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Acknowledgements

I want to give special thanks to the following persons who helped me throughout the whole fic:

Alex grandpa, who's like a mother bird to me. He helped me with the first half of the Book I and eventually pushed me off the nest so I could learn how to fly solo. Thank you for being there with me when I needed you, Grandpa.

Enki umma, who supported me till the end and gave me encouraging words to keep me going. Your words meant a lot to me. I love you, Umma.

::allbliss::, who beta read the first few chapters of Book I. She's the first person who actually supported me and pursued me into writing an on-going. I don't know if you're supporting me silently, or if you even still remember me, but wherever you are now, Jill, my friend, I miss you.

The Twitter Fam. I haven't known you guys for too long, but you already meant a lot to me. Grandpa, Umma, Grandma, Arex oppa, Lil one, Kim unnie, Greatgrandmom, Budz unnie, B unnie—everyone! Just talking to you guys relieves my stress.

And last, but definitely not the least, the Cupids, who almost died with all the drama. I'm sorry for breaking your hearts and for playing with your emotions. Thank you for everything. You all rock so hard it hurts.

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Book I

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CHAPTER 1:'MATTER'



CHAPTER 1:'MATTER'

It's a bright Sunday afternoon and Jessica Jung was still lying on a hammock at the back of their house; the only 'natural' place left; the garden; her favorite place among other parts of their TaeCsion (the latest type of McMansion). She felt comfortable and peaceful in this place doing nothing, just lying there, and appreciating the nature. It's great how the Jungs preserved a heavenly place like this in a modernized generation of year 2027 where everything was latest, electronic, instant, convenient, modernized and *everything* was possible.

The green grass below her, -- she never dared to lay there because in just a minute she's feeling itchy already so she decided to set up a hammock herself to make it more 'natural' -- the puffy clouds in the blue sky above her, and the shades of the trees shielding her skin from bright sun rays, together with the apple trees, where the hammock was tied, surrounding her, as if guarding her, was a perfect setting. Whoever would see her in this moment would have mistaken her as a fairy or a princess or a goddess with her white flowing dress that swayed along with the grass and with the strands of her dark brown hair, brushing some of her bangs away, because of the fresh wind as she napped with her eyes closed and a smile painted up on her pinkish, plump lips.

Out of nowhere, something hit her on the head.

"Ow!" She bolted up from shock and the hammock reacted with a full swing, causing Jessica to fall on the grass.

"Owww..." she winced once again, rubbing her temple where something hit her. She looked around, searching for the thing that hit her and where it came from. Then she saw an apple not far from her. She picked it up with her left hand and leaned her right hand on the ground, helping her upper body up.

She examined the apple, tilting it to the left and right, as if it was her first time seeing an apple, and then she looked up only to be greeted by the sun rays seeping through the branches and leaves of the tree. She extended her right hand upward to protect her eyes from the sun rays. She stayed like that for a couple of seconds, just staring at nothingness, then she chuckled as she realized something.

“You guys surely know me, huh?” She was directing to the trees. She let out a small hearty laugh before her stomach growled.

She laughed even louder, her laughter echoing in the whole area along with the soft breeze. She then took a bite on the apple. She savored it, like how she savored this moment. She wanted to stay like this forever, being so childish, careless and innocent. Oh how she missed being a child again. She loved to stay in this place though it meant that she has to be alone. Maybe someday, with him, the man she would love and marry.

She enjoyed the soft wind brushing her hair, so much that she didn’t notice that she had already finished the apple.

“Miss, Madame Jung was looking for you,” said a man’s calm voice, but Jessica didn’t even budge, she has sensed it.

An Intruder at Jessica’s sacred place, Mr. Go, her personal chauffer and butler, working for the Jungs for thirty years now.

Though he’s an intruder, it was okay with Jessica. He’s an exception. She has been living with him for as long as she could remember. How could she not like this guy? He’s caring, sweet, and so devoted to work that he didn’t get married because of his loyalty to the Jungs. Though he’s already old with his thick, round reading glasses covering his smooth blue eyes, with white hairs and creaking knee bones, she preferred this old guy than those freaking Nanny and Butler robots. He’s like her second father.

“Where is she?” Now Jessica couldn’t be childish anymore. She has to return to reality now, away from her lalaland.

“She’s in her room, Miss,” he replied. Jessica have been complaining about him calling her ‘miss’ but the humble guy insisted and still called her ‘miss’ so Jessica couldn’t complain anymore.

“OK, I’ll go to her in a minute.” The old guy took this as a cue and left her there.

Jessica inhaled the fresh air deeply, as if it was her last breath. How much she longed for a fresh air. Outside the gate of their TaeCision were flying cars and other vehicles that released black smokes. Improvement came with a great consequence. To change the world or modernize it, they had to cut the trees and the air became polluted because of the vehicles and factory’s smokes.

She walked back inside their house, commanding the doors to open using her voice. The last door opened with a beeping sound, revealing a young-looking woman, looking like a carbon copy of Jessica. That was not impossible these days.

“Hi, Hon,” greeted the sweet voice with a smile.

“Hi, Mom,” Jessica replied in the same manner. She walked to her mom and hugged her for two certain reasons. One: she missed her mom, and two: she has to make sure that it was her real mom and not some

freaking robots. It's hard to determine which was human and which was not these days, all thanks to 'TAECNOLOGY'

Mr. Ok Taecyeon Jr. was the current world president. He reached his peak not because of his efforts, but his grandfather's. His grandfather was the first man to land on planet Mars. One day, he was studying; he discovered some water traces on the surface of the planet, so he decided to go there with the help of his company to study it. His studies never failed him; he discovered that there was a life in planet Mars. He came back to Earth to tell the whole world the news he'd got. Because of this discovery he became the world's president. When he died his son took over his position as the world's president. Ok Taecyeon Sr. invented a lot of things like flying cars (TaeCars) and when he died, his son, Ok Taecyeon Jr., replaced him as the president. Taecyeon Jr. also invented a lot of things like the TaeCsion or the modern version of McMansion like the Jung's, and still inventing. Many people believed that they inherited their grandfather's intelligence. And that's where TEACNOLOGY originated.

"Why are you looking for me?" Jessica asked when they broke the hug.

"Honey, I have something to tell you." The tone was serious. It made Jessica nervous. Was it about their company? That she has to take over it already? No, she's not yet prepared for those, maybe the other matter?

"Go on," she replied.

"Honey, you already know the details about this matter, right? I just wanna tell you... it's near."

How could she not know that matter? She grew up knowing the fact that she doesn't have control of her life, that she's destined to do what was planned for her even before she was born, that someday at the right time and at the right age she needed to take over their company since she's the first born of Albert Jung which happened to be the first born of Anthony Jung, her grandfather. She lived her life being controlled like that because of one reason-- all thanks to her grandfather's brilliant wish before he died way back even before she was born.

"When?" She tried to be calm as she scratched her arm. *Grass.*

She's feeling goosebumps. She suddenly felt that breathing was hard, fearing the worst that could happen.

The thing that she feared the most...

"Within fifteen days."

...has come.

CHAPTER 2: 'MAD'



CHAPTER 2: 'MAD'

Jessica heard an imaginary thud along with the feeling of her world collapsing around her. Her shoulder slumped and her breathing became irregular.

"F-F-Fifteen days?!" she stuttered.

"Yes, Honey, I'm sorry. I know this is hard for you. It's hard for me too, y'know, I'm your mother, but there's nothing I can do. It's your grandfather's wish and it's written in the papers and if we don't follow it, we'll lose the company." Her voice sounded so apologetic and her eyes were really saying sorry. She felt bad for her daughter, how could she call herself a mother if she couldn't even fight for the rights of her child? But what else could she do? It's the culture-- the endless Korean culture. Everything in this world has changed but, somehow, the old Korean culture remained in the modernized world.

Jessica couldn't comprehend on this. Their real estate company seemed to be doing well. In fact, the sales this year were higher compared to last year so Jessica couldn't really understand it.

"But, Mom, I don't get it! The company is doing well! So what's wrong? Why does it have to be this early?" Jessica never once yelled at her mother so she was surprised by her own outburst. She was always the obedient and kind daughter but what happened this time revealed the different side of her that only she, herself, used to know. She's so desperate to make a hole so she could dig herself out of this situation.

"I can't tell you right now, maybe tomorrow or the next day, just not now. I'm still waiting for Mrs. Hwang's call. If she calls, I'll set up an appointment and we'll talk to her, OK?"

But her mom understood her outburst so she just let it slide and talked to her child like it didn't offend her, that her first born was yelling at her. Maybe Jessica inherited her mom's kindness but not the patience; she inherited her impatience from her dad.

"Does Dad know this?" She was hoping that her dad didn't agree to this like how he didn't agree when Jessica was eight and her mom was trying to send her to the park to play with the other kids. She just ran to her dad

then and hugged him, saying "I don't want to", and everything was handled by her dad. He was always in favor of Jessica. She wished that she could run to her dad like that again.

"Yes. He even told me to handle everything concerning this thing."

Jessica couldn't run to her dad right now, she's all grown up and her dad knew what's right and needed to be in favor of, and Jessica knew that he's not siding with her this time.

"OK, Mom. I think I need to go." Jessica turned around and started walking out of the room with the background song of what sounded like a ringing phone. She walked slowly, acting as if she's not affected. When she turned to the corner she accidentally hit the vase with her trembling hands and it almost fell on the red carpet. She was just in time to catch it. When she's sure that her mom couldn't see her anymore, she started to jog, then run.

She entered her room and when the door was finally closed, she leaned her back on it. Her vision was starting to get blurry because of the tears that were stuck on her lower eyelids. She blinked, letting the tears fall along with her body onto the floor in a slide.

She sobbed so hard until breathing became a hard task to do. She clenched her chest, inhaling then exhaling deeply, trying to stop herself from crying so much so she could breathe normally. She had no hope now. Her mom couldn't do anything, even her dad. Who's left? Mr. Go? Krystal? They couldn't do anything either and Jessica knew that. She has no one to hold on to now. She hoped that at least someone could catch her and save her out of this situation.

She crawled to her bed and lay down on it, thinking.

What's new anyway? You've known about this, Jessica! Ever since you were a child! she scolded herself.

But I never expected it would be this early! I still have plans for my life! she defended.

When has your plan ever materialized? Huh? Come on! Wake up! You know you can't do anything about it! You just have to accept it!

Then the battle against herself stopped. She has finally decided.

"I'm going to accept it." She was talking to no one.

She closed her eyes and drifted off to dreamland.

Life must go on and she still has classes tomorrow.

CHAPTER 3:'BRAVE'



CHAPTER 3:'BRAVE'

"...Yes, Mrs. Jung... Tomorrow 3:30pm? Okay... Yes, yes, Mrs. Jung... I'll see you tomorrow, bye!"

The old woman pressed the end call button of her fist-sized iPadXV with a beep.

"Remind me again why we have to come back here in Korea?" the younger girl spoke to the old woman in an annoyed tone.

The old woman turned around and faced the younger one, her black dyed hair slightly swaying. "Don't worry, we'll only stay here for fifteen days then we'll go back to Scorchwood*. Mrs. Jung and I will discuss everything to you tomorrow, okay?"

I hope you'll understand, Honey, it's hard for me too, but we have to do this, the older one thought.

"Pfft." The younger girl who's busy unpacking her luggage rolled her eyes.

The old woman walked to her and cupped her cheeks, stopping her from opening the zipper of the pink luggage. "Fany-ah, we'll explain everything to you tomorrow, okay? Please understand." Her brown calm eyes stared right into Tiffany's identical ones, rendering the girl speechless because of the comforting stare.

"Yes, Mom," was all Tiffany could utter.

Why do I have a feeling that it's not going to be something good? That look in her eyes, it meant something, her mind spoke to herself.

She continued unpacking her luggage. She took all the things her hand could carry from the luggage before pacing on the brown carpeted floor to her walk-in closet of their old TaeCsion.

Mrs. Hwang sat herself on the bed, watching her stubborn daughter. She chuckles every time she uses the word 'stubborn' to describe her daughter. Tiffany was a stubborn yet sweet daughter. The elderly woman

watched her first born doing her own thing for a moment. She never imagined watching her first born walking from the luggage then back to the walk-in closet could be this fun. If only she have had some bonding moments with her child, but she never had the time. She's always busy with their jewelry company that she couldn't even spend some time with her daughter and son resulting in them growing up with their butler, Mr. Baek. She doesn't want Tiffany to work for the company yet so she did all the work with the help of her husband which caused white hairs to be visible on their heads one week ago before they dyed it black to be more presentable.

When the luggage was almost done Mrs. Hwang stood up from the bed.

"I'll go check on Leo, okay?"

"Okay, Mom." Tiffany didn't bother to look at her mother when she replied.

She knew the door was already closed because of the beeping sound. She came out of the closet and dropped herself on her bed, staring at the ceiling. She reminisced her childhood in this place, running around the house with her little brother, Leo, and when she fell on the front lawn while playing, resulting to a scratch on her knee, she'd just run to her father and her dad would kiss it then it'd get better. He used to say that kisses from the person you love could heal any wound. But that was when she was still a child, she's all grown up now and she found running to her dad a moment that's so corny and cliché. Along with the evolution of Scorchwood, these past years were her own evolution in life. She mingled with the wrong crowd which resulted in her being a rebel.

She inhaled deeply while closing her eyes. Oh how she missed the scent of their old rusty house. She then smiled. *Staying here for fifteen days wouldn't be so bad, would it?*

"It's good to be back." She then opened her eyes and continued on whatever she was doing until she was finished.

She lay on her bed thinking, *I wonder why we came back here for only fifteen days. I don't know if something will happen within these few days. Oh well, I think I'll just find some bars around here to keep myself busy. But I don't have someone to go with me! Aish!*

She closed her eyes as she pulled the blanket up to her chest. Her right hand stayed on top of her head while the other was resting on her stomach.

After eight long and tiring hours of flight in the bullet airtrain** without sleep plus a bonus of jet lag, it won't be bad to reward yourself a little nap, right?

*Was called 'America' before.

**Means of transportation ten times bigger than an airbus.

CHAPTER 4:'SURE'



CHAPTER 4:'SURE'

Jessica stared through the wind shield of their flying car, looking down at the sight below them. Having a car that had the TaeCnology and the ability to fly was so convenient for her because she woke up late and traveling through the sky allowed one self to avoid traffic jams and only rich ones have flying cars. She suddenly felt sleepy looking at those pale colored buildings surrounding the car and the slow driving of Mr. Go. He used to say he drives slow to make sure of their safety though Jessica said that it's impossible for them to get hit by another car when they were flying. But Mr. Kim was so stubborn, he kept on disobeying his boss, but then again, Jessica doesn't mind. She understood his intentions.

Nine minutes later, the car started hovering down slowly until it touched the ground with a soft thud in front of the white stone mansion grandpa Taecyeon's patron had built for him a century ago.

"We're here, Miss," Mr. Go said while pressing some buttons on the dashboard, opening the door on Jessica's side. "Good luck in school!" he cheered Jessica on.

Jessica slid across the seat and was lifting her duffel bag out of the car when Mr. Go spoke again. "Be out here in front of the squad at four-thirty, if something comes up, Mrs. Jung will call you. Got your wristwatch?"

Jessica nodded and slung her backpack over her right shoulder, the duffel bag on her left hand, as she watched Mr. Go flew off. Other kids were getting out of their own cars. She shivered in the cool morning air and allowed the wind to caress her cheek gently. Today was a Monday and the usual Monday Blues were already seeping into her in a slow pace. She shivered slightly at the sight of the school in front of her that she had attended for the past 3 years. She just has to follow her normal everyday routine, go to school, eat lunch in the cafeteria, and after four more classes go home. A normal and average life of a third year college student. She mostly do it alone, though, since she doesn't have friends. She preferred to be alone than to be a rebel. She had been living in this world for twenty-three years that she knew who to avoid and it meant everyone in that school.

Today's the last week of August and everyone seemed to be so busy with their own lives.

Jessica took a deep breath and inhaled the scent of new grass and old money. Yes, this was a different world from what the books of history have said. Those books from seventeen years ago stated that the world was beautiful, with trees and all but those things would remain a history. What the world has now was buildings and other concrete and metal things. It's unbelievable how the world could evolve that fast.

She'd never fit in because she lived in those books. Books that was never real. She'd never fit in. Never. No matter how challenging the classes, how inspiring the teachers were, she wasn't prepared for the shaft of loneliness that struck her as friends greeted friends with shrieks and hugs after a long summer break. Oh, she might put on a brave face in front of others, but at heart she was not a loner, she has her father, her sister, her mom, and Mr. Go. They're enough. That's what she thought.

Unable to quell the hollow sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach, Jessica scanned the crowd, trying to pretend she was waiting for someone. Anyone.

Just when she thought she couldn't fake it another minute, a pink vintage convertible slowly cruised by. At the wheel was a white goddess. That was the only way to describe her.

