. But she couldn’t deny the fear of not getting that better opportunity. This agency was indeed new but very big because the president had been in the business for a long time and owned many other entertainment companies. He was trying to expand it by creating an agency and the artists that he had signed were some of the most respected and top-listed names in South Korea. She knew that debuting from this company would at least provide her with the proper boost.  
  
She needed to discuss it with Tiffany and Sunny before she could make a decision.  
  
She walked inside Sunny’s large house and went into her room.  
  
Another good thing about joining the agency was that she could live in the dorms again and stop being a burden to her best friend. Although Sunny didn’t mind and enjoyed the company since her family mostly lived in the US; she still didn’t like the feeling of freeloading on her friend.  
  
She took a quick hot shower to help her relax and climbed on her bed after turning off the lights. She was glad her best friend was still out with her sister.  
  
She switched her phone on to see messages from Tiffany asking where she was and whether everything was okay.  
  
She dialed the number and waited. It only took one ring.  
  
“TAEYEON-AH!”  
  
“Ouch, my ear…”  
  
“Where have you been? Why was your phone off? Are you okay?”  
  
“My battery died. I forgot to charge it last night.” She had to lie for now.  
  
“Oh I see. You’re home now?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“You okay? You sound kinda down…”  
  
She smiled. “I’m fine. Are you busy tomorrow?”  
  
“Nope.”  
  
“Spend the day with me?”  
  
“Sure! It would be my pleasure. Besides, I also need a break from all the studying. My head’s about to burst.”  
  
She chuckled sadly. Soon they would start to lead totally different lives and Taeyeon realized with a gulp that they might never reach their 200th day.  
  
“Taeyeon?”  
  
“Yes?”  
  
“Are you sure you’re okay?”  
  
“I’m fine. Just a bit tired, I guess.”  
  
“Oh! I forgot to ask. How did the audition go?”  
  
“It went okay. The president knows the president of my old company. He recommended me, apparently.”  
  
“That’s good!” Tiffany didn’t hear any happy reaction from Taeyeon though. “Isn’t it?”  
  
“Y-yeah! Of course!” She tried to sound excited.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah… what’s wrong? I know you’re not okay. What is it?”  
  
She sighed. “I’ll tell you about it tomorrow.”  
  
“Okay… promise you’ll tell me everything?”  
  
“I promise. I’ll pick you up after breakfast… say… nine-ish?”  
  
“I’ll be ready.”  
  
“Good. See you tomorrow then?”  
  
“See you tomorrow. Go get some sleep, okay? And cheer up, please?”  
  
She smiled. “I will, thanks. Good night.”  
  
“Good night.”  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
“Yes?”  
  
“You know I love you, right?”  
  
She heard a giggle. “I do. And you know I love you, right?”  
  
She sadly gulped. “I do.”  
  
“Good. Sleep well, Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
She hung up and plugged her phone into its charger.  
  
She wanted to sleep but she couldn’t. Her mind was tired from all the thinking so she just lay there in the dark – tossing and turning for hours.  
  
She heard the front door open and guessed that Sunny was home. She was too lazy to check the time but she assumed it was late so she decided to just talk to her best friend after she had talked to Tiffany.  
  
She heard footsteps up the stairs and frowned as she realized that Sunny alone couldn’t have caused so much noise. She threw the covers aside and got up to check. She heard strange noises behind her door and became a bit paranoid. What if it’s a burglar?  
  
She quickly searched for anything she could use as a weapon and found an old tennis racket in the closet. It must’ve belonged to Sunny’s sister since it was her old room.  
  
She held the racket in one hand while the other slowly reached for the handle.  
  
The noises were now mixed with hushed giggles and she was confused.  
  
She took a deep breath and quickly pulled the door open to see her friends giggling and huddling behind Tiffany who was holding a birthday cake in her hands – Sunny was lighting the candles on it and Sooyoung had a finger in the icing.  
  
Both parties froze.  
  
Taeyeon was the first to regain her composure. “What the heck are you doing here?!”  
  
“Err…”  
  
“SURPRISE!!!”  
  
“Happy birthday, Taengoo!”  
  
Jessica and Yuri blew party horns and Hyoyeon threw streamers at her. They then started to sing happy birthday with the usual crazy dance from the hyperactive trio.  
  
She had to laugh. Thanks to all that was going on that day, she had completely forgotten that the next day was her birthday.  
  
“What’s with the tennis racket?” Yuri asked. “Do we look like tennis balls?”  
  
They laughed.  
  
“I thought you were a burglar.” Taeyeon sheepishly said as she put the racket behind the door.  
  
“I don’t think they fear tennis rackets…” Sooyoung said.  
  
“Make a wish and blow the candles first.” Tiffany nudged the cake forward.  
  
She smiled and stared lovingly at Tiffany until the rest started to cough, make puking noises and protest loudly.  
  
“Alright, alright. Sheesh…”  
  
She clasped her hands together and wished that she would know what to do with her situation. She wished for a win-win solution that could keep Tiffany with her while making her dream come true.  
  
“The candles are melting, Taeng! Hurry!”  
  
She opened her eyes and stuck out her tongue at Hyoyeon before blowing out the candles amidst the cheers and claps of her friends.  
  
Sunny turned on the lights and Tiffany gave her a kiss.  
  
“Ew… no PDA in front of food, please.” Sooyoung was already dipping her finger in the icing again.  
  
“YAH! You’re so disgusting!” Jessica slapped the hand away. “I’m not eating that cake. There’s shikshin’s saliva all over it!”  
  
“Don’t exaggerate, Ice Princess. I make sure that I consistently lick the same spot, okay? Unless you really want me to spit on the entire cake…”  
  
“NO!”  
  
Yuri covered Sooyoung’s mouth with her hand and Sunny rescued the cake – taking it away from Tiffany.  
  
“Kitchen!”  
  
The shortest made her way downstairs and everyone followed her – Sooyoung and Yuri still wrestling each other.  
  
“We should’ve creamed the shorty…” Hyoyeon said.  
  
“Right, with Tiffany there? Psh… We’d get killed.” Jessica retorted.  
  
They made their way to the kitchen noisily, leaving the two laughing after them.  
  
“Happy birthday.” Tiffany wrapped her arms around Taeyeon’s neck and gave her a kiss.  
  
“I forgot it’s my birthday.” She grinned. “Thanks for coming.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “I thought I’d save you a trip to my house tomorrow.”  
  
“Huh?”  
  
“I can’t go home after midnight. My parents would kill me.”  
  
Taeyeon was confused. “What did you tell them then?”  
  
“The truth. Sleepover at Sunny’s to celebrate your birthday.” She grinned. “Where exactly I’ll be sleeping and with whom are minor details they don’t need to know.” She kissed Taeyeon again and the latter smirked.  
  
“Such a smart girl,” Taeyeon mumbled between their kisses.  
  
“Uh-huh. *Your* smart girl.”  
  
Taeyeon stopped and opened her eyes as Tiffany’s words evoked the thoughts she had managed to forget for a while.  
  
“What’s wrong?” Tiffany pulled away to look at the now still Taeyeon. “Are you okay?”  
  
“Y-yeah. I’m fine.” She forced a grin. “I just realized that those noisy brats would be staying here too.” She covered up her real reason.  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “They’ll sleep in other rooms… away from us.” She leaned forward in search of Taeyeon’s lips again. “It would be like that weekend in the mountains, remember?” She smiled before gently and slowly tugged at Taeyeon’s upper lip.  
  
Taeyeon let herself get lost in Tiffany’s kisses. “I remember…” She mumbled. Constant make out sessions for the win! She chuckled at her own dorky thought.  
  
“And when the rest leave tomorrow… I’ll still be here until Sunday.”  
  
“W-what?” Taeyeon pulled back. “You’ll stay here this entire weekend?”  
  
“Yep. Consider it your birthday present.” She grinned.  
  
“Assa!”  
  
Taeyeon went back to kissing Tiffany with distinctly more fervor than before.  
  
“YAH! GET DOWN HERE!”  
  
They heard the shout and groaned – still not willing to let go of each other’s lips.  
  
“OH COME ON! YOU HAVE ALL WEEKEND TO EAT EACH OTHER’S FACE!”  
  
They laughed and Tiffany gave Taeyeon one last peck before turning around to face the sulking Sunny at the foot of the stairs.  
  
“We’re coming, Soonkyu.”  
  
“Call me that one more time and I’ll call your parents and tell them why you’re here this weekend. I’ll even send your father a picture of you two smooching.”  
  
Tiffany rolled her eyes. “You should join the mafia. You’d feel right at home.”  
  
She pulled Taeyeon by the hand and they went downstairs to join their friends.  
  
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Tiffany blinked and huffed. She stretched and frowned as she failed to recognize her surroundings.  
  
“Good morning, beautiful.”  
  
She recognized the voice and turned around to see Taeyeon who had just finished changing.  
  
Taeyeon climbed onto the bed and kissed her forehead. “Slept well?”  
  
She nodded and reached out – asking for a hug.  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “You’re even cuter when you’re half asleep.” She lay down next to Tiffany and held her.  
  
Tiffany snuggled close until she found a warm and comfortable position in Taeyeon’s arms. She inhaled the freshly showered scent and smiled contently.  
  
They lay there silently – enjoying each other’s presence and the peaceful morning.  
  
“Why is it so quiet?” Tiffany finally spoke.  
  
“Hmm?”  
  
“Where are the kkab partners?”  
  
“Oh them.” Taeyeon chuckled. “They’ve gone home.”  
  
“Oh?”  
  
“Jessica had to take her mom and sister shopping and I think Sooyoung also has a family thing to go to. Not sure about Yul and Hyoyeon but they’ve both gone home as well.”  
  
“Sunny?”  
  
“Still snoring in her room, most likely.”  
  
Tiffany grinned. “You smell nice.”  
  
“That’s because I’ve showered… unlike this one lazy girl who didn’t want to get up. Good thing she’s gorgeous.”  
  
Tiffany hit Taeyeon lightly. “Why were you up so early anyway?”  
  
“Couldn’t sleep.”  
  
She shifted and looked up. “Why?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Too much on my mind, I guess.”  
  
Tiffany remembered their talk from the night before.  
  
“You wanna tell me about it now?”  
  
“Not really… since it’s my birthday and all… I was thinking that we could have fun first before the more serious part.” She grinned.  
  
Tiffany didn’t smile. “Are you sure?”  
  
“Yep. The birthday girl gets to decide, right?”  
  
“Of course. But promise you’ll tell me about it later?”  
  
“I promise. We have all day today and tomorrow. Plenty of time, Fany-ah. Don’t worry.”  
  
“Well, if you say so. I just don’t like seeing you so down…” She reached out and gently brushed Taeyeon’s bangs away.  
  
She smiled. “I’m fine. I have you, don’t I?”  
  
“That you do.”  
  
“Then I’m fine.”  
  
Tiffany could sense that Taeyeon was troubled and that it wasn’t just something trivial. She had never seen the girl so quiet and solemn. And the way those eyes looked at her… she was afraid of what lay behind those sad yet gentle orbs.  
  
“Let me go take a shower first then so we can start your fun day right away.”  
  
She tried to get out of Taeyeon’s hold but the arms around her didn’t budge.  
  
“Can you stay here just a little while longer? Just… here? With me?”  
  
Those unreadable sad eyes again. Tiffany was truly scared now but she decided to save the questions for later.  
  
“Of course.” She held Taeyeon close and hoped that whatever it was that was bothering the other girl wouldn’t break them apart.  
  
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“Can I shower first? I feel so sticky…” Tiffany grimaced.  
  
“Go ahead.” Taeyeon walked towards the kitchen.  
  
“Thanks and don’t eat too much cupcake!”  
  
“How do you know I was going to eat your mother’s cupcake?”  
  
“I know you, Kim Taeyeon.” Tiffany made her way up the stairs. “Don’t make her regret baking them for you.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “I’ll just have one, I promise.”  
  
She was about to take a bite when she heard footsteps down the stairs; approaching the kitchen. She knew Tiffany couldn’t have taken a shower that fast and turned to greet her best friend instead.  
  
“Cupcake?”  
  
“Ooh! Yes, please.”  
  
Taeyeon handed Sunny another cupcake and sat at the tall counter in the middle of the spacious kitchen.  
  
Sunny opened the fridge and took out two cans of sodas before joining her friend.  
  
“Had a great day?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“Where did you go?”  
  
“Amusement park, the mall and the river.”  
  
“Wow.”  
  
“It was too crowded at the amusement park and the mall was not much better… so we just took a long walk along the river.”  
  
“That’s nice. Have you had dinner?”  
  
She nodded.  
  
“Glad to see you’re enjoying your birthday.”  
  
“Thanks,” she smiled. “And thanks for letting her stay.”  
  
Sunny shrugged. “She’s my friend too. Just consider it an extra birthday present.”  
  
“And another thanks for the real birthday present.”  
  
“I figured you could use a new mp3 player and some nice quality earphones. Please throw away your old ones? I’m not even sure what their original color was.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “I will.”  
  
“What did Fany get you?”  
  
She shook her head. “She hasn’t given me anything besides her staying here until tomorrow.”  
  
Taeyeon remembered the decision she had to make again and stared at her half-eaten cupcake.  
  
“What’s wrong, Taeng?”  
  
“Huh?” She looked at her friend. “Oh nothing. I’m fine.”  
  
“Taeng…”  
  
She sighed. “I need to talk to Fany first about this… I’ll tell you about it later, okay?”  
  
Sunny understood and nodded. “Of course. You know where to find me.”  
  
“Yeah… in that messy hole you call a room.” She grinned.  
  
“Do not insult the one who made it possible for you to spend an entire weekend with your girlfriend.”  
  
She laughed. “Thanks, Soonkyu…”  
  
“And since it’s your birthday, I’ll let that slip this time.”  
  
They heard a door close and footsteps down the stairs.  
  
“Looks like it’s my turn to shower.” Taeyeon got up from her seat and left the kitchen. She slapped Tiffany’s butt on the way up the stairs and laughed while running away.  
  
Sunny smiled and shook her head.  
  
“Hey…” Tiffany took Taeyeon’s seat and drank her soda.  
  
“Hey. Heard you had fun today.”  
  
She nodded and began nibbling on Taeyeon’s leftover cupcake. “I do wish amusement parks aren’t that crowded on weekends… we didn’t even get a chance to ride the huge rollercoaster because the queue would take more than an hour.”  
  
“Just go again on a weekday. You’re both still free anyway.”  
  
“Yeah… might just do that.”  
  
Sunny finished her cupcake. “By the way, your mother should open a bakery. These are yummy!” She went in search for another one.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Good idea. That might save the house from smelling like an oven most of the time.”  
  
“I bet Taeyeon would be her number one customer.”  
  
“Nah… Mom would feed her for free. She had been doing that ever since she first met her anyway.”  
  
“That’s true.” Sunny paused. “They still don’t know about you two, huh?”  
  
Tiffany slowly shook her head. “I’m not sure I’ll tell them anytime soon. I mean… we barely passed 100 days… three and half months, more or less. I don’t need the drama right now.”  
  
Sunny nodded in understanding.  
  
“Maybe when we’ve hit a year… or at least when I know we’d last…”  
  
“What’s with the doubt? I thought you two are doing just fine?”  
  
“We are. But I don’t know, something’s bothering her and she hasn’t told me about it. I’m worried, honestly…”  
  
“Whatever it is, I’m sure it doesn’t have anything to do with you two. I think she’s serious with you – as serious as a twenty year old could be.” She grinned.  
  
Tiffany chuckled. “Yeah, I know what you mean.” She smiled. “She told me she loves me.”  
  
“She did? Well that’s something.”  
  
“What do you mean?”  
  
Sunny took a sip from her drink. “She’s not one to openly admit her feelings, you know. Her ex-boyfriend cheated on her so she wasn’t really one to easily trust someone, let alone tell them she loves them.” She then grinned. “She hates those lovey dovey mushy stuff.”  
  
“Really? How come she’s always so cheesy and clingy and touchy with me?”  
  
“Good question.” Sunny laughed. “I’ve also been wondering about that since you two got together. She’s different when she’s with you…”  
  
“How?”  
  
“Well, like you said… the mushy stuff, the way she listens to everything you say, not to mention the sudden radiating joy every time she sees you…” She laughed. “Maybe having a crush on you for more than two years did that to her.” Sunny snickered. “I’m so dead when she finds out I’m telling you all this.”  
  
“Two years is a very long time.”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“How come she never even talked to me until I started following her around?”  
  
“I told you, she’s not the type to openly admit her feelings. She acts tough and super cool around the people she actually likes.”  
  
“I see…”  
  
Tiffany was glad to learn this about Taeyeon. She knew that girl was reserved, she just never knew that she was currently still like that towards others. Tiffany was used to the open and caring sides of Taeyeon.  
  
They heard a door close and the sound of footsteps.  
  
Sunny put a finger to her lips and Tiffany nodded.  
  
“Hey! You finished my cupcake?”  
  
“Oops. Sorry.”  
  
“Nah, it’s fine. I’ll just go get another one.”  
  
“Don’t, Taeyeon-ah. You’ve eaten too much sweet stuff today. Cotton candy, ice cream and now half a cupcake.”  
  
“B-but…” She was already holding a cupcake in her hand. “Oh fine. I’ll just save this for tomorrow then.” She turned around to return the treat back into the box and put it in the fridge.  
  
Sunny gave Tiffany a look and mouthed, “See?”  
  
The latter nodded.  
  
“I’m off to finish my game.” Sunny stood up and grabbed another can of soda and a bag of chips before leaving the kitchen and going back to her room.  
  
“You wanna watch TV or something?” Taeyeon asked.  
  
“I’m kinda tired actually. I think I’ll go to bed early.”  
  
“Okay. Go on then, I’ll be right up.”  
  
Tiffany nodded and left.  
  
Taeyeon threw the half empty cans of soda into the trash and cleaned up a bit.  
  
She took a deep breath. It might be time to talk to Tiffany about what happened yesterday. She turned off the kitchen light and slowly made her way upstairs.  
  
She opened the door to find Tiffany lying on the bed and texting on her phone.  
  
She sat down next to her and waited until Tiffany had put her phone down.  
  
“You wanna talk about it now?” Tiffany asked.  
  
She nodded.  
  
Tiffany sat up and turned to face Taeyeon.  
  
Taeyeon sighed and fiddled with the edge of the pillow on her lap. “Basically… the audition went well yesterday. They want to sign me for this group they’re preparing – a trio. Idols.”  
  
“Okay…” Tiffany carefully observed Taeyeon who was strangely not happy at all at the good news.  
  
“This company is different. It’s big, new and I know it has a lot of top artists under its management so there will be no problem in terms of promotions and such. But…” She paused to take another deep breath. “It’s a lot more strict than my old one, I think. And my old one was already strict enough.”  
  
Tiffany waited patiently for Taeyeon to continue.  
  
“You know that being an idol is different than being a solo singer, right? And I don’t mean in terms of songs or groups members and all those stuff…”  
  
Tiffany instantly understood where Taeyeon was going. She gulped.  
  
“You won’t be allowed to date, huh?”  
  
“Not likely…”  
  
Tiffany felt her heart broke. She hid it and tried to smile. “I did hear about those who still secretly dated though…”  
  
Taeyeon nodded. “It can be done. I’ve seen my seniors done it many times.” She then looked up to meet Tiffany’s eyes. They mirrored her own sadness. “But none ever last long. And even if they do last long, it’s usually when they’re already a few years into their career. Rookies would be kept under strict supervision. Most companies will take away phones for a year… some even longer. Depends on the idol and on the company’s policy.”  
  
Tiffany stayed quiet.  
  
“And you know how idol scandals are at least ten times worse than other artist’s simply because it would be blown into huge abnormal proportion thanks to the fans and antis?”  
  
Tiffany nodded.  
  
“If having a boyfriend could be that bad… what about…” She couldn’t finish.  
  
Tiffany sighed. “What about having a girlfriend, huh?” She smiled bitterly.  
  
Taeyeon looked away; fighting back tears. She hadn’t expected it to be this painful.  
  
“But it’s your dream, Taeyeon-ah. If you let this opportunity slip, you might regret it for life.”  
  
“I know. But I don’t want to lose you…”  
  
“You should’ve thought of that before you had a crush on me for two years.” She tried to joke.  
  
Taeyeon didn’t laugh. “I’ll kill that Soonkyu for telling you that but I have no regrets, Fany-ah. I’m serious. I love you.”  
  
“I love you too but come on… we’re just kids, we’ve just been together for three months. This may just be a phase, you know. They said teenage years are the time to experiment and search… you might forget you ever liked a girl one day.” She grinned while every word she said was slowly and painfully shredding her heart into pieces.  
  
Taeyeon was shocked. “I would never…”  
  
Tiffany smiled and held back her tears. “You have worked so hard for this, Taeyeon-ah. Come on. Don’t throw it away for something you aren’t even sure would reach 200 days. This is your future, your life, we’re talking about.”  
  
“Don’t talk as if you mean nothing to me, please.”  
  
Tiffany held her tongue.  
  
“I know what you’re doing, and thank you, for being so selfless…” She reached for Tiffany’s hand. “But I’m telling you all this not because the choice is obvious – or because one is clearly more important than the other. I’m telling you all this because I want to share this with you… because we’re in this together… because I was hoping that there’ll be a solution for us and that you’ll help me find it.”  
  
Tiffany gulped again and wiped the tear that had made its way to the corner of her eye.  
  
“Don’t give up yet, please.”  
  
“S-sorry…”  
  
They weaved their fingers together and sat in the silence.  
  
“When are you supposed to give your answer?”  
  
“Monday.”  
  
“Oh.”  
  
Another short pause.  
  
“When will you debut?”  
  
“Within months, I assume… since he said he had found the other two members and that we’re all basically ready.”  
  
“I see.”  
  
Both were at loss for words. Neither of them could come up with a solution.  
  
“You do realize that for every dream there are bound to be sacrifices?”  
  
Taeyeon looked up to see Tiffany’s sad smile.  
  
“There’s gotta be another way, Fany-ah…”  
  
“Don’t worry… the rules won’t apply until you officially debut, right? I think we can still reach 200 days.”  
  
“Fany…”  
  
“Just think of this as another sacrifice, Taeyeon-ah. It’s fine. You’ll get through it. You moved from Jeonju and lived alone since you were 15 and look at you now.”  
  
“Tiffany…”  
  
“You had to lose sleep, friends and take care of your body extra carefully but hey, you have a number one digital single under your name… granted, it was a duet but still… not everyone can say that, you know.”  
  
“Stop, Fany-ah…”  
  
She smiled. “You can’t always have it all, Taeyeon-ah. Be grateful that we could still have 200 days together. It would make a great memory, don’t you think? You can tell it as a funny anecdote in one of those variety talk shows later on. Although you might not want to mention that I’m a girl… but I think this would be a very touching story, don’t you?”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Please stop.”  
  
Tiffany was still smiling although her eyes were brimming with tears.  
  
“It’s okay, Taeyeon-ah. It’s going to be okay.”  
  
She shook her head. “Maybe I should just wait for another company to come along and debut as a solo singer…”  
  
“Do you want me to break up with you now? Well, not now since it’s still your birthday… tomorrow?”  
  
“What are you talking about?”  
  
“If this was about us against the world or whatever, I’d gladly fight, Taeyeon-ah. But I can’t let you throw away your dream like this…”  
  
“I just want to sing. I can sing under another management.”  
  
“And disappear after a single or two? Come on. You said so yourself… this company can boost you. After that, you can go solo.”  
  
“Do you know how long idol contracts are?”  
  
“Not exactly but I read something about it… seven, nine or sometimes eleven years?”  
  
“I’ve even seen fourteen years.”  
  
“Wow. That’s a very long time.”  
  
“I’m pretty sure this company won’t hang on to us for that long but still…” Taeyeon sighed. “And I’m not going to ask you to wait so you have nothing to worry about.”  
  
“To be perfectly honest, I also don’t know whether I can wait that long…”  
  
Both were trying to be realistic and strong for the other but they secretly hoped that they could wait or were asked to wait.  
  
“Look.” Taeyeon finally spoke again. “We’re not even sure what the terms of the contract are, right? I mean they might not be that bad.” She tried to smile.  
  
“Y-yeah… you’re right. It might not be that bad…” Tiffany tried to return the smile. “Just say yes first though? It’s a good opportunity, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
“I’ll think about it.”  
  
Tiffany didn’t want to push further.  
  
“You’re not tired?” She tried to change the subject.  
  
Taeyeon shook her head. “You’re tired?”  
  
“Just a little bit.”  
  
“Go sleep then.” She let go of Tiffany’s hand. “I’m going to brush my teeth.”  
  
Taeyeon got off the bed and went to the bathroom.  
  
She returned to the bedroom a short while later to find Tiffany lying down and staring at the ceiling. She turned off the lights and slipped under the covers; next to the quiet girl.  
  
She turned on her side and put her arm around Tiffany and her head on Tiffany’s shoulder.  
  
Tiffany held on to the arm and leaned her head on Taeyeon’s.  
  
Although their talk didn’t exactly provide a definite solution or a clear path to what’s going to happen next; they knew that they would not be with each other for much longer. That one thing was certain. They would be separated somehow… one way or another, sooner or later.  
  
After all... a dream’s not worth dreaming without sacrifice, right?

**chapter 8**

“Whoa…” Taeyeon almost choked on her cupcake. She coughed and quickly drank her water.  
  
“What’s wrong with you?” Sunny put some bread in the toaster and took out a bottle of juice from the fridge.  
  
“You’re up?! Why are you up? And all dressed? Is the world coming to an end?” Taeyeon was still coughing.  
  
“Shut up. I have to pick up my mother at the airport.”  
  
“Oh? She’s here?”  
  
Sunny returned the bottle to the fridge after pouring herself a glass and searched for food. “Yep.”  
  
“Oh okay.” Taeyeon continued eating her cupcake.  
  
“Why are you up so early?” Sunny took out some leftover chicken and put it in the microwave. “Toast and leftover chicken… Sigh… thank goodness Umma’s here.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned.  
  
“So?” Sunny sat down across from her best friend and chewed her toast. “What’s bothering you?”  
  
Taeyeon took a deep breath. “I’ve been offered a spot in this new idol group…”  
  
“And?”  
  
“And… you know why I don’t really want to be an idol, right?”  
  
“You know it’s a surefire way to get your name out there though, right?”  
  
She heard the ding and moved to retrieve her warmed up breakfast. “Which company?”  
  
Taeyeon told her and Sunny raised her eyebrows.  
  
“That one’s huge, Taeng. New but the president is one heck of a power player in the business.”  
  
“I know.”  
  
“Regardless of whether your group is good or not, one thing’s for sure… Your name will be known. They are packing some serious money and influence.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “I know…”  
  
Sunny offered Taeyeon a piece of her chicken and the latter shook her head.  
  
“It’s Fany, huh?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
Sunny thought for a while before finally taking a deep breath. “Please forgive me for saying this but… I don’t know whether you should throw away a golden opportunity to make your dream come true for someone you’ve only dated for three months.”  
  
She saw Taeyeon’s eyes growing wide and quickly said her next sentence before Taeyeon scolded her.  
  
“I’m not saying that she’s not worth it! I’m not, okay? I think she’s a great catch and you’re one lucky shorty.” She smiled. “But we’re only twenty, Taeng… We’ve just graduated high school. Don’t you think it’s too early to decide to stick to one person and throw everything away for that? Especially after working so hard all these years…”  
  
Taeyeon sighed and buried her head in her palms. “I know…”  
  
Sunny felt very bad for her best friend. It was a position she never wanted to be in.  
  
“What did Fany say? Have you talked to her about this?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“And?”  
  
“She basically said what you’ve just said…”  
  
Sunny nodded to herself. She knew her friend would do the right thing.  
  
“She said that the opportunity’s too good to pass up on.” Taeyeon continued. “But… what if she’s the one for me and I let that go?” She looked up at her best friend. “Your parents got married when they were young and so did mine.”  
  
“That’s true. But that was a different era, Taeng. Both of you still have your lives ahead of you. Don’t tell me you want to marry her now…”  
  
Taeyeon thought for a moment and shrugged. It didn’t sound like a bad idea to her.  
  
“Taeng, don’t do crazy stuff, okay? She hasn’t even started college.”  
  
“I’m not going to ask her to marry me, okay? Chill.”  
  
“The look on your face says otherwise.” Sunny took a deep breath. “What has gotten into you…”  
  
“I don’t know.” She smiled weakly. “I do love her, you know… tease me all you want but yeah… I love her.”  
  
Sunny grinned. “You’re lovesick.”  
  
“Maybe…”  
  
“Fine. Let’s put it this way then.” Sunny put down her chicken and took a napkin to wipe her fingers. “Let’s say you decide that you no longer want to sing and choose to stick with Fany instead. Would you go to college?”  
  
Taeyeon grimaced at the thought of school.  
  
“That’s a no then. So what kind of life do you think you’d have? That she’d have?”  
  
She contemplated her best friend’s word before exhaling in defeat. “A pretty bad one…”  
  
“Exactly.” Sunny reached out for Taeyeon’s arm. “Look… I want to see you happy – both of you – but we live in a world where nothing comes easy or cheap. You have a dream. A big dream. You’ve practically given up everything to make it this far. And now all you need to take is that one final step and you’re there, Taeng.” She paused. “Are you sure you want to throw all that away… now?”  
  
Taeyeon stayed silent.  
  
“I don’t know what’s going to happen to you and Fany but maybe you should just think of this as a test.”  
  
She looked up. “A test?”  
  
Sunny let go of her arm. “Yep. If you two truly belong together and meant for each other, I think it doesn’t matter how much time passes. You’d still end up together in the end, right?”  
  
She thought about those words.  
  
“Besides, if you’re successful then I’m sure you’d be able to give her a better life compared to just being some random street singer. Right? I mean… big picture wise… future goals and all that.” Sunny grinned. “You get what I’m saying?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded slowly. “Yeah…” She then sighed and leaned back on her chair. “So that’s it, huh?  
  
“It’s up to you, Taeng. I’m just telling you what I think…”  
  
“Right.”  
  
She kept staring at her half empty glass.  
  
Sunny finally sighed. “Look, just enjoy to the fullest and prepare for the worst. Wait until you see the contract and we’ll talk more.” She threw the toast in her hand on the plate. “This is gross.”  
  
She then stood up and threw away all her food. “I’ll just grab a sandwich or something at the airport.” She washed her hands and turned to leave – seeing her quiet best friend still not moving in her seat.  
  
“Hey… cheer up.” She patted Taeyeon’s cheek. “Enjoy your time with her. You have the whole house to yourself for the rest of the day. Umma wants to go straight to my aunt’s house to see her newborn grandnephew.” She paused. “Is that even the correct term? Oh well… you know what I mean.” She smiled. “Make every moment count, Taeng.”  
  
Sunny left the kitchen and the house.  
  
Taeyeon took a deep breath and put her glass in the sink.  
  
She went back to her room and saw Tiffany drying her hair.  
  
“You’re up?”  
  
“What?” She turned the loud dryer off and turned to look at Taeyeon.  
  