"Who... is... that?" a girl on the sidewalk asked breathlessly.

"Some movie star?"

"A princess?"

The princess wore sunglasses. Her skin was the color of milk. Her hair danced in the color of light brown. Jessica stood rooted to her spot, staring as she drove past. If the first bell had rung she wouldn't have heard it. If the earth shook she wouldn't have felt it.

What she did feel was waves of heat rising from the sidewalk, traveling through her body until she was hot all over, causing heat to rise in her cheeks and her heart to pound. She never heard of this girl in school and to top it up, she has never heard of an English Goddess in a sports car.

A hush fell over the waves of students as the convertible turned, and just before it did, the girl turned her head and raised one hand in a half salute, half wave greeting to God knows who. Jessica couldn't help it. Her arm lifted all by itself, the duffel bag hit the floor, making the mask roll on the floor and the electric foil spilled on the floor as she waved back.

Why? She wasn't even waving at her. How could it be? Jessica didn't even know her and she didn't even know Jessica. To make things worse, there was a tiny cacophony of different voices behind her. She heard the unmistakable sound of guys and girls snickering. Had someone seen her making a fool of herself? Oh, please no. Was she bashed by her over flowing charm? Oh, please no.

She dropped her arm like it was made of lead and stuffed her things back in the duffel bag. The convertible continued on the circular drive on out the parking lot. No more snickers. Just silence. It was as if the whole

school was holding its collective breath until she disappeared into the mass of expensive parked flying cars.

The princess was gone and life went back to normal. For everyone but her. Shouts, cries and laughter filled the air. Jessica must have been the only one who'd waved at her like she was her friend or something. Now she felt like some kind of clueless dimwit.

Jessica didn't dare to look around to see if anyone was staring at her. She swallowed hard and glanced at her watch like being on time was her biggest concern. It was eight-thirty, but no bell rang. Did they really expect students to get to class on time if they didn't ring the bell?

She turned and paced to her first class. She arrived a minute earlier than their history teacher because he was also late. As soon as the teacher started the lesson, she was spacing out already, thinking about the princess until she felt sleepy. What a sleepy head she was.

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"Aish! It's three o'clock already! I don't even know where she is!" the girl blabbed to herself in fluent English, cursing her mom for not giving her some identification about the girl she wanted her to pick up.

She knocked on the last door on the third floor hoping that she's there. An old woman with specs commanded the door to open. The door opened in between, like an elevator door.

"I'm looking for a girl named Jessica Jung," the girl said to the old woman with her funny accent, a sign that she's a foreigner. She peeked inside the room and realized that everyone was looking at her with their mouth and eyes wide open.

The old woman pushed her shoulder just enough for her to be kept out the door. "Why are you looking for her?"

"It's none of your business! Just show her to me already!" She removed her sunglasses, a sign that she was losing patience.

Jessica heard it and she held up her head; she looked around for the source of the funny Korean accent. When she found it her face turned pale and her eyes grew wide.

Princess?

"Tell me why you need to see her first!"

And she's looking for me? Oh my gosh.

Jessica stood up and collected her things. She stood right next to her teacher. "Ma'am it's okay, I know her, and could you please excuse us?" The old woman averted her gaze to Jessica then to the girl who was holding the sunglasses and back to Jessica before giving a weak nod.

Jessica exited the class room and followed the girl since she was already walking away. She didn't even bother to look at Jessica; Jessica didn't even bother to ask her why she was looking for her. Suddenly, the girl stopped abruptly which resulted to Jessica bumping into her back accompanied by her things falling onto the floor.

The girl didn't say anything as she coolly collected Jessica's things.

"Here. Can you please lead the way out of this fudging building? I can't even remember which direction I came from," she said as she handed Jessica her bag. It's obvious that she's not in the mood to be polite.

"Okay. Hmm... is it okay if I ask you something?" Jessica asked as they started to walk.

"Go on." The girl stuffed her hand into her pockets.

"I saw you this morning, are you looking for me since then?"

"Yep, I was. I saw you too but I didn't know you were the one I was looking for," she said confidently.

"What took you so long to find me?"

"Aish! I never thought that looking for you was that hard! I knocked on every door that I passed by in this entire building and asked for a Jessica Jung!" she said while she flailed her hands in the air along with her funny accent, but Jessica found it cute and exploded in laughter soon after because of her slow reflexes. With that, the girl reminded herself to kill her mother later for not giving her identifications of Jessica.

"It's really hard to look for me here, I'm not famous y'know," Jessica said while turning her head to the other girl after her laugh subsided.

"Pfft, whatever." The girl acted as if she's offended, but she wasn't.

"And you can speak English now, I can understand. Don't worry," Jessica said in clear English. Her voice sounded different to the girl, it sounded softer and smoother and that made her voice seem sexier than before.

"Really? Thank God! I was really having a hard time speaking Korean," the girl excitedly exclaimed in English. Her voice kinda sounded different to Jessica, too. It sounded a bit huskier that it made her voice more seductive than before. *Maybe that's her real voice*, Jessica thought to herself.

They walked in silence for about 5 minutes and they're still on the 2nd floor of the huge building until the girl spoke.

"I'm Tiffany by the way, Tiffany Hwang," she said coolly.

Hwang? So it means she's the sister...

"I'm Jessica Jung," she replied absentmindedly.

"I know, my mom told me. She was the one who told me to pick you up."

Mrs. Hwang. Oh my God, don't tell me this is the day.

"Is my mom with her?" Jessica asked, making sure.

"Mrs. Jung? Yes, she is. We need to hurry, they're waiting for you."

They finally arrived on the parking lot and spotted the pink convertible easily because its color stood out among the rest. They got in with Tiffany as the driver and they rode off. At least the ride would be slow since they're using a normal car and not a flying car, but through the ride there's only one thing inside Jessica's mind.

Oh, please no.

CHAPTER 5:'REVELATION'



CHAPTER 5:'REVELATION'

They arrived at the Jung's Land five minutes later than the said time of three-thirty. They got off the car. Jessica led the way inside the building with Tiffany trailing behind her. It's huge, the walls were all glass, the colors inside were playing with white, black and silver starting from the tile of the floor to the sofas in the lobby to the elevator doors and even the information desk.

"Good afternoon, Miss Jung. Madame Jung is waiting for you in her office," greeted the girl on the information desk. Jessica just gave a nod.

"Good afternoon, Miss," every worker on the building greeted Jessica and she just gave a nod without a smile, just like a matured person. Tiffany was amazed; this girl in front of her was different from the laughing girl she's with just a while ago.

Jessica entered the building with a heavy heart. To Tiffany, she doesn't have any clue of what she's doing there. They got inside the elevator. Jessica pressed the number representing the ninth floor. In the short amount of time, they were the only ones inside the elevator, Jessica couldn't help but to tap her foot on the floor repetitively, fidgeting her fingers and sometimes tugging at the end of her hair and sighing deeply because of nervousness. She's just staring at the elevator door that if her eyes were beaming lasers, it would be broken by now.

"Are you okay?" Tiffany asked. She could really feel Jessica's uneasiness.

"Hmm?" She faced the girl behind her while biting her lower lip. "Uh, yeah, I'm okay," she said, unsure.

"Are you sure? It looks like you're going to cry. Is it your first time in an elevator?" Tiffany joked.

"Of course not!" Jessica then pouted. She's not used to people making fun of her.

"I'm just kidding!" Tiffany lightly patted her shoulder in a friendly gesture.

“It’s because you don’t understand. Try being in my place!” Jessica just couldn’t let this kid win.

It’s the fact. Tiffany doesn’t really understand this; she doesn’t really have any idea what Jessica was talking about. But she pushed that aside and instead, she has decided to make the girl smile.

Tiffany grabbed both Jessica’s shoulders with both her hands, and then pulled Jessica in her spot as she stepped forward to replace Jessica’s position.

“I’m standing in your place now. I don’t feel any difference.” Tiffany tapped on the floor of the elevator, pretending as if she’s looking for some hidden button to feel what Jessica was feeling. She turned around to look at Jessica with an innocent smile and a raised eyebrow.

That looked kinda funny to Jessica that she smiled unconsciously. How come this cool girl in front of her was a dork at the same time being sophisticated?

Tiffany was happy to make this girl smile. She never thought that that would be Jessica’s last smile for the next three days.

The door opened and Tiffany got out first followed by Jessica. Jessica was walking so slowly because she doesn’t want to face her mother. She’s not yet ready. Tiffany then turned around when she noticed Jessica was so slow, she grabbed Jessica’s left hand because her right hand was holding her duffel bag and dragged her.

“You’re so slow!” Tiffany said. She’s clearly annoyed. She dragged Jessica until they reached the door to Mrs. Jung’s office. No, Tiffany doesn’t know where Mrs. Jung’s office was and no, it’s not a lucky guess. It’s because it’s carved on the door with red LED lights: Mrs. Jung – Vice-President.

“Open,” Tiffany commanded the door, not bothering to use the door bell. The walls were metal and were thick that’s why they’re using doorbells to communicate with the people inside the room instead of a knock.

The door opened in between, revealing a standing Mrs. Jung talking to a sitting Mrs. Hwang and Leo. She stopped talking when the door opened and everyone looked in the direction of the opened door.

Tiffany walked in fast without any permission, still dragging Jessica that she almost tripped on the red carpeted floor. She then pulled Jessica in front of her, held her shoulder from behind and said, “She’s here now, I picked her up. Now, can I go?” to both Mrs. Jung and Mrs. Hwang.

Mrs. Jung looked at Mrs. Hwang, expecting an answer from her. They were talking with their eyes, until Mrs. Hwang nodded and stood.

“No, you stay.” Her voice was serious. Tiffany’s shoulder slumped as she whined like a kid. She knew that she’s not going to win against her mom’s words.

The whole time this was happening, Jessica was busy studying the whole room, her soon to be office. Until

her eyes landed on something. Someone. Leo. He has an earphone plugged on his ears and was busy looking at his iPod, probably looking for a good song to listen to. Jessica observed him intently from his black shoes, his gray pants, his stripped black and gray shirt with a vest, all in all-- preppy. When Jessica was about to look at his face, he turned up and met Jessica's eyes. He smiled along with his eye-smile that runs through the Hwang's blood. Jessica was shocked, he's... young! Probably thirteen years old, Jessica assumed.

How am I supposed to... Oh! If he's this young and tiffany's that old, it means Tiffany was the first born! Oh God...

Jessica's world was busy crashing down that she didn't notice Leo stood up and spoke, "Mom, can I go now? I don't think I'm even needed here." His voice was so deep and so manly it sounded like eighteen years old instead of thirteen years old.

"Sure, you can go now."

He kissed his mom on the cheeks and bid farewell. As soon as Leo got out of the door, Jessica's body slumped down on the sofa, her duffel bag fell hard on the floor but it was sealed so the things inside didn't spill and her breathing became hard.

"He can go and I can't? I'm the first born!" Tiffany annoyingly said.

"You're involved in this." Mrs. Hwang's voice was more than serious that it sent shivers through Tiffany's entire body.

The whole time the Hwangs were bickering, the Jungs were talking in their own world.

"Hon, you probably know by now." Mrs. Jung's voice was so smooth, a sign that she's sorry for her daughter.

"Mom, why you didn't tell me earlier?"

"I didn't know. I was only told today." She's trying so hard not to cry.

"Don't worry, Mom, I understand." Jessica couldn't look at her mom's eyes. But it's true, she understood, she was always been the understanding one. She couldn't do anything, could she? It's fixed and already written on the papers that even her parents couldn't do anything about it, and besides; she had made a decision, didn't she? That she's going to accept it... if it's a guy! But being it a girl, it's hard for her, but she'd try.

~.~

The four of them was sitting on the sofa. Quiet. Still couldn't determine whose going to start the revelation. The Jungs were sitting opposite the Hwangs. Tiffany have been observing them the whole time, shifting from

Mrs. Jung to Jessica and to Mrs. Hwang. They were acting strange.

They surely know something that I don't know.

"So are you going to tell me about this thing that you're hiding from me or not?" She couldn't take it anymore.

"Do you really want to know?" Mrs. Hwang said.

"She *needs* to know," Jessica said and Mrs. Hwang looked at her.

"Just tell her already," Mrs. Jung said then sent a nod to Mrs. Hwang.

"Come on, guys! You're killing me!" Tiffany was losing patience.

"OK." Mrs. Hwang took a deep breath. Jessica shut her eyes tight and hung her head low as she clutched her hands into fists as it lies on her lap.

This was it. No time to run. Jessica was trying to contain her tears.

"You're fixed to get married with Jessica," Mrs. Hwang said as she turned her head to her daughter who doesn't have any expression at all. Everyone relaxed because they thought it was okay with her.

It took a good minute of silence until Tiffany burst out in laughter.

"Whoa! You guys are the best actresses I ever knew! You almost got me there!" She said when her laughter subsided.

When she noticed that no one was laughing with her and just staring at her she said, "What?"

"We're serious," Mrs. Jung said. Just then Tiffany's eyes widen.

"Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Just tell me you guys are kidding me!" She said as she stood up. Everyone shook their head. They couldn't find the words to say, especially Jessica.

"Jessica do you know about this?" She turned her attention to Jessica. Jessica nodded slowly.

"Mom, how long have you been keeping this to me?" Her eyes were getting teary, as well as Jessica's.

"Ever since you were born." She couldn't look at her daughter's eyes as she hung her head low. Tiffany then slumped on the sofa with a heavy sigh.

"That long!? How did this happen?" She rubbed her temples as if it could help all the happenings sink in her brain.

"It was Grandpa Hwang and Grandpa Jung's dying wish. They were good colleagues that they decided to fix the marriage of their sons' first born which happened to be you and Jessica," Mrs. Hwang explained.

"In a marriage, you need a *guy* and a *girl*, they probably thought about that before fixing us! What made them so sure that one of the first born is going to be a guy?" Tiffany interrogated. It's okay for her to be fixed with a guy, because she's sure that she could keep up with that, but with a girl? That's hard for her even if it's this beautiful girl in front of her they're talking about.

"Grandpa Hwang was so sure that our first born would be a guy because the past one hundred years, the Hwang's first born was always a guy. It was a shock that when I gave birth to you, you were actually a girl, a beautiful girl... but Grandpa Hwang and Grandpa Jung were both already dead that time so we can't do anything to cancel the agreement." Mrs. Hwang felt like she lost her words while explaining that part.

"So, why are you only telling me this now?"

"Because you're in the right age now and the company was going down that we need to execute the marriage as soon as possible to save the company and that is with the help of the Jung's Land."

"When is the wedding?" Tiffany tried so hard not to cry, biting her lip.

"Fifteen days starting from now." It's hard for Mrs. Hwang to deliver all the information that it was Mrs. Jung who said that.

Starting from now, it means fourteen days left.

Fourteen days left before their freedom would be stolen.

"So is that the reason why we come back to Korea, Mom?"

"Yes." She still couldn't look at her daughter.

Tiffany hissed as she put her left hand on her forehead. She then stood up and dropped her hand to her side. She could now feel what Jessica was feeling earlier, she doesn't need to find any hidden buttons at all, just words.

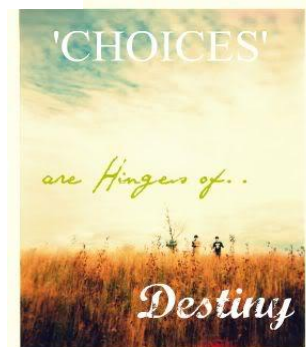
"I think I need to go. I need to be alone to clear up things in my mind and absorb what just happened." She left the room with wobbly legs that she almost tripped on the carpet.

"Mom, I'll go home. I'm so tired." Jessica picked up her duffel bag from the floor and kissed her mom goodbye.

"Bye, Mrs. Hwang." She waved at the old lady, who's trying to hold her tears and she responded with a nod and a forced smile.

She left the old ladies inside the office and got inside the elevator that Tiffany just walked in. They were the only ones inside the elevator again, just like a moment ago before all these things happened, both were quiet. The comfortable feeling a while ago just vanished and was replaced with awkwardness. Their feelings when they first saw each other were all vanished as well. Everything about their first meeting until this minute was all gone. All they have now were blank and dark hearts that when you shout you could hear an echo. They have to start new again.

CHAPTER 6:'CHOICES'



CHAPTER 6:'CHOICES'

It's been three days after the revelation and Jessica was trying hard not to remember the wedding by pushing herself to do school works. She worked and worked all day and when she got tired she'd take a rest by reading a book or going shopping. If she's not doing school work, she's doing all the things she wanted to do before getting married. She's keeping herself busy that she hasn't heard a word about how Tiffany was doing. She's actually not thinking about Tiffany but Mrs. Jung was always trying to convince her that she should share her beliefs to Tiffany so she would agree on the up-coming marriage but she managed to say no to her mom consecutively for the last three days. She doesn't care about Tiffany's opinion about the wedding. Jessica was just sitting around doing anything that doesn't concern Tiffany because she knew that whatever happens, they're still going to get married and even if she doesn't agree on this, Mrs. Jung would still insist, saying that Tiffany's approval was important too, not only Jessica's because it's hard to stay in a commitment for all of your remaining lives with a heavy heart. They would not agree on one thing, they would always fight and that meant stress for the two. It's not good especially if you're still studying. Mrs. Jung had a point, Jessica doesn't want to fight with Tiffany for the rest of her life and get stressed, and who would want that anyway? Now, Jessica was thinking twice on talking to Tiffany, she's fighting with a yes because she thinks of her future, and no because she simply just couldn't.

"Jessica, read the lead of this news," Mr. Cho said. She was now in her English class, as usual, killing herself with school works.

She stood up and read *"A recent study shows that the heart grows weaker every time we do something opposite of what we feel."* She then took her seat, gripping on the newspaper.

That quote made her think. If she continued to argue with Tiffany after the wedding because they couldn't agree on one thing, she probably would end up just following what Tiffany wanted so it meant it was the opposite of what she really wanted and that would mean her heart would grow weaker.

If my heart continues to grow weaker, it means I would die early. I don't want to die early!

Now her decision was 60% over 40% in favour of talking to Tiffany.

She didn't realize that it was actually the first time she thought about Tiffany the past three days.

Jessica was startled when the bell rang but she was happy. It's time to go home! But she's not happy because she could go home, but because today was Thursday so it meant she has fencing training and she loved fencing so much. She could release her stress by sparring with the training dolls.

She picked up her things on the desk and put it on her bag. She grabbed her duffel bag that has her fencing stuffs and ran out of the room. She really needed some stress reliever now with all of these things happening in her life.

She arrived in the fencing room down the basement and saw something posted on the door.

"Fencing training is cancelled today," she read aloud and groaned. Just when she needed some stress reliever, the training was cancelled. If she couldn't pour all her emotions now, she would explode anytime soon so she entered the password that she got when she once peeked on her coach, on the door.

As soon as it opened, Jessica quickly got inside because she was afraid that someone might see her. Once she got in, the door closed and she put her bags on the cold floor. She opened the duffel bag and took out her comfortable clothes and got changed quickly. After she was changed on her comfortable clothes, she took out her foil and gloves. She doesn't need the other stuffs since she's just going to practice alone.

She wore the gloves as she walked forward to the sparring doll; it was white and made of styrofoam. It looked so old since it has a lot of holes that came from the foils that had hit it.

Poor doll.

Jessica's eyes wandered around the room, her favourite room. The wall was made of mirror, especially made to look out for your stance, the cold concrete floor, and the other dolls that were waiting for a sparring partner, until her eyes landed on something. A paper that was sticking on the mirror. She walked in front of it and read what was written on it. It was the Fencing Club's infamous saying.

Life is a journey, keep going until you reach your destiny.

Jessica knitted her eyebrows.

And then it hit her. Sure, life was a journey and she's been a lot through it and still *going* through it.

Keep going until you reach your destiny. Keep going... Keep going... Keep going...

She kept thinking until it hit her again. Did God want her to keep going? To follow that 60% that's shouting 'talk to Tiffany'? That if she followed it, she would reach her destiny? And what could that destiny probably be?

Now her decision had changed to 80% over 20% still in favour of talking to Tiffany. But that could change anytime soon so she needed to think again.

“Ugh! Stupid quotations!” She groaned then she got back to her sparring doll.

She got into her fighting stance, legs opened widely, heels almost clicking and foil aimed at the poor doll with furious eyes.

“Aah!” She then attacked the doll repetitively. Not caring if she looked like a crazy freak since there was no one watching. All she wanted to do was to release her stress.

~.~

Jessica dropped herself on the floor, panting, not caring about the sweat that was dripping down her temples and the surface being cold.

She was panting hard because after she hit the doll with the foil on different areas, corresponding to different points, she grew tired and realized that that wasn't helping her so she started hitting the doll with her fist. Hard. Then harder. The doll responded by bouncing back at her but she managed to avoid those. She released all her anger on the poor doll that she made it looked like a boxing training rather than a fencing training. She punched and punched the doll until her fists ached and until she was out of energy and was exhausted.

She closed her eyes, still lying on the cold surface and her mouth parted, still panting. She tried to clear her mind, to not think about anything, especially the wedding, but the possibilities of what could happen after the wedding was still haunting her. Anything she did, she still couldn't clear her mind, even her aching fists did nothing, and that pissed her off.

“Ugh! Stupid wedding!” She grunted as she rubbed her palm on her face, transferring the sweat to her hands. Her panting gradually stopped.

She stood up and changed into new clothes. It's already five o'clock. She didn't noticed the time because she was busy punching the poor doll for one hour straight. She walked out of the room and the school stealthily. She doesn't want to be caught by the guard for staying late in the school.

When she was finally out of the school she turned right and started to jog.

I still need third opinion.

~.~

Jessica entered the huge old oak wood door of the place. It was huge and had a lot of wooden pews inside; the tiles were colored cream, the walls were red bricks, the ceiling has a lot of paintings of angels, and the first thing you would see when you got inside was the huge cross made of wood standing proudly on the altar.

She runs here every time she couldn't carry her burdens anymore and seek for help. God was always there to listen to her when she couldn't take whatever happened in her life anymore and this time was no different from the others. She's here to ask for an answer for thousands of questions that were running inside her head.

She took a seat on the nearest seat from the door. She just sat there, staring straight at the cross. There's no one there and it's so quiet that when you dropped a needle you could hear it clearly. In this quiet place she could think of all the things she was running from and have a peace of mind.

She closed her eyes and prayed. She couldn't bear it anymore, she needed someone to talk to and that person was God. She told God all her beliefs and all the things she wanted to release to at least lessen the heaviness and burdens of her heart, she asked guidance from God, to guide her in her every decision and to help her with deciding which path to take in her life, which to follow and which to not.

She opened her eyes when she was done and stood up briefly. She turned on her left and faced the door; she was ready to leave when her eyes landed on something, a paper that was on the floor. She picked it up and examined. It was actually a book mark that has something written on it.

Take time to ponder, but when the time for action has arrived, stop thinking and go for it.

After she read it, she clenched her chest and closed her eyes as she realized she'd already have all the time she needed to think and ponder. And now the time for action has arrived. She needed to grab the chance because she finally received an answer.

Go for it...

She smiled when she was thinking of Tiffany, on how to make her agree on the wedding.

The plan might be lame, but if she didn't try, she wouldn't know the outcome.

CHAPTER 7:'FREEDOM'



CHAPTER 7:'FREEDOM'

5 days after the revelation and Tiffany still couldn't accept it so she went to the club every night, enjoying her remaining freedom, only to go home in the morning. Like today.

She was now standing in front of her window beside a tree. She was contemplating on how she could climb up to get inside her room without anyone noticing her.

When she finally decided to climb up she planted her foot on the bark of the tree carefully, slowly but surely. She couldn't afford to fall from that tree right now even though she's dizzy. She finally got to her room from her window and once she was inside, she dropped herself on the bed, face first, and making some of the plushies topple onto the floor.

She was feeling dizzy because of all the alcoholic drinks she had drunk last night. She faced the clock on her night stand to check the time. 4:30am, it read.

"Ugh..." she groaned and closed her eyes.

And finally, after a minute of stable breathing and nothing to disturb her peace, she's off to dreamland.

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"Miss Hwang, please wake up," Mr. Baek tried to wake up his boss. He was wearing a silver vest, a black long sleeved polo, slacks and black shoes with a small notebook on his right hand to complete his ensemble. He stood beside Tiffany's bed, trying to wake the missy up.

"Uhhmm," she annoyingly replied.

"Miss, you have an appointment at 4pm and its 3pm already," he said calmly.

“Huh? How come? I didn’t know I have an appointment today,” she replied groggily with her head slightly lifted up, eyebrows meeting and one eye opened. She’s trying to adjust from the sudden brightness of her surroundings.

“Madame Hwang arranged it for you, Miss.”

“Ugh, what is it?” Her head was spinning and aching like hell but she managed to sit up on her bed while rubbing her temples.

Mr. Baek opened his notebook to check on her schedule. “You have to go to the place where the wedding would be held, Miss,” he said while reading on his notebook with reading glasses.

“Where is it?”

“Your car’s GPS was programmed to drive you there, Miss, just press Destination No.2,” he said with a smile.

“Okay.” She jumped out of the bed and grabbed a towel then headed to the bathroom.

“There’s food on the table if you’re hungry, Miss!” Mr. Baek shouted before walking out of her room.

Tiffany smiled because of Mr. Baek’s kindness. Though he already knew that Tiffany came back from clubbing last night, he never mentioned anything about it to Mr. And Mrs. Hwang. He’s trustworthy.

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After a couple of minutes, she’s finally done taking a bath. She got out of the bathroom with a bath robe and headed to the walk-in closet.

She stared at the pile of hanged dresses, shirts and even shorts. She picked the simplest clothes she has. A white semi-translucent off shoulder shirt that lay down to her hips and a short denim shorts. She put them all and admired herself in the mirror, like how she admired Jessica the first time she saw the girl.

Tiffany then shook her head. Why was she thinking about Jessica all of a sudden? It’s just too weird for her. She grabbed her black high heels and put them on. On her way out of the closet, she grabbed her black shoulder bag that has all her necessities inside. She took a last look at herself in the mirror, until she saw that something was missing.

Her hair was in a mess! She brushed it and tied it in a loose bun with her bangs laid down to her eyebrows. That hair fitted perfectly with her simple outfit.

Oh how she wished making wise decisions would be as easy as choosing clothes, shoes and hair style that

when you looked at your decision in a much wider view, it's perfect. But in life, sometimes you would forget to look at some points, like how she forgotten about her hair, but, then again, if your decisions were right, it would just look perfect.

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"Mom, I'm leaving!" Tiffany shouted once she finished eating while walking coolly to the front door. There was a maid standing there, waiting for her.

"Miss, here's the key to your car," the maid said as she handed the key to Tiffany. She grabbed it without even bothering to say thank you.

"Why should I? That's their job, we pay them for that!" was her answer every time someone was saying that she should say thank you.

The front door opened by itself, revealing Tiffany's car waiting in the front lawn with a butler beside the driver's door.

Tiffany walked to the driver's seat and the butler opened it for her. Once she was inside, she dropped her bag on the passenger's seat and took out her black sunglasses from it. She wore them then started the car and pressed 'Destination No.2' on her touch screen GPS. The car started to move on its own and went out of the huge gate of the Hwang's TaeCsion. It was programmed like that, no need for a driver. After a minute of just sitting there watching the road, she suddenly felt sleepy.

She really could use a nap right now; the car could manage on its self. Besides, sleeping was her only escape from this nightmare called reality.

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Tiffany started to feel hot from where she was sitting --inside her car-- because of the sun rays that were perforating her skin. It annoyed her so she opened her eyes in panic as she remembered that she's going to the wedding place. Once she opened her eyes all she saw was darkness.

Dark? How come I can feel heat on my skin?

Just then it hit her. She's still wearing her black sunglasses! She didn't know if she should be mad at herself for making fun of herself or happy for the police who was on the road thought that she was awake the whole time because he couldn't see her eyes.

"Aish..." she hissed and got out of the car. She was shocked at what she saw.

The wedding place was actually on the... beach! She just stood there, completely stupefied with her mouth opened. She took off her sunglasses and observed the place attentively.

There was a lot of people there, busy doing each work given to them. But the scene that caught her eyes was a group of men, not because of their masculine body, but because of the things they were doing. Some were working on the platform stage; some were at the ark in front of the platform stage. That would be the altar, she guessed.

The second thing that caught her eyes was the view just right in front of her. The place was facing the west so the sunset looked great on it. Everything seemed to be colored orange, even the sand that used to be white looked orange and the water that used to be blue was now colored orange. It was the best scene she had ever seen.

Tiffany looked around, in search for the one who planned the wedding. She's sure it's not her mom because she never asked Tiffany where she wanted the wedding to be held, probably not her dad, he never asked too, till she saw a man beside the group of working men she saw a while ago, about five feet tall with a masculine body. He's not doing anything; he's just standing there, checking some stuffs on his clipboard.

He must be the planner.

She walked to his direction, not caring about the sand that was sticking to her feet and approached the guy.

"Hey, are you the wedding planner?" she said. The man's back was facing her.

"Oh! Hi, Miss Hwang, but I'm sorry I am not the one who planned this," he said, being polite to Tiffany.

"What? Then who?" She was really curious now.

"Me," said the voice behind her.

"Y-You?!" Tiffany said once she already turned around. Shock was hinted on her voice.

"Yes, me," Jessica said proudly with a smile.

"How did you know I want a beach wedding?"

"I called your house two days ago to ask your parents but it seems that they're not at home so it was Mr. Baek I asked," she stated simply.

And a memory came back to Tiffany.

--Flashback--

Tiffany was inside the car with Mr. Baek driving. They were from school and now heading to the beach, like Tiffany wished.

Once they arrived at the beach, Tiffany jumped out of the car happily. She's so excited to go to the seashore and play with the sand and the water, her childishness made Mr. Baek chuckle.

"Come here, Mr. Baek!" she said as she grabbed the old man's hand and dragged him to the seashore.

"Look there!" She pointed at a direction and Mr. Go followed it with his eyes till he saw what Tiffany was pointing at. It was a wedding happening on the beach while the sun was setting.

"That's a wedding, Miss," he said politely.

"Wedding? What's that?" she asked. Confusion was clear on her face.

"It's a ceremony done when you and the person you love want to be together forever," he explained.

"Ohhh..." After that, there was a minute of silence until... "Mr. Baek!" Tiffany said excitedly while tugging at the sleeves of his polo. "When I grow up, I want a wedding in the beach too!" She said with a spark on her eyes.

"Oh, Miss, don't think about that yet. Focus on your study first. You're still young. How old are you again?" he asked.

"Nine!" she said excitedly with her nine fingers spread out evenly in front of him.

"See, you're still young. Now we need to go home. Your mom might be looking for you now," he said with a chuckle and guided Tiffany to the car.

"I'm so excited on my wedding!" Tiffany said while sending eye-smiles to the old man once she was seated on the passenger's seat. Mr. Baek just looked at her with a smile. He glanced every once in a while at her while driving until Tiffany fell asleep.

--End of flashback--

Mr. Go. He still remembers, Tiffany thought.

There was a minute of silence until Jessica spoke.

"Tiffany, can you come with me for a while?" She said, expecting a yes as an answer.

Tiffany just nodded though she's not sure why she did. Jessica led the way in the direction of the sea shore,

facing the sunset. Tiffany just followed her. Once they're at the sea shore, Jessica stopped and so was Tiffany.

"Tiffany, I know it's hard. If you think it's easy for me, well I'm telling you it's not," she started while looking at the beautiful view in front of them.

"Just get straight to the point." Tiffany was growing impatient.

Jessica had her hands inside the pocket of her trench coat the whole time. She clenched her hands into a fist and eyes shut tight, trying to contemplate and decide on what to do next. She couldn't think of any. Heck! God knows how much she had tried to think! She just gave up and proceeded on the first thing that entered her mind.

"Tiffany, please marry me!" she said as she knelt beside Tiffany. She took Tiffany's hand and held the ring's box on the other.

There went Jessica's plan-- propose to Tiffany whenever she could. *Lame. Totally lame.*

"Wh- wha- what?!" was all that Tiffany could utter. She's facing Jessica now. She's completely shocked and it's obvious in her face with her eyes opened wide.

"You know we can't do anything about this..."

I know.

"But, at least, I want us to be willing to do this and I am willing."

I don't know if I am.

"I know I'm not the man or the girl of your dreams..."

That's good you know.

"But no one could actually say that you deserve better because the best thing that you deserve will always be your choice."

I don't know what to choose anymore.

"Probably you're thinking that I want to steal your freedom, I don't really mean to, but please..."

That's why I don't want to marry you.

"Please, marry me?"

Jessica said all this while looking straight into Tiffany's eyes and using her most sincere voice. Jessica doesn't

know why she's doing this. She just felt like she needed to.

If anyone would see them in this setting they would think that they're totally in love with each other. With the sunset, the sand, the water and the soft wind blowing their hairs, "*Love is in the air*" was the only thing they would say. If only they knew all the things behind that beautiful scene.

Tiffany couldn't utter a word. She just stood there, staring at the kneeling girl in front of her with her expecting eyes. She has to think of a remedy, at least. She couldn't just give up everything with this girl and take all the credits. And luckily, unlike Jessica, she has thought of a remedy.

"Okay, I will," she said, making Jessica smile wide. "But!" she continued, causing Jessica's smile to fade. "You need to meet me exactly seven days from now. We need to talk about something," she finished in a serious tone.

"Okay. So, uhm.... can I put this on you now?"

"Hurry, because this scene is so corny," Tiffany said though inside she loved the setting. It was the best proposal a girl could ever wish.