“Why are you up? It’s still early.”  
  
“I’ve had enough sleep.” She stated simply and returned to her task.  
  
Taeyeon sat down on the bed and watched the other girl. She knew Sunny was right. She couldn’t give up on her dream right before it was about to come true. And yet… she gulped as she watched Tiffany ran her fingers through her long raven locks and tilted her head – showing her slim jawline and smooth neck. How could someone drying her hair look so gorgeous? She gulped again.  
  
Tiffany was finally done and turned to see a gawking Taeyeon. She had to laugh.  
  
“You’re drooling, Taeyeon.”  
  
Taeyeon immediately closed her mouth and blushed.  
  
“What do you want to do today?” She stood up and approached the bed.  
  
Taeyeon pulled Tiffany down to sit between her legs and hugged her. “Anything you want.”  
  
“It’s technically still your birthday weekend… Oh!” She suddenly sat up and freed herself from Taeyeon’s hold. “I keep forgetting…”  
  
Tiffany went to her bag and took out a small box.  
  
“Your birthday present!” She sat back down and gave Taeyeon the box.  
  
“Why is it wrapped in pink?”  
  
“Because I love pink!” She grinned.  
  
“I thought it’s supposed to be *my* birthday present?”  
  
“Yep. I love you just as much as I love pink… so, pink!”  
  
Taeyeon laughed out loud. “I don’t think I’ll ever understand that but okay.” She took the box and gave Tiffany a grateful peck. “Thank you.”  
  
“Hope you like it.”  
  
Taeyeon had already ripped the paper and opened the box. She took out the thin silver chain and the small heart-shaped pendant and grinned. “Pretty…”  
  
Tiffany smiled.  
  
“Help me put it on.” She gave the necklace to Tiffany and turned around to let the other girl secure the clasp behind her neck safely. She then stood up and looked at herself in the mirror. “I love it.”  
  
She turned around and smiled.  
  
“So now you have my heart with you everywhere you go.” Tiffany said and cringed before hiding her face in her hands.  
  
Taeyeon laughed out loud. “Wow… and I thought I’m supposed to be the corny one.” She approached the shy girl and pulled the hands away from her pink face. “Thank you.” She kissed her.  
  
“Wear it whenever you can?” Tiffany smiled sadly.  
  
Taeyeon nodded. “Definitely.” She sighed as she understood the meaning behind the request and the sad smile. “Nothing’s fixed yet, Fany-ah… don’t worry about it, okay?”  
  
“Okay…”  
  
“Hey, come on…” Taeyeon tried to smile and lifted Tiffany’s chin to look into her glistening eyes. “No need to cry… I’m still here, aren’t I?”  
  
“Yeah… guess so.”  
  
“Still my birthday weekend, remember? We’re supposed to have fun! Smile, please?”  
  
She grinned half-heartedly and Taeyeon laughed. “That’s kinda cute, strangely…”  
  
She leaned in and gave Tiffany a long gentle kiss. “I’m still here…”  
  
She felt Tiffany’s arms making their way around her neck and pulled her down – making her fall on top of her.  
  
Their kisses quickly turned rough and intense and she felt Tiffany’s hands fumbling for the buttons of her pajamas. She tensed; her mind warned her that it might be too soon – and that she’s totally, embarrassingly clumsy and inexperienced – but the thought of not being able to ever be with Tiffany again quickly dismissed it. She pushed herself up a bit after Tiffany had succeeded in opening almost all the buttons.  
  
“Are you sure about this?” She asked breathlessly – staring at the dark eyes of the girl clutching the edges of her top.  
  
Tiffany pulled and kissed her hard. Her hands then slipped inside Taeyeon’s open shirt and she gasped.  
  
If Tiffany wanted it then she could have it. Taeyeon would give her anything and everything she wanted... even her dream – if she asked for it.  
  
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“Cold?”  
  
She instinctively held Tiffany closer and tried to pull the blanket up to better cover the other girl.  
  
Tiffany snuggled closer to Taeyeon. “Not anymore…”  
  
They lay quietly in each other’s arms.  
  
“What time did you tell your parents you’re going to come home?”  
  
“Before midnight?”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “That’s doable.”  
  
Tiffany looked up. “You’ll walk me home, right?”  
  
“Of course. I need to say thank you to your mother too. The cake and cupcakes were awesome!”  
  
She giggled. “So what do you want to do today?”  
  
“I don’t know. Do you have anything you want to do?”  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “Not really.”  
  
“So we’ll just be lazy bums and stay in bed all day?”  
  
“I don’t mind. I’m very comfortable.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “We’ll need food though… I’m hungry.”  
  
“Now that you mention it… Me too, actually.”  
  
Taeyeon loosened her grip. “I’ll go take a shower first then we can go find lunch.”  
  
“Lunch? What about breakfast?”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “It’s way past breakfast time, Fany-ah…”  
  
“Oh.” She blushed.  
  
“You know… for someone who doesn’t exercise, you have quite a stamina there.” Taeyeon laughed out loud.  
  
“Shut up.” Tiffany blushed and pinched Taeyeon’s side.  
  
“Ow! Now you’re pinching?” She squirmed and scooted away – pulling the blanket with her.  
  
“Cold, Taeyeon-ah.” She held on to the edge of the covers and Taeyeon quickly moved back so that Tiffany was again completely covered.  
  
“Sorry,” she kissed her forehead. “I’ll go shower, okay?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Hurry. I wanna take a shower too.”  
  
“I thought you already did?” She then grinned. “Oh yeah. Right.”  
  
Tiffany kicked her. “GO!”  
  
“Alright, alright… Sheesh…”  
  
She was about to get off the bed when she suddenly realized something. “Uh-oh…”  
  
“What now?”  
  
“Err… close your eyes.”  
  
“What?”  
  
“I can’t reach for my pajamas… and I can’t actually take the blanket with me, can I?”  
  
“You’re shy? Seriously?”  
  
She grinned and blushed a bit.  
  
“This would be cute if it wasn’t so ridiculous.” Tiffany scoffed and pulled the blanket towards her; uncovering most of Taeyeon.  
  
“YAH!” She quickly rolled off the bed and fumbled on the floor for her pajamas.  
  
Tiffany laughed out loud.  
  
“I’ll get you for this, Hwang Miyoung.” Taeyeon sulked after quickly putting on her top.  
  
“Oh don’t be such a baby. I’m pretty sure I’ve seen everything.” She grinned.  
  
Taeyeon blushed and ran to the bathroom.  
  
She laughed again and searched for her t-shirt.  
  
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Taeyeon got out of the bathroom to find a daydreaming Tiffany sitting on the bed.  
  
“Your turn.” She kissed her temple.  
  
“Okay…” Tiffany slowly made her way off the bed and into the bathroom.  
  
The door closed with a soft click and Taeyeon sighed.  
  
Sunny’s words echoed in her head. “Make every moment count, Taeng.”  
  
She quickly got dressed and dried her hair. She then took out a piece of paper and started to make a list.  
  
“What are you doing?”  
  
She jumped in her seat.  
  
“Don’t scare me like that!”  
  
“Then don’t be so serious.” Tiffany sat down and leaned on Taeyeon’s shoulder. “What are you writing?”  
  
“Our to-do list.”  
  
“Huh?”  
  
“Things I want to do with you.”  
  
“Oh. I get it. Good idea. Can I write down what I want to do too?”  
  
“Of course.”  
  
“What have you written so far?” She took the list and read.  
  
It only took her a few seconds before she started laughing. “You want to kiss in the rain? What is that?!”  
  
“That’s romantic!”  
  
“That’s hypothermia in the making.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed.  
  
“Fine, fine. I’ll get a flu shot and learn the rain dance.” Tiffany grinned as she read the rest of the list. “Noraebang is easy enough. Picnic in the park… doable since it’s only the beginning of spring.” She then laughed. “We’ve done so many of these.”  
  
“I plan to re-do them.”  
  
“Well, I don’t mind repeating our Valentine’s Day date.”  
  
“But we only went to the movies and took a walk along the river, as usual. What’s so special about that?”  
  
“Everything’s special when I get to do it with you.”  
  
Taeyeon flinched and made a barfing gesture. “Seriously… what’s wrong with you today?”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. She looked at the list again and grabbed Taeyeon’s pen.  
  
“What are you writing?” Taeyeon curiously tried to peek before Tiffany poked her forehead with the pen.  
  
“Yah! That hurts!”  
  
The other girl kept writing – pausing every now and then to think. She then gave Taeyeon her finished list.  
  
She read it and her face turned somber. “Fany-ah… This last…” She read it again.  
  
*“To-do list (what Tiffany wants to do):*  
*1. Celebrate 200th day anniversary*  
*2. Get Taeyeon’s autograph*  
*3. Watch Taeyeon’s debut performance*  
*4. Go to Taeyeon’s concert(s)*  
*5. Join fanclub and stalk (Taeyeon only!)*  
*6. Wake up next to each other at least one more time*  
*7. Fall asleep in Taeyeon’s arms at least one more time*  
*8. Get matching something (must be pink!)*  
*9. Never say goodbye”*  
  
Taeyeon was at loss for words. It took her a while to regain her composure and finally looked at the sadly smiling girl. “Please don’t do this? I don’t want you to wait for me. That would be unfair to you.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “I didn’t say I’d wait or that you should wait.”  
  
“Then this-…”  
  
“A girl can hope, right?”  
  
“O-of course.”  
  
“If we never say goodbye, maybe one day we could… you know… just pick up where we left off.” She tried to grin.  
  
“Sigh…” Taeyeon pulled her into another hug. “I hope so…”  
  
Tiffany smiled.  
  
“But can you promise me that you won’t wait? I mean… you haven’t even started college and you have your whole life ahead of you.” She started quoting her best friend. “It would be silly to throw away what could be happier and better things for someone you’ve just dated for three months… right?”  
  
“Maybe… but that’s my decision to make. Not yours.”  
  
“Please? It would take a huge load off my mind too. I don’t have to constantly worry about how you’re doing…”  
  
“I tell you what…” Tiffany freed herself from Taeyeon’s hold. “I’ll move on when I think I should, okay? I won’t promise I’ll wait but I also won’t promise I won’t wait.”  
  
“What?”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Just trust me, okay? Don’t worry about me. I’ll be fine. And you should not wait too. I know how good looking those idols are; don’t throw away what could be happier and better things for someone you’ve just dated for three months, okay?”  
  
“I really dislike how you use my words against me.”  
  
Tiffany grinned. “So it’s a deal?”  
  
“Sigh… fine… it’s a deal. I can’t make you change your mind anyway, right?”  
  
“Nope.”  
  
“I thought so.”  
  
Tiffany took the list from Taeyeon’s hands and rummaged around for something to stick it to the mirror on the dresser.  
  
She took a step back to admire her handiwork and smiled as she felt Taeyeon’s arms around her and saw the reflection of her face in the mirror.  
  
“Wanna go get that lunch now? We can go picnic at the park while we’re at it.”  
  
“That’d be nice.”  
  
“Great. Let me get my bag.”  
  
Tiffany went to pack her things in her overnight bag while Taeyeon waited.  
  
They made their way out of the house – walking hand in hand happily as they decided to enjoy their time and not let anything ruin their day.  
  
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“I must admit that the picnic was a good idea,” Tiffany said while swinging the hand in hers happily.  
  
“Did you see the look on that boy’s face when he accidentally saw us kissing?”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “That poor kid will be scarred for life.”  
  
“Let’s just hope his parents won’t hunt us down for it.”  
  
“I think we managed to make a clean break.”  
  
The streetlights suddenly went on and Tiffany checked her watch.  
  
“It’s only six, you know… You sure you want to end the day?”  
  
“I don’t want you to get in trouble with your parents. You haven’t come home since Friday.”  
  
“They gave me permission to come home late today. Besides, it’s not like I have school tomorrow.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “That’s true… but still, I want to stay on their good side.”  
  
“They might make you stay for dinner…”  
  
“Not the first time that happens. I’ll be fine. I have to thank your mother anyway.”  
  
“And hopefully get another batch of treats?”  
  
“You know it.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed while Tiffany sighed.  
  
They turned a corner and Taeyeon stopped.  
  
“What’s wrong?”  
  
“Can I just kiss you goodnight here? There won’t be a chance for that once we reach your house…”  
  
“Why not? There’s always my room.”  
  
“Right… with your parents there? I’m too young to die, Fany-ah.”  
  
“I have a lock on my door, you know.”  
  
“No thanks. I can’t stand the suspense.”  
  
“Fine then. Do what you have to do.”  
  
“Yes, Miss Hwang.”  
  
Taeyeon took a step forward and gave Tiffany a peck.  
  
“That’s it?!”  
  
“Haven’t you had enough kisses today?” She suddenly grinned. “I even gave you plenty of other bonuses this morning, remember?”  
  
Tiffany blushed and slapped Taeyeon’s arm. “Byuntae.”  
  
She laughed. “Fine. One more and that’s it, okay?”  
  
“I’ll decide when you’re done.”  
  
Tiffany cupped Taeyeon’s face with her hands and pulled.  
  
A low rumble in the sky made Taeyeon break the kiss.  
  
“We need to get going. It’s going to rain.”  
  
She took Tiffany’s hand and started to walk.  
  
“No.” Tiffany held her ground. “One more thing to cross off the list, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
“What? Now? Just before we’re going to meet your parents? They’ll be furious to see you all drenched.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “A little rain won’t hurt anybody. I’m a big girl. They know that.”  
  
They saw a flash of lightning and flinched as the loud thunder followed.  
  
“Come on. We can do this some other time.” She pulled Tiffany’s hand again but the girl wouldn’t budge.  
  
“Gotta make every moment count, Taeyeon-ah.” She smiled.  
  
“W-what?” She was surprised to hear Sunny’s exact words. “Have you been talking to that shorty?”  
  
“Huh? Sunny? About what?”  
  
Another thunder interrupted their conversation and little drops of water began to fall from the dark sky.  
  
Taeyeon groaned. “Come on, Fany-ah! I’m serious!”  
  
“So am I. This is perfect.”  
  
“What is perfect?”  
  
“You, me, the rain on a quiet Sunday night. It’s hard to get this kind of setting again.”  
  
The drops kept on falling until they found themselves standing under the heavy downpour.  
  
Taeyeon sighed, “You’re really stubborn, you know that?” She wiped her wet face with her free hand.  
  
Tiffany smiled and approached Taeyeon. Both of them were now drenched from head to toe.  
  
“I know. But someone told me that it’s romantic and I think I might understand why.”  
  
“Oh? Why?”  
  
She gently held Taeyeon’s cheek. “Because right now I feel like there’s only you and me here… and that’s enough.” She leaned in and gently pressed her lips against Taeyeon’s before pulling back just enough for her to be able to talk. “Even when it’s dark and wet, I know I’m safe because I’m with you.”  
  
Taeyeon closed the gap between them and let Tiffany’s bag fall to the ground – off her shoulder – as she used both arms to pull the other girl close. She wanted to savor everything. Every drop of the pelting rain on her skin; every tug of Tiffany’s soft lips; Tiffany’s hot breath on her face; the feeling of those slender fingers running through her wet hair; every curve of the body pressed against hers.  
  
Everything.  
  
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It wasn’t much of a surprise that Tiffany’s parents immediately fussed over the two wet girls as soon as they appeared at the door.  
  
Mrs. Hwang ran around getting them towels and rushing them to take a hot shower as soon as possible while Mr. Hwang gave both a lecture about always bringing umbrellas or to wait somewhere and call him to pick them up instead of walking in the rain. The lecture then shifted to the fierceness of the common cold that had increased since he was just a kid and the fact that there’s still no surefire remedy to the seemingly light illness.  
  
It reminded Taeyeon of her own home and she couldn’t help but feel homesick.  
  
She found herself almost crying at the sight of the stew Tiffany’s mother quickly whipped up for them. She finally did cry a bit when Mrs. Hwang hugged her and tell her that their home was her home and that she could come by anytime she wanted to.  
  
She was glad that Mr. Hwang told his wife to let go of her but her relief immediately disappeared when he ruffled her hair and gave her a fatherly smile. She instantly wanted to run away to Jeonju.  
  
Luckily, Tiffany knew what was wrong and told her parents to leave Taeyeon alone and not add to her homesickness.  
  
She gave Tiffany a quick grateful smile while her mother argued that since it was now technically Taeyeon’s home too; her homesickness should be reduced instead of added.  
  
She stayed for dinner – wearing Tiffany’s t-shirt and shorts – and was about to excuse herself and leave when a stern Mr. Hwang forbade her from doing so.  
  
She ended up listening to another lecture about how unsafe Seoul had become, especially for young girls travelling alone at night using public transportation. She grinned through it while Tiffany rolled her eyes and left midway.  
  
She was finally able to bid good night to Tiffany’s parents and went up to Tiffany’s room to find an extra mattress on the floor next to Tiffany’s bed.  
  
She lay down on it and was about to fall asleep when she was kicked.  
  
“Yah! I was just about to doze off! Why are you kicking me?”  
  
“What are you doing down there?”  
  
“Err… sleeping?”  
  
“While I’m sleeping up there?” She pointed at her bed.  
  
“Your parents…”  
  
“Just sleeping, Taeyeon-ah!”  
  
“I’m not even implying that at all! Still… your parents…”  
  
“I locked the door and you’ve made that mattress looked slept on so get up there!” She hissed.  
  
Taeyeon sighed and reluctantly moved – dragging her pillow and blanket along.  
  
“Time to cross off the items on *my* list.” Tiffany said while she turned off the light and climbed on the bed; snuggling close to Taeyeon.  
  
“Ah… those.” She smiled. “Okay.” She wrapped her arms around the other girl and adjusted their blankets. “Comfy?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. The events of that day tired her out. Combined with the warmth of Taeyeon’s arms and of the blanket she was under; she found herself nodding off to sleep almost immediately.  
  
“Good night, Taeyeon…”  
  
“Good night, Fany.”  
  
She kissed Tiffany’s forehead and closed her eyes.  
  
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She felt something tickling her face and groaned as she slowly tried to open her eyes.  
  
She saw Tiffany’s sleeping face and smiled.  
  
She used one hand to get the long hair off her face and felt Tiffany stir.  
  
The sleepy girl rolled away and stretched before returning to face Taeyeon.  
  
“Morning…”  
  
“Good morning.”  
  
Tiffany said nothing more as she fell asleep once again.  
  
Taeyeon chuckled and looked at the clock hanging on the wall. It was already a little after nine.  
  
She slowly pulled her arm from under Tiffany and sat up. She then carefully made her way out of the bed and took her phone off the charger.  
  
She took out a slightly discolored card from her wallet and stepped out of the room.  
  
The house was quiet so she assumed Mr. Hwang had gone to work and Mrs. Hwang was probably out.  
  
She sat down at the top of the stairs and cleared her throat – staring at the small paper in her hand.  
  
She took a deep breath and dialed the number.  
  
She waited – her free hand supporting her head.  
  
“Good morning. This is Kim Taeyeon speaking. I’m calling for Mr. Kang Myungcheol?”  
  
She then straightened up.  
  
“Ah yes, good morning, Sir. President Kim told me to call you today… with my answer.”  
  
She silently took a deep breath. “I’ve thought it over and it’s true that this is too good of an opportunity to pass up on.”  
  
She listened to the positive replies from the other end of the line but she didn’t share the same happiness. She tried to sound as excited as she could.  
  
“Yes, Sir. I’m in.” She listened some more. “Today? Err… no, no… I’m not busy.”  
  
She shifted in her seat. “Sure, right after lunch would be fine… Yes, two o’clock it is. Okay, Sir. I’ll see you then. Good bye.”  
  
She hung up and sighed – staring at her phone.  
  
“Taeyeon?”  
  
The voice almost made her drop her phone down the stairs. She stood up and turned to see Tiffany standing at her room’s doorway.  
  
“Good morning again,” she smiled and gave Tiffany a very quick good morning kiss – in case one of her parents suddenly appeared.  
  
Tiffany wasn’t smiling.  
  
“You heard?”  
  
Tiffany nodded.  
  
She sighed. “I’m sorry.” She pulled the other girl into the room and closed the door before hugging her tightly.  
  
“You don’t have to be sorry.”  
  
“But-…”  
  
“I’m still here, Taeyeon-ah…” She pushed Taeyeon back so she could see her eyes. “Still here.”  
  
Taeyeon hugged her again and was about to say something when they heard the front door slam shut and the voice of Tiffany’s mother.  
  
“Miyoung-ah! Taeyeon-ah! Get up! Girls should wake up early in the morning and not be lazy!”  
  
“We’re already up!!”  
  
“Ow…”  
  
Taeyeon covered her ringing ears with both hands.  
  
“Oops. Sorry. It’s a habit.” She grinned.  
  
“Like I said before… the women in this house are loud.”  
  
Tiffany laughed and turned around – heading for her closet. She handed Taeyeon a towel, a shirt and a pair of jeans.  
  
“Go shower then eat breakfast and go home and change. You would want to look nice for your appointment later. I hope these fit.”  
  
Taeyeon only took the towel. “I’ll go ask your mother whether my clothes have dried.”  
  
“Okay.” Tiffany put the clothes on her desk. “I’ll just put these here in case your clothes are still wet.”  
  
“Thanks.”  
  
“No problem.”  
  
She moved to get out of the room.  
  
“Is it too much to ask you to come with me later? We can get lunch first and go see a movie afterward?”  
  
Tiffany froze. She didn’t want to witness the start of the end of them but she also didn’t want to disappoint Taeyeon. She knew that Taeyeon didn’t intend to make her sad or anything; she just wanted to spend as much time with her as possible.  
  
She turned around and forced a smile. “Sure! Maybe I can see some famous singers while we’re there.”  
  
“You sure?” Taeyeon suddenly realized that she was being a bit insensitive. “We could just meet after…”  
  
“No, no. It’s fine. I’ll tell Mom first, okay?”  
  
Tiffany quickly left the room and Taeyeon put down the phone and card she was still clutching before making her way downstairs.  
  
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“That’s it?”  
  
“Yep. That’s the last of it.”  
  
“Thank goodness,” Sunny threw herself on the bed. “I’m going to miss you, you know. Back to living in an empty house.”  
  
“Aw come on… you still have your sister…”  
  
“Right. How often did you see her visit me here?”  
  
“Err… twice?”  
  
Sunny didn’t reply.  
  
“Just ask those brats to stay over. Sooyoung loves your huge fridge.”  
  
“But she’d complain when she sees how empty it is.”  
  
“Restock it before you invite them.”  
  
“Such an expensive friend...”  
  
Taeyeon laughed.  
  
“Anyway…” Sunny sat up. “I’m surprised Fany didn’t come to help.”  
  
“She said she had something to do with her mom.”  
  
“Oh? How is she taking this, by the way?”  
  
“Pretty good. We got most of the items on the list crossed out. Quite a feat since it’s only been a few weeks.”  
  
“Ah. That list.”  
  
“Yeah. We even added a few things along the way,” Taeyeon grinned.  
  
“Such as?”  
  
“See the sunset and the sunrise, take a trip to the beach, me recording another CD for her… the mundane and childish stuff you despise.”  
  
“I don’t despise romance. You did.”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “People change, you know.”  
  
Sunny grinned. “Especially after being bitten by the love bug.”  
  
“Which twenty year old uses the words ‘love bug’? You’re such an ahjumma.”  
  
Sunny laughed. “Come on. Let’s get your stuff to your new dorm.”

**chapter 9**

“So she thinks you’re out with your mother?”

“Yep.” Tiffany sipped her coffee. “Sunny’s helping her so she’s fine. Besides, it’s been a while since we last hung out like this. And it’s our fault, I know.”  
  
“We don’t blame you,” Sooyoung said while reaching for the last donut. “We know you’re just trying to spend as much time together as you can.”  
  
“Which is why we’re kinda surprised that you’re here now,” Hyoyeon added.  
  
“And why aren’t *you* helping, by the way?” Yuri asked the laid back girl.  
  
Hyoyeon shrugged. “Lifting heavy dusty stuff is not my thing.”  
  
“What a friend.”  
  
“Yeah, I know. Taeng is very lucky,” she grinned.  
  
They laughed.  
  
“So… how are you doing?” Jessica asked.  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “Same old, same old. Nothing’s changed.”  
  
“She’s started to prepare for the debut, right?”  
  
“Yup. A week after she signed the contract.”  
  
“So how did you manage these past weeks?”  
  
“Normally. She just got busier, that’s all. We could still go out to eat every now and then.” She took a look around the table. “This is not a therapy session, okay? I want to hang out with my best friends, not my therapists. Is that so hard to do?”  
  
“Well… when you’re using your friends to avoid facing reality...”  
  
“Again, Jessi. Not a therapy session.”  
  
“Sica’s right, though.” Yuri said. “As happy as we are to be able to hang out like this again, we’d rather have you go help Taeng move into her new dorm… maybe get to know her members? They could be of help along the way, you know.”  
  
“What are they like anyway? Have you met them?” Sooyoung finally finished chewing her food.  
  
“I have. They seem like nice kids – younger than us. Taeyeon’s the oldest so she’ll be the leader of the group.”  
  
“That’s a huge responsibility.”  
  
“Yeah… she wasn’t very pleased about it but she had no choice. Plus, the other two are younger so she won’t have any problems making them listen. The maknae is quite cute. Very proper.”  
  
“I heard the other one has done commercials.”  
  
“Yeah. You’ll recognize her face immediately. She’s done a lot of commercials. There was even a small drama role or something.”  
  
“Seems promising.”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Yep. Very promising.”  
  
“How long is her contract?”  
  
She took a deep breath. “Six years.”  
  
“Oh…”  
  
Nobody dared to make a comment.  
  
“So… have you guys heard about what happened to Yeonghee?” Sooyoung tried to change the subject.  
  
“Please stop treating me like I’m some kind of pathetic heartbroken patient?”  
  
Everyone froze at the sharp remark.  
  
“I can handle this, okay? Ask me anything you want about Taeyeon, about us. It’s not taboo. The last thing I need is for you to be on your toes around me. I’m fine.”  
  
“We’re just trying to lighten the mood here, Tiff…” Jessica softly said. “We’ll listen, of course, if you want to talk to us… but we don’t want to make you uncomfortable, that’s all.”  
  
“Sorry…”  
  
“It’s fine.” Yuri soothed her friend. “We understand.”  
  
The table went quiet for a few seconds before Yuri broke the silence again.  
  
“So… anything you want to talk to us about? We’re all ears.” She grinned.  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “Just taking it one day at a time… while we still can.”  
  
“How bad is it? The rules in the contract, I mean.” Hyoyeon couldn’t contain her curiosity.  
  
“Well, I told you the length. The rest is as expected. No cellphone during the first year – maybe less or more, depending on Taeyeon. No dating. No scandals. Everything has to go through the managers blah blah blah… the rest are just details about the group’s income and other legal stuff I don’t understand much about. Her parents had signed it so I assume it’s all good.”  
  
“I see.”  
  
“Do they have a debut date ready?”  
  
“Not yet but it’s in a few months. In the summer, most likely.”  
  
“That’s fast.”  
  
“They’re all trainees who have been training for years at another company. They don’t need much more training.”  
  
“But Taeyeon still has her phone, right? I mean… now? You guys can still meet and stuff?”  
  
“Of course. They have started to keep an eye on her though. She has to make sure that she doesn’t have any scandalizing stuff floating around the internet and that she never misses practice or misbehave in public…” Tiffany took a deep breath. “Which is why we can’t do anything much but go out and eat.”  
  
“Hands and lips off at all times?” Hyoyeon grinned.  
  
The others laughed.  
  
“Yeah… had to sneak around a few times. Either at Sunny’s or at my house when my parents are away…”  
  
“Will they keep an eye on the dorm too?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “I think so. But as long as she hasn’t debuted, we could still manage.”  
  
“What happens after that?”  
  
She weakly smiled. “Nothing. The end.”  
  
“We’re sorry, Fany-ah…” Sooyoung stroked Tiffany’s back gently.  
  
“Anything to make her dream come true, Sooyoung-ah. She worked hard for this. It’s what she’s born to do.”  
  
“What about *your* dream?” Jessica asked – taking a sip from her drink.  
  
“What about it?”  
  
“I still remember it, you know.” She grinned. “Still the same dream?”  
  
“The one you mocked and ridiculed and laughed at? Yeah. Pretty much.”  
  
“It’s not good to hold a grudge, Tiff.”  
  
“Why did Sica laugh at it?” Even Sooyoung and Yuri had never heard of Tiffany’s dream.  
  
“Because it’s finger curling and too cliché and too corny and too childish… Ow!” Jessica glared at her friend and held her stinging arm.  
  
“What is it?” Hyoyeon was also curious.  
  
Tiffany sighed. “I don’t need more people teasing me, okay?”  
  
“We won’t tease you.”  
  
“Right. And Yuri won’t go to the gym for a month.”  
  
“Gasp! That’s so horrible!” Yuri exaggeratedly covered her open mouth with her hand.  
  
“Oh come on, Tiff. It’s an admirable goal.”  
  
“Psh… right. You’re just saying that so I’ll tell them.”  
  
“If you won’t tell them then I will. Go ahead and sulk, I don’t care.”  
  
“Cold, Jessi. Very cold.”  
  
The girl shrugged. “So? Tell them already!”  
  
She sighed. “Fine… promise that you at least won’t laugh out loud? Snicker in the corner or something. And don’t ever let Taeyeon know about this, okay? The last thing I need is for her to go all weird on me.”  
  
“We promise!”  
  
Three girls lifted their pinkies.  
  
“My dream is to…” She lowered her voice. “… find true love.”  
  
“W-what?!”  
  
“And live happily ever after,” Jessica added with a giggle.  
  
“Don’t make things up, Jessi.”  
  
Hyoyeon was staring with her mouth open while Yuri was trying hard to hold back her laughter.  
  
“Awwwww… that’s so sweet…”  
  
They all turned to see Sooyoung smiling to herself with a dreamy look in her eyes.  
  
“What is wrong with you, Shikshin?”  
  
“Oh come on. Don’t be so heartless! That’s a great dream! You know you all want it if you can have it. Right?” She scolded her friends. “Although… it’s kinda hard to fulfill, don’t you think, Fany? Since you can’t really… err… take initiative? I mean… where do you even start to search?”  
  
“Don’t know. I’ll leave that one to fate, the higher power, the universe, God or whatever you guys call it.”  
  
She looked at Yuri and Hyoyeon. “I know you think it’s ridiculous but I’m an only child. I grew up playing alone. It was lonely. I couldn’t help but wonder how it feels like to have that special someone with me at all times – to be happy and never be alone again. I don’t lack love, by the way; my parents are great. But…” She then gulped. “You’re right. It’s ridiculous. Must be all those fairy tales I read as a kid…”  
  
“No, it’s not.” Yuri said. “Well, it’s kinda funny, I admit… but you’re entitled to dream. And the great thing about dreaming is that it has no boundaries. I dream to run my own gym, one day.”  
  
They snickered.  
  
“See? It might sound funny at first but try to think about it a few seconds later. It’s reasonable, right? I like sports…”  
  
“You’re obsessed with sports.”  
  