Jessica put the box on the sand, not letting go of tiffany's hand; she took the ring out of it and aimed it at Tiffany's ring finger. This was it; no turning back. Tiffany was accepting this and so was Jessica. It seemed to be in slow motion when Jessica was putting the ring, both of them reminiscing their past that they knew they couldn't look back once the marriage was done and the future that they will be living in one house and sleeping in one room. Just when the ring finally reached the end of Tiffany's finger, they both looked at each other with the same look.

This is it.

CHAPTER 8:'GAG'



CHAPTER 8:'GAG'

Jessica arrived at the Hwang's seven days later, like Tiffany said. She's now standing in front of their house, waiting for someone to answer the doorbell. Just then there was a buzzing sound, signaling that someone was in the intercom's screen that was placed in the post where the huge metal gate was connected.

"Oh hi, Jessica!" It was Mr. Hwang with his bright smile on the screen.

"Hello, Mr. Hwang," she replied politely.

"Come on in!" Just then the gate opened by itself and let Jessica in.

She walked inside. The distance between the front gate and the house was really far that it took Jessica five minutes to reach the front door of the house. The moment she stepped in front of the huge wooden door, it opened; revealing a full view of the red carpeted grand stairs and the long trail of maids on the left and butlers on the right from the door to the bottom landing of the stairs. They looked like an army guarding those two important personnel on the stairs.

"Hi, Jessica," Mr. And Mrs. Hwang greeted as they walked down the stairs hand in hand with their office attires.

"Hello, Sir and Ma'am," she replied with a ninety degrees bow.

"Oh, please don't call us sir and ma'am," Mrs. Hwang said with a giggle.

"Yes, Miyeon is right," Mr. Hwang butted in.

"Aish, I said stop calling me with my Korean name! I want my English name, Ernest!" Mrs. Hwang said as she pinched her husband's shoulder, resulting to a laughing Mr. Hwang.

"Fine! Sophia!"

Jessica, witnessing this sweet scene in front of her, made her wish that someday her and Tiffany would be like them. Though they're already married for years, they still acted like a newlyweds; but Jessica knew very well that that's just simply impossible.

"Anyways, since we're going to be a family soon, feel free to call us Mom and Dad," Sophia said with a smile.

"Okay M-Mom and Dad." She's not used to calling anyone mom and dad other than her biological ones.

"So, what brings you here, Jessica?" Mr. Hwang said.

"I came here to talk to Tiffany, Si—Dad."

"Oh, she's at the back, swimming." Mrs. Hwang pointed her thumb behind her with a knowing smile.

"You should go to her now. Sorry we can't entertain you because we need to head back to work now, you know we only have an hour lunch break in the office. I never imagined that the branch here is much busier than the main one in Scorchwood," Mr. Hwang joked with a short laugh.

Despite them being busy all the time, they still see to it that they eat lunch and dinner in their house with the whole family. That's how the Hwangs valued their family.

Jessica just nodded with a small smile. Maybe having the Hwangs as her in-laws wouldn't be that bad, seeing how kind they were. Well, if you exclude Tiffany. She suddenly frowned when she remembered the girl.

"Hana!" Mrs. Hwang called and a maid approached them. "Lead her to the back of the house."

"Yes, Madame." The maid bowed to the elders. "This way, Ma'am" Hana said, gesturing her opened palm to a certain direction, then she started walking without looking at Jessica because she kept her head down as a sign of respect.

When they reached the back of the house, Hana opened the screen door for Jessica and left her there.

The moment she stepped out of the door, the scene that greeted her made her stand there like a statue, completely stupefied, not because of the beautiful garden with green grass and different colored flowers on her left, but because of the unidentified-shaped swimming pool filled with clear water on her right with a mermaid swimming there in her two piece bikini.

Jessica walked near the pool and the said mermaid stopped swimming as soon as she felt Jessica's presence.

The following scene made Jessica stupefied yet again. Everything seemed to be in slow motion, from when Tiffany climbed out the pool, letting the water from her hair fall down to her face, down to her jaw, neck, shoulder and collar bones, to her chest, down to her sexy abs and perfectly curved hips and finally

down to her milky white legs. Even the way she walked to Jessica's direction seemed to be in slow motion. And what did Jessica do? She stopped walking in mid track, looking stunned as if she'd been dropped into an alternate universe.

"Hello?" Tiffany said while waving her hands in front of the latter.

"Earth to Jessica!" Her voice and hot breath made Jessica snap her back to her senses only to realize that Tiffany's face was only an inch away from hers. She blinked twice before taking one huge step backward, slightly shaking her head.

"You came earlier than I expected," Tiffany said, oblivious, as she walked to one of the lay-out chairs and grabbed her bath robe off of it before wrapping herself with it; not even bothering to let her body dry.

"Follow me," she stated simply before walking inside the house and to her room.

Once they were inside the room, Tiffany took out a brown folder out of her night stand while Jessica was just trailing behind her like a puppy to its master.

Jessica felt like Tiffany was already planning their divorce even before they get married.

"Read," Tiffany commanded like a real master as she passed the folder to Jessica before proceeding to sit on her bed.

It was a contract stating what they should and shouldn't do inside their marriage but most of the paper was blank, only waiting for them to decide what were the do's and don'ts.

Jessica closed the folder. Her hands were trembling and were itching to rip it into two or more pieces. If only she could, but she knew very well that she couldn't, so she calmed her pumping nerves down.

Tiffany took it as a cue to begin.

"Rule number one, you'll follow everything I say."

"Aren't you feeling cold? I think you should change your clothes fir—"

"Rule number two, don't make Tiffany repeat herself," Tiffany butted in. She could sense very well what Jessica wanted to do-- to delay this. But Tiffany was serious about this.

Jessica tried to calm herself down with inhaling and exhaling slowly.

"Rule number three, whatever I need, YOU will be the one to provide," Jessica stated.

"Rule number four, you'll wear the tux in the wedding BUT you'll carry my surname since I was expected to be the guy and also, we need to act sweet like we're so into this marriage when our parents are around."

WTH? Why don't she wear the tux since she was supposed to be the guy?! Jessica was heating up.

"Fine. Rule number five, you won't do anything to harm the nature." It was Jessica's turn to state her rules down.

"Pfft, nature freak," Tiffany said with an unbelievable look.

"Rule number six, you won't call me anything other than Jessi—"

"AND one of the most important rules," Tiffany butted yet again, "Rule number seven, neither of us can fall in love with each other and if that happened... we need to divorce."

Tiffany stood up and gave Jessica a pen. "Sign."

Jessica stared at the space provided for her signature, her heart heavy. She doesn't want to do this! And the fact that Tiffany was making this marriage seemed only like a business made her heart more heavy.

She closed her eyes tight. *I don't want to do this!* She screamed inside but she still signed.

She passed the folder to Tiffany and she stared at the contract with the same manner like Jessica did. She doesn't want to do this either but she needed to. She couldn't fail her parents but she needed to protect herself too so she did this.

Jessica, I don't want to do this but I need to. She bit her lower lip and signed the contract.

Jessica suddenly remembered one of the most important rules that were written on the contract that made her feel like she wanted to rip the paper into the tiniest bits of pieces. It was...

After two years of living together, we will be automatically divorced without anyone of us initiating it.

CHAPTER 9:'BREVITY'



CHAPTER 9:'BREVITY'

This was their last night. Last night of freedom. And their last night before the wedding.

Tiffany couldn't stop thinking of their wedding tomorrow afternoon, like what's planned, because sun sets in the afternoon and the view would be great. The Hwangs were now on their way to Noma Restaurant which served haute cuisine.

"Why do we have to meet someone whom we've already met before? I could be having my beauty sleep now," Tiffany whined at the back seat of their family's limousine car.

"It's the tradition, Honey," Sophia simply stated and that shut Tiffany up.

Tiffany averted her gaze to the window, looking at everything that passed by their car.

Yeah right. Those stupid traditions!

~.~

The Jungs arrived at the restaurant just in time but they were greeted by the Hwangs who had arrived early.

"Good evening!" The Hwangs greeted them with a bow and the Jungs did the same.

"Tiffany, what are you doing?" Sophia hissed at her daughter who didn't even bother to stand up.

Tiffany stood up half-heartedly without looking at the Jungs and bowed ninety degrees while holding the neck line of her white Versace dress. "Good evening," she greeted before sitting down earlier than the others and darted her eyes to the window, looking at the view of the supposed-to-be blue sea, but since its night, it was black.

"Mr. and Mrs. Jung, do you already have plans?" Sophia asked as they started eating.

"I think we should follow the traditions," Mr. Jung answered.

"On the first night, the two would be sleeping at our house in different rooms," Mrs. Jung continued.

That's the tradition, the first night they would be sleeping on different rooms so that the second night, where they surely missed each other, they would make sure to give their parents a grandchild.

"Jessica decided to live in Scorchwood with you and continue her study there."

"So, it means that the next morning she would fly with us back to Scorchwood?" Sophia asked with a smile.

"Yes," Mr. Jung answered.

"We might as well continue the tradition that even though we're in Scorchwood, on the second night they would be locked up in their room and starting from there, they would be sleeping in one room," Ernest stated.

Tiffany choked with her drink when Mr. Hwang said that and Jessica dropped her spoon on the plate.

The elders looked at the two but they gave an apologetic smile.

What?! Why do they have to lock us up in one room? As if like we're gonna have a child! Tiffany thought as she downed the water.

Oh, no! I don't want to be alone with this girl in one room! That would be awkward, Jessica thought as she resumed eating.

"So, where are we?" Sophia asked.

"I forgot. But, oh well, please help our Jessica to enroll in Tiffany's school so they won't get separated," Mrs. Jung pleased.

"Sure, we'll take care of her," Ernest assured.

"Tiffany, can you please tell us something about yourself?" Mr. Jung butted in.

Tiffany looked at him for a mere second, shocked with the change of topic. "Well, I'm twenty-three years old, currently in my third year in Tourism. I need to study a lot of language since our company has a lot of branches all over the world and they said that I would soon take over the company. I don't play any sports other than volley ball but I do join beauty contests. My hobby is drag racing. Right now I'm looking forward to having a happy family with the Jungs," she stated with her sincerest smile.

Too cool for me, Jessica thought.

"How about you, Jessica?" Ernest asked.

"Uhm, I'm twenty-three and currently in my third year in Computer Engineering. I love reading. I'm involved into sports like Fencing and Archery. And I'm also looking forward to having a happy family with the Hwangs," she said with a smile.

Old-school, nerd, computer geek, Tiffany thought.

"Seems like the two of you are really taking your studies seriously, huh?" Mr. Jung joked.

"By the way, the pre-nuptial video that we shoot for two days was already done and was sent along with the invitation to the guests," Sophia stated.

"That's good to hear," Mrs. Jung said.

The elders seemed to lose their words. There was a long silence that only the clashing of spoons and forks in the plates was the only thing to be heard. Tiffany and Jessica didn't even look at each other while the elders focused on the food.

Till it's already time to leave.

"It's getting late. I think we should go now," Mr. Jung said as he stood and Mrs. Jung and Jessica followed. The three of them bowed.

The Hwangs rose and bowed to them.

"Good bye. Take care," Sophia stated.

"Excuse me, Mom and Dad, can I borrow Tiffany for a short time? I just wanna show her something. I promise she'll be home before ten," Jessica asked expectantly.

What's up with this girl now? Was that the effect of the raw meat that we ate? Tiffany asked herself.

Ernest glanced at his wristwatch. It read 08:45.

"Sure. Just make sure she'll be home safe, okay?" he assured.

"And don't tire her too much. She still needs her beauty rest and you too, for your wedding tomorrow," Sophia said with a teasing smile.

Jessica bowed, "Yes, Mom."

“Mom, we’re riding my car, okay? You go home with Dad. Take care,” Jessica said as she kissed her own parents on the cheeks and dragged Tiffany out the cafe.

~.~

“Now, where are you taking me?” Tiffany asked boringly in the passenger seat while Jessica was driving in spite that she’s wearing heels along with her white Alexander McQueen dress.

“You’ll see,” she simply replied with a smile.

~.~

Mr. and Mrs. Jung got out of the car only to see Jessica’s car already parked on its place and their eyes only caught a glimpse of the girls’ silhouette running at the back of the house.

“Where are they going?” Mrs. Jung asked.

“Maybe Jessica wants Tiffany to see her sanctuary,” Mr. Jung said with a smile.

“Wow, that’s new. She doesn’t let anyone to see her sanctuary.”

“That’s good for her. She’s slowly opening herself up with Tiffany.”

The two are happy for their daughter because finally she’s slowly learning how to open up with Tiffany.

The two shrugged their shoulders and went inside the house to take their rest because tomorrow would be a busy day.

~.~

“Whoa, what is this place? Is this for real?” Tiffany asked in amazement as she saw a hundred apple trees around her. She never thought about seeing a place like this in a modernized generation where everything was already concrete.

Jessica dragged her up to the hammock and they sat on it. “Pretty, isn’t it?” she asked as she gazed up in the dark sky in between the tree’s branches and towards the moon. “I will miss this place,” she said bitterly.

Tiffany suddenly felt a stinging pain in her heart, knowing she's the reason why Jessica has to leave this place.

"Are you Snow White? You surely have a lot of apples here," She tried changing the subject, resulting in a laughing Jessica. After the laugh subsided, there was a long silence.

"I like this place. It's so pretty and quiet... like you," Tiffany absentmindedly said as she laid herself on the hammock sideways, gaining herself a better view of the sky.

Jessica giggled. "If this place is pretty and quiet like me, does that mean that you would easily fall..." She looked at Tiffany and continued, "...asleep with me?" She giggled louder when the sleeping Tiffany beside her didn't respond, it only proved that she was really asleep.

After a minute of appreciating the surrounding, memorizing every inch of the field, and watching the beauty of the star and the girl beside her, Jessica glanced at her watch. It was already 09:30.

"Hey, you can't sleep here! I promised your parents you would be home before ten!" Jessica shook Tiffany and she woke up while rubbing her eyes.

Jessica clicked a button on her watch and spoke, "Mr. Go, please prepare the car and go to the front door."

She dragged the poor girl up to their front door where Mr. Go was already waiting.

"Please take her home safely, Mr. Go," Jessica ordered her butler when Tiffany was already in the passenger seat with her eyes closed, again.

"Yes, Miss." And the window closed. The car started hovering up and started moving away from Jessica. She just stood there and watched until the car drifted out from sight.

She scratched the back of her head. "Too bad, you didn't receive a goodnight kiss from me." Then she giggled a little louder, turned around and started jogging up the stairs up to her room.

~.~

(in the car)

"Too bad, you didn't receive a goodnight kiss from me," Mr. Go heard from his wristwatch. He glanced at Tiffany to see if she's awake. But she has her eyes closed.

Jessica forgot to cut the call from her wristwatch and Mr. Go just cut it from his. He was shocked as to how the way Jessica said that. He never heard the girl said those kinds of words before. He's not sure if that was

intended or not. And he doesn't know what to feel if Tiffany heard that.

Oh well, too bad. Tiffany wasn't sleeping at all. She heard it *loud and clear*.

CHAPTER 10:'MARRIAGE'



CHAPTER 10:'MARRIAGE'

This was the big day. The big day that the elder Jungs and Hwangs were waiting for, but not the younger Jung and Hwang.

"Honey, aren't you done yet?" Mrs. Jung asked as she knocked on Jessica's walk-in closet's door.

"Just a few minutes, Mom," Jessica responded.

"Why are you taking so long in there, by the way?" Mrs. Jung asked in concern but the latter didn't respond. Instead, she took a final look at herself at the mirror with a problematic face.

"I'm not comfortable with what I am wearing, Mom," Jessica finally said as she snuck her head out through the door of her walk-in closet.

"Come out here, let me see."

And the girl obeyed.

As she stepped out of the closet with a white tuxedo that hugged every right places of her slim body perfectly, her mom's eyes started to grow bigger. She never imagined her daughter could be this handsome.

"Why-- it looks good on you, my dear!" Mrs. Jung complimented.

Her hair was laid straight down her shoulders with a simple wave at the tip. She's so simple right now yet the way she carried the tux was so good.

"Thanks, Mom. But, come on! This is *MY* wedding and I am wearing a tux?! I was dreaming of a wedding dress!" She complained as her mom ruffled her hair.

"Come on, we don't want the Hwangs waiting," Mrs. Jung smiled sincerely to her daughter before pulling her

out of their house and inside the male's wedding car.

Mrs. Jung didn't want to talk about this wedding because just thinking about her daughter being owned by Tiffany made her heart ache --like what typical parents feel when their daughter/son were getting married-- but she knew this was the right thing to do.

They'll learn to fall in love eventually.

~.~

"Aww, you're so pretty, Darling," Sophia complimented her daughter.

Tiffany took a final spin and looked at herself in the mirror. She's wearing a beautiful wedding dress and light make-up to make it more natural. She admired her reflection in the mirror before hugging her mom.

"Thank you, Mom."

"Aww, my baby is all grown up now. *MY* baby that I tried so hard to feed for the past twenty-three years is now struggling to get out of our hands," Sophia whined like a kid.

"Mom! Stop that!" Tiffany giggled as she hit her mom's arm --arms that used to comfort her when she's sad, arms that helped her up when she's down, and arms that used to rock her to sleep when she was a kid-- "It doesn't fit you, okay?" And they giggled together.

"Few hours from now, you wouldn't be ours anymore but Jessica's," Sophia stated, serious.

"We trust her so you trust her too, okay? Don't order her around and don't bully her!" Sophia knew her daughter.

I would be Jessica's property from now on. I'm not saying she can't protect me, actually, by the looks of it, I actually feel safe around her.

Tiffany smiled. "Sure, Mom. Let's go! I don't want to be late on my wedding ceremony!" With that, she dragged her mom out of the house, causing all the things she passed by trip on her amazingly wide dress.

When they reached the female's wedding car, Tiffany seemed to have a problem. The car was small compared to her wide dress.

She contemplated for a bit and finally thought of an option. "Oh, as much as I hate to do this, I don't have a choice. Mom, you will sit on the passenger seat okay?" And her mom nodded.

She pressed herself inside the car until there was not a part of her dress flowing out the door of the car

before closing it. The dress amazingly occupied all the spaces of the back seat.

“Phew,” she breathed out. The car drove away and she started to feel hot. Having three persons crowded in the small car plus the petticoat of her dress wasn’t doing any help.

Ugh, my make-up! she worried.

Her mom saw her facial expression on the rear view mirror. “Honey, we’re almost there, just relax.” She might have thought that Tiffany was having cold feet.

“Sure, Mom,” was all that she replied before fanning herself with her hand.

~.~

Jessica couldn’t stop fidgeting with her hands as she paced back and forth on the right side of the arch where she’s standing beside her father, waiting for her bride. The priest was already there and ready, also the few guests that were mostly both Hwang’s and Jung’s company’s share holders.

“Why is she taking so long?” she mumbled under her breath.

She felt a hand took a hold of her tensed shoulders. “Relax, she’s coming. Don’t worry” Mr. Jung smiled sweetly to his daughter --his sweet, adorable, matured and obedient daughter.

“Thanks, Dad.” And they hugged. She looked straight till her eyes met her mom’s. The older girl nodded, so was she. She missed these stuffs. Feeling her father’s arms around her like he used to when she was a kid. She felt like crying, but she knew she couldn’t, it’s her wedding day!

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the female’s wedding car arrived, (if it didn’t arrive any time soon Jessica might have run away from this wedding) and Sophia got out first before helping Tiffany out.

Jessica stopped fidgeting and pacing back and forth as she focused on her bride, trying so hard to get out of the small car though she couldn’t see her face because of the distance. After a minute or so, Sophia managed to get Tiffany out of the car with a few sweat droplets on her forehead since no one bothered to help her.

The two of them bowed in apology for being late to all the guests.

Ernest walked to his daughter’s side, as Sophia took a seat in the front row, with Tiffany’s boquet and handed it to her as he put Tiffany’s wedding veil on for her to cover her face.

“Let’s go?” He asked his daughter with all smiles. Tiffany nodded.

~.~

"The wedding shall start now," The priest announced and the background song played.

It was expected to have no Groomsmen but it was a shock that the Bridesmaid didn't arrive.

Figures, Tiffany thought as she shook her head in disbelief that her Bridesmaid didn't arrive.

Though Krystal was too old to be the flower girl, she still accepted the role. She couldn't say no to her only sister. She walked in the center aisle sending a smile to her sister till she reached the end and took her seat.

Leo was trailing behind her as the ring bearer. Though he's already too old to be the ring bearer he couldn't say no to his sister too. Plus, Tiffany threatened him.

"I'm going to make you marry her if you refuse!" she once told her little brother.

"Okay! I'll be the ring bearer." He couldn't say anything other than that especially when Tiffany's eyes were piercing through him.

"All rise for the bride," the priest announced and everyone obeyed. They all looked at Tiffany in awe because she looked gorgeous in her wedding dress.

Tiffany walked ever so slowly down the aisle, her hand wrapped around her dad's arm. She's looking at everyone but Jessica. She couldn't bear to look at her especially when just a glimpse of her wearing a tuxedo made her heart flutter. And Jessica looking intently at her didn't help at all, as if she could see through Tiffany's veil. Jessica was all smiles and Tiffany wondered why.

Finally, after what felt like forever --for Jessica-- they arrived at the end and Ernest was ready to give her daughter's hand to Jessica.

Jessica bowed ninety degrees and didn't look up until she felt a hand on her shoulder. Ernest was smiling at her and she smiled back.

"She's all yours now. Please take good care of her," he whispered to Jessica as they hugged.

"Yes, Dad," was all that she answered before walking past him and to her bride.

Man, I swear this is getting corny! We're not even in love and they're acting like we are and this is a serious thing! Tss, Jessica thought. *But I can't blame them, I'm sure it's hard for them too, like how hard this is for us.*

Jessica offered her left arm to Tiffany and led her to the arch where the priest was waiting.

Along with them kneeling in front of the priest were the guests sitting down on their chairs.

The priest started the ceremony but neither of the two was listening. They were whispering to each other.

“Who chose that car?! I’m so gonna kill that person for choosing a very small one!” Tiffany hissed under her breath.

“Who chose that gown anyway?” Jessica replied with a smile and Tiffany knew what the meaning of that smile was.

“Shut up,” she hissed because she knew very well to herself that she chose that gown.

After ten minutes of singing, giving away of the bride, praying and the charge to bride and groom it was now the pledge.

“Jessica/Tiffany, will you have Tiffany/Jessica to be your wife/husband, to live together as friend and mate? Will you love her as a person, respect her as an equal, sharing joy as well as sorrow, triumph as well as defeat. And keep her beside you as long as you both shall live?”

Aish, as if like I can say ‘I don’t’! As much as I want to, I can’t disappoint them, Jessica thought.

I don’t! I’d rather haul King Crab from the frigid Bearing Sea onto a sinking trawler in an ice storm than marry this girl! Tiffany thought.

“I Do,” they both said.

They stood up and faced each other and started their vow.

“I love you Jessica/Tiffany as I love no other. All that I am I share with you. I take you to be my husband/wife through health and sickness, through plenty and want, through joy and sorrow, now and forever, till death do us part.” They both said in unison as they slid the wedding rings in their left ring finger.

Those three words ‘I love you’ were hard for them to say especially when they don’t really have feelings towards each other. *Yet.*

“I now pronounce you, husband and wife.” Then everyone applauded.

The two smiled to the guests though they couldn’t really see Tiffany since her face was covered with the veil.

“Jessica, you may now kiss your bride.”

Everyone chanted but both couldn’t hear anything other than their hearts beating abnormally fast. Jessica

lifted her hands up and unveiled Tiffany's face slowly.

"Don't tell me you're going to kiss me?!" Tiffany hissed through gritted teeth.

"Why not? You said act sweet in front of our parents, right?" Jessica hid her words with a smile.

Tiffany couldn't say anything anymore when Jessica started leaning forward, cupping her flushed cheek with both hands. She hated this part of the wedding, really! She took a deep breath, her heart still beating fast, and held it in since she has no choice but to receive this kiss.

Jessica swallowed hard as her heart never stopped beating fast. She already has a plan. This was going to be fast, like nothing happened.

Both hearts were beating faster and faster at each gap that closed in between them. Jessica held her breath and Tiffany waited for the impact on her lips. Both eyes were tightly shut, also the world around them were shut. They couldn't hear anything, anyone.

Until Tiffany felt something soft landed on her lips.

Is this it? She asked herself.

But was shocked and relieved to realize that it was Jessica's thumb that landed on her lips and not Jessica's lips. Since Jessica's hand was on Tiffany's cheek, she positioned it carefully for no one to see that she covered Tiffany's lips with her thumb before kissing her own thumb, fast, so that no one would catch.

Jessica backed away and let out the breath she'd been keeping, same with Tiffany.

"I thought you were going to do it! I swear I have my fists ready to beat you up later if you did that!" Tiffany hissed as she hugged Jessica to put up with the acting.

Jessica smiled. "You don't trust me, huh? I'm not gonna take advantage of you, remember that," she said as she rubbed Tiffany's back to ease the girl's tension.

~.~

In the reception hall, the newlyweds were getting tired already from entertaining all the guests. Tiffany was now changed in a much more comfortable dress (for her) and Jessica removed her coat only to be left with the vest.

"Mom, we're going home," Jessica said to her mom and Tiffany did the same with her own mom. Jessica hugged Sophia.

Tiffany hugged Mrs. Jung. "Please take care of my daughter, Tiffany. I leave her in your hands now," she whispered to Tiffany's ear.

"Yes, Ma'am," was all that Tiffany said, though she's not sure about it herself.

They got inside their limousine car that was waiting outside the hall and the driver drove them to the Jung's house.

After a couple of minutes or so, they finally arrived home and got out the car. They found themselves standing in front of the front door and didn't know what to do.

Jessica walked in but stopped when she noticed that the other girl wasn't following but instead she was looking at the fourteen steps stairs with her tired eyes, knowing she have to walk that up because the guest room was upstairs.

"Aish." Luckily, Jessica wasn't a fool to notice that Tiffany wanted her to carry her upstairs like a real newlywed.

She took a deep breath before carrying Tiffany bridal style up the stairs with Tiffany's hands lying on her shoulder. Good thing she's sporty and that her body was strong, but her tiredness doesn't help much that it took her two seconds on every step of the stairs to finally reach Tiffany's room.

The door opened to her command and she laid the now sleeping Tiffany on the bed.

"Aigoo, you're heavy! I think I have osteoporosis now at such young age," Jessica said particularly to no one while rubbing her back.

How can she sleep so easily like that? She asked herself as she watched the sleeping mermaid on the bed.

She clicked a button in her watch and spoke, "Mr. Go, please send Karen to Tiffany's room and change Tiffany's clothes into comfortable ones and remove all her make-up."

"Yes, Miss," came the reply.

She took a seat beside the bed and admired Tiffany's beauty. "Sleep well, Princess." After brushing away some strands of her hair, she kissed Tiffany's forehead tenderly, as if like she was so fragile, and left the room.

Tiffany opened her eyes as she just witnessed a soft and vulnerable side of Jessica. "Goodnight... Prince," she said to no one and closed her eyes.

She just chuckled when she remembered that she just broke one of the rules to not call Jessica other names, unintentionally. But she's not planning to divorce Jessica this early. What if that would happen to other rules?

She doesn't want that.

Goodnight kiss. The kiss you meant was just a kiss on the forehead? I spent the whole night thinking of that. Aish.

She finally drifted off to sleep after releasing a sigh of relief. Or was it?

~.~

(somewhere in Scorchwood)

"Tiffany, Tiffany, Tiffany," the girl said to herself as she shook her head with a smirk playing on her lips.

"You finally settled down, huh?" She just finished watching the pre-nuptial video that was sent to her along with the invitation that was now on her hands as she sat comfortably on her couch, alone.

"I hope she won't hurt you," she said with a concerned voice. She looked at her name written on the invitation before throwing it on the couch as she stood up to clean her living room.

Bride's Maid: Kim Taeyeon.



CHAPTER 11:'RENEW'



CHAPTER 11:'RENEW'

Tiffany woke up from a blinding light. She groaned and tried to sleep more but her body wouldn't let her. She slept late because Karen, one of the Jung's maids, came to her room and tried changing her clothes but she didn't let the girl do it, instead, she did it herself and changed in comfortable pajamas. That took her an hour with all the showering and removing her make-up which doesn't want to cooperate that it took a long time to be removed.

"Aish, who opened the fudging windows?" she asked no one as she bounced off the bed. She washed her face and walked downstairs.

Her feet made music of soft thuds because of the carpet of the floor, making every maids and butlers near her to turn their heads and greet her.

"Good noon, Miss," they greeted as they bowed their heads.

Tiffany turned to look at that maid with a 'what?!' look, making the maid scared.

What?! It's noon already?! She asked herself before turning around and proceeded on walking to where she heard a sound of clashing spoon, forks, knives and plates.

Just as she stepped inside the dining area, the Jungs turned their heads to look at her who were already eating lunch, based on the courses. They were all already dressed in normal clothes unlike her who was still wearing pajamas. She felt awkward feeling the Jung's eyes on her so she started to speak.

"Uhm... I- I- I'm gonna change." She turned around and started jogging back to her room, taking two steps at a time in the stairs.

"Jessica, why did you stop eating?" Mr. Jung asked when he noticed Jessica stopped touching her food.

"I'm gonna wait for her," the girl replied with a small smile as she motioned them to continue eating.

“Aww, Unnie, you’re so sweet!” Krystal beamed at Jessica but the other girl didn’t reply because she was busy thinking.

Did I over reacted? She said that we need to act sweet, right? Did I overdo it?

Mrs. Jung leaned forward to whisper something in Krystal’s ear. Jessica overheard something about inheriting sweetness from Mr. Jung.

“Mom, seriously?!” Jessica asked in disbelief.

Mrs. Jung looked down as she bit her lip and didn’t say anything. Jessica swore that she saw something in her mom’s cheeks.

“Omigosh, Mom! Are you blushing?!” Krystal asked in shock, making Mr. Jung to explode in laughter.

Aish, this is so corny! Jessica thought but then she couldn’t help but to laugh along with her family because of Krystal’s outburst.

Just then, Tiffany walked in with much normal clothes and smiled at the elders.

“Good noon, Tiffany,” Mr. and Mrs. Jung greeted.

“Good noon, Sir and Ma’am.” She bowed at the two with a small smile.

“Oh please, just call us Mom and Dad,” Mr. Jung said as he motioned Tiffany to sit on the only vacant seat between Jessica and Krystal.

Jessica stood up to assist Tiffany on the chair. She pulled it back to let Tiffany sit and then pushed it forward once Tiffany was seated. Tiffany whispered a small thank you and Jessica just smiled.

“Good noon, Unnie!” Krystal greeted with much energy.

“Good noon, Krystal,” she replied with an eye-smile.

“Oh! You have eyes like my friend’s!”

“Really? Then she must be pretty!” Tiffany joked with a small laugh.

“Yes! Sulli is really pretty!”

“Cool. I wanna meet her someday.” And their conversation continued on and on as the family ate in happy atmosphere.

The next words seemed to blur in Jessica's ears since she was busy thinking about what she was feeling right now. She's feeling something inside her that she couldn't determine. Was it because a couple of hours from now she would be leaving this house and her family to stay with the Hwangs? Yes, that must be it.

As the Jungs were busy talking, Tiffany has only one thought in mind. *Maybe having the Jungs as a family isn't bad after all. I think I'm starting to like this.*

~.~

"Where's Jessi?" Tiffany asked a maid in the hallway as she got out of her room after calling her mom to pack her things and they'd just meet at the Trainport.

"She's in the apple farm, Ma'am."

Tiffany just nodded before making her way to the apple farm.

Once she spotted Jessica there in the same spot, she instantly saw Jessica's peaceful face. To her, it seemed like when Jessica was here she really was happy and contented, not unlike when she's out. Tiffany's eyes trailed down from her face down to her hands that were lying in her stomach, clutching an apple as she lay on the hammock with closed eyes.

The sun rays hitting Jessica's skin made it looked like glowing. *Snow white*, Tiffany thought as she leaned her back on a tree couple of inches far from the hammock.

"Hey, Jessi," she called as she looked up at the clouds. As much as she doesn't want to disturb the girl, she needed to, unless she wanted to be late on their flight back to Scorchwood.

Jessica's eyes perked up with her right eyebrow raised. "What 'Jessi'?" They both surely knew that calling Jessica other names were said to be a 'don't' in the contract.

"You said I shouldn't call you names other than Jessi." Tiffany's eyes now met Jessica's.

"That was because you butted in when I was talking! That was supposed to be 'Jessica'." The girl doesn't really mind her new nickname, it's just that she wanted to clear things out.

"Oh, well, what's written is written and you signed." Tiffany shrugged.

Jessica knew this wasn't going anywhere so she just let it be.

"Why did you bring me here last time?" Tiffany asked in a soft voice after a good minute of silence.

"I just want to show you this place. It's really important to me." Jessica bitterly smiled.

"I know. I can see that." Tiffany suddenly felt sad since she's the one taking Jessica away from this place.

"You want some?" Jessica asked as she held up the apple to Tiffany.

"Are you the re-incarnation of Snow White?" Tiffany said jokingly.

"How I wish," Jessica said sarcastically and threw the apple softly to Tiffany. She managed to catch it with one hand and started eating it.

Jessica heaved a deep sigh. "You know, I promised myself before that I would bring the person I love here in this place..."

"So, you love me?" Tiffany asked with a smirk.

"Of course not! I'm not yet done talking! At least let me finish."