“Shut up, Shikshin.” She continued. “I like seeing other people get healthy too…”  
  
“Right. The constant nagging about calories and vitamins…”  
  
“Shut up, Ice Princess.”  
  
Jessica glared but Yuri ignored her.  
  
“So it makes sense for me to want to own a gym, right? And although I don’t even know how that could ever happen, it’s a motivation for me to study hard so I’d get accepted in the university I want and the major I’ve chosen – health and nutrition.”  
  
“You’re surprisingly wise today, Kkab Yul,” Hyoyeon grinned. “Must be something in your drink.”  
  
She ignored her friend. “Get my point, Fany?”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Thanks, Yul.”  
  
“Back to my question,” Jessica spoke again. “What about this dream of yours?”  
  
“What about it?”  
  
“Are you sacrificing it for Taeyeon’s dream?”  
  
“I-…” Her phone suddenly rang and interrupted her sentence. She quickly searched her bag for it.  
  
From the small smile that instantly formed on Tiffany’s lips; her friends immediately knew who it was.  
  
“Hello?”  
  
“Hi. Still out with your mom?”  
  
“Yeah… but we’re almost done.” She put a finger to her lips and glared at her friends.  
  
“Great! Wanna help me unpack? You can come see the new dorm. No bunk beds! We each have our own room!”  
  
“Are you done with the lifting?”  
  
“Yep. There’s not much left to do. I wouldn’t want you to tire yourself out. Please? I miss you…”  
  
She sighed. “I miss you too…” She threw some napkins and straws at the gagging girls. “Fine. I’ll drop by. Text me the address?”  
  
“I’ll come pick you up.”  
  
“You don’t have to, Taeyeon.”  
  
“I want to. It’s moving day so practice isn’t until much later. We have plenty of time. I’ll pick you up at your house?”  
  
“Let’s just meet somewhere in the middle? Save us the trip.”  
  
“Okay. Where are you now?”  
  
“That huge new mall that just opened.”  
  
“Ah okay. I’ll meet you there then. Wait for me?”  
  
“Of course. See you in a bit.”  
  
“See you.”  
  
She hung up and took a deep breath.  
  
“Going to see her new dorm?”  
  
“Yeah… I honestly don’t need to see it…” She threw her phone back in her bag.  
  
“Hang in there, Fany-ah. It means a lot to Taeng to have you there with her. She wants to share her happiness with you.”  
  
“I know. It’s just… too much of a reminder, you know?”  
  
“We know.” Jessica patted her arm.  
  
“Anyway… as I was saying… I don’t know, Jessi.” She looked at her best friend. “I don’t even know if Taeyeon’s really the one for me… I mean… aren’t we still too young and foolish to even claim love? And with all the stuff that’s going on – plus that tiny detail that we’re both girls – I really think it’s quite impossible to tell right now. Besides, it’s only been four months…” She smiled half-heartedly. “It’s probably just another reckless silly teenage act that would make a fun story when we’re all old and grown up. I’m not sacrificing anything for Taeyeon. My dream has nothing to do with hers. She deserved this; she worked hard for it. I’m fine.”  
  
The friends could see that Tiffany was rambling; trying to convince herself to believe everything she had just said.  
  
“Okay,” Jessica smiled and reached to hug her friend. “It’s okay, Tiff… We understand…”  
  
She hid her face in Jessica’s shoulder and held back her tears.  
  
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“Ta-da!”  
  
Taeyeon jumped and grinned – spreading her arms widely. “What do you think? Not bad, huh?”  
  
Tiffany looked around and nodded. “Not bad at all, actually.”  
  
“Yeah. I guess they do have a lot of money.” She strolled into one of the rooms. “And being the oldest is awesome. I get the biggest room!” She sat down on the bed.  
  
“Nice…” Tiffany walked in and took another look around. “You’re going to keep hanging this here?” She saw the list on the mirror. “Isn’t this dangerous?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “I’m not breaking any rules. I’m still a trainee, technically.”  
  
“Your manager doesn’t mind?”  
  
“He can’t come into my room. And what he doesn’t know won’t piss him off.” She grinned. “Don’t worry, I’ll take it down when we’ve crossed all the items off.”  
  
Tiffany read the list. “Not many more to go...”  
  
“Yeah…” Taeyeon stood up and walked over to hug Tiffany from behind. “I miss you. I’m sorry I’ve been so busy these past couple of weeks…”  
  
She leaned back against her. “I miss you too and it’s okay. You have a lot to do.”  
  
“We’re going to start recording soon.”  
  
“Oh? That’s great!”  
  
“Can’t believe this is happening.” Taeyeon couldn’t hide her smile. “Too bad I can’t have it all, huh?”  
  
Tiffany sighed and turned around, “I guess that’s life, Taeyeon-ah.” She tried to smile. “It’s fine. You gotta do what you gotta do. There’d be plenty of time for other things later.”  
  
“Guess so…”  
  
“I know so.” She kissed Taeyeon gently and was about to pull back when Taeyeon didn’t let her.  
  
“I miss you…”  
  
She let Taeyeon kiss her again.  
  
“UNNIE!”  
  
They heard the door close and quickly took a step away from each other.  
  
“Oh, hello.” The young girl bowed as soon as she caught sight of the two other girls. “I didn’t know you have company. Sorry for being so impolite.”  
  
“Yoona, right?” Tiffany asked.  
  
“Yes, Unnie. You’re Tiffany unnie, right?”  
  
“That’s right.”  
  
“Please don’t mind me, I’ll just be in my room.” She started to walk towards the room across Taeyeon’s.  
  
“Have you had lunch?” Taeyeon asked.  
  
“Yep. My sister took me out to lunch. Is Juhyun here?”  
  
“Nope. She said she’d come by after her piano lesson – with her mother.”  
  
“Ooo!! Let’s hope her mother brings us more of her delicious home cooking!”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “I don’t know how you stay so thin with that huge appetite of yours.”  
  
“The mysteries of the human body, Unnie… or blessed genes maybe? Height might be a factor though...”  
  
Taeyeon scoffed and Yoona laughed.  
  
Tiffany was surprised to hear the loud childlike laugh from the elegant looking girl; and she was starting to feel a bit left out. Taeyeon had a whole new life now – one where she was not a part of. She watched as the two members exchanged some more jokes and discussed dorm-related subjects from kitchen utensils, toiletries to furniture.  
  
“Hey…”  
  
She heard the voice and felt Taeyeon squeezing her hand.  
  
“Are you okay?”  
  
“Y-yeah… I’m fine.” She faked a smile.  
  
“I’m sorry… didn’t mean to make you feel left out or anything.”  
  
She shrugged. “It’s fine.”  
  
Taeyeon could see that it was not fine. She was about to say something to Yoona when she saw her staring at the two of them with wide eyes and mouth slightly agape. The tall girl’s gaze was fixed on the joint hands.  
  
“Ah… this…” She took a deep breath. “Yoong, Tiffany’s my…”  
  
“Best friend!” Tiffany blurted out. She tried to let go of Taeyeon’s hand but Taeyeon held on.  
  
She smiled. “It’s okay… I trust my members. We promised not to hide anything from each other.”  
  
Yoona finally understood what was going on. “Yes, Unnie. It’s okay. I’ve seen and helped a lot of unnies and oppas date… back in my old agency, I mean. In fact, it was the same agency Taeyeon unnie was in.”  
  
“Oh? You’re from SM too?”  
  
She nodded. “I was there longer than Taeyeon unnie.”  
  
“Yeah, I was pleasantly surprised to know that I’ll be in the same group as Yoong. Juhyun’s from another agency though.”  
  
“I see.”  
  
“So it’s fine, Unnie,” Yoona smiled. “Don’t worry.”  
  
“Okay then. Now go to your room, Yoong and finish your unpacking.” Taeyeon shooed her away.  
  
“Right,” Yoona smirked. “What are you two going to do?”  
  
“None of your business! Go do your homework or something!”  
  
She laughed and waved before going into her room and closing the door.  
  
Taeyeon closed the door to her room and pulled Tiffany to sit down on the bed. “I’m sorry.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Because you feel left out.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “I told you it’s fine. You can’t help it. We’ll soon be leading totally different lives. It’s understandable.”  
  
She sighed. She wasn’t sure what to say so she only did what she could – silently reaching out to hug Tiffany.  
  
“What time is your practice?” Tiffany finally broke their silence.  
  
“Eight.”  
  
“Oh.”  
  
“Stay with me until then?”  
  
Tiffany nodded.  
  
Taeyeon lay down on the mattress – pulling Tiffany with her. They shared occasional short talks and exchanged light kisses; enjoying the peaceful moment together and not even caring that the room had become dark as day turned into night.  
  
A soft knock on the door and Yoona’s voice telling Taeyeon that they had to go made Tiffany groan.  
  
“Don’t go.” She held on to Taeyeon’s t-shirt.  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “I have to, I’m sorry.” She kissed Tiffany’s forehead. “I’m sorry. I’ll try to go see you tomorrow, okay?”  
  
It took another minute and a few more kisses from Taeyeon before Tiffany finally let go.  
  
She stood up, turned on the lights and changed into her sweatpants.  
  
“Come on. I’ll walk you to the bus stop.” She extended her hand and Tiffany took it.  
  
They walked out the door to see two girls chatting on the couch and an older woman in the kitchen – putting something in the fridge.  
  
Tiffany and Taeyeon quickly let go of each other’s hand.  
  
“Good evening, Omoni.” Taeyeon greeted the woman.  
  
“Oh! Good evening Taeyeon. Had a nice nap?”  
  
“Nap? O-oh yes, Omoni.”  
  
“Good then. I brought some kimchi and other side dishes so please eat a lot, okay? And make sure Juhyun eats a lot too.”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “I will. Don’t worry, Omoni. Juhyun’s healthier than me and Yoong combined.”  
  
“That’s because we’re taller, Unnie,” Yoona commented from the couch and laughed.  
  
“Unnie!” The maknae reprimanded the laughing girl. “Don’t tease Taeyeon unnie like that. Who knows, she might be able to grow another centimeter before her growth spurt stops for good.”  
  
“That’s very reassuring, Juhyun.” Taeyeon sarcastically said.  
  
“Ah… and who is this pretty girl?”  
  
Juhyun’s mother smiled and approached Tiffany.  
  
“Hello, Omoni.” Tiffany bowed a little. “I’m Tiffany, Taeyeon’s friend.”  
  
“I see. You’re a trainee too?”  
  
“No, Omoni.” Tiffany smiled. “Just a friend from school.”  
  
“Really? A girl as pretty as you could easily become a celebrity.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “I have no interest in that area, unfortunately. Just an ordinary college student.”  
  
The woman smiled.  
  
“Unnie, we should get going.” Juhyun stood up from the couch, followed by Yoona. “We don’t want to be late.”  
  
“Ah yes, okay. You guys go ahead. I’ll catch up.”  
  
“Why? Umma will drop us off with the car…” The maknae spoke again when Yoona suddenly snapped her fingers.  
  
“Oh! I just remember. Namsook oppa wanted to see me before practice!” She quickly grabbed her phone and typed something. “Omoni, can you drop me and Juhyun there first? And fast? I don’t want Namsook oppa to wait too long for me.”  
  
“Of course. We don’t want you to be late.” She took her purse from the dining table and walked towards the door. “See you, Taeyeon, Tiffany.”  
  
Taeyeon waved and Tiffany bowed.  
  
Juhyun followed her mother out and Yoona gave Taeyeon a thumbs-up before grinning and going after the others.  
  
“I have to buy that kid some ice cream,” Taeyeon smiled.  
  
“Yeah. Nice save there.”  
  
“Come on then.” Taeyeon held Tiffany’s hand and tugged. “I’ll walk you to the bus stop. Good thing the dorm’s not far from the agency.”  
  
Tiffany silently followed Taeyeon out the door.  
  
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“Thanks for helping me guys.”  
  
“No problem,” Yoona took another bite from the cupcake in her hands. “Just keep this coming and I’ll gladly make myself disappear more often.”  
  
“Unnie!” The maknae pouted. “Don’t say that to Tiffany unnie.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “It’s okay, Juhyun. I know she’s just kidding. And my mother would love to find another mouth to feed. I’m beginning to think that she really should open a bakery at this rate.”  
  
“I’ll be the model in exchange for free cupcakes!” Yoona raised her right hand.  
  
Tiffany laughed again.  
  
“Will you come watch our debut stage, Unnie?” Juhyun asked.  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Of course. I even promised Taeyeon I’d join your fanclub.” She laughed.  
  
“Oh! You could be the president, Unnie!” Yoona then paused. “On second thought, you might only pay attention and make an effort for Taeyeon unnie. Never mind. Don’t be the president.”  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “You are one funny kid, Im Yoona.”  
  
“I heard that a lot from Taeyeon unnie too. You two must be telepathic.”  
  
“Or you are really just a funny kid, Unnie,” Juhyun grinned.  
  
Yoona stuck her tongue out at her dongsaeng and finished her cupcake.  
  
“Let’s go then, Hyun-ah. My unnie’s waiting for me at home.”  
  
“Thanks again, guys.”  
  
“No problem, Unnie.” Yoona grabbed her backpack. “We’re going home anyway. Gotta enjoy this final short break before promotion starts.”  
  
Juhyun’s phone suddenly rang. “Oh my mother’s here.” She quickly shouldered her bag and waved to Tiffany. “See you, Unnie.”  
  
“Bye, Juhyun-ah…”  
  
“I’m off too, Unnie.” Yoona finished putting her shoes on. “Please try to keep Taeyeon unnie intact? We still need her for practice tomorrow.” She grinned mischievously.  
  
“Get out of here, Im Yoona!”  
  
“Bye, Unnie. Thanks again for the cupcakes!”  
  
“You’re welcome.”  
  
She waited until the two girls had left the dorm before going to Taeyeon’s room and closed the door – waiting in the dark.  
It took another half an hour before she heard the front door opening and closing. She quickly went to stand behind the door.  
  
“IM YOONA!”  
  
She held back her laughter.  
  
“Where are you, you little choding? Here’s your fruit! Do you know how hard it is to find this pomegranate thing? You better savor every bite or I’ll make sure you do the dishes for the rest of the year!”  
  
She heard a knock on another door. “Yoong choding! Open the door!”  
  
She then heard shuffling of feet and noises from the kitchen and Taeyeon muttering to herself.  
  
Tiffany waited quietly until Taeyeon opened the door to her room.  
  
“That ungrateful little… I should’ve never listened to her whining…” Taeyeon was still grumbling – turning on the lights and stepping into her room.  
  
“Hi there, cute one.” Tiffany came up from behind her and hugged her waist.  
  
Taeyeon jumped. “GAAHH!”  
  
She had to laugh. “That’s your surprised reaction?”  
  
Taeyeon turned in Tiffany’s hold. “Don’t ever scare me like that again!”  
  
“Fine. I’ll yell ‘surprise’ next time.”  
  
“That should be better than the sudden touching.”  
  
She grinned.  
  
“What are you doing here by the way?” Taeyeon snaked her arms around Tiffany’s waist and gave her a peck on the lips. “Miss me that much? Sorry for being super busy this month.”  
  
“Nah… you’ll debut in a couple of weeks. It’s natural for you to be crazy busy.”  
  
“They give us a short break though…”  
  
“Why do you think I’m here?”  
  
Taeyeon grinned happily. “Now I know why that kid suddenly wanted me to find that weird fruit. They’re your accomplices, aren’t they?”  
  
“Yep. I bribed them with cupcakes and goguma.”  
  
“Smart girl.”  
  
“*Your* smart girl.”  
  
Taeyeon smiled sadly. “That’s right. *My* smart girl…” She sighed as she silently added ‘for now’.  
  
“What’s with the sudden mood drop? Smile! I’m here, aren’t I?”  
  
“And I can’t be happier.”  
  
They kissed and Tiffany forgot for a moment why she was there.  
  
She pulled back. “Do you know what day it is today?”  
  
“The day I find out which supermarket sells pomegranates?”  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
She grinned. “The day we cross out an item off your list?”  
  
“That’s right.” Tiffany kissed Taeyeon again. “Happy 200th day anniversary, Taeyeon.”  
  
“Glad to be able to celebrate 200 days with you, Hwang Miyoung.”  
  
“Please leave the Korean name out of this.”  
  
She laughed. “So the dinner plan was also fake then?”  
  
“Not really. We can still go out to dinner although I was hoping we’d just order take out and stay in. Got the whole place to ourselves, you know.”  
  
“You sent away those kids?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“Nice.”  
  
“Thanks.”  
  
“So… we can do whatever we want? All night long?”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “Byuntae.”  
  
“I meant cuddling while watching TV together and stuff like that…”  
  
“Right. Like I don’t know how your mind works…”  
  
She grinned. “Make out session RIGHT NOW! N.O.W NOW!”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “I thought you haven’t hung out with Jessi for a while.”  
  
“I haven’t. But you gotta admit it’s pretty catchy.”  
  
She laughed again. “You’re too cute. What would I do without you…”  
  
It wasn’t intended to mean anything – just a reflex of saying what flashed in her mind at that very second. However, the words instantly erased Taeyeon’s smile.  
  
Taeyeon gulped and turned her head away.  
  
“I-I mean… I didn’t mean…” She sighed. “Sorry… didn’t mean to say it like that.” She reached for Taeyeon’s chin and softly turned her face towards her. “It’s going to be okay, Taeyeon-ah. Don’t worry, okay? I’m still here.” She kissed her. “I’m still here.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply. She let Tiffany kiss her for as long as she wanted to.  
  
When Tiffany finally pulled away, she slowly took her hands off Tiffany’s waist and moved to her closet.  
  
“I have something for you.”  
  
She took out what looked like two bundles of cloth.  
  
“I know it’s not cold yet but I got us this anyway.” She gave Tiffany one of the bundles. “It’s pink so you can cross another item off the list.”  
  
“Couple pajamas? Cute!” Tiffany smiled. “Thanks Taeyeon-ah.” She then frowned when she realized that Taeyeon’s was blue. “But yours is blue… I want both of us to wear pink.”  
  
“Blue is my color!”  
  
“The list clearly says matching pink!”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Fine… I’ll go back to the store tomorrow and buy the pink one for myself.”  
  
“You don’t have to.”  
  
Tiffany put the pajamas in her bag and picked up a paper shopping bag. She gave it to Taeyeon. “Here.”  
  
“What’s this?” Taeyeon looked inside it and saw two pink hoodies. She took one out and laughed.  
  
“*Now* we can cross off that item.”  
  
“I’m just glad it’s soft pink and not hot pink.”  
  
“One step at a time, Taeyeon-ah. You’ll get to hot pink one day.”  
  
“Never!”  
  
They laughed and Tiffany was glad that Taeyeon had become cheerful again.  
  
She then took a pen off Taeyeon’s desk and fixed the list.  
  
“Almost there, huh?” Taeyeon had snuck up behind her; wrapping her arms around her waist.  
  
“Yup. But I doubt we can go to the beach before you debut.”  
  
“Nah, we can do that later. Plenty of time.”  
  
“What do you mean?” She put the pen down and turned to face Taeyeon. “You only have weeks till your debut. There’s no way we can go to the beach with the amount of preparation you have to do before then.”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Then we just have to do it after I debut.”  
  
“What?”  
  
She took a deep breath. “I’ve been thinking… Why do we have to stop seeing each other when we don’t really have to? I mean, yes, the contract is troublesome but we can always keep it a secret, right? Yoona and Juhyun will help.”  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“At least try, Fany?” She pleaded. “I don’t want to say goodbye when I don’t really have to.”  
  
“We would never say goodbye, remember?”  
  
“Sigh… you know what I mean…”  
  
“Yes, I do.” She gently brushed Taeyeon’s cheek with her fingers. “But you know it’s too risky and I don’t want to get you in trouble.”  
  
“They won’t find out!”  
  
“What if they do? You could lose everything, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
“They won’t disband a newly debuted group. That would be a stupid scandal and they wouldn’t want that.”  
  
“Yes but they would watch your every move and make your life miserable. Plus, you’re also responsible for Yoona and Juhyun now. It’s no longer just you running for your dream, Taeyeon-ah. The three of you are running together now – as a team. If one falls down; the other would likely fall down as well. Don’t do this to them. They’re nice kids who have worked just as hard as you have to get here.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “So now I can’t be happy because that would make them unhappy? Nice. Very nice.”  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“And I thought you’d be more supportive…”  
  
“How can I when it could destroy you?”  
  
She shook her head. “Forget it.”  
  
Taeyeon let Tiffany go and walked out of the room. She sat down on the couch and turned the TV on.  
  
She was disappointed. She wanted them to fight – to last just a bit longer. She thought Tiffany would want the same thing.  
  
She roughly pressed the button on the remote; trying to find a channel worth watching even though she didn’t really want to watch TV at that moment.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
Tiffany sat down next to the upset Taeyeon.  
  
“It’s not that I don’t want this, okay? I’d do anything to be able to celebrate another 100 days together. But we can’t. You can’t. You know this.”  
  
“At least try, Fany. Put some effort into it.”  
  
“Haven’t I done that?” She didn’t like the insinuation.  
  
“Not enough…” Taeyeon muttered under her breath.  
  
“That hurts, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
She didn’t reply – feeling instantly guilty at her childish respond. She glanced to see Tiffany looking at her with glistening eyes and felt even worse.  
  
“Sorry… I’m sorry.” She put the remote down and reached to pull Tiffany into her arms. “I’m sorry… I just…”  
  
“I want this as badly as you do, Taeyeon. Maybe even more…” She gulped – fighting back her tears as she thought of what Jessica had asked her about sacrificing her dream for Taeyeon’s. She never thought of it that way but at that moment it felt like she was.  
  
“I’m sorry…”  
  
Taeyeon gently stroked Tiffany’s hair.  
  
“It’s hard for me too, you know. You have it better because you’ll be so busy, you probably won’t have much time to think about this. The college entrance exam is in November. All I can do until then is spend my time with books. What do you think would go through my mind? Who would I think about? Who would I see on TV, hear on the radio and everywhere else but couldn’t actually talk to? Or hug? Or kiss?”  
  
She realized her selfishness. It would indeed be harder for Tiffany since she wouldn’t have enough things to distract her.  
  
“I’m sorry… it was selfish and thoughtless of me.” She kissed the top of Tiffany’s head. “I’m sorry.”  
  
Tiffany ran out of words. She was hurt, not merely because of Taeyeon’s words, but because she now realized that Jessica was probably right. Letting Taeyeon go would mean letting her dream go. Taeyeon was her first in so many things – and definitely her first love. Could she forget her and find someone else? Love someone else as much as she loved her?  
  
She quickly wiped a tear that had made its way down her cheek.  
  
Taeyeon saw the gesture and sighed. “Don’t cry, please don’t cry. We’re supposed to celebrate. I’m sorry for ruining today. I’m sorry.”  
  
“I understand. You don’t have to keep apologizing.” She then looked Taeyeon directly in the eyes. “Don’t ever think – not even for a second – that I don’t want this as much as you do. You hear me?”  
  
She nodded. “I do. I’m sorry.” She hugged Tiffany again. “I’m really really sorry.”  
  
“It’s okay.”  
  
“I love you, Fany-ah. I don’t care what people might think or say. I love you.”  
  
“I love you too, Taeyeon-ah. I really do.”  
  
They didn’t let go of each other.  
  
“Thank you.”  
  
“For what?”  
  
“Best 200 days of my life.”  
  
“Well, you’ve only lived for 20 years… there could be better days ahead…”  
  
“Yah! Don’t ruin the moment, Fany!”  
  
She laughed and finally broke their hug. “Just kidding. I had a great time too.”  
  
“Just great?”  
  
“Meh…”  
  
Taeyeon slapped Tiffany’s arm lightly and the latter grinned. “Fine, best days so far too.”  
  
“That’s more like it.”  
  
Tiffany eased herself more comfortably on the couch; leaning on Taeyeon.  
  
“Are you seriously going to watch this?”  
  
“Not really.” Taeyeon reached for the remote. “What is this anyway?”  
  
“Don’t know.”  
  
“What did you have planned for tonight?”  
  
“Jump you, make you wear a pink hoodie, feed you cupcakes, suffocate you…”  
  
“You’re too kind.”  
  
“… get some of the things on the list done and redone…”  
  
“Like what?”  
  
“I was hoping we could watch the sunrise together since we can’t actually see the sunset from here. And since I’m spending the night…”  
  
“You’re spending the night?!”  
  
“Well, duh, genius. Why did I even bother sending those two kids home?”  
  
“Assa!”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “How can someone so perverted be so cute at the same time?”  
  
She shrugged. “Blessed genes?”  
  
“You’re starting to sound like Yoona.”  
  
“Oh no. Will I turn into a bottomless pit choding after this!?”  
  
“Please don’t. That would be a major turnoff.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “I missed this… just having a random conversation with you in my arms…”  
  
Tiffany gagged. “Wow… that’s bad.”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Wanna get dinner?”  
  
“Can we order kimchi fried rice?”  
  
“Sure.”  
  
Taeyeon moved and left the couch – heading for the phone.  
  
Tiffany sighed and silently hoped that the rest of the night wouldn’t involve more heartache. She wasn’t sure she could stop herself from crying should things turned somber again.  
  
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“Hey…”  
  
Tiffany grunted.  
  
“I thought we’re supposed to see the sunrise?”  
  
“Five more minutes…”  
  
She chuckled. “You’ll miss it…”  
  
Another groan came from Tiffany before she slowly blinked and creased her brows.  
  
“Come on… just this one more thing and we’re done.”  
  
She huffed and stretched before sitting up. “Fine.” She suddenly shivered.  
  
“Here…” Taeyeon handed her a pajama top and she slipped it on – eyes still closed.  
  
“Now come on.”  
  
Tiffany let Taeyeon pull and drag her out of the room.  
  
“It’s still dark.”  
  
“Of course. The sun’s not up yet, remember?”  
  
She opened the sliding door to the balcony and Tiffany again shivered before she felt Taeyeon wrapping her in something soft and warm and hugged her from behind.  
  
“Thanks…” She mumbled.  
  
“You’re welcome.”  
  
They stayed and waited until the sky turned a shade of purple followed by the slow spread of the orange and yellow before finishing in a lighter shade of blue.  
  
“Wow…”  
  
“Yeah… Never thought it would look that beautiful. Imagine what it would look like at a beach…”  
  
“We’ll find out one day.”  
  
Taeyeon smiled sadly. “Yeah… We’ll find out one day…” She kissed Tiffany’s temple and let Tiffany leaned her head on her cheek.  
  
“You wanna go back to sleep?”  
  
Tiffany nodded and she chuckled. “Okay then.”  
  
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There was a knock on the door.  
  
“Taeyeon.”  
  
A man’s voice.  
  
Taeyeon thought she was dreaming.  
  
The knocking continued.  
  
“Taeyeon. Wake up.”  
  
She furrowed her brows and tried to focus.  
  
She heard another knock.  
  
“Taeyeon.”  
  
She suddenly realized who it was.  
  
She frantically pulled her arm from under Tiffany; waking the other girl.  
  
“… why are you…”  
  
“Ssshh!! Be quiet. I think manager oppa’s here.” She whispered as she covered Tiffany’s mouth with her hand.  
  
Tiffany woke up in an instant as her eyes grew wide with shock and she pulled the blanket over her head – trying her best to hide under it.  
  
The insistent knocking continued.  
  
Taeyeon scrambled out of bed and composed herself before acting groggy and pulled the door open.  
  
She faked a yawn as she naturally stepped out of the room and closed the door behind her – knowing that the manager didn’t have access to her room.  
  
“Oppa? What are you doing here?”  
  
“Who else is here?”  
  
“W-what?” She pretended to stretch.  
  
“Who else is here? Is there someone in there with you?”  
  
“What are you talking about, Oppa? It’s too early for this…”  
  
The man walked away and came back with a pair of heeled sandals.  
  
“Whose are these?”  
  
Taeyeon cursed silently but kept up her act. “Yoona’s? Juhyun’s? I don’t know.”  
  
“Don’t lie, Taeyeon. I know none of you wears this kind of shoes.”  
  
She shrugged. “Maybe Yoona’s unnie left them here? I don’t know, Oppa. I’m sleepy.” She stretched again and even scratched a bit. “What are you doing here anyway?”  
  
He still didn’t believe her. “Came to talk to you guys about something. Where are the others?”  
  
“They went home.”  
  
“Oh.”  
  
“What do you want to talk about?”  
  
“Your debut date has been set. I thought I’d come and talk to you guys personally about it. We’re going to do a short TV documentary about it too – get people to see your so-called preparation and the first weeks of your debut.”  
  
“Oh?”  
  
“I’ll explain more later during practice.”  
  
“Okay then.” She furrowed her brows. “Wait… debut date has been set?”  
  
“Yes.”  
  
“When?”  
  
“July 5th. Music show.”  
  
Taeyeon tried to calculate. “That’s in about… two weeks?”  
  
“Yes. The longer teasers will start airing tomorrow. Starting with Juhyun.”  
  
“Wow. That’s fast.” She was quite surprised. “I see.”  
  
He sighed, “Taeyeon.”  
  
“Yes?”  
  
“Remember what your debut means, okay? You have to give me your phone and you need to talk to whoever it is you’re dating.”  
  
“Huh? Who am I dating?”  
  
“I don’t know. Whoever you run off to meet every chance you get and whoever you talk to on the phone or text while smiling from ear to ear.” He took a deep breath. “I can recognize someone in love from fifty miles away. They glow. And I’ve been in this business for quite a while and handled idols – boy groups! If that didn’t train me then I don’t know what will.”  
  
He gestured to the pair of shoes that was still in his hands.  
  
“Two weeks, Taeyeon. After that, I might even have the right to barge into your room when I see stuff like this.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply.  
  
He turned around. “You need a lift to practice later? I can come pick you up if you want?”  
  
“I-it’s okay, Oppa. I’ll just walk as usual.”  
  
“Better start getting used to me driving you around, Taeyeon. You won’t be able to walk around freely again in two weeks.”  
  
He set the shoes down and walked out of the apartment.  
  
Taeyeon was still frozen in place. She didn’t even hear the door opening and Tiffany walking out.  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
She found herself in Tiffany’s arms. “Two weeks, Fany-ah.”  
  
“I heard.”  
  
And then it hit her.  
  
This was the end. Finally. The moment they had been dreading was upon them. It was time to let go and move on.  
  
She thought she would be crying her eyes out but she just stood there, motionless in Tiffany’s hold. Numb. Blank.

**chapter 10**

The sound of her phone vibrating against the wooden surface of her nightstand woke her up with a start.  
  
She groaned and blindly searched for it.  
  
She squinted at the name on the bright screen and immediately sat up.  
  
“Hello?” Her voice cracked.  
  
“Hi… sorry to wake you up…”  
  
“What’s wrong?”  
  
“Nothing. Can you come out? Just for a minute? Quietly?”  
  
“W-what?” She looked at the phone’s clock. “It’s almost three, Taeyeon… where are you?”  
  
“Outside your house.”  
  
“What?!”  
  