"Continue." Then Tiffany continued eating.

"...And the person that I would marry. I knew ever since from the start that that would be two different persons. But I never stopped wishing that the person I would marry would be the person that I love, but still.... it didn't come true. Though I don't love you... you're the one that I was supposed to be married with so I brought you here to tell myself that at least I fulfilled half of my promise."

"So that's the real reason?"

Jessica just nodded.

"Come on, let's go. We don't want my parents waiting in the Trainport." Tiffany started walking back to the house and Jessica followed. Tiffany slowed down a bit to let Jessica catch up on her.

"Cheer up! You look like a kid who dropped her ice cream," Tiffany joked as she patted Jessica's shoulders with a chuckle and Jessica chuckled along.

Jessica was quiet the whole time they were walking back inside the house. She's thinking that if she fulfilled only half of her promise, was she ever going to fulfill her grandfather's wish fully? Or only half? Which, she's still not sure.

In a couple of hours everything would be new to her, the surroundings, the school, the family and the people. She felt like a restarted computer and a born again child because she would start from the beginning of life again. It's just that this time, it's not the single life but the married life.

Did Snow White and Little Mermaid ever met before in the fairytale land? It doesn't matter. What mattered

was that this time, in this period, in this land, in this century and in this time line... was *they met*.

Too much things were running inside Jessica's head right now, and to think... the story was yet to begin.

CHAPTER 12:'FEEL'



CHAPTER 12:'FEEL'

By the time the Hwangs (including Jessica, since she's a Hwang now) arrived in Scorchwood, it was already 7pm. The ride took five hours, three hours less than the usual, and everyone was exhausted from the long ride when in fact all they did was just sit and eat in the private airtrain that the Hwangs owned.

"Ugh, I'm so tired. I so want to sleep already," Tiffany complained while slouching on the backseat of their limousine on their way to the Hwang's house.

"Then sleep. I'll wake you up when we get home," Sophia replied motherly, seated beside Ernest just at the back of the driver's seat and in front of the newlyweds.

"Aish, how can I sleep if Leo is sitting here beside me? And-" She turned to her right and looked at Jessica but she didn't mention the girl's name. "It's so crowded back here!" Then she shot a glare to Leo, who was seated on her left.

"Leo, could you please move at the next row?" Ernest commanded his son and the kid obediently followed.

If Leo didn't move any sooner, Tiffany would have gone more pissed and annoyed and that wouldn't do any good, because for her sleep was important. She doesn't want to grow eye bags, that wouldn't go well with her infamous eye-smile.

A minute of silence had passed since Leo moved but Tiffany couldn't seem to sleep. *How am I supposed to sleep now? It's so awkward here. Only Jessica and I? Aish, I could have just let Leo stay beside me.*

Tiffany was feeling awkward and she couldn't find a perfect position to sleep. She moved farther from Jessica so she could lean her head on the window. *My neck might hurt, but... whatever!* She closed her eyes and tried to nap as she rested her head on the closed window.

Jessica, seeing Tiffany fidget every now and then, felt like she needed to do something. Tiffany was surely screaming complains inside her head right now but she chose to keep it to herself. Though Jessica, herself,

was also sleepy and tired from the long ride, she chose not to complain because it will leave bad impressions to her in-laws.

Aigoo, this girl. Jessica shook her head lightly. She glanced back only to see that Leo was already napping with his body laid on the seat. She took her eyes off the boy when, once again, Tiffany shifted and focused her eyes to Tiffany instead.

Tiffany, who couldn't seem to find a comfortable position, was shocked when she felt Jessica's soft hands wrapped around her shoulders and assisted her head down to Jessica's lap softly, like she was so fragile, but she didn't open her eyes, pretending she was asleep though Jessica knew that she wasn't.

Jessica brushed off some strands of hair away from Tiffany's face to make a better view of the girl's features. Jessica sighed softly, placed her hand on top of Tiffany's shoulder before leaning her head on the closed window beside her and closed her eyes, trying to take a nap, too.

Tiffany suddenly forgot how to sleep that though everything around her was so quiet and serene, which usually lulled her to sleep, seemed to not work. She's feeling something inside her.

Jessi, why are you so kind? Even though I do bad things to you, you keep on taking care of me. Please don't spoil me too much; I don't like it because it's making me feel guilty, Tiffany thought sadly.

Little did they know, the elders in front was witnessing everything that was happening at the back from the rearview mirror and now having tender smiles playing in their lips.

~.~

The Hwangs have finally arrived at their massive house. The whole place was really dark since it was already late. Tiffany, who was already awake from her so-called nap, rushed out of the car without waiting for Mr. Baek to open it for her. She opened the trunk of the other car behind theirs and took out her pink luggage. Jessica went to the trunk too to get her own luggage.

"Jessi," Tiffany called.

"What?" Jessica asked as she took a hold on the handle of her luggage, pulling it with one hand.

"You carry this up to our room," Tiffany whispered since she doesn't want her parents to hear.

"What?" Jessica asked in surprise. Since Tiffany has her own butler why would she want her to carry it for her?

"Rule number one, follow everything I say," Tiffany reminded her with a deathly glare. "Rule number two,

don't make me repeat myself."

Jessica heaved a sigh of defeat. "Aish. Fine!" Though she was getting pissed from Tiffany's behavior, she couldn't do anything since she had signed the contract.

Jessica grabbed the handle, on her left was her luggage and on her right was Tiffany's, and started walking to the front door, leaving Tiffany behind while mumbling incoherent words under her breath.

What? She really did it?! I was just testing her! Tiffany watched the girl walk away from her in regret and guilt since she doesn't really want to upset the girl, she was just really testing her.

"Wait! Miss Jessica!" Mr. Baek called. Jessica stopped walking and faced the old guy.

"Please leave the luggage here. We'll take care of that," he said as he grabbed the luggage and tossed it to the other butlers to carry it to their room.

Tiffany saw it and sighed in relief since she doesn't want Jessica to suffer from carrying two luggages up the six steps of stairs on their front portico.

"Lead the way, my lady," Jessica said sarcastically as she walked to Tiffany.

Whoa! So she's mocking me now? Who does she think she is?! Tiffany's feelings from before were replaced by irritation as she walked past Jessica. Their shoulders bumped, and Jessica followed suitably.

Jessica was so tired and she still hadn't had any decent sleep to the point that she was getting pissed. Sleeping late was never her routine since she thought that sleeping late was unhealthy for a sporty person like her. A rest or sleep or nap was important and she badly needed it right now.

The two walked into the darkness, not even bothering to switch on the lights of the hall. Tiffany stopped walking and Jessica bumped into her back since she was already sleepy. Her eyelids were drooping down.

"Open," Tiffany commanded the door and when it opened they saw that their luggages were already there just beside the door. Tiffany entered and Jessica followed.

The room was surprisingly not in pink. It was so simple and spacious that Tiffany herself couldn't believe she agreed to her parents that she needed a more bachelorette-like room, different from her room in Korea, but she thought it was kinda worth it since she loved the sun every morning on her skin that comes through the floor-to-ceiling window because she have read somewhere that it was good for the skin and she valued her skin so much.

Just as the door was about to close, it opened again, revealing Sophia and Ernest.

"We are going to open up your room tomorrow afternoon..." Sophia held up her key card to Tiffany's door. "...just to make sure you've rested enough from tonight's 'activity'." Then she grinned excitedly.

“Make us some grandchildren, okay?” Then Sophia chuckled as the door closed and the next thing the two heard was the swipe of the card, meaning that they they’re already locked.

“Mom!” Tiffany shouted as she slammed her fists on the door. “Oh, great!” Tiffany complained before starting to remove her coat, revealing a **pink tight tank top** which showed her curves and exposed some parts of her abs to Jessica. Then she removed her pants, revealing a white women’s boxer shorts inside.

What is she doing?! Jessica thought in panic, her eyes wide open as if like she hasn’t seen the other girl in her two-piece bikini before.

“Like what you see?” Tiffany said as she walked to Jessica’s direction with her seductive smirk. She leaned closer to Jessica and whispered, “What? You think I’m going to do something to you?... In your dreams!” Tiffany threw her excess clothes over her shoulder and they landed on the floor. She plopped herself on the bed and covered her body with the sheets, leaving Jessica flabbergasted.

After thirty minutes, Jessica changed into comfortable clothes and lay beside Tiffany. The whole massive house was so quiet, indicating that everyone was already sleeping, but Tiffany knew that her parents weren’t.

Jessica has her back facing Tiffany and Tiffany was facing the ceiling. Both didn’t had the chance to nap in the car but pretended that they did and they were guessing that they wouldn’t be able to sleep tonight because of the uneasiness surrounding them. Being under one roof, one room, lying on one bed, and under one blanket seemed too uncomfortable for the two.

Jessica was so far from Tiffany, like she was allergic to the girl that she was already at the edge of the bed. Tiffany turned her head to her right and found Jessica pretending to sleep.

“Jessi, can you like move closer?”

Not until you add more clothes to your body, Jessica answered in her head.

“You’re going to fall off the bed!” Tiffany was running out of patience.

“Hey! I know you’re awake.” She poked Jessica’s shoulder.

“I said MOVE. CLOSER.” And Jessica seemed to be frightened with the girl’s deep voice that she scooted backwards so she’s not at the end of the bed but still has her back facing Tiffany.

“Closer.” Her voice went back to normal but Jessica didn’t move.

“MOVE. CLOSER.” Tiffany was getting pissed and finally Jessica moved at least three inches.

“Are you that afraid of me?” Tiffany said in disbelief.

Yes! You're scaring the hell out of me now, she answered in her head yet again.

"I won't do anything to you!"

No response.

"Now, move closer."

Jessica Finally gave up and scooted closer to Tiffany that her back was brushing against Tiffany's right arm.

"Good. Now face me."

"What? Why?" Jessica finally spoke.

"We need to do this! You don't know my parents!"

What does she mean by 'this'?

Jessica sighed in defeat and faced Tiffany only to find that the girl was already facing her. She felt uneasy seeing Tiffany's face up-close. She couldn't even look at the girl within a few seconds, and she just scrunched her eyes shut.

Jessica felt the bed move slightly and an arm was wrapped around Jessica's head. Slowly and gently. Almost as if it was afraid to hurt her.

"Wha-what are you doing?!" Jessica cried out in panic as she looked at the girl, using the moon's light that was seeping through the window as a light, trying to loosen herself from Tiffany's arms.

"You know why I'm doing this, Jessica. Don't ask. Just stay in my arms for awhile," Tiffany answered coolly and Jessica didn't say anything more when she felt Tiffany's arm tilt her head onto her chest. She just went with the flow.

Tiffany's left hand grabbed Jessica's right and wrapped it on her own waist but Jessica didn't do anything to object. She felt Tiffany's slim waist on her hands and she doesn't really like this, it felt like she's taking advantage of Tiffany when in fact it was Tiffany who's taking advantage of her powers. Finally, to complete the act, Tiffany wrapped her left arm around Jessica's waist.

Jessica's body was tensed up. Same goes for Tiffany. The sudden skinship between them made the both of them blush madly. Jessica, who was buried in between Tiffany's chest slightly, couldn't help but had a whiff of her scent unintentionally. Her tantalizing lavender scent paralyzed Jessica for a short while before she regained her senses. When she realized that, she exploded into a deeper shade of red across her face. Tiffany, on the other hand, rested her left hand on Jessica's head and ran her fingers through her soft locks absentmindedly with her eyes trained on the wall before her but her thoughts were someplace else.

Tiffany was right after all, to avoid suspicions, they needed to pretend.

Well, this is awkward... especially when she has so little clothes on! But I feel comfortable... Her scent seems to be dragging me to sleep... I think I'm starting to feel sleepy. Jessica yawned.

Tiffany began to hum a slow lullaby from out of the blue. Jessica's half-lidded eyes got heavier when she heard the soft lullaby coming from Tiffany's lips. Her thoughts disappeared away. Her muscles relaxed. Her entire body seemed to be getting used to the girl's warmth and she closed her eyes in ease, giving in to the chains that were pulling her to dreamland.

Jessica's breathing was finally stable and Tiffany assumed that the girl was already sleeping. She stopped humming the lullaby and landed her nose on the crown of Jessica's head and inhaled her scent before resting her chin on top of the girl's head. This time, she ran her fingers through the sleeping girl's soft locks slowly, smiling subtly, unconsciously.

Her hair is so soft. Even her body feels soft. Having her in my arms feels like I'm hugging my favorite pillow when I was still nine, Tiffany thought before she tilted her head to the left and laid her head on top of Jessica's head, falling asleep with a contented smile on her lips.

CHAPTER 13:'GESTURES'



CHAPTER 13:'GESTURES'

Sophia turned her head to the right to check on the clock that was on their night stand. The neon red colored digital clock read 2:20am.

"Ernest, do you wanna check on 'em?" Then Ernest lowered the book he was reading and rubbed his temple. His head hurt from reading with only the lamp shade's light on.

"For what purpose?" He answered.

"I don't know." She shrugged her shoulders. "To check if Jessica is still alive? You should know Tiffany very well. She might have killed her," she joked with a small chuckle.

Ernest understood what mothers have that fathers don't-- it's the Mother Instinct. They could sense what was happening to their children even if it's miles away.

"Okay." He removed his reading glasses and put it on the night stand before standing up and grabbing his robe. Sophia did the same then the two headed out of the house.

Once they were outside Tiffany's floor-to-ceiling window, they instantly noticed the newlyweds cuddling in each other's arms with the help of the moonlight.

"They fit perfectly together, don't they? Just like a key to a lock," Sophia stated.

"Yeah and I think they're getting along now." Ernest chuckled a manly chuckle from the image of her daughter cuddling Jessica in her arms.

"Look at our daughter."

"They're both our daughters now."

“No. I mean, Tiffany,” Sophia cleared.

“She’s smiling.” The two elders smiled unconsciously.

“Yeah. It’s nice to see her smiling again. It’s been so long since...”

“Don’t start.” Then Ernest spun his arms around his wife’s shoulder and rested his chin on the crown of the smaller woman’s head.

“I’m still blaming myself, Ernest,” Sophia sobbed against her husband’s chest.

“Sshhh. Don’t blame yourself for that incident. It’s my fault. I am the father, I could have—” Ernest cut himself off. He just rubbed his wife’s back to stop her from crying.

Tiffany fidgeted and spun her leg above Jessica’s and resumed her sleep.

“We’re already over that incident, Miyeon. What’s important is she’s here now. Look at her.” He pointed at Tiffany. “She’s all grown up now. I can’t even remember the last time she cried in my arms.”

“But Mr. Choi...” Then she sobbed even harder, remembering those dark memories, memories that were pushed all the way to the back of her mind. It was forgotten until today.

“Shhh. It’s God’s will. Mr. Choi was a good man that God decided to take him off this cruel world and make him live his life beside Him,” Ernest comforted his wife.

“Let’s just hope that Jessica can help her to get over those days.” Sophia took a good look at her daughter one last time and Ernest did the same. They looked at the couple like they were newly born babies inside the Nursery, not even wondering why they were cuddled in each other’s arms knowing the fact that they’re both girls and didn’t do what Sophia said a while ago about making a grandchild.

“Let’s go to bed?” Ernest suggested and Sophia just nodded and they made their way back to their room and slept.

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“Hi, Auntie!” A petite and surprisingly loud girl came in the Hwang’s house at ten in the morning and greeted Sophia with a huge hug.

“Oh, Taeyeon.” Sophia returned the hug.

Kim Taeyeon was the first daughter of Ernest’s younger sister who married a Kim. She’s close to the Hwangs

like she's a member of their family. She's attending the same school as Tiffany but her course was Business Management because her mother said that she'd be a great help to Tiffany once she inherited the company.

"You. You have a lot of explaining to do," Sophia said once they broke the hug and glared at Taeyeon, which obviously failed.

"I know, Auntie. I'm really sorry. But don't worry, I'll explain to Tiffany."

"You had better."

"Yes, Auntie," Then Taeyeon proceeded to sit beside Ernest on the sofa.

"Hi, Uncle. What are you reading?" Taeyeon tried to peek at the newspaper Ernest was reading but Ernest closed it the moment she shifted near him.

"Nothing." Then he glared at Taeyeon.

"Uncle, don't tell me you're mad at me too?" Taeyeon whined like a kid.

"I'm just kidding, Taeyeon-ah." Then Ernest hugged his niece. "It's been a long time since you visited us, Taeyeon."

"I'm sorry, Uncle. Just busy with school. But I came here to give Tiffany my best wishes. How's her wedding?"

"Well, it's great. It went smoothly."

"I still can't understand what made her marry that girl. It was so sudden. I thought Tiffany was straight," Taeyeon thought out loud.

Taeyeon doesn't know anything about the fixed marriage, only the Hwangs and Jungs knew about it.

"We don't know. Love has no awareness of merit or demerit; it has no scale... Love loves; this is its nature and sometimes love is stronger than man or women's conviction."