Sleep immediately left her as she stealthily got out of her room and went downstairs.  
  
She opened the door to see Taeyeon standing there with a phone to her ear.  
  
“Hi.”  
  
“You’re crazy!” She hugged her. “What are you doing here? At this hour? How did you even get here?!”  
  
“I took a taxi.”  
  
“ARE YOU CRAZY?!” She let go of Taeyeon and shook her.  
  
“Ssshhh!”  
  
“Do you know how dangerous that is?!” Tiffany whispered harshly.  
  
“I can’t sleep… I-I… I have to see you… I miss you…”  
  
“Sigh…” She hugged Taeyeon again. “I miss you too but this is dangerous, Taeyeon…”  
  
Taeyeon tightly wrapped her arms around Tiffany. She missed the warmth. They hadn’t seen each other since that day she took Tiffany home two weeks ago – after the unexpected encounter with her manager.  
  
“You’re worried about tomorrow, huh?”  
  
She nodded.  
  
“You’ll be fine… you’ll do great.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t respond. She closed her eyes and breathed in the familiar scent of Tiffany’s clothes, hair, skin… etching it permanently in her memory. She clutched Tiffany’s t-shirt and wished that she could just stay there forever.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
She felt Tiffany gently stroking her hair.  
  
“Let me call Sunny, okay? She could drive you back to the dorm.”  
  
“No. Let me stay.”  
  
“I can’t. You have to perform tomorrow, Taeyeon. It’s your long awaited debut stage. Yoona and Juhyun would be worried if they find you missing in the morning.”  
  
“I don’t care.”  
  
“Come on, Taeyeon-ah. Please?”  
  
“I need you. I can’t do this alone… I think I’ll mess up… I-I…”  
  
“I’ll be there tomorrow. With Sunny, Hyoyeon, Jessi, Yuri and Sooyoung. We’ll all go and support you. You’re not alone. There’s Yoona and Juhyun too. You won’t mess up, Taeyeon-ah. You’re born to do this. Remember that.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t budge.  
  
Tiffany sighed and tried to dial Sunny’s number with the phone she was still holding in one hand.  
  
Sunny finally picked up after her third attempt.  
  
“Hey… sorry to wake you up. Can you do me a favor?”  
  
Tiffany felt Taeyeon gripping her tighter.  
  
“Can you come to my house right now and take Taeyeon home? … Yeah, she’s here… taxi… I know… that’s why I need you to help take her home... Okay sure. Thanks, I owe you.”  
  
She sighed and hung up. “Sunny will take you home.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply.  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
She tried to break free from the hug; struggling against the fiercely clinging Taeyeon.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah… Come on. Look at me.” She finally managed to create a bit of distance between them.  
  
Taeyeon finally looked up and Tiffany saw tears. It was the first time Tiffany had ever seen her cry.  
  
“Why are you crying? Don’t cry.” She quickly wiped Taeyeon’s cheek with her hand.  
  
“Will this be the last time I’d be able to hold you like this?”  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
“Will it?”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “I don’t know. Maybe. But you can still give me friendly hugs when we happen to meet… just don’t grope.” She grinned and tried to hide her own sadness.  
  
Taeyeon was staring at her intently – as if she was trying to imprint her face in her mind forever.  
  
“Taeyeon-ah… Don’t do this, okay? It’s not the end of the world. In fact, it’s a new beginning! You’re officially a singer! Your dream is coming true! And tomorrow you’ll be standing on that stage – showing the world what an amazing singer Kim Taeyeon is.” She smiled. “And I’ll be there too, applauding and supporting you all the way.”  
  
“But then you’ll leave…”  
  
“I won’t leave. I’ll always be here.” She gently fixed Taeyeon’s disheveled hair.  
  
“But not with me…”  
  
Tiffany didn’t know what else to say. She knew Taeyeon was nervous and worried about her first stage and that she needed someone to comfort her. She wished she could be that comfort but she was also struggling within. She had even considered not going to Taeyeon’s debut performance but she knew she had to be there to show her support – and to fulfill the promise she wrote on that list.  
  
“Look… we’ve been over this a million times. There’s nothing we could do, Taeyeon… at least for the time being. It’s hard for me too, you know. But I choose to think positively. It’s a new beginning. It’s you living your dream. It’s you doing what you’ve always wanted to do… and I’m happy to see you happy – even if it means that I can’t have you with me.”  
  
“Please reconsider what I asked you? I’m pretty sure we can still see each other sometimes… secretly. I’m here now and nobody knows about it.”  
  
“You think I’d let you go out on your own in the middle of the night just to see me? Even a friend wouldn’t do that, Taeyeon.”  
  
“What if it’s not in the middle of the night?”  
  
Tiffany sighed. “I’ll be there anytime you need me, okay? But not at the cost of your career or your safety. I love you too much to let you risk any of that.”  
  
Taeyeon seemed to accept that last sentence and quieted down. She hugged Tiffany again and Tiffany let her hang on for as long as she needed to.  
  
A car stopped right in front of them and Sunny got out of it; still wearing her pajamas under her hoodie.  
  
“You’re crazy, Taeng!” She scolded her best friend. “You could’ve gotten kidnapped or robbed or worse! What the heck were you thinking?”  
  
Taeyeon stayed silent.  
  
Sunny sighed. “What’s wrong with her?”  
  
“Nervous about tomorrow, I guess,” Tiffany answered.  
  
“Taeng…” Sunny’s tone softened. “Let’s go home, okay? You need to get up early to get ready. The filming crew would show up at the dorm around seven. You won’t have much time to sleep.”  
  
“Taeyeon-ah…” Tiffany tried to coax the girl still sticking to her. “Sunny’s right. You need to rest. You would want to look fresh tomorrow.”  
  
It took the two girls a few more minutes of coaxing before Taeyeon finally loosened her grip and let Tiffany go.  
  
“Please go home and sleep, okay?” She leaned in and gave Taeyeon a kiss.  
  
Sunny went back inside the car to give the two some privacy.  
  
“I’ll be there tomorrow. I promise.”  
  
Taeyeon suddenly grabbed Tiffany’s face and kissed her passionately. She knew that once she stepped into that car; she wouldn’t be able to do this again for nobody knows how long.  
  
Tiffany understood and returned the kiss just as hungrily – trying to savor every taste of Taeyeon.  
  
“I love you. Please don’t forget that.” Taeyeon stifled a sob.  
  
“I love you too. Please don’t cry. I’ll always be here, Taeyeon-ah… Remember that.”  
  
She nodded and slowly dropped her hands.  
  
“I’ll see you tomorrow then?”  
  
“Yes, see you tomorrow.”  
  
Taeyeon took a step back, and another, and another until she reached the car. She kept her eyes on Tiffany.  
  
She almost said goodbye but remembered their list.  
  
“Good night?”  
  
“Good night, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
“See you around… I guess.”  
  
“Yup. See you around…”  
  
Taeyeon stepped into the car and rolled down the window.  
  
She waved as Sunny slowly started to drive away.  
  
She leaned out the window and kept waving until the car made a turn and she lost sight of Tiffany.  
  
That night was the first time Sunny ever saw her best friend cry that hard in all the years she’d known her.  
  
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“Wow… I never knew these fanchants could be this loud,” whispered Yuri.  
  
“Yeah… me neither,” replied Tiffany. Her eyes were fixed on the stage. She couldn’t believe how gorgeous Taeyeon looked that day. She had seen the teasers, the music video and the album but to see her in the flesh with all the make-up, new hair color and the stage outfit… smiling, dancing, singing on the fancily decorated stage… it was like looking at a different person – not the dorky, down-to-earth and caring Taeyeon she knew so well. This Taeyeon was someone who clearly belonged under the spotlight.  
  
The song finally ended and they all applauded along with the fans and audience as Taeyeon, Yoona and Juhyun bowed and quickly ran off the stage.  
  
She knew the parents were waiting back stage and she wished she could join them.  
  
“Fany…”  
  
Sunny’s voice brought her out of her thoughts.  
  
“Let’s go. The dark shikshin is hungry again. Let’s feed her before Jessica kills her for whining and being her usual annoying self.”  
  
She nodded and quietly followed her friends out of the studio.  
  
She took one last look at the side of the stage and saw Taeyeon peeking from behind one of the heavy curtains – amidst the bustle of the staff and other artists. It looked like Taeyeon was looking for someone in the audience.  
  
She waved – trying to get Taeyeon’s attention but the audience had erupted in cheers as the next group started to make their way to the stage; causing her wave to go unnoticed. She saw one of the staff talking to Taeyeon and the girl bowing as if apologizing before she reluctantly made her way backstage.  
  
Tiffany gulped as she felt her heart break at the thought that that was probably the last time she could see Taeyeon in the flesh.  
  
She felt an arm around her shoulders.  
  
“Don’t worry. She knows you’re here.” Jessica tried to console her friend and slowly pulled Tiffany out of the studio.  
  
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“Please prepare your CDs and stand in line. And move quickly please.”  
  
The man directed the queue for the umpteenth time and she waited patiently until her turn came.  
  
She made her way towards the maknae and handed her the CD.  
  
“Unnie!” Juhyun stood up and hugged her. “So good to see you!”  
  
“Congrats, Juhyun-ah. You guys are great.”  
  
“Still wanna be the president of our fanclub, Unnie?” Yoona grinned and Tiffany moved to hug the second girl.  
  
“I’ll just stick to being a fan. Less work.”  
  
Juhyun passed Yoona the signed CD and she quickly signed it before handing it to Tiffany. “Thanks, Unnie.”  
  
“Thank *you*, Yoong.”  
  
She walked to the end of the table and saw Taeyeon smiling.  
  
“Hi.”  
  
“Hi.”  
  
It took everything she had to not jump over the table and hug the girl cutely asking for her autograph.  
  
She hugged her briefly – just like her dongsaengs did – to not arouse suspicions from the onlookers.  
  
“Crossing an item off the list?” She mumbled just loud enough for Tiffany to hear as her hand quickly signed the CD. A smile was plastered permanently on her face.  
  
“Yup.”  
  
She flipped the CD over and quickly scribbled more on it before returning it to Tiffany.  
  
“Thank you.”  
  
“You’re welcome.”  
  
Tiffany walked away – feeling Taeyeon’s eyes on her back. She didn’t turn around; afraid that it would be too obvious for the people there and Taeyeon’s managers.  
  
She read what Taeyeon had written on the back of the case.  
  
“Dorm: 010-7294875. 1 AM call me.”  
  
There was even a heart at the end of the message.  
  
She grinned and shook her head – safely placing the CD in her bag. Suddenly, she couldn’t wait until it’s 1 AM.  
  
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“So how long has this been going on?”  
  
“Since that fansign event…”  
  
“Three months?”  
  
“More or less.”  
  
“Not bad.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “Not often though… I’m happy if we can talk for five minutes, once a week. There were days when she would only get three, four hours of sleep. And I’m talking about the less busy days.”  
  
“That bad, huh?”  
  
“Yep. She’s very busy…”  
  
“Their debut single did surprisingly well so they’re pretty high in demand right now, I guess.”  
  
Tiffany nodded.  
  
“How did you know when to call?”  
  
“It’s always around 2 to 3 AM on a weekday. If she’s home and still up, she’ll pick up. If not, then I’ll call back another day…”  
  
“And you’ve never told a soul about these calls?”  
  
“Nope. Too risky. You’re the first. I might tell Sunny and the others but not anytime soon. The less people who know the better.”  
  
“Understood.”  
  
Jessica went back to her book and Tiffany did the same.  
  
“How long do you plan to keep this up?” Jessica spoke again.  
  
“I’ll let her decide.”  
  
“Seriously? You’re just going to let her string you along until she finds someone better?”  
  
“As much as I hate the sound of that… Yes.”  
  
“So no chance of moving on for now?”  
  
“Not until she decides to move on.”  
  
“Even when a better person comes along?”  
  
Tiffany nodded again.  
  
“Are you sure that’s wise, Tiff?”  
  
“I have a dream too, remember? And dreams require sacrifice.”  
  
“Now you’re telling me you’ve found true love? Her?!”  
  
“That I don’t know. But I know I love her and she loves me. I’m willing to wait and find out.”  
  
“For six years? In uncertainty?” Jessica sighed. “You don’t even know whether you could get back together again – even after six years.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “I guess I just have to find out for myself later on.”  
  
Jessica shook her head. “You might be wasting your time, Tiff.”  
  
“I guess that’s the risk that I have to take.”  
  
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Her phone rang and she saw an unknown number displayed across her screen.  
  
“Hello?”  
  
“HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!!!! HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!!!”  
  
She laughed as the loud singing from the three girls continued.  
  
“Yah! Im Yoona! I can hear your annoying aegyo voice!”  
  
“Will your mom be baking on your birthday, Unnie? I’m craving her cupcakes. Please send me some?”  
  
“Only if you stop using that aegyo voice.”  
  
“Done! I’ll be waiting for the cupcakes!” She switched back to her normal voice and laughed. “Yay! Cupcakes!”  
  
“Happy birthday, Unnie!” It was Juhyun’s voice this time.  
  
“Thanks, Juhyun. Taeyeon told you guys, huh?”  
  
“Yes, she did.”  
  
“Whose number is this?”  
  
“Oh this is my mother’s number. She’s visiting us at the dorm.”  
  
“I see. No schedules today?”  
  
“We’ve just finished a morning radio show.”  
  
“Ah, I see.”  
  
“Hang on, Unnie… Taeyeon unnie...” Juhyun’s voice faded out.  
  
“Hello there, beautiful.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Still cheesy, I see. Can you talk like this?”  
  
“I’m in my room and manager oppa’s not here.”  
  
“Oh okay… Want me to call the dorm? You’re going to make Juhyun’s mother’s phone bill explode.”  
  
“Nah, I’ll be quick. Happy birthday. I’m sorry I can’t be there to celebrate with you.”  
  
“It’s okay. I’m happy you called. That’s already a-…”  
  
“Oh shoot. Oppa’s back. Sorry, Fany-ah. Gotta go. Love you.”  
  
The line went dead.  
  
Tiffany sighed. “Love you too, Taeyeon.”  
  
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The laughing girl was pushed forward by the two taller ones standing behind her.  
  
She grinned and spoke into the microphone. “Thank you for this award. It was unexpected and we’re so happy to receive it. It’s an honor to even be nominated and to be here with the respectable seniors and colleagues. Thank you President Kim and everyone at the agency, our families, friends, manager oppas, stylist unnies and my members. Couldn’t do this without you two, dongsaengs.”  
  
Yoona and Juhyun each held her arm.  
  
“Thanks to all our fans! You make all this possible! Let’s make next year an even greater year!”  
  
She held the award high in the air and her dongsaengs hugged her – screaming in joy.  
  
The MCs closed the award show and they prepared for their encore stage.  
  
“Still hung up on her?”  
  
Sunny stood up and strolled into the kitchen to refill her cup.  
  
Tiffany didn’t respond. Her eyes were still glued to the screen.  
  
“You know she won’t move, talk or even blink when she’s watching Taeyeon,” Hyoyeon commented.  
  
“I wish she’d move on… It’s been too long. We’ll be graduating next year!” Sooyoung reached into her big bowl of chips.  
  
“I thought you’re all for this whole true love search thing?”  
  
“I am but I love my friend more and seeing her like this…” She sighed.  
  
“When was the last time they even saw each other?” Hyoyeon asked Sunny who had returned to her seat.  
  
“A year? Two?”  
  
“Two years, eight months and sixteen days.”  
  
The other girls were startled by Tiffany’s sudden reply.  
  
“I wish you wouldn’t talk about me as if I’m not here.” She lowered the volume of the TV.  
  
“Sorry… we thought you were lost in staring at Taeng…”  
  
“Seriously though… how about you try to move on now?” Sooyoung asked. “She might have moved on too, you know. I mean… if those tabloids were right… she’d have dated at least two people.”  
  
“We never said we’d wait for each other. She’s free to date whoever she wants.”  
  
“Then why are you waiting?” Sunny asked.  
  
Tiffany shrugged.  
  
“Come on, Tiff…” The quiet Jessica finally spoke.  
  
“Mind your own business, okay?” Tiffany stood and left for the kitchen.  
  
No one dared continue talking about it.  
  
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“Unnie…”  
  
She felt her mattress dip and opened her eyes to see Yoona’s face hovering above hers. She pushed it away.  
  
“Go away. I want to take a nap.”  
  
“Come with me? Or go home with Juhyun?”  
  
“No thanks…”  
  
“Come on… what are you going to do alone for four days?”  
  
“Sleep.”  
  
“Unnie…”  
  
“See you in four days, Yoong.” She pulled the blanket over her head to end the conversation.  
  
Yoona sighed. “Fine. I’ll bring you something nice from Bali.”  
  
She waved her hand and shooed the girl away.  
  
She waited until she was sure that Yoona and Juhyun had left the dorm and she was alone in the quiet apartment.  
  
She closed her eyes and tried to go back to sleep but found that she couldn’t.  
  
She reached for her phone and started to absentmindedly browse through her contact list – trying to think of someone who could accompany her for the day.  
  
She thought about calling her boyfriend but decided that she didn’t need another scandal. The last one almost got her phone taken away again by her manager. Not to mention the long lecture from the agency president.  
  
Her finger stopped scrolling at a name.  
  
“Tiffany…”  
  
She gulped. She hadn’t heard of that name for more than two years. They drifted apart a few months after her debut – when she got too busy and her schedule became too unpredictably packed that she couldn’t even answer Tiffany’s calls.  
  
Tiffany had stopped calling not long after and she couldn’t find the right time to call her back.  
  
They saw each other a few months later – by accident – when she was filming on the street.  
  
There were too many people and cameras around so she couldn’t do anything but steal glances at the girl standing in the crowd.  
  
By the time she had gotten her phone back, she felt that it was too late. She didn’t want to pop out of nowhere and disrupt Tiffany’s life. She would sometimes hear from Sunny about her but since she couldn’t even stay in touch regularly with her short friend, she just completely lost track after a while.  
  
She tried to move on and tried to forget her. She dated – every chance she got.  
  
Unfortunately, the media caught on with some of her escapades so she had to lay low for a while. Being dubbed the number one girl group in the country made it quite difficult to even go to the mall without having a random picture of her surfacing somewhere on the internet.  
  
She sighed and stared at the screen again. She decided to get some fresh air.  
  
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Ding dong.  
  
Tiffany grunted and pushed herself away from her desk – setting down her pen in relief. She needed a break from her headache-inducing assignment.  
  
She stretched and went downstairs to answer the door.  
  
She pulled the door open and saw the backside of someone in a cap – about to walk away.  
  
“Can I help you?”  
  
The figure stopped and slowly turned around.  
  
She caught her breath.  
  
Taeyeon cleared her throat and adjusted her cap. “H-hi…”  
  
It took a few more seconds before she was convinced that she wasn’t hallucinating.  
  
“W-what are you doing here?”  
  
“Uhm… I’m… not sure about that myself…” She shoved her hands into her pockets and stared at Tiffany’s feet.  
A breeze of cold wind made Tiffany shiver.  
  
“You wanna come in?”  
  
“Are your parents home?”  
  
“No.”  
  
“Oh. Okay.”  
  
Tiffany stepped back and opened the door to let Taeyeon through.  
  
“Your mom’s been baking again?” Taeyeon sniffed the sweet air.  
  
“Yeah. You want a cupcake?”  
  
“Maybe later.”  
  
Tiffany walked passed Taeyeon – into the kitchen. She took out a plastic box from one of the cabinets and put some cupcakes in it.  
  
She then gave it to the girl who was still standing near the door.  
  
“Share them with Yoona and Juhyun.”  
  
Taeyeon slowly took the box. “Thanks.”  
  
“Don’t mention it.”  
  
They awkwardly stood facing each other; not really sure what to say or do.  
  
“So… Why are you here? No schedules?”  
  
Taeyeon shook her head. “Got a few days off.”  
  
“I see.”  
  
She took a deep breath and finally found the courage to look Tiffany straight in the eyes. “How are you?”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “The usual. Congrats on the Daesang, by the way.”  
  
“Ah that. Yeah, thanks.”  
  
“You’re not warm?” She noticed that Taeyeon was still wearing her thick jacket.  
  
“N-not really.” She gulped.  
  
Tiffany moved to the couch and Taeyeon slowly followed. She sat down on one of the chairs.  
  
“You can take off your jacket, you know.”  
  
“Y-yeah…”  
  
She blushed a bit and clumsily tried to shrug her thick jacket off – shifting the container from one hand to the other.  
  
Tiffany couldn’t help but thought how cute Taeyeon looked with her no makeup face and the casual clothes. This was the Taeyeon she knew. Although the blond hair was definitely not there before – but she thought it suited her.  
  
“How’s college?”  
  
“Hectic.”  
  
“Ah okay. When are you graduating?”  
  
“Next year… if all goes well.”  
  
“I see.” She took a deep breath. “It’s been that long, huh?”  
  
“Yeah…”  
  
Taeyeon went quiet – staring at the cupcakes in her hand.  
  
“How have you been doing?”  
  
“Okay… I guess… I mean… can’t complain…”  
  
“Yeah… nation’s number one girl group, huh?”  
  
She blushed a bit. “I can never get used to that, I think…”  
  
“It means you’re at the top. I’m happy for you.”  
  
She looked up and saw Tiffany’s smile. She never realized how much she missed that beautiful smile.  
  
“How’s your boyfriend?”  
  
“W-what?”  
  
“You’re dating that idol from that group right?”  
  
“That’s just a rumor.” She couldn’t tell Tiffany the truth.  
  
“It’s okay, you know… I never said you should wait.”  
  
“Are you seeing anyone?”  
  
“Y-yeah…” She lied.  
  
“Oh? Classmate?”  
  
“Something like that…”  
  
“I see.”  
  
It went awkwardly quiet again.  
  
“Why are you here?” She realized that Taeyeon hadn’t really answered that question.  
  
“I-… I don’t know… exactly… I was just driving around…”  
  
“You can drive now?”  
  
She grinned proudly. “Got my license a few months ago.”  
  
“Nice. I failed my driving test. Twice.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed by reflex.  
  
Tiffany instantly smiled at the sound of the ahjumma laugh.  
  
The laughter broke the ice.  
  
“Are you busy?”  
  
“Not really. I was going to burn my books.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Crappy assignment.”  
  
“Ah… wanna take a break? Go to the river and take a walk?”  
  
“Can you do that?”  
  
“Why not?”  
  
“Won’t you get mobbed?”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Got my cap, scarf and hoodie. I think it won’t be a mob; usually just a few people staring and whispering. Besides, it won’t be the first time my face appears randomly on some news site. I still have the right to leisurely take a walk with my friend, don’t I?”  
  
Tiffany felt the sting at the word ‘friend’ but chose to keep smiling. “Of course you do. I’ll go change.”  
  
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“Thanks for the ride.”  
  
“No problem. Not so bad, right?”  
  
“Strangely so. I would have expected a lot more commotion.”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “Depends on the location too, I guess. There were some people taking pictures so don’t be surprised to see your face online.”  
  
“Nah… they won’t focus on me. I’ll be cropped from the picture.”  
  
“Don’t know about that. They might be curious to who this beautiful friend of mine is.”  
  
There’s that word ‘friend’ again, Tiffany thought but she, again, smiled instead.  
  
“Thank you for the compliment.”  
  
“It’s the truth,” Taeyeon smiled.  
  
She ignored the flutter in her stomach. “So… I’ll see you around, I guess. I had fun.” She took a step closer towards the door.  
  
Taeyeon followed her – not willing to add distance between them. “Yeah, I had fun too. It’s been a while since I felt so relaxed and comfortable around someone besides Yoong and Juhyun.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “Glad to hear that.”  
  
Taeyeon looked around. “Your parents are still out?”  
  
“They’re off on their second honeymoon. Left this morning.”  
  
“Oh? Where to?”  
  
“Bali.”  
  
“Oh nice! They might meet Yoong.” She grinned. “She’s going there with her family too.”  
  
“Oh? That would be a nice surprise.”  
  
“That girl might pounce your mother and beg for cupcakes.”  
  
Tiffany could hear that annoying aegyo voice already. She laughed. “That would be so funny.”  
  
“It’s not impossible, knowing Yoong…”  
  
They smiled – happy to be able to reduce the awkwardness.  
  
When Taeyeon didn’t seem to want to leave, Tiffany finally took the chance.  
  
“You… err… wanna come in?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
She fumbled with her keys as she tried to calm her racing heart. The small smile never left her lips. She was happy to have Taeyeon around – even for just random talks.  
  
She finally managed to open the door and quickly walked inside – taking her coat and shoes off.  
  
“You hungry?”  
  
“A little…” Taeyeon closed the door behind them. She hung her jacket by the door and strolled into the living room.  
  
“Mom only leaves me cupcakes and cookies so… order take out?” Tiffany was in the kitchen.  
  
“Kimchi fried rice?”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Yeah…”  
  
“Just like old times…”  
  
Tiffany froze – one hand holding her phone and the other on the open drawer with the restaurant brochures.  
  
“Y-yeah…” She nervously gulped. “Just like old times…” She quickly straightened up and dialed.  
  
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“Ugh… I’m full.” Taeyeon leaned back and held her stomach.  
  
“That’s because you ate most of my rice.”  
  
“No… it’s because I just realized that I hadn’t eaten all day.”  
  
“You should take better care of yourself.”  
  
“I usually do. Must’ve slipped my mind.”  
  
Tiffany stood up and started to clean up the coffee table.  
  
“Let me help.”  
  
Taeyeon grunted as she struggled to stand up.  
  
Tiffany had to laugh. “Just sit tight, you stuffed pig.”  
  
“I’m trying to be a good guest here.”  
  
Taeyeon was finally able to stand. She grabbed a bowl but Tiffany stopped her; pulling it away from her hand.  
  
“Oh come on…” She didn’t let go of the bowl.  
  
“Sit down.” Tiffany pulled again.  
  
“I won’t die just because I help you clean up.” She tugged.  
  
“Guests shouldn’t clean up.” Tiffany pulled harder.  
  
“And hosts shouldn’t be so stubborn!” She yanked it and accidentally spilled the sauce all over her shirt as the bowl slipped from Tiffany’s hand. “Darn!”  
  
“Told you you should’ve stayed put.”  
  
“This is the thanks I get for trying to be nice and polite…” She sighed and tried to wipe off the stain with a napkin but to no avail. It left a big dark spot on her shirt.  
  
“That’s not gonna come off now and it looks so messy.”  
  
Tiffany put down the plates in her hands and went up to her room.  
  
“I’ll get you another shirt. You can take that off. Wouldn’t want people to think their idol is a baby who can’t even eat properly.”  
  
“Again, thanks for the appreciation.”  
  
Tiffany grinned and entered her room to find a clean shirt for Taeyeon to wear.  
  
She rummaged in her closet and found a white shirt among the other colors she thought Taeyeon wouldn’t like to wear.  
  
She turned around to see Taeyeon leaning on the doorway with her arms crossed – watching her.  
  
She gulped.  
  
“H-here… you can wear this.” She motioned her hand forward – offering the clean shirt to Taeyeon. “Go change in the bathroom.”  
  
When Taeyeon didn’t move, she found herself blushing and nervously shifting in place.  
  
“Or you can change here…” She tried to tuck the shirt somewhere in Taeyeon’s arms and moved to walk out of her room.  
  
Taeyeon grabbed Tiffany’s wrist and pulled her – bumping their bodies and held Tiffany by the waist.  
  
“T-taeyeon-ah…”  
  
She gently ran her finger along Tiffany’s cheek, following her jawline and down to her chin – letting her eyes fall on Tiffany’s lips.  
  
Tiffany felt like it was that day at the school stairway all over again. The butterflies in her stomach were doing somersaults as she felt a shiver coursing through her.  
  
Taeyeon slightly tugged Tiffany’s chin forward as she leaned in to close the gap between them.  
  
She closed her eyes and waited.  
  
A loud ringtone and a sudden vibration in Taeyeon’s pocket made them jump.  
  
Taeyeon quickly let go of Tiffany and reached for her phone.  
  
Tiffany blushed and took a step back. She wasn’t really expecting that to happen – although she didn’t mind at all.  
  
Taeyeon sighed before answering the call; stepping away from Tiffany.  
  
“Hello? … Yes, Oppa… No, no I’m… at the dorm…” She massaged her forehead as her head suddenly throbbed. “Oh… what time? … Okay. The usual place? No? Where then? … Is that safe? … I see. Okay… no it’s fine. I’ll meet you there… Yeah… Sure… Miss you too… Bye…”  
  
She hung up and cursed the bad timing of the call. She then realized that Tiffany must’ve overheard the conversation.  
  
Taeyeon quickly turned on her heels to see Tiffany already gone.  
  
She went into the room and saw the clean shirt still lying on the floor. She picked it up and quickly changed. Her mind noted the familiar scent and it relaxed her for a second before she rushed and went downstairs.  
  
She saw Tiffany putting the dirty dishes in the sink and throwing away the plastic bags and containers.  
  
“Let me help.” She rolled up her sleeves.  
  
“No, it’s fine. I’ll do them later.”  
  
“Sigh… I’m sorry…”  
  
“What’s there to be sorry about?”  
  
Tiffany washed her hands, dried them and turned around to open the fridge.  
  
“You want dessert? I think there’s still some ice cream and fruit left…”  
  
“Fany…”  
  
She kept her face in the fridge. She didn’t want Taeyeon to know how that phone conversation had affected her. It was clear that Taeyeon was taken. She wasn’t hers anymore.  
  
“Wait… scratch that. I think we ran out of fruit.”  
  
“Fany…”  
  
Taeyeon held the hand that was on the handle of the fridge.  
  
Tiffany quickly pulled her hand away and avoided Taeyeon’s eyes as she turned to the sink and started to do the dishes.  
  
Taeyeon sighed and closed the fridge door.  
  
“I’m sorry you had to hear that…”  
  
“It’s fine. Why should you be sorry?”  
  
She tried to keep her voice steady as she scrubbed the plates.  
  
“And I’m sorry I tried to kiss you… it’s just that…” She couldn’t continue. She could break up with him easily but she didn’t want to break Tiffany up with whomever it was she’s dating. “Sorry…”  
  
“No worries.”  
  
She watched Tiffany scrubbing and scrubbing – seemingly trying to make the simple task endless.  
  
She sensed the change of mood. “I should just go…”  
  
Tiffany nodded. “Okay…”  
  
She didn’t want Taeyeon to go but she knew Taeyeon had a date and she didn’t want to make her late for it.  
  
“Thanks for today… and the shirt. I’ll wash it before I return it to you.”  
  
“No worries. You can keep it.”  
  
“Err… right. Thanks. Okay then.” She didn’t know what else to say.  
  
Taeyeon walked out of the kitchen and picked up the stained shirt she had carelessly thrown on the couch.  
  
Tiffany finally turned the tap off – thinking that she should at least walk Taeyeon to the door. She dried her hands and left the kitchen to see Taeyeon putting her cap and jacket on.  
  
“Drive carefully.”  
  
“I will.”  
  
She finally caught Tiffany’s eyes for a second before the latter look away. She thought she saw sadness but she really didn’t want to make things worse so she kept quiet.  
  
“I’ll… err… see you around?” She pulled the door open.  
  
“Yup. See you around.”  
  
She hesitated for a second before slowly making her way out of the house.  
  
Tiffany stood at the doorway – watching Taeyeon getting into her car and drove away.  
  
She took a deep breath and finally let her tears trickle down her cheeks.  
  
Taeyeon’s gone and she’s not coming back.

**chapter 11**

“Hello?”  
  
“Hey, Fany… are you home?”  
  
“Yep… just got here. What’s up?”  
  
“Taeng’s on the radio.”  
  
“Oh? Now?”  
  
“Yup. FM 89.1.”  
  
“Thanks. I’ll tune in.”  
  
“Call me back later? I need help with my project.”  
  
“Sure thing.”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
She hung up and put her bag on the floor before turning her radio on.  
  
The warm voice of the female DJ filled her room.  
  
“Really? That’s… interesting.”  
  
“We were pretty shocked ourselves.”  
  
She heard Yoona’s voice and smiled. It’s been a while since she talked to that cheerful girl. The last being a short phone call thanking her for the cupcakes. That was almost a year ago – she realized with a start. That’s how long it had been since Taeyeon’s random visit to her house… and what had almost become their kiss. She took a deep breath to get rid of the feelings that resurfaced every time the memory crossed her mind.  
  
“So about this new album…”  
  
The radio brought her out of her thoughts and she went about her room – changing her clothes and taking out her books.  
  
“I heard this album is special since all of you have your own special contribution to it… you each record a solo track for it?”  
  
“Taeyeon unnie recorded two!”  
  
“Yeah… I got greedy, sorry kids.”  
  
She heard the voice and unconsciously smiled.  
  
“But one wasn’t even a solo track since Yoona rapped a bit in it.”  
  
“Really?! Yoona can rap? Omo… this unnie never knew that.”  
  
“None of us did. She did well though.”  
  
“Ah… it’s that song. A remake of that group’s single, right?”  
  
“It’s a slightly different rendition…” Taeyeon said.  
  
“Taeyeon unnie wrote that song actually,” Juhyun tried to explain.  
  
“She did?”  
  
Taeyeon laughed shyly. “Yes, I did. The manager of that group happened to hear it and thought to include it in their album since we weren’t releasing anything back then…”  
  
“Ah I see… that group belongs to the same company anyway, right?”  
  
“Yeah… Their manager walked in when I was recording it for myself.”  
  
“They performed it live at that TV show I hosted…” The DJ spoke again.  
  
“Ah that’s right!”  
  
“I remember that…”  
  
The girls exclaimed in agreement.  
  
“… yes and I must say that even though I’m their noona, I can’t help but melt a bit after hearing the lyrics… well and seeing those cute manly boys singing to me like that… Whooo…”  
  
The four ladies laughed and so did Tiffany.  
  
“Omo… if you wrote this… Wow… you’re good, Taeyeon!”  
  
A nervous and embarrassed laugh could be heard from Taeyeon. “Oh please, Unnie. It was just a spur of the moment thing. I didn’t expect it to be liked by so many people…”  
  
“But it’s such a touching song… Omo… we need to talk about your inspiration behind this song later on. Anyway… you’ll sing it for us live, right?”  
  
“Yes with the help of Rapper Im there.”  
  
They laughed again.  
  
“Okay then please take your places, Songwriter Kim and Rapper Im. Listeners, this is ‘I Can’t’ a track from Girls’ Generation’s new album as written and sung by Taeyeon… Let’s take a listen. Applause!”  
  
Tiffany turned up the volume.  
  
The sound of acoustic guitar and piano flowed softly out of the speakers before she heard Taeyeon’s voice.  
  
“I’ll wait until you come cause I can’t forget your love. I feel like I’m going to cry when I think of you. It gets deeper as time goes on, I can’t stop thinking about your love. I don’t think I can forget all of you. I don’t think I’ll be able to believe it when you return.”  
  
The song went into the chorus.  
  
“I can’t forget your love. No matter how long it takes, I’ll wait for you to come. I can’t forget your love. No matter how long it takes, I’ll wait for you to come. Cause I can’t, I can’t forget your love.”  
  
“Whoo!!” Yoona’s voice echoed loudly as the song went into a short interlude and Taeyeon laughed.  
  
“I stay up all night thinking of you. I can’t hold back the tears and end up crying by myself, I cried. You were the only one existing in my world. Losing you, I have nothing left. So I can’t forget your love.”  
  
The chorus was repeated once more before she heard Yoona’s calmly rapping voice.  
  
“I never even tried to forget you, it’s a task that’s worthless to me. Thinking of you everyday is as precious to me as breathing. Can’t forget your love, boy, you know that I need your love. I need your everything, I need you back. I can wait for you till you come back, come back to me.”  
  
Taeyeon’s voice took over again.  
  
“I can’t forget your love. No matter how long it takes, I’ll wait for you to come. I can’t forget your love. No matter how long it takes, I’ll wait for you to come. Cause I can’t, I can’t forget your love… I just want to be with you… I just want to be with you…”  
  
The music faded out and applause was heard before it switched to commercials.  
  
Tiffany stared blankly at the radio. She gulped. She wanted to believe it was for her but she couldn’t. Assuming like that would only hurt her more if it turned out that it wasn’t the case.  
  
She turned on her computer and searched online for the group that had sung the song the first time.  
  
She saw the release date and it was roughly a month after that visit from Taeyeon.  
  
“Could it be…”  
  
She suddenly heard the return of the DJ’s voice.  
  
“And we’re back with Girls’ Generation. The song you heard before the commercial break was their third live performance tonight – a song called ‘I can’t’ that was written by Taeyeon herself. That was amazing, Taeyeon! Oh and Rapper Im too, of course.”  
  
They giggled.  
  
“Thank you, Unnie.”  
  
“This will forever be one of my favorite songs, I think. Is it okay if I ask who you wrote it for? Or who you had in mind when you wrote it?”  
  
“Ah… like I said, it was just a spur of the moment thing. I was suddenly thinking of my first love that day… Kkkk… Aigoo… so embarrassing…”  
  
“Oooh! When was this first love of yours?”  
  
“High school.”  
  
“I see. Well, first loves die hard, you know. Trust this unnie, my first love is now married with kids and every time I happen to see him I’d stutter like a high school girl.”  
  
The three girls laughed again.  
  
“I’m serious! Even at this age. Can you imagine how embarrassed I am? It’s not even like I still love the guy or anything… I guess the feelings never really go away… being the first and all…”  
  
“Yeah… I guess so,” Taeyeon said.  
  
“Especially if it was the first person you ever said ‘I love you’ to.” The DJ continued. “Whooo… that’s even crazier…”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t reply. She just laughed.  
  
Tiffany had forgotten to breathe at the mention of ‘first love.’ She knew she was Taeyeon’s first love. So that song was really for me? She turned to her computer again and searched for the song.  
  
She downloaded it and kept looping the song until she realized that the radio show was coming to an end.  
  
“Well, unfortunately that’s all the time we have with these three cute dongsaengs of mine. Thank you Taeyeon, Yoona and Juhyun for coming. It’s always a pleasure having you here.”  
  
“The pleasure is ours, Unnie.”  
  
“Happy to be here.”  
  
“Thank you, Unnie.”  
  
“Alright then. May your album be a hit! Let’s say goodbye to our listeners.”  
  
“Good bye!”  
  
“Good night!”  
  
“Bye!”  
  
It switched back to commercials and Tiffany turned her radio off. She decided to forget her project for the night.  
  
She took out her mp3 player from her bag and lay down on her bed.  
  
She scanned the songs and found the one she was looking for. She put on her headphones and tapped the play button. Taeyeon’s voice instantly filled her ears.  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
She smiled and closed her eyes.  
  
“If you’re listening to this then it means you’ve accepted my heart… Kkkk… Aigoo… My fingers are curling…”  
  
Her smile faded a bit as she felt her eyes warmed with tears.  
  
“Anyway… here’s something for days when you can’t stalk me. Sincerely from my heart…” Taeyeon giggled. “… I like you, Fany-ah. Kkkk~ Gah!! I can’t do this…”  
  
She chuckled and felt warmth flowing down the side of her face.  
  
She let the looping track lull her to sleep.  
  
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“It was for you, I’m sure of it.”  
  
She shrugged.  
  
“You know it. You didn’t call me back after that and you didn’t even pick up when I called.”  
  
“I fell asleep, okay?”  
  
“Right.” Sunny finished her lunch. “I’ll forgive you since I know how lovesick you are when it comes to that shorty… but you gotta help me today, okay? I’m really really stuck here!”  
  
“Okay okay. But call me lovesick again and I’ll let you be stuck forever and never graduate.”  
  
“Who should join the mafia now?”  
  
“Chill, you two…” Jessica said. She suddenly noticed something behind Tiffany and lowered her voice. “And here he comes again…”  
  
“Hi there, Tiffany, Jessica and Sunny…” He suddenly laughed. “Why does that sound like some American teenage drama?”  
  
“Gotta admit our names make us sound totally not Korean.” Sunny said.  
  
“Until they hear you speak English, that is… Ow!” Jessica sulked and rubbed her arm.  
  
“Anyway, I don’t want to disturb your lunch so I’ll just be quick.” He turned to the quiet Tiffany. “I was wondering whether you’d want to go see that new movie with me… the sequel of that blockbuster I heard you liked?”  
  
Jessica nudged Tiffany’s feet under the table and Sunny was practically glaring at her.  
  
She sighed. “I’m sorry, Hwanhee…”  
  
He was clearly disappointed but he kept his smile. “It’s okay. I’ll try again some other day.” He looked at Sunny and Jessica. “See you girls around.”  
  
“Yah!” Sunny quickly reprimanded Tiffany once the guy had walked away. “Why did you turn him down again? Just one movie, Fany-ah. Wouldn’t hurt.”  
  
“Yeah. Have pity on the guy, will ya? He’s been asking you out for almost a year now. Give him a break!”  
  
“I don’t want to give him false hope!”  
  
Sunny groaned. “I shouldn’t have told you about the radio show last night. You might’ve said yes. He’s not bad, you know.”  
  
“Radio show or not, you guys know where I stand.”  
  
“Right. Celibacy.”  
  
“Hey!”  
  
“Convent? Oh wait… that’s still celibacy.” Jessica said. “What?”  
  
Tiffany was glaring at her friend.  
  
“Sigh… move on, Fany-ah… It might not be about you, remember?”  
  
“You said it was definitely about me!”  
  
“I changed my mind.”  
  
“Do you still want my help?”  
  
“It was totally about you!”  
  
Jessica slapped her short friend’s arm. “Have some principles!”  
  
“My final project is at stake. I’ll curse principles if that helps me finish it and graduate on time, okay?”  
  
“Then no more of this.” Tiffany sternly warned her friend. “You too, Jessi.”  
  
“What did I do?”  
  
“I know you guys mean well but we’re not in high school anymore. I’m capable of making my own decisions – reasonably.”  
  
“What’s so reasonable about waiting for someone who might not even want you back?”  
  
“If it means having the one thing I’ve always dreamed about then yes, it’s reasonable.”  
  
That silenced her friends.  
  
“Come on. Let’s go to the library.”  
  
She gathered her stuff and stood up – leaving the table.  
  
Sunny sighed and exchanged looks with Jessica. The latter could only shake her head.  
  
“Let her be… There’s nothing we can do or say to make her change her mind…”  
  
“I need to find out the truth.” Sunny quickly shouldered her bag and followed Tiffany.  
  
“What do you mean?” Jessica called out but Sunny was already half running – trying to catch up with Tiffany.  
  
She sighed and leaned back in her chair. She hoped that Taeyeon had meant the words in that song – for Tiffany’s sake.  
  
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“Are you busy?”  
  
“On my way back to the dorm. What’s up?”  
  
“I have something to ask you.”  
  
“What is it?”  
  
“Was that song really about Fany?”  
  
She held her breath.  
  
“Yes.”  
  
“Every word?”  
  
“Every word.”  
  
“What about that guy you’re dating?”  
  
“Broke up with him almost a year ago.”  
  
“Seeing someone else now?”  
  
“No. Give me more credit, please.”  
  
“Sorry. I have to protect Fany.”  
  
“It’s not like I want to hurt her, you know...”  
  
“Do you still love her?”  
  
She sighed and considered for a moment before typing her reply. “I do.”  
  
“You sure?”  
  
“Why are you doubting me? Didn’t you hear the song? Search online for the lyrics.”  
  
“You know why.”  
  
She remembered the conversation she had with Sunny when she asked her who Tiffany was dating. She was surprised to hear that it was a lie and that Tiffany had never dated anyone else. If she had known that, she would’ve gone ahead and kissed her again that day. She broke up with him shortly after that talk.  
  
“We told each other not to wait. And I told you why I dated those people…”  
  
“And I believe you. But it’s hard to see her like this for almost four years, Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“I know but my hands are tied at the moment, okay? Dating fellow celebrities is easy… we could share the impact if anyone finds out… we’re used to the bashing. If anyone finds out I’m dating *her*…”  
  
“Crazy fans?”  
  
“And antis. I can’t do that to her.”  
  
“So you’re making her wait in vain?”  
  
“Again… PLEASE SEARCH FOR THE SONG ONLINE AND READ THE LYRICS!”  
  
“You’re telling me you’ll wait?”  
  
“Yes, short ye of little faith…”  
  
“I’m serious, Taeng. You’ll wait for her?”  
  
“Yes, I will. For as long as it takes. There’s not much left anyway… about two years to go and I’m free. Idol groups don’t last that long, you know, especially girl groups.”  
  
“You sure about this?”  
  
“Why does it feel like nothing I do or say is right with you?”  
  
“Let’s switch lives for a day and you’ll know why.”  
  
“I’m sorry if I hurt her, okay? It wasn’t on purpose. I thought she had forgotten about me… I thought she had moved on.”  
  
“Well now you know she hadn’t.”  
  
Taeyeon didn’t know what to reply after that. Sunny’s message suddenly popped up again.  
  
“Can you do me a favor?”  
  
“What is it?”  
  
“Tell her.”  
  
“How?”  
  
“I don’t know. Go figure something out. I don’t want her to keep living in this uncertainty. I don’t want her to keep suffering. I care about her – we all do. We love her too, you know… although in a different way, of course…”  
  
“I know and thank you for that.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Because you guys have been taking a very good care of her while I’m not there…”  
  
“It’s our pleasure. Just tell her. Okay, Taeng? Fast.”  
  
“Okay.”  
  
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The sound of her loud ringtone startled her.  
  
She mumbled a light curse and reached for her phone. It was late and she was finishing her project. She had not been getting enough sleep and even the smallest things irritated her. She had a good mind to throw her phone in the trash when she saw the unknown number and frowned.  
  
“Who on earth… at this damn hour?!”  
  
She sighed and harshly answered the call.  
  
“Hello?!”  
  
“Hi…”  
  
She froze after hearing the voice.  
  
“Did I wake you up?”  
  
“N-no. I-I… I’m working on my project…”  
  
“Are your parents home?”  
  
“Err… yes?”  
  
“Can you quietly sneak out of the house? Just for a bit? Please?”  
  
She was hit with a sense of dejavu and straightened up in her seat. “Where are you?”  
  
“Outside your house.”  
  
She was right.  
  
“What are you doing here?”  
  
“Just… come out? Talk for a bit?”  
  
“Sigh… fine. Be there in a sec.”  
  
She hung up and didn’t even bother to change out of her pajamas as she made her way down the stairs and out the door – grabbing her jacket along the way.  
  
She saw Taeyeon standing near her car; arms wrapped around herself and steam puffing out of her mouth. The girl smiled as soon as she saw her.  
  
“Hi… sorry to bother you…”  
  
She closed the door behind her after pulling her keys out of the lock and pocketing them.  
  
She zipped up her jacket.  
  
“Why are you here?”  
  
“It’s cold. Can we talk in the car? I’ll turn on the heater.”  
  
“Sigh… fine. Make it quick. I have a deadline to meet.”  
  
“Of course.”  
  
Taeyeon opened the door for Tiffany before going to the driver’s side and got in. She turned the engine on and waited until the heater had warmed them up.  
  
“So?”  
  
“So…” She suddenly didn’t know where to start.  
  
Tiffany waited.  
  
“So… I… Err… Uhm… About that song…”  
  
“What song?”  
  
“The one I wrote…”  
  
“Oh. That.” She held her breath.  
  
“Yeah… that.” Taeyeon shifted in her seat. “Sunny told me you heard it… on that radio show last month…”  
  
She nodded.  
  
“I wrote that after that day I came to see you… remember?”  
  
She nodded again.  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “I mean every word. I’ll wait. For as long as I have to… until you come back to me.” She tried to smile but felt that it was too awkward. “I-…” She gulped. “I can’t forget you either…”  
  
It took Tiffany almost a full minute before she finished processing everything Taeyeon had said.  
  
“What about your boyfriend?”  
  
“I’m not seeing anyone. I haven’t seen anyone for almost a year…” She realized that she somehow owed Tiffany an explanation. “I admit I dated a lot… it’s not because I love them; I never loved any of them… I was just trying to move on, I guess. I thought maybe-…” She sighed again.  
  
“You don’t need to explain anything to me.”  
  
“I have to. I can’t help but feel like I’ve hurt you…”  
  
“I told you to move on.”  
  
“But you never did…”  
  
“My decision. Not yours.”  
  
“Still…”  
  
“You’ve done nothing wrong, Taeyeon-ah… well, except breaking your agency’s rules…” She smiled a bit.  
  
Taeyeon was relieved to see the smile.  
  
“So you’ll forgive me?”  
  
“What’s there to forgive? I told you, you’ve done nothing wrong…”  
  
“I feel like I did. I’m sorry… I should’ve tried harder…”  
  
“It’s not your fault, okay? And let that be the end of that.”  
  
She smiled. “I still have the list stuck to my mirror, you know.”  
  
“For real?”  
  
She nodded. “I didn’t have the heart to take it down. Best 200 days of my life, remember?”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “I remember.”  
  
“So… I know this would be too much to ask but maybe – just maybe – you won’t mind waiting just a little bit more? Until my contract ends? We’d probably disband by then. Yoong’s pretty serious about her acting and I prefer going solo if I could… Juhyun said she wanted to study…” She adjusted her beanie to cover her anxiety.  
  
Tiffany tilted her head and observed the other girl.  
  
Taeyeon shifted and looked away. “Is it too selfish of me?”  
  
“You really mean what you said? You’ll wait?”  
  
Taeyeon turned and Tiffany saw the sincere eyes.  
  
“I mean it. I’ll wait until you decide you want me back. In the mean time, I don’t mind if you want to give other people a shot… I mean… it’s only fair…”  
  
“Still a babo, I see…”  
  
“Wh-what?”  
  
“What do you think two years is compared to almost four years? It’d be nothing. I don’t need other people to fill the time… they never stand a chance anyway, why give them false hope?”  
  
“Y-you mean…”  
  
“We’ll just pick up where we left off, Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
She grinned at last. “I think there’s still something we haven’t finished, by the way…”  
  
“And that is?”  
  
Taeyeon gently held the sides of Tiffany’s face and leaned in to kiss her.  
  
Tiffany smiled when Taeyeon pulled back a bit. “Gotta admit I missed that a lot…”  
  
Taeyeon returned the smile and kissed Tiffany again, more fervently this time.  
  
She felt Tiffany’s hands going around her neck – trying to pull her forward.  
  
Their positions were awkward and her mind was trying to think of a better way to hold Tiffany when she saw a blinding flash through her closed eyelids.  
  
Taeyeon quickly pulled Tiffany down, hiding her face in her shoulder as she pulled her own beanie over her face.  
  
“Stay here and stay hidden.” She whispered.  
  
She let go of Tiffany and peeked through her beanie to see a man running away with a camera in his hand.  
  
She got out of the car and ran after him.  
  
She turned the corner and saw him disappearing into the dark of the night. Cursing loudly, she kicked a nearby trashcan before hurrying back to her car.  
  
She looked around for more paparazzi and quickly pulled Tiffany out of the car after making sure that there were none.  
  
“Get inside.”  
  
Tiffany opened the door to the house and they both walked inside – leaving Taeyeon’s car running with doors still open.  
  
“I’m sorry about that…”  
  
“Don’t apologize.” Tiffany was clearly still shaken.  
  
She hugged her tight and softly soothed her. “It’s fine… don’t be scared. It was just some overzealous tabloid paparazzi... must have followed me or seen my car or something…”  
  
“I’m glad my parents are such deep sleepers.”  
  
Taeyeon chuckled.  
  
“What’s going to happen next?”  
  
She took a deep breath. “I don’t know. We’ll just have to wait and see, I guess.”  
  
She silently wished that only her face were visible. She couldn’t bear to think what would happen to Tiffany should people recognize her.  
  
She hugged her even tighter. “It’s going to be fine. It’ll be fine…”  
  
“What about your manager… the president?” Tiffany slowly broke free from the hug.  
  
Taeyeon shrugged. “So I’ll get scolded… won’t be the first time that happens. They might take my phone away again but there are Yoong’s and Juhyun’s phones so that won’t even matter.” She gave Tiffany a reassuring smile. “It’s going to be okay. Don’t worry.”  
  
“Are you sure?”  
  
“They won’t fire me – we’re making them a lot of money. Knowing the president, he wouldn’t risk losing that for just a silly scandal that would blow over soon. Besides, it was dark and my windshield is a bit tinted so the photo might not even come out well. I’m not even wearing any make-up. It’s fine, Fany-ah…” She gently tidied up Tiffany’s disheveled hair. “I might have to deny it vehemently though… or make fun of it. I hope you won’t take it personally.”  
  
“Of course I won’t.”  
  
“Good. Because I mean every word, okay? I’ll wait…” She kissed her forehead. “I love you…”  
  
It felt so good to be able to hear those words coming out of Taeyeon’s mouth again. She didn’t realize her eyes were watering until she noticed the warmth on her cheek. She quickly wiped it with her hand.  
  
“Hey… are you crying? Don’t cry… please don’t cry…” Taeyeon pulled Tiffany into her arms again.  
  
“I never thought I’d hear you say those words again…”  
  
“You’re the only one I’ve ever said them to.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “Thank you.”  
  
“You’re welcome. Anything you want to tell me?”  
  
“Nope.”  
  
“Yah!”  
  
“Ssshh!”  
  
“Oops… sorry…” She lowered her voice. “Come on!”  
  
“What? I said thank you…”  
  
Taeyeon sighed.  
  
Tiffany giggled. “I love you too. And I’ll wait. No matter how long it takes.”  
  
“Thank you.” She gave her a quick kiss – in case her parents suddenly woke up. “I better go now. You have a project to finish and you need to sleep.”  
  
“You need to sleep too…”  
  
She shrugged. “I’m used to not sleeping. If only the eye-bags would not look like hot air balloons the next day…”  
  
Tiffany held back her laughter.  
  
“I’m glad we never said goodbye…”  
  
Taeyeon nodded. “I’m glad you wrote that.”  
  
She slowly took a step back and opened the door. “Glad to see you still have the pajamas, by the way.”  
  
Tiffany looked down at her clothes and grinned. “Can’t believe you still recognize this old thing…”  
  
“I got you those so of course I remember. I still have the blue one too.” She smiled one last time. “Anyway… Good night.”  
  
“Good night. Drive safely please?”  
  
“Of course. It’s kinda dark though… can I have one more kiss for good luck?”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Still begging for kisses, I see.” She took a step forward and gave Taeyeon what she wanted.  
  
“Only from you…” She smiled and started to walk away. “See you around…”  
  
“See you around.”

**chapter 12**

She walked into the room and tensed once she saw the expression of the two men. They never took their eyes off her as she bowed and slowly made her way towards the large desk.  
  
“Sit down, Taeyeon.”  
  
She did as she was told.  
  
The standing man shifted a little.  
  
“This came out just this morning.” The older man sitting at the desk across her shoved a paper forward with a printed online article.  
  
She read the title and almost flinched.  
  
“Girls’ Generation Taeyeon Caught Red-Handed Kissing A Girl.”  
  
Under it was a blurry picture of her kissing Tiffany in a car – only the flash had reflected on the windshield and had covered half of her face. She noticed with relief that the only visible parts of Tiffany’s face were her chin and lower lip. She didn’t think anyone would be able to recognize who that was.  
  
“This picture is too dark and blurry to even tell who’s really in it,” she tried to defend herself. “It was probably a slow day for the news so they decided to mention my name.”  
  
The two men didn’t move an inch.  
  
“We know it’s you, Taeyeon.” He grabbed the paper back. “The blond hair is quite unmistakable and we know it’s your car. We don’t want to know who this girl is and we’ll deny everything, as usual, BUT! …” He leaned forward in his desk. “This is your last warning. You’ve had too many scandals in the past four years – more than any other idol we’ve ever managed, for goodness sake!”  
  
Taeyeon avoided his eyes.  
  
“We told you last time that another one of these…” He shook the paper in his hand. “… would cost you your phone. It wasn’t an empty threat.”  
  
He gestured to the other man who moved forward and opened his palm – asking for Taeyeon’s phone.  
  
Taeyeon reached into her pocket and stealthily shut it off. She didn’t want anyone to read the messages or see Tiffany’s number in it.  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
She sighed and took out the device; placing it in her manager’s hand.  
  
“I hope you realize how serious this is. I mean scandals with boys are still quite normal. But with girls?! Do you have any idea how this would affect your group? Your members? This isn’t just about you, Taeyeon! This isn’t just about your image!” His tone steadily rose. “This could forever label your group as the one with the gay idol in it and you don’t need that bad publicity – not now; not while you’re still promoting your new album and trying to keep your top position! Do you have any idea how many new groups out there are more than ready and willing to kick you down and replace you? Do you?!”  
  
He shook his head.  
  
“I know this is just business and I know you didn’t want to be an idol in the first place. But you’ve made your decision. Grow up and start taking responsibility for it! What would happen to Yoona and Juhyun? The media will go after them too, you know that! They would bombard them with questions about this. They would follow them around– hoping to catch you with them; red-handed. Your antis will have a field day! And your fans would not only be disappointed in you but also in your group. And let’s not get started on your parents…” He looked at her intently.  
  
“This isn’t just about the life of Kim Taeyeon. You’ve given that up when you signed your name on that paper. For six years, you’ll be Girls’ Generation’s Kim Taeyeon. A property of the public – whether you like it or not.”  
  
He sighed.  
  
“This isn’t just about the money, Taeyeon. Yes, I know you think I’m a greedy businessman who only cares about money. In a way, I guess that’s true. But in case you haven’t noticed; I also put high value on teamwork and friendship. Why do you think I have so many resources and networks? Because I treat them with respect. What you’ve done is totally inconsiderate towards your dongsaengs. You’re practically dragging them down with you! This won’t affect their individual activities, of course… but you have smeared the name they’re identified with. This is definitely *not* how a leader should behave.” He stood up and inserted the paper in the paper shredder.  
  
Taeyeon understood the truth in his words and regretted making the lives of her innocent members even more complicated than they already were.  
  
“I understand, Sir… and you’re right. I have acted recklessly and I’m at fault. I will talk to them, apologize and I’ll step down as the leader if you want me to. I will watch what I say and do for the remaining two years and try to improve the good image of this group. You can punish me in whatever way you deem fair.”  
  
He looked at her. “But you’ll continue seeing this girl?”  
  
Taeyeon looked him straight in the eyes. “Not for as long as I’m in this group.”  
  
She knew this would happen but she had made up her mind to wait it out. And she knew Tiffany would do the same – at least she hoped she would do the same.  
  
“How can I trust you? I’ve lost count of your scandals…”  
  
“Manager oppa can hold on to my phone forever and I will not use Yoona’s or Juhyun’s phone. I do care about them like they’re my own sisters. I will not discomfort them any more that I have. He’s also free to stalk me and watch over me like a hawk. And should I disregard any of this and cause another scandal, feel free to terminate my contract.”  
  
He sat back down.  
  
“You do know that once something bad causes a contract termination with a company as big as this one, there’s a chance you might not be able to work in this business again? For a long time?”  
  
She had seen it happen to other artists.  
  
She nodded. “I understand the risk, Sir.”  
  
He grew quiet – eyes still on Taeyeon.  
  
“Have you forgotten your dream, Taeyeon? Your goal?”  
  
“I haven’t, Sir.”  
  
“Then what is all this?”  
  
She smiled. “My dream has come true. I’ve sung on large stages and stadiums, sold albums, held concerts, won charts and awards… I’ve been to places I never thought I would go in my entire life… I’ve heard people say how my music helped change their lives… I was able to meet people I had never imagined I could meet. And I think I have worked hard enough to be able to live the rest of my life comfortably – even just as a random café singer.”  
  
He raised his eyebrows.  
  
“I have a new dream now, Sir,” she kept on smiling.  
  
“Oh?”  
  
“I figured that when your dream has come true, the only thing left to do is dream a new dream and make that come true too.”  
  
“Hmm…” He leaned back in his chair – folding his arms. “I see. And what might this new dream be?”  
  
“With all due respect, Sir, it’s a private one.”  
  
“Let me guess. It has something to do with that girl?”  
  
“What girl?”  
  
He didn’t respond.  
  
“I’m sorry, Sir. I do not wish to discuss her outside of the context of this scandal. I meant what I said. I’m keeping this away from my work until that contract expires.”  
  
“Good. Keep it that way.”  
  
“Yes, Sir.” She knew he was somehow testing her.  
  
“I’m pretty sure producers would try to get you on their talk shows after this. Make sure you get on every single one you can and deny this. Make jokes of it. Do whatever’s necessary to let people think that it’s not you.”  
  
“Yes, Sir.”  
  
He turned to the manager. “Bring Taeyeon to the hair salon immediately. Get her hair dyed brown before lunchtime.” He looked at her again. “You weren’t blond yesterday. Got that?”  
  
She nodded.  
  
“I’ll remember your words, Taeyeon. One more slip up and you’re out.”  
  
“Yes, Sir. I understand.” She stood up and bowed before following her manager out.  
  
He closed the door behind them and sighed. “Why did you do this, Taeyeon?”  
  
She fixed her cap and hoodie; hiding every strand of her hair. “A girl’s gotta do what a girl’s gotta do.”  
  
“But not with another girl!”  
  
She grinned. “It was always her, Oppa. Always.”  
  
“That song… her?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
He shook his head. “Then what have you been doing with all those other kids?!”  
  
She shrugged. “It’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it one day… Maybe after two years.” She smiled as she finished what she was doing. “How is it?”  
  
He nodded. “Looks fine. Let’s go.”  
  
They walked out of the agency and got in the van.  
  
“Oppa?”  
  
“What?”  
  
“Can I have one last phone call? Just one. You can take my phone back after that or throw it under the van or something…”  
  
He shook his head. “This kid…”  
  
He used one hand to pull the phone out of his pocket and tossed it behind him. “One call, Taeyeon.”  
  
“Yes, Oppa.”  
  
She quickly turned the device on and dialed.  
  
“Taeyeon! Are you alright? Is everything alright?”  
  