"Ernest, let's go!" Sophia yelled from the front door.

"Gotta go. Don't wanna be late for work." Then Ernest stood up and met his wife halfway.

"Bye, Uncle. Bye, Auntie." Then the couple left, leaving Taeyeon slumping herself down on the sofa.

"This is boooooorriing," she told herself before realizing that she wanted to watch a movie.

She looked at the coffee table for the remote but to no avail. She looked under the sofa. Nothing. Under the rug. Nothing. She shuffled and messed up the whole living room for the remote but to no avail.

“Aish! Where is that remote control?!” She flung her hands in the air in frustration and felt her hand hit something... or someone, in her case. She turned her head to the right to see a girl in maid’s uniform, an inch smaller than her with her head hung low.

“Do you need any help, Ma’am?” the girl asked.

“Are you new? What’s your name?” Taeyeon asked, remembering that she never saw this cute girl before.

“Lee Sunny, Ma’am. It’s actually my second week here today.”

Taeyeon just nodded.

“Can you find the remote control for me?” Taeyeon sat on the sofa, observing the new girl.

Sunny walked to the TV’s glass stand that she found was not really necessary since the flat-panel 82 inches LCD TV was hanging on the wall and she grabbed the remote control from there.

“Here it is, Ma’am.”

Taeyeon quickly grabbed it.

It has been there all the time? Why didn’t I see it?! Aish! Taeyeon thought.

“Now look for a good movie to watch.”

Sunny ducked down to read the titles of the movies on the CD rack.

Nice assets, Taeyeon thought as she looked at the girl’s assets.

Sunny, feeling eyes on her, decided to just kneel down and continued searching for a good movie.

“How about *wally*, Ma’am?” Sunny asked without looking at Taeyeon.

“What *wally*? It’s *Wall-E*, but no, I don’t like that.”

“Ratatouille?”

“Those are for kids way back years and years ago. I want romantic comedy.”

“How about ‘*He’s just not that into you*’, Ma’am?”

“Oh, the latest revision? That will do.”

Then Sunny inserted it into the player and the movie started playing.

Taeyeon slumped further on the sofa, feeling comfortable. Sunny walked and stood just beside the sofa with her head still hung low.

“Do you still need anything, Ma’am?” she politely asked.

Taeyeon turned her head and looked at Sunny, dead serious. “I need you.” She tried to contain her laughter seeing the other girl’s shocked expression then she turned her head to the direction of the TV, hiding her smirk. “Stay there. I might need something later.” She heard the other girl heaved a sigh of relief.

Never thought visiting here would be this fun. I should come by more often, Taeyeon thought to herself with a smirk.

~.~

Tiffany woke up from the sun rays that were hitting her eyes from the window only to realize that her right arm, which was under Jessica’s head, was already numb. She moved ever so slowly to not wake the girl up and removed her arm from under Jessica’s head.

Once she removed her arm, she closed and opened her fist a few times to ease the numbness.

She looked at her night stand and the clock that read 12:09 greeted her.

“Ugh...” she groaned before getting off the bed and proceeded to her bathroom, leaving Jessica behind on the bed.

By the time Tiffany got out of the bathroom, Jessica was already awake and a movable food tray was already beside the bed.

“Who brought those?” Tiffany asked.

“Maids?” Jessica answered, unsure.

“Through the door?” Tiffany was thinking that if the door was already open why Jessica didn’t do anything to at least get out of the room?

“Oh no! It’s from the window! Because when I woke up it’s already there,” Jessica answered sarcastically with her eyes rolled up before grabbing clothes from her luggage and proceeded to change in the bathroom.

What happened to her? One moment she’s nice then the next she’s not. Maybe she has a split personality? Tiffany thought in disbelief. She looked at her clock and it read 12:22. She surely spent a lot of time in the

bathroom.

Tiffany clicked something under the bed and the bed turned 270 degrees, facing the wall. She pressed a button on the wall and a portion of the wall opened in between, revealing a flat-panel LCD TV before it closed again behind the TV.

She turned on her gaming console and played random games which happened to catch her eyes. That would drain all her energy for sure.

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By the time Taeyeon finished two movies it was already 3pm. She enjoyed playing with Sunny than watching the movie. She made Sunny get her a drink, then pop corn, even her lunch; she asked that Sunny herself should cook the food herself and not the chef.

Taeyeon stood up and stretched, causing her shirt to roll up, revealing her belly button. She caught Sunny glancing her way and she hid her blush from the corner of her eyes.

She smirked.

"I'm going to go somewhere. Stay here."

Sunny just nodded. Once Taeyeon was already out of sight, Sunny plopped on the sofa and sighed.

"Aish, that girl. Who does she think she is?! She's worst than Ma'am Sophia and Sir Ernest combined!" Sunny complained.

"I heard that!" Taeyeon yelled from the hallway, making Sunny gasp from shock and embarrassment.

Sunny bit her lip and lowered her head to hide her blush of embarrassment. *I'm so dead! She probably would tell Sir Ernest and Ma'am Sophia*, she thought in regret.

"Don't worry. I won't tell anyone." Taeyeon actually came back just to hotly whisper it in Sunny's ear, as if she could read Sunny's mind, making the girl tensed up before jogging and giggling her way to Tiffany's room.

Once Taeyeon was in front of Tiffany's door, she pressed her ear on the slit of the door only to hear faint voices talking or more like... moaning.

"Ugh... that feels good." Though it was almost like a whisper, Taeyeon figured it was Tiffany.

"How come you're so good? Do you have any experience?" Tiffany asked.

“No. it’s actually my first time,” came the answer which Taeyeon assumed from Jessica.

“How come you know the right places to touch?” By this time, Taeyeon’s mind was already thinking about something... pervy.

“Because I know which part of my body I want to be touched and how I want it to be touched.” After hearing another moan, Taeyeon’s eyes grew wide. Though they’re already married, it’s not usual for Taeyeon to witness or hear it.

“Taeyeon?” came Sophia’s voice and Taeyeon instantly looked at the direction of the voice with a shocked expression.

“What are you doing?” The older woman asked.

“Oh, nothing.” Taeyeon nervously laughed since she was caught red handed.

Sophia walked past her and swiped the key card. The door opened, revealing a sweating Tiffany sitting on the floor, tired from playing boxing, call of duty, and even Downhill Jam. Jessica was sitting on the edge of the bed behind Tiffany and giving her a massage.

Jessica was just massaging Tiffany?! Taeyeon thought as she focused her eyes on Jessica since it’s her first time seeing this girl in personal.

The two stopped what they were doing and Tiffany stood up. “Mom! Finally you decided to open up the door.”

Sophia’s eyes roamed around the room only to find that it’s messy. The plates and glass were placed empty atop the rolling drink/food tray, the bed sheet was lying on the floor, the gaming console was somewhere else, the two’s luggage was still on the floor and not in the closet.

“Aish. Get out. Get out,” she shooed the two. “I’ll order the maids to clean your room.”

Once the two was out, Tiffany instantly saw Taeyeon. “Yah, Kim Taeyeon!” She smacked Taeyeon’s head. “Why didn’t you show up at my wedding?! You’re my bridesmaid!” Tiffany yelled.

“Ouch, Couz! Relax, I’m gonna explain!” Taeyeon said then she dragged Tiffany to the living room, leaving Jessica trailing behind them.

“Now explain,” Tiffany commanded with a glare once they arrived in the living room.

Taeyeon gulped. “It’s Monday. I have school,” she reasoned.

“As if being absent on that day would ruin your schooling,” Tiffany answered sarcastically. “Is your school

more important than my wedding? You're unbelievable Taeyeon," she added dramatically.

"It's not like that, Couz!" Taeyeon pleaded.

"It's... it's because... I have exams that day..." Her voice trailed off slowly and softly.

Tiffany understood that Mrs. Kim wouldn't be so happy if Taeyeon skipped classes especially if they have exams that day even if it's Tiffany's wedding, so she decided to just let it slide.

"You. You could have just said the truth the first time." Tiffany then hugged her cousin.

"Aww, Couz." Taeyeon returned the hug.

"You know I can't get mad at you." Then Taeyeon released herself from Tiffany's arms and looked past Tiffany. The girl noticed it and followed Taeyeon's eyes. She was looking at Jessica.

"Hm..." Taeyeon rubbed her imaginary beard as she circled around Jessica like a critic, making Jessica uneasy.

"What are you doing? Can you like stop?" Tiffany interrupted her cousin.

Taeyeon stopped in front of Jessica. "She's pretty. No wonder you turned gay for her," she said with a smile before turning to face her cousin.

"Yeah, I know right. By the way, Couz, she's already mine, okay? Don't you dare. I recognize those looks on that face." Tiffany pointed her finger threateningly at Taeyeon, causing the girl to be afraid while Jessica just hung her head low, blushing from Tiffany's over protectiveness.

"What? You think I'd steal someone else's wife? Especially my beloved cousin's wife?! Of course not!" Taeyeon defended. "Besides, I like Sunny more than her," Taeyeon whispered to herself; almost inaudibly.

"What are you mumbling about?"

"Oh, nothing! So, what should we do now?" Taeyeon tried changing the subject.

"I dunno."

"Let's go out! It's been so long since we last went out, Couz," Taeyeon suggested.

"Sure. But we're bringing Jessica, okay?" Tiffany decided for Jessica without even asking the girl.

"Okay."

Then the two left to change into their outdoor clothes, leaving Taeyeon in the living room, speaking to herself.

"I've never seen Fany that over protective before. She must have been hit really hard."

Hwang's living room:



CHAPTER 14:'MELANCHOLY'



CHAPTER 14:'MELANCHOLY'

“Ugh! I’m so tired!” Jessica complained as she plopped herself on the bed.

It has been four days since she met Taeyeon and the girl constantly nagged her and Tiffany to go shopping with her in the afternoon after her classes. Tiffany didn’t go to school yet, saying that when she got back to school she wanted to be with Jessica.

Sure, their credit cards were being overused, or rather being abused, endlessly but they don’t care. It would be charged into their parent’s accounts anyways. It helped Jessica in terms of adjusting and memorizing some places in the neighborhood and since Jessica didn’t bring all of her stuffs when she moved, she had the chance to buy things that she needed. It also helped the three of them to grow fond of each other.

“I’m going to take a shower first,” Tiffany said as she entered the bathroom without giving Jessica a chance to protest.

It was already 8pm and Tiffany didn’t show any sign of tiredness or exhaustion despite the fact that they’ve gone shopping and touring for four days straight. Well, no one could blame her, it’s what kept her going and was her hobby.

Jessica sat up on the edge of the bed and stared at the shopping bags on the floor as if it would walk to her. When she realized that the bags wouldn’t walk itself she stood up and picked up three pink paper bags that stood out among the other colorful ones. It has the logo of her new school imprinted in the middle of it.

She sat back on the edge of the bed before taking out something pink inside one of the paper bags and held it up in front of her.

It was her new uniform attached to some metallic hanger custom made from their school’s tailor down the center of Scorchwood. The coat was pink with the school’s logo printed on the left chest’s part with her name tag just on top of it. A white long-sleeved polo was tucked inside the coat with the logo printed on the left chest’s part too and a checkered pink and black necktie hanged with it to complete the ensemble.

But something hit her heart. Longing. She missed her old uniform. Although it was simple, at least it made her feel warm and comfortable.

“No wonder Tiffany likes it there.” She chuckled to herself in an attempt to push her feelings go along with it as she remembered Tiffany’s room in Korea.

She then proceeded to hanging it on her spot inside Tiffany’s closet. Well, their closet now.

She grabbed another cloth from the second paper bag. It was her skirt. The tailor measured it three inches above the knee and she just couldn’t stop wishing that it wouldn’t be that short once she wore it. She put it once again inside the closet just beside her coat. Finally, she took out a box from the third bag and opened it. It was a two-inches high heeled pink shoes. She grimaced at the sight of it, thinking that her feet would suffer from it though her entire self was already suffering from this relationship. A relationship that she never wanted. She preferred sneakers or doll shoes over those high heels. She gently put it into the shoe rack inside the closet before lying down again on the bed.

“What’s taking her so long in there?” she asked herself and continued to stare at the ceiling as she waited for Tiffany to come out of the bathroom.

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Jessica turned to her right as she slept, though her eyes were still closed, her eyebrows automatically knitted when she realized a heavy weight was on her feet which restrained her from doing so. She lifted her left leg in an attempt to remove the weight but it immediately came back. She knitted her eyebrows further and put her other leg above but another heavy weight landed above her leg. Now, the weight was twice as heavy.

Hers and Tiffany’s feet played a little tag-of-war before both of their eyes opened only to realize their feet tangled below them and their faces an inch away from each other. Both stopped moving and, who knew, maybe even breathing, due to their sudden proximity for a good second before both kicked hard to untangle their feet and as a result, they both landed on the opposite sides of the floor with a thud.

“Ow!!” Both winced as they rubbed their butts.

Though the bed was in between them, the two still managed to glare at each other.

“Aish-“ A sound interrupted Tiffany’s early Monday morning’s yelling. It was her alarm clock.

Tiffany’s eyes literally popped out as she turned to check the time on her night stand. 6:15am.

“Shoot! Class starts at seven!!!!” She panicked as she ran to the bathroom, leaving Jessica dumbfounded on

the cold floor.

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“Are you ready?” Jessica asked as she stepped out of the closet and was greeted by Tiffany in her new uniform, standing in front of the mirror.

“Yep!” Tiffany proudly said.

“Are you sure?” Jessica questioned as she observed Tiffany from her multiple ear piercings down to her loose tie and the first two buttons of her white polo was unbuttoned as well as her pink coat. Jessica couldn’t deny that it gave off a cool effect to Tiffany compared to her own neatly worn one.

“Yes! This is how I’m wearing it!” Tiffany defended once she noticed Jessica’s eyes observing her from head to toe.

“Let’s go! I don’t wanna be late!” Tiffany held Jessica’s wrist because she would feel awkward if she would take Jessica by the hand and dragged her to the garage, making it more difficult for Jessica to walk since she’s not used to wearing high heels.

“Good morning, Miss Tiffany, Miss Jessica,” Mr. Baek calmly greeted once they stepped in the garage before pressing something in his wristwatch and the car’s doors behind him opened vertically.

Tiffany tried to drag Jessica in the car but to no avail when the other girl didn’t even budge.

“What?! We’re going to be late!” Tiffany annoyingly said as she glared at Jessica for procrastinating.

“Rule number five,” Jessica whispered.

Tiffany’s eyes opened wide with the thought, *Nature! That means-*

“Yes. We’re not going to ride that monster,” Jessica interrupted her thoughts bitterly.

“Mr. Baek, you can go now,” Tiffany ordered.

“But, Miss-“

“No buts! Go in.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” And the old guy left with a bow, giving the two some privacy to talk.

“Now. How are we supposed to go to school? Walk?” Tiffany said as she turned to the other girl.

It was given that a rule couldn't be use over another rule. Meaning, Jessica's rule number five couldn't be override by Tiffany's rule number one, leaving the other girl no other choice but to deal with Jessica.

“Sure we can, since school's just a minute away from here. But since I don't want you to get tired I'm giving you another choice. You remember that bicycle we bought two days ago?”

“Yes?”

“We're going to use that.”

“What?!”

Now it's Jessica's turn to drag Tiffany to the other side of the garage where the two bikes were standing. Yellow one for herself, and pink one for Tiffany.

Jessica hopped on the yellow one, ready to go if not for Tiffany who stayed rooted beside the pink one, looking at it as if it turned into a zombie and was threatening to grab a chunk out of her flesh.

“What are you waiting for?” Jessica glanced at her watch. “It's 6:45 already!”

“I-I can't ride that! I'm wearing a skirt!” Jessica looked at her own skirt and was glad that it wasn't that short and she's wearing shorts underneath so it's okay.

“So what? You wear boxer shorts anyways.”

Jessica saw Tiffany's eyes though she was looking at the floor as she bit her lip.

“You don't know how to ride it, do you?” Jessica narrowed her eyes teasingly at the sulking girl.

When the girl didn't answer Jessica smiled. Then grinned. Before exploding into laughter, offending the girl.

“What?!” The girl still tried to threaten Jessica.

“Just give me a second.” Jessica turned her back to Tiffany before exploding into a much louder laugh.

“Go on! Laugh all you want!” Tiffany crossed her arms with a pout like a bullied little girl.

“I'm sorry.” Jessica took a deep breath. “There. You can ride with me for the mean time.” She patted the extra seat behind. “Come on! We're going to be late!”

“Fine!” Tiffany gave up and sat down on the seat without even holding onto something for support.

Jessica grabbed the girl's arms and wrapped it around her own waist. "Hold on tight. This is going to be a bumpy ride!" Then she began to pedal hard, earning Tiffany's shriek and an even tighter grip around her waist but she just laughed it off, thinking, *If I'm going to suffer in this relationship, I might as well take my turn in teasing Tiffany just for fun and to distract myself from counting my loss.*

The ride was fast, easy and smooth since a lot of cars were flying and there were only few who were actually using the road.