“I’m fine, Fany. Look, I don’t have much time so I’ll just say this quickly. Please listen to me?”  
  
“O-okay…”  
  
“First, deny everything about the photo. They can’t clearly see your face anyway so anyone who asks is purely speculating. And I’m no longer blond so that couldn’t have been me. Second, my phone will be taken away again... indefinitely. This is my last call. Remember what you said last night?”  
  
“Yes…”  
  
“I hope you’ll keep your promise. Wait for me, please? I will wait for you. I promise.”  
  
“I’ll wait, Taeyeon-ah. I promise.”  
  
She smiled. “Thanks. Sorry about all this. Just a little bit more, okay, Fany?”  
  
“Okay… I’ll be here. I’ll always be here.”  
  
“And I’ll be there with you. Just… hang on…”  
  
“I will.”  
  
“Good.” She blinked her tears back. “See you in two years?”  
  
“See you in two years. Take care of yourself, Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“I will. You too. Make sure you graduate on time and make your parents proud, okay? Don’t stress out too much…”  
  
She giggled. “I love you…”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “I love you too… I’m sorry for all this… I really am.”  
  
“It’s okay. You’re worth the wait.”  
  
She couldn’t held it back anymore at those words. She frantically wiped her eyes as the guilt and remorse finally pushed her tears out of her closed eyelids. “I’m not. I’m sorry, Fany-ah… I’ll see you, okay?”  
  
“See you, Taeyeon…”  
  
She hung up and tossed the phone onto the empty seat next to her. She pulled her cap even lower as she searched for some tissues.  
  
“You okay?” He overheard and couldn’t help but feel bad for her.  
  
“I’m fine. Thanks, Oppa.”  
  
“Wanna make one more last call? A short one though since we’re almost at the salon.”  
  
“Oh yes, please. Thanks, Oppa.”  
  
She reached for her phone again and dialed her friend’s number.  
  
“Hey, Sunny… I can’t talk for long but can you do me a favor? I swear that this would be the last one I’ll ever ask of you… and the other girls too…”  
  
“Hey, Taeng. What’s wrong? What happened?”  
  
“You’ll find out soon enough. Anyway, my phone will be taken away again and I don’t know for how long this time. Do me a favor? Take care of Fany? Please? Tell that to Sica, Yul, Sooyoung and Hyo too. I owe you guys for this. I’ll pay you back, I promise.”  
  
“Haven’t we been doing that for years now?”  
  
She smiled. “I know. And I also owe you for that. But it’s a bit different this time…”  
  
“How different?”  
  
“Make sure no one goes near her. She’s mine and no one else’s.”  
  
“Are you saying-…”  
  
“She’ll tell you about it herself, I think. Just please, do as I say?”  
  
“O…kay…?”  
  
“Great. Thanks. I’m counting on you and the others, Soonkyu.”  
  
“Call me that again and you won’t live to see her again.”  
  
She chuckled. “Gotta go now…”  
  
“Hey Taeng?”  
  
“Yes?”  
  
“You better make up for it and do her right or I swear… your manager’s or your agency president’s wrath would be nothing compared to ours. I mean it, Taeng. Hurt her again and I’ll-…”  
  
“I get it, I get it. I know… Don’t worry. I intend to make this dream come true too.”  
  
“What?”  
  
“Never mind.” She noticed the car parking at the busy street. “I gotta go. Tell the others thanks and that I miss hanging out with all of you. I really do. I’ll make it all up to you one day.”  
  
“Okay. Go then.”  
  
“Bye…”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
She hung up and turned off the device before handing it to the man in the driver’s seat. “All yours, Oppa.”  
  
“Good luck, Taeyeon.”  
  
She smiled. “Thanks.”  
  
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“So that’s it? You’re back together?” Yuri was furrowing her brows. She wasn’t sure what to think of everything her friend had just told her.  
  
“Kinda… technically…”  
  
“Is this just another uncertain waiting period before you see her on the tabloids with some other random idol?” Jessica asked.  
  
“I told you it’s not like that!” Tiffany finally raised her voice and silenced her friends.  
  
She looked around her room. “Look, I know you’re all just looking out for me and I appreciate that, I really do. But please, let me do this. I need to find out whether she’s really the one for me.”  
  
None of the other girls replied.  
  
“I know you guys think it’s a waste of time and that it’s silly… but to me, it’s just another sacrifice I have to make in order to chase my dream. I need to follow my heart in this one and it’s telling me that Taeyeon might be it. She might be the one.” She took a deep breath. “I haven’t been able to forget her all this time… that should tell you something.”  
  
Some of her friends exchanged glances.  
  
“I have to say I’m with Fany on this one… this time.” Sunny quietly spoke – her fingers absentmindedly playing with the whiskers on Tiffany’s plush.  
  
“What?! And I thought you’re the most reasonable one.”  
  
“Hear me out first…” She looked at Tiffany. “Taeng called me.”  
  
“Huh? When?”  
  
“This morning… might be after or before she called you. She was in a hurry. She asked me – us – for a favor.”  
  
“And that is?” Jessica skeptically crossed her arms and raised her eyebrow.  
  
“To take care of Fany? Like we’ve been doing all these years when she wasn’t even here?” Hyoyeon scoffed.  
  
“Guys…” Tiffany warned her friends.  
  
“Well, yeah… to take care of Fany… but in a slightly different way.” Sunny said. She looked uncertain.  
  
“What slightly different way?” Tiffany asked.  
  
Sunny looked at her and everyone else in the room. She took a deep breath. “Taeng wants us to make sure that no one goes near Fany. In her own words… ‘Fany’s mine and no one else’s.’”  
  
Surprised faces stared back at the shortest while Tiffany was smiling widely.  
  
“See? She promised me she’d wait and I believe her. I wish you guys could do that too…”  
  
“It’s not that we don’t want to do that…” Yuri finally broke the silence that followed Tiffany’s words. “But after all these years…”  
  
“It wasn’t entirely her fault. We’re living totally different lives! I’m pretty sure things would be different if she wasn’t an idol…”  
  
“It irks me sometimes how you keep defending her.” Jessica blurted out. “It’s like she could have cheated on you with dozens of people and you would still take her back.”  
  
“She has never cheated on me, okay? We never told each other to wait before. I could have dated if I want to. It annoys me too how much you guys seem to dislike her. Have you forgotten that she’s your best friend too?”  
  
“Was, Fany… the word is ‘was’. She *was* our best friend…”  
  
“Oh come on! You can’t blame her for not being able to stay in touch with us. Look at her life!”  
  
“And look at yours! Four years of waiting for someone who didn’t even seem to remember you exist!”  
  
“It wasn’t her fault!”  
  
“Guys…” Yuri tried to step between the arguing friends. “Calm down, okay? There’s no use for this. You each have a point.”  
  
Tiffany and Jessica were still glaring at each other.  
  
“Fany-ah…” Yuri put her arm around her friend’s shoulders. “Sica didn’t mean that we don’t care about Taeng. It’s just… it’s been hard watching you like this for the past 4 years. She – and all of us here – only wants you to be happy instead of waiting endlessly for something that might not even happen.”  
  
“But it will happen! Taeyeon has given her word!”  
  
“At the cost of two more years?” Jessica snapped.  
  
“It’s a risk I’m willing to take, Jessi. Sacrifices, remember?”  
  
“That bad, huh?” Sooyoung suddenly said – mumbling to herself.  
  
“What did you say?”  
  
“Oh nothing. I was just wondering how bad you must really want this to put yourself through all this… year after year…”  
  
She gritted her teeth. “Don’t you have a dream?”  
  
“I do…”  
  
“And if you have a chance to make it happen, wouldn’t you do anything for it?”  
  
“But reality-…”  
  
“Reality will always be in the way. But if I’m given the chance to actually do something to try and make it happen then I will take it. It’s not even costing me my life, school or my parents for goodness sake…”  
  
“Just your happiness…”  
  
“I *am* happy. Well, now, at least… because Taeyeon had come back to me. And she’ll be back for good. I just have to wait a little bit longer.” She deflated. “And if you don’t agree with me then it’s fine. You don’t have to. We can stop talking about this now and never talk about it again. I’m fine with that. You’ll see. You’ll all see…”  
  
“Fany…” Yuri was still trying to soothe her friend.  
  
“I, for one, am keeping my promise to Taeng.” Sunny put the plush aside. “I agree with Fany. We can stop discussing this but I will still do my part. I will stop whoever tries to make Fany go out on a date with someone else. Just for two years. If Taeng doesn’t keep her end of the bargain, I’ll personally make sure that she would wish that I had joined the mafia instead.”  
  
Her face was serious and everyone knew how scary Sunny could be when she was serious or angry about something. Everyone stayed quiet while Tiffany gave Sunny a grateful nod and a smile.  
  
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“And the disk daesang goes to… Girls’ Generation!”  
  
Streamers and confetti filled the air as the three girls slowly rose to their feet in shock.  
  
They made their way to the stage and Juhyun accepted the award while Taeyeon and Yoona hugged each other in tears.  
  
The maknae soon joined the hug and this time, Taeyeon pushed her forward to give their acceptance speech.  
  
“Wow… This is… unbelievable. Thank you for this award. We never expected to win this with all the great songs and albums that were out this year. Thank you so much to all our fans for your constant support through thick and thin – even during our overseas activities… you’re always here for us. Thank you very much. To President Kim, manager oppas, stylist unnies and every other staff. Thank you for keeping up with us. We’ll become an even more hardworking Girls’ Generation. Our parents, we love you! My unnies…” She turned to her side and laughed as Yoona and Taeyeon gave her their thumbs-up. “I’m so lucky to have you with me along this journey. Thank you.”  
  
Juhyun stepped back and Taeyeon spoke into the microphone.  
  
“Thank you for giving us another great year and for always supporting us. I personally thank you for the love even when I sometimes feel like I don’t deserve it. And these naughty dongsaengs of mine…” She laughed as Yoona and Juhyun stuck their tongues out at her. “Thank you for sticking with your not so admirable unnie for five long years. Let’s make next year count as well, okay?”  
  
“OKAY!”  
  
She laughed.  
  
“Thank you to my family. I know it’s been a rough ride for you but we’re almost there. Miyoung-ah! I’ll see you soon! Love you all!”  
  
They hugged and jumped and laughed and cried behind the MCs.  
  
“Thank you, guys… I’m sorry for everything…” Taeyeon whispered as they hugged each other tightly with tears running down their faces.  
  
“It’s not your fault, Taeyeon unnie… we understand…”  
  
“And we won’t be here without you either. We’re in this together, Unnie. Now and forever, always.”  
  
“Thank you…”  
  
The large hall erupted in cheers and they took the tissues offered by the staff as they performed their encore stage.  
  
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“See you soon, Taeyeon.”  
  
She smiled and watched as the ceremony came to an end and the three girls in a group hug.  
  
The encore didn’t air for long and it soon ended with the commercials.  
  
“Anyone still doubting Taeng?” Sunny asked as she emptied her glass.  
  
Tiffany silently smiled as she saw none of her other friends making a move or saying anything.  
  
“Fine. I might be wrong about her…” Jessica said.  
  
Hyoyeon nodded.  
  
Sooyoung continued munching on her chips.  
  
“Well… I’m all for a happy ending so one year babysitting to go and we’re done,” Yuri stood up and went into the kitchen.  
  
“Sorry, Fany-ah…” Sooyoung finally spoke.  
  
“It’s okay… I know you’re all just looking out for me. Just remember that Taeyeon’s your friend too and she was never at fault, okay? She never did anything to hurt me on purpose.”  
  
Some of them nodded.  
  
“How are the preparations coming along?” Hyoyeon changed the subject.  
  
Tiffany’s smile faded. “It’s going fine. Everything’s pretty much done.”  
  
“You’ll start in September?”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“Two years?”  
  
“I’m going for one and a half…”  
  
“What about Taeyeon?” Sunny asked.  
  
“I’ll find a way to let her know somehow… it won’t change a thing. We’ll still wait for each other.”  
  
“I know but just make sure she knows what to expect. I don’t want to see her all excited just to find out that you’re actually on the other side of the world and won’t be back for at least another year…”  
  
“I’ll tell her… I’ll find a way to tell her…”  
  
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“Hey shorty…”  
  
“TAENG!?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“Got your phone back?”  
  
“After a second Daesang? You bet!”  
  
She laughed and typed in a laughing emoticon. “So you’re free again?”  
  
“Not really. I want to stay on the good side of my manager and the president. I’m giving them free access to my phone to check whether I’m dating anyone or not.”  
  
“Wow. That kinda sucks.”  
  
“It’s okay. I intend to keep my promise.”  
  
“Congrats, by the way.”  
  
“Thanks. Did Fany happen to watch the show?”  
  
“Of course. We stayed over at my place and watched… like we did almost every year.”  
  
“Really? I didn’t know that…”  
  
“She watched every show, every music program and every appearance.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “Well, at least she kept her word about being my fan and stalking me…”  
  
“She loves you too much.”  
  
“Yeah… I know. I’m such a lucky brat, aren’t I?”  
  
“Glad you realize that. We will never understand what she sees in you though…”  
  
“Neither will I.” Taeyeon added another smiley. “How’s she doing by the way?”  
  
“Good. We’re all still working our day jobs...”  
  
“I expected as much. Do tell her that I’m proud of her.”  
  
“Will do. Just don’t ask me to kiss her for you or anything…”  
  
“I’d rather extend my contract for another 50 years than to ever ask you to do that! No one kisses my Fany but me!”  
  
Sunny laughed. “Wow. You’re possessive.”  
  
“I have to be. I don’t want to lose her.”  
  
“One more year, Taeyeon-ah… you can do it. We’ll look after her and you don’t need to worry. She won’t as much as blink at anyone else.”  
  
“Good to know.” She paused. “How are the others feeling about this? I’m pretty sure they all hate my guts, huh?”  
  
“They did. Heck, I did! But that shout out you gave pretty much silenced them. Don’t worry, they’ll turn around. They don’t mean any harm, you know that.”  
  
“Sica must hate me most…”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“Even now?”  
  
“I think so. She’s still not convinced…”  
  
“Text me her number?”  
  
“What are you going to do?”  
  
“Make things right, for once…”  
  
“Don’t make a scene, Taeng.”  
  
“You know I won’t. And please don’t tell Fany about any of this? I can’t risk her contacting me.”  
  
“Got it.”  
  
She tapped on the number Sunny pasted on the screen and brought the phone to her ear.  
  
“Hello?”  
  
“Hi. Sica?”  
  
“Who is this?”  
  
“It’s Taeyeon.”  
  
“Wh-… Taeng?”  
  
“Keep your voice down, please. Are you with Fany?”  
  
“No… I’m home. How did you even get my number?”  
  
“Soonkyu.”  
  
“Oh no wonder.”  
  
“I just got my phone back but you can’t tell Fany that or that I called you, okay? I need her to not contact me at all. My manager and the president are still watching me like a hawk and I want to make sure I don’t slip up again.”  
  
“Right…” Jessica sounded doubtful.  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “This is why I called you. I know you hate my guts but I never wanted to hurt Fany, Sica… I swear! I thought she had moved on. We never promised each other we’d wait.”  
  
Jessica stayed silent.  
  
“I mean what I said to her, okay? I’m waiting patiently until the contract ends…”  
  
“What happens then? You keep singing and be your famous celebrity self and she keeps getting the bad end of the deal. She’ll get bashed while you can happily have your cake and eat it too.”  
  
“I seriously hate what you’re insinuating here…”  
  
“She has given up too much for you, Taeng. You know it.”  
  
“I do know it! Why do you think I’m doing all this now if not for her?!” She was getting annoyed at Jessica’s behavior. “Stop making me the bad guy when I haven’t done anything wrong! It’s the unlucky circumstances! It’s not what I want!”  
  
“You wanted to become a singer, an idol… and you know how that would affect her…”  
  
“She knew about it too! It was her decision as well, okay? There are two of us in this, Sica. It’s not just me. Did you know that I was willing to give this up for her? But fact is, that would be stupid. If I hadn’t debuted, what would I be doing now? Cleaning bars during the day and sing during the night? How much do you think I would make? I’m pretty sure you’d blame me then too – for not being able to provide for Fany, for not doing my best… Heck! We were kids, for crying out loud! What do you expect me to do?!”  
  
“…”  
  
She sighed. “Sorry for that… Look, Sica. I love her. It’s not just a high school crush or a silly fling. I really love her. I thought I could stop but I can’t. Yes, it took me a while to realize it because of everything that was going on. But now I have a chance to make things right for her and I intend to do so to the fullest. You can hate me, it’s fine. I can live with that. But one thing I do ask from you is to not show it in front of her. She needs your support while she waits. She doesn’t need your criticism or you bad mouthing me. You can do that behind her back. Swear and curse me all you want. But you’re her best friend – she counts on you. I hope you understand what I’m trying to say here…”  
  
Jessica was still not saying anything.  
  
“Sica? Did you hear me?”  
  
“Sigh… yes, I did.”  
  
“You get my point?”  
  
“Yes, I do.”  
  
“Good. Think about that, okay? I’ll be back for her, Sica. I’ll stop singing if I have to. I’ve lived the dream and I’m able to let that go and start chasing a new dream – with her.”  
  
When Jessica didn’t reply, Taeyeon decided that she should give her friend time to think.  
  
“I have to go now. Think about what I say, okay? And keep this between us, please.”  
  
“Okay.”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
“Bye.”

**chapter 13**

“Taeyeon unnie…”  
  
She looked up from her iPad and saw Yoona entering her room.  
  
“Tiffany unnie texted me…”  
  
“Oh? She has your number?”  
  
“I-… err… remember when I asked you for her number back then?”  
  
“Yes?”  
  
“Well… I was… craving for cupcakes again and…”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “You keep her number for your cupcake fix?!”  
  
Yoona grinned. “What can I say… my unnie likes them too!”  
  
“I should introduce you to my friend Sooyoung. You’ll instantly be best friends for life.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Same bottomless pit of a stomach…”  
  
“Unnie~” Yoona sulked and started to whine in her aegyo voice.  
  
“Okay okay! I’m not in the mood to listen to your aegyo. Continue with what you were saying please… I have birds to throw…”  
  
Yoona laughed again. “Tiffany unnie said she needed to talk to you and wondered if it’s okay to do so…”  
  
“Oh? That’s… hmm…” She thought it was a strange request since they hadn’t had any contact for more than a year.  
  
“So?”  
  
“Ask her if it’s really urgent… I mean, I can’t risk it…”  
  
Yoona nodded and typed on her phone.  
  
A reply soon came.  
  
“Yep. It’s super urgent…” Yoona showed Taeyeon the message in her phone.  
  
“Tell her to call the dorm. And ask her when.”  
  
Yoona showed her the next reply.  
  
“As soon as possible?” Taeyeon was a bit confused. It wasn’t like Tiffany to be this impatient. “Tell her now is a good time.”  
  
Their dorm phone rang just seconds after Yoona sent her message.  
  
Taeyeon ran to the living room and answered it.  
  
“Hello?”  
  
“Hi!”  
  
“Are you okay? What’s wrong?”  
  
“I’m fine…”  
  
“Then what’s wrong? Why did you sound so urgent?”  
  
She heard Tiffany hesitating for a bit.  
  
“I-I… Err… There’s something I need to tell you…”  
  
She got worried. “What is it?”  
  
“My parents wanted me to continue my studies abroad… Just for a short two years though, nothing to worry about.”  
  
“W-what?! When!?”  
  
“Err… term starts September so…”  
  
“This September?!”  
  
“Yes. I’m leaving in July.”  
  
“But that’s next month!”  
  
“Yeah, I know. That’s why I need to talk to you. I don’t want you to find out from someone else or after I’m gone…”  
  
Taeyeon sat down on the couch. She was disappointed that it would take yet longer before she could be reunited with Tiffany again.  
  
“Taeyeon? Still there?”  
  
“Y-yeah…”  
  
“I’m sorry…”  
  
“Don’t be sorry. It’s a good investment for your future, right?”  
  
“Yeah… I really want to try studying in the States too. It looks so cool…”  
  
Taeyeon chuckled. “You’ve been watching too many American shows.”  
  
Tiffany grinned. She then took a deep breath. “Will you still wait for me?”  
  
“Of course, I will! What kind of question is that?”  
  
“Just checking.”  
  
“I told you I’d wait no matter how long it takes.” Taeyeon then paused to think. “You’ll come back after you graduate, right? You won’t stay there for good?”  
  
“Don’t worry. I have no plans to stay longer than I have to.”  
  
“Good.” Taeyeon exhaled in relief. “Try not to be tempted by all the handsome American students? Please?”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “I’ll try my best.”  
  
“Try hard!”  
  
“Yes, Miss Kim. I’ll try very hard.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “I wouldn’t be able to see you before you leave, most likely… we’re going to start preparing for our last concerts soon.”  
  
“Last concerts?”  
  
“Yes.”  
  
“That’s… sad…”  
  
“Yeah. I couldn’t wait to stop but at the same time I admit that I’ll miss all this.”  
  
“You don’t have to stop singing…”  
  
“I know… I’m just preparing for the worst.”  
  
Tiffany took a deep breath. “Is this worth it, Taeyeon?”  
  
“What is?” She was suddenly alerted by Tiffany’s question. “Don’t back out on me, Miyoung! I’m not kidding here!”  
  
“I’m not backing out! I’ve been waiting too long for you to back out now… but, you know, just… try to think things through a bit more. What your future would be, what you want to do after this…”  
  
“My future is you.”  
  
“That’s too corny even for me.” Tiffany laughed. “I forgot how amazingly finger curling you can be.”  
  
“I’m serious, Fany-ah.”  
  
“I know. But that won’t be enough. You would need to think about what you want to do, Taeyeon. Seriously…”  
  
She sighed. “You’re right. Fine. I’ll use this next two years to think it through.”  
  
“That’s a good girl. And please don’t feel pressured, okay? I’m fine with knowing that you want me as badly as I want you. If you think that your singing is more imp-…”  
  
“Let’s not go back to high school, okay? I don’t want to have this conversation ever again.” She cut Tiffany off.  
  
“Sorry. Just… think about it. Okay?”  
  
“Sure. Anyway…” She tried to change the subject. “Since we’ll be quite busy with the concert preparations and the last album, I’m not sure I’ll be able to see you before you go… plus manager oppa…”  
  
“It’s okay. I expected as much. I’m used to this. I should change my name to ‘waiting’.” She laughed.  
  
Taeyeon felt very guilty and sad. “Sorry to keep you waiting all this time…” She sighed. “You shouldn’t have waited. I’m not worth it…”  
  
“Yes, you are. Plus, now it’s your turn. Just consider it paying me back and we’re good.”  
  
Taeyeon couldn’t help but laugh. “Your funny logic… I missed that.”  
  
“Well, that’s all I needed to tell you. Let’s not cause suspicions.”  
  
“Don’t worry. My manager’s not here. We have the rest of the day off.”  
  
“Oh really? That’s great. Enjoy it. Send my regards to Yoona and Juhyun. I’ll be sure to send Yoong some more cupcakes before I leave. She’s turning into an addict.”  
  
Taeyeon laughed again. “That she is. Thanks for calling, Fany.”  
  
“You’re welcome.”  
  
“Have a safe trip?”  
  
“Yup. I will. Have fun on your last concerts and album. And remember what I said, okay? Think about what’s next.”  
  
“I will. I’ll see you?”  
  
“Yup. I’ll see you. Ask Jessi or Sunny for my US number when you’re able to do so.”  
  
“You bet.”  
  
“See ya, Taeyeon…”  
  
“See ya, Fany. I love you.”  
  
Tiffany giggled. “I love you too.”  
  
She hung up and sighed – lying down on the couch with an arm over her eyes. For the first time in a while, she started to question her ability to let go of her singing for a life with Tiffany. She thought she could and she would definitely do it in a heartbeat but what Tiffany said had rattled her disposition.  
  
Could she really stay away from the stage?  
  
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“Uhm…”  
  
Taeyeon was at loss for words as the crowd cheered again and she laughed while trying to wipe her tears. A crying Juhyun helped her and she grinned.  
  
The audience started to chant for her not to cry.  
  
“So… thank you for coming. We’ve had a great six years together and they were some of the best years of my life.”  
  
The stadium was again filled with shouts and she turned to her members. “I couldn’t have wished for better companions. You both know my heart, right?”  
  
Yoona curled her fingers and Juhyun laughed. The two tall girls hugged Taeyeon tightly – squishing her in the middle.  
  
“Yah! YAH!”  
  
They let her go and stood with arms around each other at the front of the large stage.  
  
“We thank you for always supporting us,” Juhyun spoke into the microphone. “We always feel indebted and that we should’ve tried harder or given more…”  
  
“No!” The crowd yelled again and they laughed.  
  
“But you always make us feel rewarded and fulfilled and happy. Thank you for that.”  
  
“This is not the end, you know…” Taeyeon spoke again.  
  
“Actress Yoong will continue shooting her drama…” She turned to her right.  
  
Yoona made a cute V-sign and the audience cheered.  
  
“And you can expect more news from Juhyun and me soon.”  
  
“And we’ll always be Girls’ Generation,” the maknae added.  
  
“Yup. Now and forever; always.”  
  
Another round of shouts and cheers filled the stadium.  
  
“So… I guess this is it. Let’s never say goodbye, shall we?”  
  
The other two girls nodded and the final song began.  
  
They sang through their tears as the crowd waved their light sticks and chanted and sang along.  
  
They waved and made sure that they’d been to every corner of the stage before gathering together in the middle once again. They held hands and took a long deep bow.  
  
“Thank you!”  
  
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Tiffany clicked to close the browser and took a deep breath.  
  
She had just finished watching the fancams of Taeyeon’s last concert. It was heartbreaking. She knew how much Taeyeon loved the stage. She could see it. That girl would glow and laugh happily – ecstatically – during every show. She could see that Taeyeon belonged there.  
  
She wondered what Taeyeon would do now and when she would contact her.  
  
The official end date of the contract wouldn’t pass for another month so she knew it would take a while for anything to happen.  
  
She decided to distract her mind with studying when her phone suddenly rang.  
  
“Hello?”  
  
“Hey, Tiff.”  
  
“Oh hey, what’s up?”  
  
“Have you started on our assignment?”  
  
“I was about to but I ended up watching some videos online.”  
  
“How admirably studious of you.”  
  
“Why, thank you. Have you started?”  
  
“Nope. Just got out of bed.”  
  
“What?! It’s almost eleven!”  
  
“It’s weekend. Give me a break!”  
  
“Fine. You want to work on this together?”  
  
“Err… I was hoping that you’ve done all the work but I guess I have to help too now, huh?”  
  
“Library, your place or mine?”  
  
“Cafeteria! I’m hungry!”  
  
“Sigh… I have a pig as a partner…”  
  
“Humans need food and sleep to survive, Miss Hwang. I’ll see you there in an hour.”  
  
“Fine. Please don’t skip shower.”  
  
“I really don’t like what you’re insinuating.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “See you in an hour then.”  
  
“Bye.”  
  
She put the phone down on her desk and decided to use the free hour to catch up on news and other videos about Taeyeon and her group.  
  
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“So… are you okay with this one?”  
  
“Are you?” He sipped his tea and looked at her.  
  
“I am. It’s a lot smaller but they specialize in solo and ballad singers. It’s homier too. I’ve visited and met some of the seniors there. One was also from SM… back in the day.”  
  
“Whatever you think is best, Taeyeon. We trust you.”  
  
“Thanks, Appa.”  
  
He looked closely at his daughter who was busy putting the papers back in a folder.  
  
“Taeyeon…”  
  
“Yes, Appa?”  
  
“Are you really going to do this?”  
  
“I thought you just said that you trust me?”  
  
“I don’t mean the agency move… I mean with Ti-… Miyoung…”  
  
“Oh… that…”  
  
She took a deep breath and prepared herself. She had taken the time to go home to talk to her parents about the offers she had received from multiple agencies – and about Tiffany. Their initial reaction was that of a huge shock, of course. Her mother had been giving her the silent treatment while her father was in a daze. He even put salt instead of sugar in his tea more than once that day.  
  
“I am, Appa. I’m sorry if I’m such a disappointment to you but I love her. I tried to find someone else, I really did. You knew who I had dated.”  
  
He stirred his tea. “You’re not a disappointment to us, Taeyeon. We’re proud of you.” He suddenly remembered something. “So that photo a few years ago… in the car… that was really you, wasn’t it?”  
  
Taeyeon slowly nodded and kept her eyes on the folder on the table.  
  
He sighed again.  
  
“Please, Appa?”  
  
“You know of the consequences?”  
  
“I do. I will talk to this agency tomorrow and tell them. If they do not wish to sign me because of that then I’ll accept it and move on until I find someone who can accept me for me.”  
  
“And if that doesn’t happen?”  
  
“I’ll just stick to singing at cafés and restaurants again, I guess. I don’t mind. There are also indie labels these days. I’ll be fine, Appa.”  
  
He sipped his tea slowly and finally nodded.  
  
“Okay. You’re not a kid anymore. You decide what’s best for you. Just be aware of every risk and consequence of your decision... and don’t hide things or lie to us again.”  
  
She nodded. “I will. Thank you.”  
  
“Talk to your mother before you leave.”  
  
“I will. Thanks, Appa.” She hugged him and quickly went to find her mother in the kitchen.  
  
“Umma?”  
  
“…”  
  
“Umma… I’m going back to Seoul now.” She stood next to her; watching her cutting the meat for the family dinner.  
  
“Umma… I’m sorry if I disappoint you…”  
  
“Do you have any idea what this would do to you? To your family? To her family?” She put down her knife and heaved a deep sigh. “Why do you do this, Taeyeon-ah? Did we not raise you well?”  
  
“You raised me very well, Umma! Please don’t say that!”  
  
“Then why?”  
  
“I don’t know… It’s not like I did it on purpose or that I chose to be… like this…” She sighed. “I love her, Umma…”  
  
Her mother started to cut the meat again – harshly.  
  
“I really do… and I hope one day you can accept that. I never wish to bring shame or anything bad to you, Appa and everyone in this family. Please believe me.” She kissed her mother’s cheek. “Bye, Umma.”  
  
She made her way out of the house.  
  
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“Wow! That one looks like Winnie The Pooh!”  
  
Tiffany rolled her eyes. “Stop acting like a three year old and get serious, will ya? We don’t have much time left!”  
  
“But it does!” He pointed to the sky. “See for yourself!”  
  
“I’m *not* going to look at your imaginary cartoon cloud!” She turned to the person lying down on the grass next to her. “Oh come on.” She plucked some of the blades and threw them at him.  
  
“Hey! Pfft… Stop that!”  
  
He finally sat up and grabbed Tiffany’s wrist.  
  
“Then stop being so lazy and start doing your part! Seriously. This is the last time I’m partnering with you. You always procrastinate… leaving everything until the very last minute. I can’t do that! I’ve been losing so much more sleep since you started becoming my group partner!”  
  
He grinned. “You need to learn to chill, Tiff…”  
  
“And you need to learn to be serious.”  
  
“Aw come on… we still have plenty of time – days – before the assignment is due. It’s such a nice day. Just enjoy it!”  
  
“Easy for you to say, Mr. Genius. I don’t have your brain.” She tried to yank her arm free from his grip. “I need days to process, okay? Now let go of me!”  
  
“You’re cute when you’re all pissed like this…”  
  
“What are you talking about, you sleazebag?”  
  
“Let’s go to the movies instead of wasting such a nice weather on boring assignments.”  
  
“W-what? You’re asking me out?”  
  
“Yep. I’m asking you out. On a date. Now. Today.”  
  
“You’re crazy.”  
  
“Maybe. Come on. Give me a chance. I’m not that bad. You already said I’m a genius…”  
  
“A lazy annoying genius.”  
  
“Yet a genius nonetheless.” He grinned. “What do you say?”  
  
“You know I have someone back home.”  
  
“So? That’s thousands of miles away. I’m here now.”  
  
She sighed and pulled her arm again. “Not gonna happen. Let me go please.”  
  
“Fine. You’re playing hard to get? I can do that.” He pulled her and pressed his lips onto hers.  
  
“HEY!” Tiffany pushed him away. “WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!”  
  
She yanked as hard as she could and finally broke free from his grasp. She slapped him.  
  
“Ouch…” He slowly rubbed his stinging cheek.  
  
“FANY!”  
  
She hadn’t overcome her initial shock when she heard the familiar voice calling her.  
  
She turned around to see Taeyeon running towards her with her luggage in tow.  
  
“Are you okay? What happened?” She let her suitcase drop to the grass as she kneeled in front of the flustered Tiffany and pulled her away from the confused guy – shielding her with her small arms.  
  
“T-taeyeon?”  
  
“What happened? Did he hurt you? I’ll punch his-…”  
  
She let go of Tiffany and was about to swing her arm when Tiffany held it.  
  
“No, Taeyeon. It’s fine. I think he got what he deserved.”  
  
“What is this alien talk?” He was still staring at the two girls who were conversing in a language he had never heard before.  
  
“This is called Korean and I suggest you get your ass out of here before my girlfriend kicks it.”  
  
“You-r w-what?”  
  
“I told you I’m taken. Now get out of here!”  
  
He slowly got to his feet and picked up his backpack – one hand still rubbing his cheek and his eyes still fixed on the two glaring girls. He walked away; trying to figure out what had just happened.  
  
“Are you okay? What happened? I thought I saw you kissing and I was about to leave when I saw you slap him.” Taeyeon scrutinized Tiffany’s face.  
  
“What are you doing here?” She still couldn’t believe her eyes. “You’re really here?”  
  
“Yeah…” Taeyeon grinned. “I missed you so I thought I’d try to go look for you... and go on vacation while I’m at it.”  
  
Tiffany pulled her into a hug. “I can’t believe you’re here.”  
  
They ignored the busy campus and the onlookers as they hung on to each other tightly.  
  
Taeyeon was the first to let go. She gently pushed Tiffany away.  
  
“You’re busy?” She noticed the books and the laptop.  
  
“Not really. Was trying to get my assignment done when my partner suddenly turned into a jerk and tried to hit on me.”  
  
“I’ll hit him if he tries to do that again.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “I’m sure he got the message loud and clear and won’t try anything funny anymore.” She looked at Taeyeon from top to toe. “You’ve gained weight. That’s good.”  
  
“Was I too skinny?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
She laughed. “How come you never told me that?”  
  
“Because I know it’s for work.” She smiled. “Hi there, cute one…”  
  
“Hello there, beautiful. Miss me?” She leaned in and kissed Tiffany gently.  
  
“Mmhmm…” She wrapped her arms around Taeyeon’s neck and pulled.  
  
They took their time as they welcomed the return of the familiar touches and soft tugs.  
  
“I’m so glad we’re in the States.” Taeyeon said – pulling back a little bit. “Nobody knows me and nobody cares about what we’re doing.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “You should just stay here with me until I graduate.”  
  
“I’m afraid you won’t be able to graduate if I’m here.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“Because I’d want to make up for lost time and that might distract you from studying…”  
  
“Still a byuntae?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
She giggled. “How did you even find me?”  
  
“I asked Sica and Sunny. The rest was just some bad English and a lot of body language to actually find your campus and your dorm.”  
  
She laughed. “Thanks for the effort.”  
  
“My pleasure.”  
  
“You’ll stay here with me, right?”  
  
“I’ll stay anywhere you want me to stay.”  
  
“Then I’m glad I don’t have a roommate.” She pulled away and gathered her stuff. “Let’s go.” She pulled Taeyeon’s hand – almost making the latter lose her balance.  
  
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“Wow… that was… yeah…”  
  
Taeyeon tried to catch her breath.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “You’ve improved from the last time I remember…”  
  
“Oh please… we were just silly crazy kids back then…”  
  
“True… I do hope you haven’t been practicing.”  
  
She laughed. “Pervert! Of course not! Have you?”  
  
“What do you think?”  
  
She shrugged. “Since you’re in this free country and all…”  
  
She hit her shoulder.  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “Just kidding. I know you’re mine and only mine.” She kissed Tiffany’s forehead and pulled her closer by the waist. She rested her head under Tiffany’s chin and closed her eyes – enjoying the moment.  
  
Tiffany gently stroke Taeyeon’s hair as they lay quietly in the peaceful silence of the room.  
  
Taeyeon almost fell asleep when she suddenly heard Tiffany’s voice.  
  
“I saw your last concert…”  
  
“Oh? Online?”  
  
“Yeah… How are Yoong and Juhyun?”  
  
“Doing good. Yoong was just cast in a movie. Juhyun has released a solo single. She’s going back to school too.”  
  
“That’s good. I do miss them… even Yoong’s aegyo voice. But please don’t tell her that.”  
  
She chuckled. “I won’t.”  
  
“And how are you doing?” She loosened her grip and shifted to see Taeyeon’s face. “Have you thought about what I said last time?”  
  
“I have…”  
  
“And?”  
  
“I can’t stop singing. I can’t imagine not singing…”  
  
“Of course…” She slightly felt nervous about what Taeyeon was going to say next.  
  
“And since I got a lot of offers from other agencies to go solo…”  
  
“You’re going solo?”  
  
“Yes.”  
  
“You’ve signed with an agency then?”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“Oh.”  
  
Taeyeon knew what Tiffany was thinking about.  
  
“It’s fine. I talked to them openly about us. If they can’t accept it then I won’t sign.”  
  
“And someone actually signed you?!”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“Is it shady?”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “Of course not. But it’s not that big. It specializes in solo singers… they only have one idol group. One of the seniors I know is also under their management.”  
  
“I see. So it’s all good?”  
  
“Yup. All good.” She smiled and kissed Tiffany again.  
  
The latter could sense that there was still something Taeyeon was hiding.  
  
“Are you sure everything’s alright?”  
  
She briefly thought of her mother. “Yup. Everything’s going to be alright.”  
  
“What happened, Taeyeon?”  
  
She sighed. “I told my parents about us…”  
  
Tiffany held her breath.  
  
“Appa’s… well… he has basically accepted it.”  
  
“Your mother?”  
  
Taeyeon tried to smile. “She’ll learn to accept it too, one day… I hope…”  
  
“I’m sorry to hear that.” She gently caressed Taeyeon’s cheek.  
  
“What about you? Have you told your parents?”  
  
“Not yet. I think Mom will be fine though…”  
  
“And your father?”  
  
She sighed. “I honestly don’t know. He has been nagging me about dating lately… but I ignored him.”  
  
Taeyeon knew that the road before them might not be an easy one. But she was willing to fight this time around. She wanted to make this new dream of hers come true.  
  
“By the way…”  
  
“Hmm?”  
  
“I have a new dream.”  
  
“Oh? I thought becoming a singer is your dream?”  
  
“It was. It came true, didn’t it?”  
  
“Sure did. Very successfully too.”  
  
She smiled. “That’s why I need a new dream.”  
  
“And what would that be?”  
  
“You mean who.”  
  
“Huh?”  
  
“Who my new dream would be.”  
  
Tiffany grinned. “Seriously. You’re overloading with corniness right now.”  
  
“It’s not corny! It’s the truth. Time for a new chapter, Fany-ah…” She smiled. “With you.”  
  
“I see. Well, I guess I should start thinking about a new dream too.”  
  
“What? Why? Wait. You’ve never told me your dream before. Have you?”  
  
“I don’t think so.”  
  
“What is it then?”  
  
She shrugged. “It’s an old childhood dream… it’s silly. Time for something new.”  
  
“Why? Has it come true?”  
  
She smiled. “I’d like to think so.”  
  
“Then why can’t you tell me?”  
  
“Because you might call me stupid, silly, childish, cheesy…”  
  
“I won’t! I promise! Silly dreams could turn into something big, you know.”  
  
“That’s true.”  
  
“So what is it?”  
  
“Promise me you won’t laugh?”  
  
“Err… I might laugh just a little bit… is that okay?”  
  
“No.”  
  
“Oh come on.”  
  
“Sigh… fine. Just a little bit. And remember, I was still a lonely little kid when I first thought of this okay? Disney must’ve succeeded in unconsciously poisoning my mind at some point…”  
  
Taeyeon grinned.  
  
“I’ve always wanted to…” She looked away, “… find true love.”  
  
“W-what?!” Taeyeon almost laughed out loud. She quickly covered her mouth with her hand.  
  
“I told you not to laugh!” Tiffany was blushing. She hid her face under the covers.  
  
“Sorry… it was reflex.” Taeyeon tried to pull the fabric off Tiffany’s face. “Don’t be shy. It’s fine to want to do that, you know. I just hope there’s no prince charming and magic castle or singing mice and happily ever after involved.” She snickered again.  
  
Tiffany didn’t budge.  
  
“Sorry…” She decided to just hug the hiding girl. “So. You’ve found it yet?”  
  
“Maybe…” The muffled reply was cute and Taeyeon had to grin.  
  
“Me?”  
  
“Not if you keep making fun of me.”  
  
“Fine, I won’t. I promise.” She tried to pull the covers down again. “Me?”  
  
“What do you think?” Tiffany finally showed her pink face and pouted.  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “You’re too cute. Now it all kinda makes sense…”  
  
“What?”  
  
“The reason why you choose to wait for me all those years… why you never dated anyone else... Have you known all along?”  
  
“No, I was just… taking a chance, I guess… to see where it would lead…”  
  
“Why didn’t you give up and try to find it elsewhere?”  
  
“Because we never said goodbye. It hasn’t ended yet.”  
  
“But you were the one who came up with that in the first place.”  
  
“I know. I felt like we hadn’t had enough time so I couldn’t just let go. I still wanted to find out more about you… us…”  
  
Taeyeon smiled.  
  
“Plus, they did say that first loves die hard, right?”  
  
“I’ve heard of that.”  
  
“Well, I guess it’s true.” Tiffany finally smiled.  
  
Taeyeon returned the smile. “So what’s next?”  
  
“Graduate, go home and find a nice job?” She took a deep breath. “Tell my parents…”  
  
Taeyeon reached out to put her arms around Tiffany again. “It’s going to be fine. I’m here. I’ll always be here.”  
  
She smiled. “Thanks…”  
  
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“So… that’s everything off the list?”  
  
“Yeap. I can’t believe you still have this.” Tiffany folded the paper neatly and gave it to Taeyeon.  
  
“I told you… it was always on my mirror, where you left it.” She pocketed the paper.  
  
“Keep it. It makes a good souvenir.”  
  
“Of course.” She wrapped her arms around the girl sitting between her legs. “I’m glad there are plenty of beaches here.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “We are in California…”  
  
“And nice sunset too.”  
  
“Yeah…”  
  
“Fany-ah…”  
  
“Hmm?”  
  
“Do you think your parents would let you move out?”  
  
She turned to look at the girl sitting behind her. “What?”  
  
“I’ve bought an apartment large enough for two in a really nice area in Seoul…”  
  
A smile began to spread on Tiffany’s face.  
  
“… and since I have a lot to make up for… I figured… you know… we should try to spend as much time together as we can…”  
  
Taeyeon was clearly nervous and Tiffany chuckled at the cute behavior.  
  
“Are you asking me to move in with you?”  
  
Taeyeon exhaled in relief. “Yes, I’m glad you understood that…”  
  
“Well you were being pretty obvious…”  
  
“I’m nervous, okay? Give me a break, please.”  
  
“You’re not afraid of public scrutiny, antis or your fans leaving you?”  
  
She shrugged. “I can’t care about those. As long as I have you and as long as I can sing… I’ll be fine.” She then looked at the girl staring up at her. “What about you? You might get bashed. They can be pretty cruel…”  
  
“They can say whatever they want. As long as I know you’re not going anywhere then I’ll be fine too.”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “So it’s a yes?”  
  
“Meh…”  
  
“What?!”  
  
She laughed. “Of course it’s a yes. But we need to talk to my parents first, okay?”  
  
“Okay! Yay!” She kissed her.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Sometimes I think you’re still stuck in high school.”  
  
“That’s a good thing then. I had a pretty good time in high school. Some of the best days of my life…”  
  
They smiled – happy to finally be back in each other’s arms without having to fear of being separated again.

**chapter 14**

“Miyoung-ah! Taeyeon’s here to see you!”  
  
“Send her up!”  
  
“Seriously… volume! Sheesh…”  
  
She turned from the open luggage to see Taeyeon massaging her ears. She had to laugh.  
  
“Your ears are just too sensitive…”  
  
“Nope. You and your mother are too loud.”  
  
Taeyeon closed the door and skipped over to the now standing Tiffany.  
  
“Someone looks happy today,” Tiffany smiled.  
  
“That’s because someone’s finally home.” She leaned forward and gave Tiffany a quick peck on the lips. “I missed you.”  
  
“I missed you too.” She pulled Taeyeon by the waist and kissed her again.  
  
“Your parents, Fany…” Taeyeon tried to break away when she realized that Tiffany was not just merely giving her a quick peck.  
  
“Then lock the door.” She wasn’t letting go.  
  
“Not here, okay?” She was finally able to set some distance between them. She pried Tiffany’s arms off her and stepped back to sit on the bed.  
  
Tiffany pouted. “And I thought you missed me…” She went back to rummaging in her luggage.  
  
“Doesn’t mean I want to be held responsible for giving your parents a heart attack!”  
  
“They don’t have x-ray visions, you know. They won’t be able to see through doors and walls…”  
  
“Yes but they can push that door open.”  
  
“That’s why there’s a lock on it!” Tiffany glared at Taeyeon and the latter grinned.  
  
“Plenty of time for that later, Fany.”  
  
“Five months is a long time, Taeyeon…”  
  
“I know… but come on… we need to stay on their good side, remember?”  
  
Tiffany sighed. She finally found what she was looking for and pulled the t-shirt out.  
  
Taeyeon was still looking at her with mild amusement on her face.  
  
She stood up and walked to the door to lock it.  
  
She then took off her t-shirt and changed into the one she was holding in her hand. Slowly.  
  
“You did that on purpose, didn’t you?”  
  
She smiled innocently. “What are you talking about? I need to change. We’re going out, remember?”  
  
Taeyeon started to consider Tiffany’s words. The door was locked. There’s no camera around. Her parents were not descendants of Superman…  
  
Tiffany giggled and sat next to the thinking Taeyeon.  
  
“Regretting your decision?”  
  
“Can I change my mind?”  
  
“Not anymore. This is my nice t-shirt. I don’t want to get it all crumpled…”  
  
“Don’t worry, this won’t involve crumpling your t-shirt. It can be neatly folded and safely kept at a distance.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “I miss this little byuntae.” She gave Taeyeon a quick peck. “But you were right. Let’s try to stay on my parents’ good side.”  
  
Taeyeon groaned. “I hate it when I’m right…”  
  
“Come on.”  
  
Tiffany stood and pulled Taeyeon with her.  
  
“Just a quick one?”  
  
“No, Byuntae.”  
  
“Aren’t you tired? It was a long flight… you need some rest, relax. And there’s a perfectly good bed right here…” She patted the mattress.  
  
Tiffany laughed again. “You’re too much. I’m not that tired.” She pulled again.  
  
Taeyeon finally stood up – relenting to the pull. She sighed. “I also hate it when you tease…”  
  
“Learn to live with it, Taeyeon.”  
  
She smiled. “I will. Soon.”  
  
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“So you’re moving in together?” Sooyoung asked through a mouth full of food.  
  
“Yup. If my parents are okay with it, that is…”  
  
“When are you going to tell them?” Sunny sipped her drink.  
  
“Some time this week.”  
  
“I see.”  
  
“Ah there they are!” Taeyeon stood up and waved to get the two girls’ attention. She walked towards them and pulled them with her.  
  
“Guys, I want you to meet my dongsaengs. This is Yoona and this is Juhyun.”  
  
The two younger ones bowed politely while the rest of the girls around the table waved to them.  
  
“This is Jessica… Sunny… Sooyoung… Yuri… Hyoyeon and you know Fany…”  
  
“Unnie!”  
  
Yoona pounced the girl coming up to her.  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Miss me? Or my mother’s cupcakes?”  
  
“Both.”  
  
“How have you been doing, Unnie?” Juhyun hugged her next.  
  
“I’m fine. How are you? School’s okay?”  
  
“Yup. It’s so nice to be able to go to classes like a normal student.”  
  
Tiffany smiled and let the two take their seats next to Taeyeon and her.  
  
“I got you chocolates and your usual cupcake fix, Yoong.” She handed Yoona a large shopping bag. “There’s a box for Juhyun in there as well. Please share?”  
  
Yoona laughed. “I will. Thanks, Unnie.”  
  
“Thank you, Unnie.”  
  
“No problem.”  
  
“Oh right… Yoong, this is Sooyoung… the one I mentioned to you a couple of times, remember?” Taeyeon gestured towards her busily chewing friend. “You two have a lot in common.”  
  
“And that is?” Sooyoung wiped her mouth.  
  
“You eat like pigs but look like toothpicks.” Taeyeon laughed out loud.  
  
“Yah!” Sooyoung slammed her napkin down on the table.  
  
“Don’t deny it, Shikshin,” Hyoyeon calmly sipped her soda.  
  
“Sigh… oh well, nice to meet a fellow food lover…” Sooyoung extended her hand and Yoona shook it gingerly, still surprised at the banters between the unnies.  
  
“Don’t worry, Yoong. She won’t bite… unless you’re food.”  
  
“Shut up, Taeng.”  
  
The two latecomers ordered their food and the nine of them talked casually – getting to know each other.  
  
“So anyway, how’s your mother, Taeng?”  
  
“Good. At least she’s talking to me again.”  
  
“Really? That’s nice.”  
  
“Yeah… although she still refused to talk about this…” She pointed to Tiffany and herself. “I’m pretty sure she’ll come around soon.”  
  
“How’s your album preparation coming along?” Yuri subtly changed the subject.  
  
“Nicely. I’m done recording it so the music video’s next and it’s ready for release.” She suddenly turned to Yoona. “Which reminds me… Yoong, wanna star in it?”  
  
“In what?”  
  
“Music video. Title track.”  
  
Yoona shrugged. “Depends…”  
  
“Huh? On what?”  
  
“On how many more cupcakes Tiffany unnie’s going to give me.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed and the others laughed.  
  
“I like this girl,” Sooyoung grinned.  
  
“Get someone else to do it. I need to readjust to the oven smell back home. I can’t have Mom baking too much.” Tiffany said teasingly.  
  
“Noooo!! Unnie! How could you!” Yoona frowned cutely.  
  
“Unnie! Behave!” The maknae reprimanded Yoona and they all grinned at the cute dongsaengs.  
  
“Fine. I’ll coax Fany into letting her mom bake another batch for you. But just one batch!”  
  
“Yay! Alright! I’ll talk to manager oppa.”  
  
“Sigh… this kid…” Taeyeon shook her head.  
  
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“So this is it, huh?”  
  
“Yep.” Taeyeon threw the keys into the bowl on the small table. “What do you think?”  
  
“Very nice.”  
  
Tiffany took a look around the spacious living room and the kitchen.  
  
“There are two bathrooms so we don’t have to fight.”  
  
She laughed. “Good thinking.”  
  
“And you’ll get a room for your stuff. You can turn it into whatever you want…” Taeyeon opened a door and showed Tiffany the empty room.  
  
“What about your stuff?”  
  
“There’s a small room for that too.” She grinned.  
  
“When you said that it’s big enough for two I didn’t expect it to be this big.”  
  
“Too small?”  
  
“Are you kidding me? Too big.”  
  
She smiled. “That’s good then. I was afraid that it’s too small…”  
  
“Well, there’s strangely just one bedroom…” Tiffany poked her head into the master bedroom. “… and one bed.”  
  
“Do we need more?”  
  
Tiffany turned around to see a grinning Taeyeon. “As long as there’s somewhere else for you to sleep in case I throw you out.”  
  
“What?! Why would you want to do that?”  
  
She shrugged. “I said just in case.”  
  
“This may not be as fun as I thought it would be…”  
  
She laughed. “Regrets?”  
  
“Kinda…”  
  
“Don’t worry. I’ll let you make up for all those years first before I start the abuse.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Why must there be abuse?”  
  
“Usually it’s because you ask for it.”  
  
“Fine. Whatever.” She suddenly remembered something. “There’s something I want to show you.”  
  
She pulled Tiffany into the bedroom.  
  
“What is it?”  
  
She pointed at a frame hanging on the wall. “I framed it.”  
  
Tiffany immediately recognized the tattered list. She laughed. “You framed it?!”  
  
“You said it makes a good souvenir right? I thought this would preserve it better.”  
  
She smiled. “I like it. And I’ve just realized how ugly your handwriting is.”  
  
“Hey! It’s better than yours!”  
  
“True but I admit to have messy handwriting.”  
  
“Sigh… I can never win, can I?”  
  
“Nope.”  
  
“Oh well, you win some, you lose some.”  
  
She laughed again.  
  
“And there’s something else…” She let go of Tiffany’s hand and pulled out a drawer. “The old ones were cheap and mine has become almost completely black so I got us new ones.”  
  
She took out a box and opened it – showing the contents to Tiffany. “Will you wear my ring?”  
  
She smiled. “Of course!”  
  
Taeyeon grinned and slipped one of the matching rings on Tiffany’s finger and on her own.  
  
“Thank you.” Tiffany gave her a kiss. “For all this…”  
  
“No problem. I still have a lot of making up to do. I’m sorry for everything…”  
  
“There’s nothing to be sorry about. It’s all in the past, Taeyeon. I’m here and you’re here so let’s just focus on that, shall we? Look forward…”  
  
She smiled gratefully. “I don’t deserve you…”  
  
“I know but unfortunately, I can’t go anywhere.” She grinned. “So stop talking that way and start making it up to me.”  
  
“What do you have in mind then?”  
  
“Have you tested the bed?”  
  
She laughed out loud. “I live here remember?”  
  
“Well, since I’ll be living here too… I think I need to test it.”  
  
“Knock yourself out.”  
  
They kissed and Tiffany pulled Taeyeon onto the bed.  
  
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Ding Dong.  
  
“I’ll get it!”  
  
Tiffany ran down the stairs to get the door.  
  
“Hi!” She smiled as she let Taeyeon in.  
  
“Hi there…” She peeked inside to see no one in the living room and quickly gave Tiffany a peck on the cheek.  
  
She giggled and waited for Taeyeon to take off her shoes.  
  
“How are your parents today?”  
  
“I think they’re in a good mood. Can’t you smell it?”  
  
“I think my nose has become immune to the smell of your house. Your mother’s been baking again?”  
  
“Yeah. She almost jumped through the roof when I told her how much Yoona loves her cupcakes. She’s a fan after all…”  
  
“That daily drama, huh?”  
  
“You know it. And she’s been in the kitchen ever since. I think she baked you a cake too.”  
  
“Oh? For what?”  
  
“I told her you’ll be releasing a new album soon… with Yoona to star in your music video…”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “So all I have to do is mention Yoong and I’ll get free cupcakes and cake for life?! Assa!”  
  
Tiffany shook her head. “To think that you two were idols…”  
  
Taeyeon shrugged and her eyes searched the house. “Where’s your father?”  
  
“Upstairs, taking a shower. He had just arrived home.”  
  
“Mood?”  
  
“Normal.”  
  
Tiffany was obviously worried as the mention of her father almost instantly made her smile disappear.  
  
“Are you sure you want to do this tonight? We can wait. No rush.” Taeyeon gently stroke Tiffany’s arm.  
  
“I’m sure. The sooner the better.” She took a deep breath. “We would still have time to persuade them or think of something should things go wrong.” She gave Taeyeon a small reassuring smile. “Besides, he’s been nagging about me getting a job and getting married and stuff… maybe this will help him realize that I am moving forward with my life?”  
  
“Maybe… or he might think that you’re just throwing it all away…”  
  
“Don’t say that.”  
  
They heard noises in the kitchen and Tiffany sighed. “I better help Mom.”  
  
“I’ll go help too.”  
  
It didn’t take long before they were ready for dinner. They talked and casually enjoyed the meal – just like they used to when both Tiffany and Taeyeon were still in high school.  
  
Tiffany’s parents were welcoming, as usual, and Taeyeon felt confident and at ease.  
  
After dinner, Taeyeon and Tiffany’s father went to sit in the living room. He turned the TV on and the late news showed a short clip of Yoona’s recent commercial filming. It inadvertently mentioned her old group name and Tiffany’s father turned to her.  
  
“That girl was in your group?”  
  
Taeyeon nodded.  
  
“So what do you do now that the group has disbanded?”  
  
“I’m in the middle of preparing for a solo album.”  
  
“Oh? That’s nice. You’re going solo?”  
  
“Yes, Sir.”  
  
“So you’ll stay in the business?”  
  
She nodded. “Singing is what I love to do.”  
  
“Glad you’ve found your calling at such a young age.” He took a deep breath. “Whereas my own daughter…”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “She’ll find her way. I think she has started to apply for jobs.”  
  
“She better be.”  
  
Their talk was halted as Tiffany and her mother came out of the kitchen to join them.  
  
She took a seat next to Taeyeon as her mother placed some tea and cupcakes on the table.  
  
“You must not forget to bring Yoona’s cupcakes and your cake later, Taeyeon.” The woman took a seat across from her husband.  
  
“I won’t, Omoni.” She reached for a cupcake.  
  
“Taeyeon said you’ve started to look for jobs?” He asked his daughter.  
  
Tiffany nodded.  
  
“That’s good.”  
  
“Look for suitors, next.” Her mother added.  
  
Taeyeon stifled a laugh as Tiffany sulked. “Mom…”  
  
“What? It’s about time, you know. I’ve never seen you out on a date. We’re getting restless. Your friend… what’s her name… Hyoyeon? She’s getting married, right?”  
  
“Yes. So what?”  
  
“So that’s a sign! You need to start thinking about this, Miyoung.” Her father said.  
  
“Actually…” Tiffany stole a brief glance at Taeyeon who had just finished her cupcake.  
  
Taeyeon sensed where this was going and quickly drank her tea to help swallow the last bit she was chewing.  
  
“There’s something I need to talk to you about…”  
  
“Oh? What is it?” Her mother was still staring at the TV since Yoona’s commercial had just appeared. “That girl is so pretty… and she likes my cupcakes!” She clapped happily.  
  
“Mom…”  
  
“What?”  
  
“There’s something I need to talk to you about.” She repeated herself nervously.  
  
“Then talk…”  
  
Taeyeon saw Tiffany’s father looking at them both and she fidgeted in her seat.  
  
“I-I… I’m seeing someone…”  
  
“Really? That’s such a relief!” The woman finally turned her attention away from the TV and fully focused on her daughter.  
  
Tiffany’s father didn’t react.  
  
“Who is he? Do we know him? How long have you been dating him? Is he American? Are you going to introduce him to us?”  
  
“Slow down, Mother,” Tiffany was baffled by the rapid questioning. She looked at her father but he was basically asking the same thing although in silence. He was calmly staring at her with eyebrows slightly raised.  
  
She took a deep breath. “I’m… with Taeyeon.” She gently held Taeyeon’s hand and felt the tension in Taeyeon’s grip.  
  
“W-what?!”  
  
They gulped.  
  
Neither of the two parents could say anything for the next minute.  
  
Taeyeon tightened her hold on Tiffany’s hand until she could feel her palm sweating. She was afraid. This was also the initial reaction her own parents gave her and that didn’t turn out well in the end. Well, not entirely anyway.  
  
“Please tell me this is a joke?” Tiffany’s mother finally spoke.  
  
“It’s not, Mom.”  
  
“How long has this been going on?”  
  
“Uhm… on and off… since high school?” Tiffany didn’t dare meet her mother’s eyes.  
  
“We weren’t seeing each other when I was in that group,” Taeyeon tried to help Tiffany out.  
  
“High school…” The woman leaned back in her chair and heaved a deep sigh. “I should’ve known…”  
  
“Dad?” Tiffany turned to her father who had been quiet all this time. She feared his reaction most.  
  
He looked at her then at Taeyeon before standing up and going upstairs.  
  
They heard a door close.  
  
Nobody said a word.  
  
Taeyeon glanced at Tiffany and saw the girl at the brink of tears – looking down at her lap.  
  
She took the initiative.  
  
“Omoni… We’re sorry to shock you like this but we’re serious about this. I’m serious about this. I know you might not want to hear it but I do love your daughter. Very much.”  
  
The woman didn’t reply.  
  
“Please, Mom? I love Taeyeon very much too.”  
  
She heaved a deep sigh. “Why, Miyoung-ah? Isn’t there any nice boy out there? What about that Hwanhee?”  
  
“He’s just a classmate, Mom. I love Taeyeon.”  
  
“But…” She shook her head. “I can’t do this…”  
  
The mother stood up and followed her husband into their room.  
  
Taeyeon quickly pulled Tiffany into a hug and tried to soothe her. “Let them take their time. It’ll be fine.”  
  
She waited until Tiffany stopped crying and left the house soon after – with a deep fear in her heart.  
  
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“They’re still not letting you go anywhere?”  
  
“Nope. He even drove me to my interviews.”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “This is worse than I thought.”  
  
“I know. I feel like a prisoner in my own home.”  
  
“How are we going to tell them about the move?”  
  
“I don’t know.”  
  
They grew quiet.  
  
“Taeyeon? Still there?”  
  
“Yeah… I’m off to Jeju tomorrow, by the way… just an overnight trip.”  
  
“Oh? To shoot the music video?”  
  
“Yep.”  
  
“I see. Yoong too then?”  
  
“Yeah. I’m glad that she’s there to keep me company. I was going to ask you to come along but there goes that…”  
  
“Sorry…”  
  
“It’s okay.” She paused. “I’ll come and talk to your parents after I get back, okay?”  
  
“You don’t have to. I’ll talk to them… although they won’t listen to anything I say…”  
  
“We’re in this together, remember?”  
  
“I didn’t talk to your parents…”  
  
“Because you were still in the States. You have to learn to let me help, Fany. It’s no longer just about you or me.”  
  
She smiled – feeling warm after hearing the words. “Thanks…”  
  
“Most welcome.” A muffled noise followed briefly before Taeyeon spoke again. “I gotta go, the meeting’s about to continue. I’ll come by later tonight.”  
  
“Okay. Call me and I’ll sneak out.”  
  
“Sure thing. See you later then.”  
  
“See you.”  
  
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“Great job, Yoong.”  
  
She handed the crying girl a tissue.  
  
“Sniff… thanks, Unnie. Man, that song is sad…”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “Your sad acting has improved a lot, I see.”  
  
“Thanks to that daily drama. The story’s disturbingly depressing.”  
  
She grinned. “Well, that’s a wrap. Thanks for doing this, Yoong.”  
  
“Anytime, Unnie. Too bad Tiffany unnie can’t come and see your sad singing. I assume her parents aren’t taking it well?”  
  
“Nope. They basically won’t let her out of their sight.”  
  
“Really? So you haven’t seen her since you tried to talk to them?”  
  
“Nah… you know that won’t stop us.”  
  
“Back to sneaking out in the middle of the night?” She grinned.  
  
“Yeah…”  
  
“Wow… you two make Romeo and Juliet look like they have it easy. How long has it been now? Since high school… so… eight years?”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“Yikes! You’re old.” She laughed her choding laugh and earned a loud ‘YAH!’ from Taeyeon.  
  
“So what’s next?” Yoona stood up and put an arm around her shorter unnie. “You’re not gonna give up, are you?”  
  
“Of course not!”  
  
“Good then. Don’t disappoint Tiffany unnie, Unnie. She’s been through too much.”  
  
“You think I don’t know that? I mean what I said, Yoong. I’m here to stay. I’m not going to let her go again. No matter what happens.”  
  
“Okay then. We’re here to support you.” She grinned. “Now let’s get dinner! I’m buying!”  
  
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Ding Dong.  
  
“I’ll get it!”  
  
She ran down to the stairs to see her mother already standing at the door. She sensed trouble.  
  
“Please, Omoni?”  
  
She heard Taeyeon’s voice and went to stand behind her mother.  
  
“Mom…”  
  
The woman sighed and walked inside – leaving the two girls at the door.  
  
“Nothing’s changed, huh?” Taeyeon asked.  
  
Tiffany shook her head sadly. “Come on in.”  
  
“I got your parents some Jeju oranges…” She showed the basket in her hands.  
  
“Thanks. Just put it in the kitchen. I’ll go get my Dad.”  
  
Taeyeon went to the kitchen and saw Tiffany’s mother putting the leftover dinner in the fridge.  
  
“Omoni…” She placed the basket on the counter. “I heard you like oranges so I got you these Jeju oranges. Please enjoy them.” She bowed a little before turning to leave.  
  
The woman sighed. “Thank you…”  
  
“My pleasure, Omoni.”  
  
She left the kitchen to see Tiffany pulling her father to sit on his chair.  
  
She bowed a little. “Good evening, Sir.”  
  
He looked at her briefly before turning away.  
  
“Daddy… Please?”  
  
“There’s nothing to discuss.”  
  
“Then just listen to us?” Tiffany let his arm go and went to get her mother in the kitchen. She returned with the woman in tow and sat her mother down on the couch.  
  
The two parents didn’t want to look at any of the girls standing together.  
  
“Mom, Dad… Please… I’m old enough to make my own decisions. I’m not confused nor am I stupid. I know what I’m doing and I love Taeyeon.”  
  
Taeyeon held Tiffany’s hand.  
  
“And I love your daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Hwang. I really do. I’ll take good care of her. I swear.”  
  
They were not moving.  
  
“I’m happy with Taeyeon. Don’t you want to see your daughter happy?”  
  
Her mother started to fiddle with her fingers whereas her father only looked at her with a stern and unreadable expression.  
  
“How do you suppose the public would react, Taeyeon?” He finally asked after a few more seconds of silence. “You’re a singer, a public figure. Do you think putting my daughter out there under the scrutiny of every eye in society is taking good care of her?”  
  
Taeyeon gulped.  
  
“I’m going to be fine, Dad.”  
  
“I’m asking Taeyeon.”  
  
Taeyeon tried to meet his eyes but faltered. “I-I…” She didn’t really know what to say. “I’m not planning to reveal her to the public, Sir.” She finally managed to speak. “I keep my private and public lives separate.”  
  
“Really? What about all those scandals back then?”  
  
She gulped again. “That was different, Sir. I was an idol and the paparazzi went a bit overboard several times. Being a solo singer is different. I get a lot more privacy and less publicity. I’ll make it my top priority to keep your daughter away from the public eye.”  
  
He kept his eyes on her.  
  
She shifted uncomfortably under his gaze.  
  
“How much did you make?”  
  
“Wh-what?”  
  
“Daddy!”  
  
“How much did you make? Your group was big. You had overseas concerts and all kinds of lucrative deals. Did you make enough to be able to give my daughter a good living?”  
  
“I did, Sir. And my current contract includes three albums so I will still have a steady flow of income for a few more years.”  
  
“What happens after that?”  
  
“I plan to keep singing until no one wants to hear my voice anymore. I might also start a business or two. Some people I know have been asking me to join them and open a restaurant.”  
  
Tiffany looked at Taeyeon. She didn’t know that Taeyeon had such plans.  
  
“So you plan to continue singing?”  
  
“If that’s possible, yes.”  
  
“Then there’s no way that you could keep my daughter hidden forever. People will find out sooner or later about this and I don’t want my daughter judged by the whole nation.”  
  
He stood up.  
  
“Dad…”  
  
“I might reconsider if you’re not a public figure, Taeyeon…”  
  
“I’ll be fine, Daddy!”  
  
“Stay out of this, Miyoung!” He sternly pointed at his daughter. “This is for your own good.”  
  
“I know what’s good for me!”  
  
“You clearly don’t.”  
  
He left the room.  
  
Taeyeon deflated as all her hopes left with him. She had never felt so desperate in her whole life.

**chapter 15**

She spent hours lying awake in her bed replaying Tiffany’s father’s words in her head over and over again.  
  
She cursed the fact that it had again come to the point of choosing between Tiffany and singing. If this had happened before she signed her contract then she would have chosen Tiffany for sure. But she was now bound to that agency for three more years and she couldn’t get out of it – especially with her solo album in its finishing stages.  
  
She sighed for the hundredth time and decided that she had to sleep if she wanted to come to the album cover shoot on time the next morning, and not looking like she had just been hit by a truck.  
  
She tossed and turned some more before finally drifting slowly into sleep.  
  
She heard faint jingling and clicking noises and she thought she was dreaming.  
  
A sudden dip of the mattress made her open her eyes.  
  
She turned to see Tiffany climbing into bed and lying down next to her.  
  
“Wh-wha…” Her voice cracked and she furrowed her brows – trying to decide whether this was really just a dream.  
  
“Sorry to wake you…” Tiffany whispered. “Go back to sleep.” She gently patted Taeyeon’s cheek.  
  
Taeyeon took another second staring at the girl who was settling herself under the covers.  
  
“What are you doing here? Wait. What time is it?”  
  
“Around one, I think…”  
  
“W-what?!” She sat up. “How did you get here?!”  
  
“You gave me the keys, remember?”  
  
“I mean… how did you get here… from your house?”  
  
“Taxi…”  
  
“WHAT?!”  
  
“I know, I know… I won’t ever do that again but this is an emergency.”  
  
“What emergency?” Taeyeon was now fully awake. “You ran away?!”  
  
“I moved out.”  
  
“You ran away.”  
  
Tiffany shrugged. “I thought you have a schedule tomorrow? Go sleep.”  
  
“Fany…”  
  
“We’ll talk in the morning, okay? Sleep, Taeyeon.” She tugged at Taeyeon’s t-shirt.  
  
“Sigh… fine… tomorrow.”  
  
Taeyeon lay back down and immediately felt Tiffany snuggling close to her.  
  
She pulled the girl closer and held her tight. She was happy that Tiffany’s there but her worry about Tiffany’s parents overshadowed her happiness. She knew she had to make a decision somehow and she decided to think about it the next day as her mind became clouded with sleep once again.  
  
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She opened her eyes to see a head on her chest and messy dark hair strewn all over her neck and chin.  
  
She used her free hand to gather all the strands and gently tidied up Tiffany’s hair.  
  
Tiffany stirred and tried to lift her head. “What time is it?” She asked drowsily.  
  
Taeyeon turned to the small alarm clock on her nightstand. “Six twenty…”  
  
Tiffany groaned and returned to her position as she put an arm around Taeyeon. “Go back to sleep.”  
  
“I have to leave in an hour.”  
  
“Why so early?”  
  
“Need to go to the hair salon before the shoot…”  
  
Tiffany huffed and rolled off Taeyeon.  
  
“Won’t take long. I’ll come home as soon as I’m done.” She suddenly smiled widely.  
  
“Why are you smiling like that?” Tiffany was still trying to blink her sleepiness away.  
  
“I like the idea of coming home to you…”  
  
Tiffany grinned. “Well, you can do that everyday now.”  
  
Her smile disappeared. “Not like this, Fany-ah…”  
  
“Like what?”  
  
“You ran away.”  
  
“Can we just enjoy the morning and talk about that later?” She snuggled close again and kissed Taeyeon. “It’s been a while since I woke up next to you like this…”  
  
Taeyeon sighed and said nothing. As much as she enjoyed waking up next to Tiffany, she couldn’t help but feel guilty towards Tiffany’s parents. They must be worried to find Tiffany missing.  
  
“Please tell me that you’ve at least left them a message?” She mumbled between the kisses.  
  
“I did. I told them I’m off to be happy.”  
  
“Fany…”  
  
“What?” Tiffany broke the kiss and looked at the frowning Taeyeon. “You don’t want me here?”  
  
“It’s not that and you know it.”  
  
“You heard my father. I’m not going to let him stop me. It’s totally unreasonable to make you choose. Again.” She sighed. “Talk about this later. Please?”  
  
“Fine… later…”  
  
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“Whoa…”  
  
Taeyeon tried to maintain her balance as Tiffany pounced her.  
  
“You’ll make me drop the food, Fany-ah!”  
  
She quickly let go of Taeyeon’s neck and took the thin cardboard box from Taeyeon’s hand.  
  
“Yay! Pizza!”  
  
She chuckled and took her shoes off. She went to the bathroom to wash her face clean from all the make-up.  
  
Taeyeon then strolled into the living room to find Tiffany sitting on the couch with her legs folded and a slice of pizza in her hand.  
  
“Do not stain the couch.” She warned sternly – walking to the kitchen.  
  
“Here. Use this.” She handed Tiffany a plate for the pizza. “I don’t want to be attacked by ants.”  
  
“Wow. Such an ahjumma.”  
  
“Live with it.”  
  
She continued watching the TV until she realized that Taeyeon wasn’t eating. “You’re not hungry?”  
  
“I already ate.”  
  
“Oh? Don’t tell me you’re still on that diet?”  
  
“I just saw the dress for the first performance. Gotta make sure I don’t look like a snowman in that.”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “It’s white?”  
  
“Yeah…”  
  
“I bet you’ll look gorgeous in it.”  
  
“Let’s hope so.”  
  
Tiffany went back to eating and watching her show.  
  
Taeyeon quietly observed the girl sitting next to her with fascination. She couldn’t believe that Tiffany was really there with her, comfortably eating and watching TV – wearing her clothes – in their home. Their. Home. She smiled at those words.  
  
“Why are you smiling like a creep?” Tiffany finally finished her slice and got off the couch to wash her hands.  
  
“I’m not a creep.”  
  
“Yes you are.” She called out from the kitchen. “And we need to do some shopping. There’s barely any food here.”  
  
“What did you have for breakfast then?”  
  
“Cereal. There’s no more left, unfortunately.” She sat back down and took some tissues to dry her hands. “So why were you being creepy?”  
  
“Nothing. Just… happy…” She smiled.  
  
“I’m happy too.” She kissed Taeyeon and pulled her down to lie on top of her.  
  
“Fany…” Taeyeon tried to push herself up. “We need to talk…”  
  
Tiffany groaned. “What’s there to talk about?”  
  
She lifted her eyebrows and Tiffany gave up.  
  
“Fine…” She pushed Taeyeon away. “Talk.”  
  
“You need to tell your parents that you’re here.”  
  
“I already left them a message.”  
  
“But they’ll be worried!” Taeyeon sighed. “I’m happy to have you here with me but not at the cost of your parents, okay?”  
  
“But they won’t listen to us!”  
  
“I know but running away will not solve this.”  
  
“So you’d rather have me imprisoned in my own home where I have to sneak out like a high school kid again just so that I can see you? Some life that is…” Tiffany sulked.  
  
“I’m not saying that you should continue living like that… but there’s gotta be a better way to solve this.”  
  
“How?”  
  
“I… don’t know…”  
  
Tiffany sighed. She scooted closer to Taeyeon. “Look… I’m not going to make you choose between singing and me. Not again. Enough of that. I’m making the decision now. And I say you can have both.”  
  
“But your parents…”  
  
“They’ll come around one day. Let’s prove to them that we can do this.”  
  
“I feel bad…”  
  
“Don’t. It’s my life too and I’ve had enough waiting. I want you. Now.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “Right now? N.O.W now?”  
  
Tiffany laughed. “Yep. Now.” She grabbed Taeyeon’s collar and kissed her again.  
  
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The door slammed shut and Taeyeon sat up on the couch.  
  
“Bad day?”  
  
Tiffany was startled. “You’re home?”  
  
“Yep. The last schedule got canceled. Sick host.” She stood and walked over to the girl taking off her scarf and jacket. “You okay?”  
  
“Yeah… Stupid client, that’s all.”  
  
Taeyeon grinned. “What do you want for dinner?”  
  
“I’m not hungry.”  
  
“Have you eaten?”  
  
“Nope. That stupid meeting basically killed my appetite.” She finished taking off her shoes and grabbed her bag that was lying on the floor.  
  
Taeyeon suddenly leaned forward and kissed her.  
  
“What’s that for?” She smiled.  
  
“I thought I’d help you feel a bit better.”  
  
“I need to feel a lot better though…”  
  
Taeyeon smirked. “Then have dinner? Just a little bit?”  
  
“I was referring to more kisses…”  
  
“There will be plenty of time for that later. Go take a hot shower. I ordered your favorite.”  
  
“Kimchi fried rice?”  
  
“Yup.”  
  
“Okay then.”  
  
“Good girl.”  
  
“*Your* good girl.”  
  
“Yeap.” She laughed. “*My* good girl.” She gave Tiffany one last quick peck before going to the kitchen to warm up the food.  
  
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Her phone rang while Tiffany was still in the shower.  
  
She saw the number and answered it.  
  
“Hi, Umma…”  
  
“Are you home or out?”  
  
“Home. The last schedule was canceled.”  
  
“Is Miyoung home too?”  
  
“She just got back from work.”  
  
“Oh. How is she doing?”  
  
“You aren’t going to ask how your own daughter is doing first?”  
  
“I know you’re doing well...”  
  
Taeyeon chuckled. “Just kidding. She’s fine. Tired though. I think one of her clients has been stressing her out lately.”  
  
“Has she talked to her parents yet?”  
  
Taeyeon sighed. “Not yet.”  
  
“It’s been months, Taeyeon-ah…”  
  
“I know, Umma. I’ll talk to her about this.”  
  
“The sooner the better.”  
  
“Yeah. Umma… Can I ask you something?”  
  
“Sure. What is it?”  
  
“How did you change your mind? Why? I mean… I need to know how I can convince Tiffany’s parents.”  
  
“Well… I realized that no matter what happens you’re still my daughter and this doesn’t make me love you less. And that you’re old enough to make your own decisions – not that I agree with it completely – but if you’re happy then I guess there’s nothing I can do about it, is there?”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “Thanks, Umma.”  
  
“Besides, Miyoung is not a bad kid.”  
  
“She’s not.”  
  
She heard footsteps and turned to see a freshly showered Tiffany walking towards the kitchen.  
  
“Do you want to talk to her?”  
  
“Sure…”  
  
She handed Tiffany the phone.  
  
“Who is it?”  
  
“Umma.”  
  
“Oh.” She quickly took it.  
  
Taeyeon turned to take the food out of the microwave.  
  
“Hello, Omoni… Ah, I’m fine just a bit tired that’s all…” Tiffany smiled. “No no, she’s taking very good care of me.” She glanced at the busy Taeyeon gratefully.  
  
“Oh… no, I haven’t.” Her smile disappeared and she silently took a deep breath.  
  
Taeyeon heard the change of tone and knew that her mother must be talking about Tiffany’s parents.  
  
“Yes, Omoni… Mhmm… Yes, I know… Sigh… Okay… I will… Yes, I promise. It’s okay, Omoni. Thank you…”  
  
Taeyeon held the phone, trying to pull it out of Tiffany’s hand.  
  
“Yes, okay… oh, Taeyeon wants to talk to you… yes, Omoni. Thank you.” She let Taeyeon have the phone and left the kitchen – brows furrowed.  
  
“What did you tell her, Umma?”  
  
“Nothing. I just tried to explain the parental point of view. Her parents must be devastated. She’s their only daughter after all…”  
  
“What did you make her promise?”  
  
“That she would talk to her parents soon. Don’t worry, I apologized for meddling but I can’t help it. She’s my daughter too now, isn’t she? I care, you know.”  
  
Taeyeon smiled in relief. “Yes, she is. Thank you for that, Umma.”  
  
“Don’t mention it. Now go eat your dinner.”  
  
“Huh? How do you know we’re going to have dinner?”  
  
“I heard the microwave… which reminds me. Come home soon. I need to teach you to cook. You two can’t live off take outs forever, you know.”  
  
She laughed. “Fany’s hopeless in the kitchen but I guess I can learn.”  
  
“Both of you must come, you hear me?”  
  
“Yes, Umma. I’ll talk to you later, okay?”  
  
“Take care of yourselves.”  
  
“Will do. Bye, Umma.”  
  
She hung up feeling light yet she knew that Tiffany must be feeling pretty bad after her mother’s short lecture. She took the food and left the kitchen.  
  
“Fany-ah… dinner.”  
  
Tiffany turned the TV off and took a seat at the table. She ate in silence with Taeyeon watching her.  
  
“You’re not eating?”  
  
“I already ate.”  
  
Tiffany continued eating. She stopped after a few more bites.  
  
“That’s it?!”  
  
“I’m not that hungry…” She put her glass down and moved back to sit in front of the TV.  
  
“Okay then.”  
  
Taeyeon threw away the leftovers and left the dirty dishes in the sink.  
  
“What’s on your mind?” She sat down next to the quiet girl.  
  
“You’re lucky.”  
  
“Huh? Why?”  
  
“Your parents are okay with this.”  
  
“It took my mother quite a while to adjust too, remember? And Appa was in a daze for days. I bet he kept wondering why his tea was salty…”  
  
Tiffany smiled a little.  
  
“You want to go pay them a visit this weekend? Or invite them here?”  
  
She turned to look at Taeyeon. “You’re free this weekend?”  
  
“We can visit in the morning. I have no other schedules besides the radio.”  
  
Tiffany tilted her head to think. “Which one is better? Going there to visit them or letting them come here?”  
  
“That’s up to you. You can start by calling them first though.”  
  
“Now?!”  
  
“Whenever you’re ready.”  
  
Tiffany sighed and leaned her head on Taeyeon’s shoulder.  
  
She pulled her into her arms and kissed the top of her head. “Everything’s going to be fine, Fany-ah. Don’t worry. I’m here. I’ll always be here…”  
  
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“You ready?” Taeyeon fixed Tiffany’s bangs and gave her an encouraging smile.  
  
Tiffany inhaled and exhaled a few times before clearing her throat.  
  
“Let’s do this.”  
  
She pressed the doorbell and waited. She felt Taeyeon squeezing her hand and she smiled at her gratefully.  
  
The door opened and she saw the woman who had raised her standing in front of her.  
  
She gulped when she realized how much older her mother looked. The woman also appeared to have lost weight since the last time she saw her.  
  
“H-hi Mo-…”  
  
She was pulled into a hug before she could finish her sentence.  
  
She smiled through her tears. She had missed her mother too. She returned the hug tightly.  
  
Taeyeon watched the small reunion with a small smile on her face.  
  
Her mother let her go and turned to Taeyeon. She opened her arms and hugged the small girl as well.  
  
“Umph…” Taeyeon was a bit surprise at the tight grip. She stifled her laugh.  
  
“Come on in then.”  
  
They walked passed the woman and stood in the hallway. They sniffed the air and looked at each other in confusion. It didn’t smell sweet at all. It smelled… normal.  
  
Taeyeon lifted her eyebrows while Tiffany alarmingly frowned.  
  
“Have you two eaten? I made japchae…”  
  
“We’re good, Omoni.” Taeyeon said. “Oh and Yoona wanted me to give you this.” She handed her the box she was holding in one hand.  
  
“What’s this?” The woman gasped as she saw the autograph and the handwritten message.  
  
“It’s a special DVD box set from the drama you liked so much. It was such a hit that they released this. Yoona signed it for you.”  
  
“Omo…” She grinned and almost jumped around like a fangirl. “Thank you so much, Taeyeon! Tell Yoona thank you! I will show this around tomorrow. Those ahjummas are going to be so jealous of me…”  
  
Taeyeon laughed. “You’re most welcome, Omoni. I also got you this.” She gave Tiffany’s mother her CD. “I don’t know whether you’re familiar with the song…”  
  
“How can I not?! I’ve heard it so many times on the radio and on TV! It’s also the song used in that new drama, right? And Yoona looks so beautiful in that video...”  
  
Taeyeon snickered. I should’ve known that it’s Yoong and only Yoong, she thought to herself in amusement. “Thank you, Omoni. Anyway, please read the ‘thanks to’ when you can.”  
  
“I will. Thank you, Taeyeon-ah.”  
  
Taeyeon was about to respond when they heard a door open and footsteps coming down the stairs.  
  
Tiffany’s mother quickly walked inside and they followed her to see an unhappy looking Mr. Hwang standing at the foot of the stairs.  
  
He scoffed after seeing them and walked away into the kitchen.  
  
His wife followed him and the two girls stood frozen in place.  
  
“W-we should go…” Tiffany gulped and tried to move towards the door.  
  
“No.” Taeyeon held Tiffany’s hand firmly. “Let’s wait a bit and see what happens.”  
  
“He’s clearly not happy to see me.”  
  
“For your mother’s sake, Fany-ah. Your house smells different. She must have stopped baking. That’s serious.”  
  
“I know but Dad-…”  
  
“Wait just a little bit longer…”  
  
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He took out a glass and poured himself some water.  
  
“Dear…” She put the box and CD in her hands on the counter and approached him. “Don’t do this to your daughter…”  
  
“She left. Why did she come back?”  
  
“Please don’t talk like that. She’s your daughter… your only daughter.”  
  
“I don’t have such an ungrateful daughter.”  
  
“Don’t say that! This is why she left in the first place!”  
  
“You’re siding with her now?”  
  
“Sigh… I’m not siding with anybody. She’s our daughter. We’re a family. I’m just saying that she left because of us – how we treated her. She wanted to make peace now, let’s not drive her away again, please? She’s all I got, you know. She’s all we got.” Her eyes started to tear up.  
  
He didn’t reply.  
  
“Please? They look well – healthy, happy. Give them a chance, please? For her sake and mine?”  
  
He was still quietly standing there with the half-empty glass in his hand.  
  
“Taeyeon has ended her promotions and you still haven’t seen a single article or photograph about them, right?”  
  
“It’s still too early to tell…”  
  
“But- … Sigh. Fine. You are just as stubborn as your daughter. Do whatever you want but I’m welcoming my daughter home. And if you still care about her then the least you can do is act your age. Be nice and don’t glare at either of them.”  
  
She grabbed the box and turned on her heels.  
  
He took a deep breath and finished his drink.  
  
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“He’s not coming out. Let’s go…”  
  
Tiffany kept pulling on Taeyeon’s hand.  
  
“Just a little bit more, Fany-ah… be patient.”  
  
“I know him. He’s not going to change his mind no matter what my mom’s going to say.”  
  
“Like you?” Taeyeon smiled. “Give them a chance. We’ll leave as soon as he throws us out, okay?”  
  
“Why are you so determined? They’re not your parents.”  
  
“I’d like to think they are.”  
  
“What?”  
  
Taeyeon was still smiling. “Haven’t you read my ‘thanks to’?”  
  
“I have…”  
  
“Then you know how grateful I am for them. Not only because they’ve raised you so well but because they welcomed me and gave me a home when my own was so far away.”  
  
Tiffany stopped struggling.  
  
“Besides, I owe your mother so many yummy cupcakes and cookies and cakes.” She grinned.  
  
Tiffany finally smiled. “Okay then. Let’s wait until he throws us out.”  
  
“He won’t do that.”  
  
The voice startled them.  
  
Tiffany’s mother put the box and Taeyeon’s CD carefully on the dining table and walked over.  
  
“He can go sleep outside if he does that.”  
  
They smiled.  
  
“So how have you been doing?” She sat down on the living room couch and the two followed her.  
  
Taeyeon took a seat on the chair – letting Tiffany sit on the couch next to her mother.  
  
They had been talking for a few minutes when Tiffany’s father walked out of the kitchen. He grabbed a newspaper and sat down on his chair. He then started to read without uttering a word or even looking at the two girls.  
  
Tiffany’s mother shook her head and smiled.  
  
She looked at Taeyeon and Tiffany and gestured with her head slightly towards the cool man who seemed to be ignoring everything around him.  
  
The two nodded quietly and smiled back. They understood that he needed more time but simply willing to be in the same room as them showed that he was at least trying.  
  
Tiffany took a deep breath and saw Taeyeon giving her a thumbs-up. She had to laugh.  
  
“So Taeyeon… there’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you…” Tiffany’s mother spoke again.  
  
“Ask away, Omoni.”  
  
“Is Yoona really dating that actor?”  
  
Taeyeon and Tiffany burst out laughing. Even the quiet man shook his head behind his newspaper.  
  
“I can’t tell you about that, Omoni. That would be breaking my promise to Yoona. You would have to wait for the official announcement but yes, they are close. That’s all I can say for now.”  
  
“Omo… he’s such a charming and kind looking boy. Tell Yoona to go for it!”  
  
They laughed again.  
  
“I’ll be sure to tell her that.”  
  
“We always listen to your weekend radio shows, you know. Well, I listen to it. That man over there just eavesdrops most of the time…”  
  
Taeyeon smiled. “Thanks, Omoni.”  
  
“It’s a way to learn about Miyoung too since you frequently tell stories about her and your other friends.”  
  
“I’m sure you focus more on Yoona’s stories.” Tiffany said.  
  
“That’s important too, of course… but my daughter always comes first.”  
  
Tiffany smiled. “Thanks, Mom. I’m sorry…” She held back her tears. “… for everything.”  
  
“Oh it’s fine.” She gave her daughter a hug. “We’re sorry too. But you’re back, that’s all that matters. You’ll always be my daughter anyway.” She then turned to Taeyeon. “You too, Taeyeon. This house will always be your home.”  
  
“Thank you, Omoni.” Taeyeon grinned.  
  
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“Not bad, right?” She put on her seatbelt.  
  
“Not bad at all.”  
  
“Your father will come around.”  
  
“Yeah… he’s kinda funny when trying to act all cool like that.”  
  
“He is.” Taeyeon laughed. “I could’ve sworn I heard him grunt a few times whenever your mother went into Yoong’s fangirl mode.”  
  
“Me too.”  
  
Taeyeon turned on the engine and started to drive. “So where to next? We still have a few hours left…”  
  
“Home? It’s been quite an exhausting week…”  
  
Taeyeon nodded. “Okay. Home it is.”  
  
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“Fany?”  
  
No reply came from the sleeping girl in her arms.  
  
She smiled and tried to stealthily untangle herself.  
  
She had barely moved two inches when Tiffany stirred.  
  
“Where are you going?” She snuggled against Taeyeon again and threw an arm over Taeyeon’s waist – keeping her in place.  
  
“Radio show, remember? Manager oppa’s going to come pick me up soon.”  
  
“No…”  
  
She chuckled. “I’ll be back before you know it.” She kissed the top of her head. “Let me go? Please? I need to change before he gets here.”  
  
“Why?”  
  
“It’s viewable radio today. I have to look less like a hobo.”  
  
Tiffany grinned.  
  
“Plus, the guests are those cute new boys from that idol band that had just debuted. My reputation as a senior is at stake here!”  
  
“Then I really won’t let go. Maybe if you look like a hobo, they’ll keep their ogling eyes to themselves.”  
  
“You do realize that there are real live viewers too? You want them to think that I’m a hobo?”  
  
“Sigh… fine. Go dress up for those young cute boys.”  
  
She sulked and moved to the other end of the couch – slightly kicking Taeyeon in the process.  
  
“They don’t stand a chance and you know it.” She gave her a kiss on the cheek and ran to the bedroom to get changed.  
  
Tiffany smiled and almost fell asleep again when she felt Taeyeon’s warm breath on her face.  
  
“What are you doing, creep?”  
  
“I was going to kiss you but since you call me a creep…” Taeyeon stood up quickly but Tiffany still managed to catch the sleeve of her sweater.  
  
“Forget I said that.”  
  
Taeyeon scoffed.  
  
“Oh come on… I’ll be here alone for the next three hours. The least you can do is give me that kiss.” She opened her eyes to see Taeyeon looking down at her with a smile.  
  
“You can always watch me?”  
  
“And see those boys giving you compliments and making you blush? No way.”  
  
“They’ll only be there for the second half of the show. First half would still be all me.”  
  
“We’ll see.”  
  
Taeyeon’s phone suddenly rang.  
  
“Gotta go…”  
  
“Kiss!”  
  
She chuckled and squatted. “Fine.” She kissed her and was about to pull away and stand back up when Tiffany suddenly sat up and locked her arms around Taeyeon’s neck – pushing her back with the force of her kiss.  
  
“Y-yah! Fany! I can’t-…” She fell backward with a thud and Tiffany on her lap.  
  
“Ow…” Her back had hit the edge of the coffee table and she grimaced at the pain.  
  
“Oops. Sorry… Does it hurt?” Tiffany pulled Taeyeon forward – away from the table – and rubbed her back.  
  
“What do you think?”  
  
“Sorry.” She grinned.  
  
Taeyeon’s phone kept ringing and she sighed. “Really have to go, Fany-ah…”  
  
“Okay. Come home soon?”  
  
“As soon as I’m done.” She smiled and gave Tiffany one last peck. “Wait up for me?”  
  
“Of course.”  
  
“Good. Now get off me. Manager oppa’s gonna be pissed. He hates waiting.”  
  
Tiffany stood and pulled Taeyeon up.  
  
“See you later…”  
  
“See you.”  
  
She walked Taeyeon to the door and waved goodbye before closing it with a small content smile on her face.  
  
She went into the bedroom to turn on her computer.  
  
Her eyes fell on the framed paper on the wall.  
  
She smiled and took it down to read it.  
  
“We’ve come a long way, Taeyeon-ah…” She tapped the glass right on the last item she had once written. “I’m glad we never said goodbye…”

THE END