I remembered her using a flying car in Korea! And then she's telling me not to use those? Aish! Tiffany thought.

"We're using electric flying cars, just so you know," Jessica suddenly stated, as if she could read Tiffany's mind.

"How did you--"

Jessica turned around a corner, resulting for the bike to shake and for Tiffany to shut up and just hold onto Jessica's waist tighter. Jessica smiled.

It's okay for Jessica to use electric flying cars since their electricity was from water. The electric company converts the water current into electricity and it doesn't harm the nature. It's righteous enough for Jessica.

With one final swift turn, they were already entering the school's front gate. Seeing no one around --probably they are already in their respective classrooms-- Tiffany still hid her face on Jessica's back just in case someone would see her.

Jessica suddenly stopped pedaling when she reached a safe corner of the parking lot to park her bike. Allowing Tiffany to stand up first, she noticed the girl was blushing. She didn't know if it's because of shame or their body contact, either way she doesn't mind since she enjoyed such adventure or, in this case... Tiffany's hug?

Tiffany dragged Jessica again into the huge building, leaving the bike standing there. Who would steal a simple bicycle in a luxurious school like this anyway?

They entered the automatic glass door and a robotic guard greeted them. Once they were already in the hallway of the second floor, a screen caught Jessica's eyes. There was an image of Tiffany in a drag racer's uniform, holding a trophy with her fake smile.

"Hey. I remembered that! You're a drag racer, right?"

"So what?"

"I would love to see a certain news on that screen someday."

“What news?”

“Tiffany, a champion drag racer, doesn't know how to ride a bicycle!” Then Jessica exploded in laughter.

“Oh, shut up!” Then Jessica stopped laughing abruptly when she sensed Tiffany's threatening tone.

Jessica couldn't stop observing her new school. Memorizing every bit, every corner, so that she knew where to go someday. Everything was metallic, from the chip accessed doors, high ceiling with different colored pale neon lights, even the walls and floors were metallic too. Once their heels stepped on it, it created echoing sounds of clanks.

Even their intertwined hand, Jessica observed. She thought to herself that it just doesn't fit. In any way and any angle you look at it. It just doesn't fit. Like how she doesn't fit in this place.

Tiffany came to an abrupt halt and let go of Jessica's hand.

“This is how you do it. See this chip in your tie?” Tiffany pulled up the tip of her tie to show the chip on her own tie. “It is your code access to this door... to all the doors actually, except those that are prohibited.” Tiffany rushed her explanation once she got a glimpse of her watch. 06:58.

“You swipe it here.” She pointed at the scanner beside the door. “Now try it.”

And Jessica did. The door opened, revealing a huge lecture room with, she assumed, ten to thirty persons inside. She's not shocked to see that there were only few people there. They're the few ones who passed this school's qualities and requirements, which was, of course, money.

Tiffany dragged Jessica again up to the vacant seat beside hers along with the eyes of her classmates shining at the sight of Jessica, a new face. Since almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the chairs were all empty including those seats around hers, Jessica didn't have a hard time looking for a seat.

“Tiffany,” called the robot teacher standing in front.

“Yes?” Tiffany stood up, uninterested.

“Introduce her.”

She let out a boring sigh before grabbing Jessica's shoulder. “She is Jessica Jung- Hwang.” Jessica stood up with an awkward smile, Tiffany's arms slide perfectly down on her shoulder.

“Is she somehow related to you? Seeing you're both Hwangs,” the guy asked from the front row, clearly saying that he's interested in Jessica.

“Oh, her? Hmmm...” Tiffany smiled evilly as she pulled Jessica close to her body. “She's just my girl. My WIFE,” she said proudly, emphasizing the word ‘wife’ to make it clear to everyone.

Everyone gasped. Maybe from shock that the heiress of Tiffany and co. was already married and with a *girl*, knowing that she's as straight as an arrow, but maybe more from disappointment since they knew that they don't have any chance with the new girl.

Jessica was flushed and just hung her head down. She doesn't know if it's because everyone was looking at them or because of Tiffany's protective arm around her.

"Dare to land a finger on her and...." Tiffany tossed a coin with her free hand and caught it before slowly opening her fingers one by one to reveal the coin was gone.

She smirked and glared threateningly at everyone, scaring them because they knew what a Tiffany Hwang could do.

The two then took their seats.

"Since when did you learn magic?" Jessica whispered but Tiffany just shrugged and focused her attention on the talking robot in front with a sly smile.

"Now on the lesson." The lights dimmed and the robot's eyes released a hologram just like a projector and it started talking, emotionless, about history and everyone fished out their fist-sized iPadXV to check their e-mails for today's lessons. That way they don't have to take notes since the robot itself sent notes to them to keep in their iPads.

iPadXV was the new model of iPad from Apple with chip cores made from Intel and was invented by the great Ok Taecyeon Jr.

"You should have seen them!" Tiffany whispered to Jessica. "Disappointment was written all over their faces! Even girls, can you believe that? Just continue being pretty and I would be proud of you!" Then Tiffany focused again on the lesson.

Though Tiffany just called her pretty she could n't help but to feel sad. This was going to be her world from now on. *'This'* as in:

- 1.Emotionless.
- 2.Immoral.
- 3.Informal.

Behind the colorful uniform, cool buildings, high-tech surroundings and full attentions focused on you, thoughts like 'who does she think she is?', 'huh! How was she able to attend here?' and 'she's in no position to be here' were hiding behind those soulless eyes.

Everything was about fancy, luxury, wealth. Money. None of these things she thought of experiencing in life. She just wanted to be happy and contented. What she doesn't understand was why all these people couldn't

be contented with what they were having? They fight over money and wealth. Comparing who's richer than who, who's prettier than who. Was this how the *real* life was supposed to be? Way too far from the *real* life she used to know?

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Three Korean girls were talking in English in the corner of the lecture room.

"Man! I thought she was straight?!" Girl One whispered to the other two carefully so Tiffany's sharp ears wouldn't hear her.

"It's because of you, Unnie!" said Girl Two.

"Why is it because of her?" said Girl Three, trying to defend Girl One.

"Because you two brainwashed her from PDAing too much when we're with her!"

"What?!" the two hissed under their breath and Girl Three started acting as if she's offended.

"Hu-hu... we've brainwashed Tiffany!" Girl Three sobbed in Girl One's shoulder dramatically.

"Shh... Yoong baby, it's okay," soothed Girl One.

"Aish! Yoona unnie! Yuri unnie! Stop it, will you? Do you want me to be corrupted too? And hello? Can't you see that I'm trying to focus here?"

"Aw... we're sorry, Seo baby!" And the two hugged her.

"Unnies! Focus on the lesson!" The youngest managed to remove their long slender arms around her shoulders with one swift glare before focusing her eyes, ears and mind on the lesson and not on the two who was busy whispering sweet nothings to each other.

The school's lobby:



CHAPTER 15:'HEART-QUAKE'



CHAPTER 15:'HEART-QUAKE'

"Welcome to Pilipholis Academy!" greeted the enthusiastic tanned woman.

The bell just rang a minute ago, ending their five long hours of lecture and lessons of different courses which they could never use in real life once they graduated, and it's now time for lunch. The trio was now standing beside the newlyweds, trying to welcome their new company.

"Sorry for the lack of formalities." Yuri scooted closer to whisper to Jessica. "That's one thing this school doesn't teach." Before giving Jessica a believe-me nod.

"By the way, I'm Kwon Yuri." She offered her hand for a handshake.

"I'm Jessica. Nice to meet you." Jessica took her hand with an awkward smile.

"And this is my girl, Im Yoona." Yuri pointed to her right where Yoona stood. "Isn't she pretty?" she whispered once again to Jessica, who was feeling more awkward than ever. Yoona responded with a warm smile and bowed.

"And this is Seo JuHyun." Yuri pointed to her left where the said girl was standing just behind her.

"Call me Seohyun for short." And then she smiled.

"Nice meeting you." Jessica smiled at the other two, wondering why they were introducing themselves to her until Yuri answered her thoughts.

"Just so y'know, we're Tiffany's friends."

"Remind me again why," Tiffany said sarcastically while rolling her eyes.

"Just because. Now come on! I'm hungry!" Yuri then grabbed the two persons near her, who was Jessica on

her left and Yoona on her right, before dashing out of the room on their way to the school's café, leaving a dumbfounded Tiffany and Seohyun behind.

This girl is hospitable but... she's too clingy! Jessica thought as she felt awkward with Yuri's tight grip on her wrist.

Once Tiffany and Seohyun caught up with the trio in the hallway that wasn't really crowded, Tiffany called out for Yuri.

"Yah, Yuri-ah! That's MY girl, right there, y'know?" Tiffany pointed at Jessica. "Do you wanna disappear like the coin a while ago?" she threatened.

"Oh!" Yuri let go of Jessica's wrist. "Relax, geez." Yuri then wrapped both her arms around Yoona's instead while mumbling 'I just don't want her to feel out of place' under her breath.

"You're too over protective, Tiffany," Yoona said.

"What? Should I not?" Tiffany glared, resulting in a sulking Yoona.

Seohyun, who was trailing behind the two couples, slightly shook her head, thinking, *They're so immature... But anyways, time to look at the bright side! We have a new company now; I hope she won't have a hard time adjusting to us.*

Then she jogged to catch up with the couples.

"Unnies! Wait for me!"

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"Seohyun, y'know what? You're too formal. We knew each other for like... three years now and you still call us unnie. We're just a couple of months older than you, y'know?" Tiffany said as she took a seat beside Jessica once they were inside the school's café. Their table was too far away from the others.

"I'm sorry, Tiffany." Seohyun felt awkward not calling her unnie but she'd get used to it soon.

"Hey, Tiff, you already have something to wear at the Welcoming Party this coming Saturday?" Yuri asked with excitement visible in her eyes.

"What Welcoming Party?" Tiffany asked.

"The Welcoming Party for the new headmaster!" Yoona answered as she eyed the foods that were being

served to them though they haven't ordered anything yet. It's automatic since they're VIPs in this school because their parents were one of the builders of Philopolis Academy. Their daily menus were always different from the other students.

"You didn't know?" Seohyun asked.

"Taeng didn't tell me," Tiffany responded with a bored look.

"So what are you planning now?"

"Hmmm... Shopping? Jessi and I need a new dress for that party."

"Who's the new headmaster, by the way?" Tiffany added.

"The name's Chuck Galluzi... I heard he graduated from a great university and is a computer genius..." Seohyun's information went on and on, giving them a good atmosphere and something to talk about. Jessica found herself enjoying herself chatting and laughing with her new friends.

They aren't that bad after all, she thought.

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The bell rang, indicating that their lunch break was already over and the group left the café.

"Tiffany, my schedule says that my next subject was my course: Computer Engineering. Where's the computer laboratory?" Jessica asked as they walked side by side in the hallway.

"I'll just accompany you there." Tiffany looked at the direction of the trio. "Yuri, Yoona and Seohyun, you go ahead first, okay? I'm sending Jessica to her next class."

The three nodded before turning different ways to their next class.

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"Thank you for accompanying me here," Jessica said as she stood in front of the automatic door of the computer lab while her classmates were starting to gather inside the room.

"No problem. So yeah, goodbye." Tiffany awkwardly glanced around and everyone was looking at them as if expecting something. Jessica just stood there, waiting for Tiffany to leave, but the girl didn't even move from

her spot.

Tiffany took a deep breath. She knew that everyone in this school already knew that they're married and they're watching them, curious as to how they would act in public. What does a couple do before they part? They're expecting for a kiss.

And Tiffany decided to give in to their expectations.

She took a deep breath and leaned forward with her heart beating fast. Jessica was shocked, she doesn't know what Tiffany was doing and she's getting dangerously close. Tiffany pecked Jessica's cheek before turning around and jogged quickly away from the room, leaving Jessica rooted on her spot, blushing.

Jessica shook her head slightly and found that everyone was looking at her so she turned around and entered the room with her head hanged, trying to hide her blush.

She needed to do that because everyone knows that we're married and that's what couples do before parting. That was just an act, Jessica... or is it? Jessica thought as she clenched her chest with her right hand to stop her heart from beating too fast or else she'd have a heart attack while her left hand cupped her left cheek where Tiffany kissed her.

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Tiffany walked to her next class, Tourism, with her hand on her cheeks. She was slapping her cheeks to stop it from blushing madly while whispering to herself.

"Why am I blushing? Aish, Tiffany! What's up with you? She's just a girl. She's not even a hot guy!" Tiffany scolded herself, ignoring the looks of the people given to her as she trotted pass them.

Tiffany took a seat at the back of the class, feeling her fast beating heart. She tried to focus on the lesson, hoping that it would help her abstain from thinking about Jessica's soft cheeks.

CHAPTER 16:'SUSPICIOUS'



CHAPTER 16:'SUSPICIOUS'

The rest of the afternoon became awkward with Jessica and Tiffany. They couldn't even look at each other's eyes nor let their shoulders brush against each other.

"What's up with you two?" asked Yoona as they strode their way out of the building to the parking lot.

"One minute, you're sweet, then the next, you're not. Is that how newlyweds behave? Well, I'm gonna change that when Yoona and I get married." Yuri gave Yoona a mischievous grin.

Yuri's car alarm turned off and both her and Yoona hopped into it.

"Gotta go. Buh-bye!" And Yuri flew out of the school.

"Jessica, Tiffany, I'm going ahead now, okay? Take care." Seohyun got into her car where her chauffeur was waiting for her and they flew out of sight.

"What now?" Jessica asked.

"We're not going to ride that bicycle again."

"How are we gonna get back home then?"

Then, as if on cue, a flying car started hovering down in front of them till it landed on the ground. Mr. Baek hopped out of the car, grabbed, and placed Jessica's bike into the trunk of the car.

"That's electric, don't worry. I had it especially made for you."

Jessica was shocked at first. She totally forgot that Tiffany could have anything she wanted in just one click.

They hopped into the car and flew out of the school in an awkward silence in the backseat. And their first day

at school as newlyweds ended just like that.

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“Yul, what do you think of Jessica?” Yoona asked when Yuri opened the car’s door for her.

“Jessica? Uhm... She’s pretty nice but I can see she’s holding back a bit.”

“Oh, you noticed that too? I wonder what made Tiffany marry her. I mean, I thought she was straight? Could it be that it’s because of their company?”

“Maybe. I heard from father that Tiffany & co.’s sales were not that great lately and Jung’s Land was the top land seller on the planet.”

“It must have been that.”

“But can’t you see their acts? Tiffany’s over protectiveness, Jessica’s blushing cheeks. They’re telling another story.” Yuri was so confused as to how they act, as if they were really having feelings for each other.

“I don’t know. But whatever their reasons are, we must watch over Jessica. You know Tiffany can be stupid sometimes and just hurt Jessica. We don’t want a new friend to get hurt, do we?”

“Of course not.”

By this time they've already reached the Im’s front door. It opened and revealed a slim woman looking exactly like Yoona.

“Hi, Mrs. Im,” Yuri greeted.

“Hello, Yuri. How’s school today?” Mrs. Im answered casually.

“We just met Tiffany’s wife.”

“She’s pretty, isn’t she?”

“How did you know, Mom?” Yoona asked.

“Their wedding was a big news on Im’s Automobile. Share holders are saying that Tiffany & co. was going to be the next big thing because of this marriage and I also saw a glimpse of their wedding on the news.”

“How come I didn’t hear about that news?” Yoona asked in disbelief.

"It's because you're always watching movies with Yuri." Mrs. Im chuckled.

"Mom!"

"Mrs. Im, I need to go. I still have some things to do."

"Oh, okay. Take care."

Yuri bowed before kissing Yoona on the cheek and she flew out of the Im's residence.

"So, Daughter, tell me something about this new friend of yours." Mrs. Im placed an arm around her daughter's shoulder and both walked inside the house and the front door closed by itself.

"Oh, Jessica's kind but most of the time she's quiet..." Yoona suddenly got excited to tell her mother everything she noticed about Jessica, even her relationship with Tiffany. Their conversation continued on and on.

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Taeyeon barged in the Hwang's kitchen in search of a certain short girl. Once she spotted the girl, she quickly dragged her out of the kitchen.

"Taeng, where are you taking me?"

They have been seeing each other for a week, but not really dated, that they started calling each other informally since they're already comfortable with each other.

"I just want to talk to you, Sunny."

"I have work, can't you see?"

"Don't worry, I got you covered up," Taeyeon assured.

Sunny sighed. "Fine. Wait for me, I'll just change my clothes."

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They arrived at the playground and sat on one of the benches as they quietly watched the kids play under the

orange sky of the afternoon.

“So, what do you want to talk about?”

“I actually don’t have anything in mind. I just wanna see you and hear your voice.” Taeyeon grinned sheepishly. “After a tiring day at school I always look forward to seeing you. You’re like my energy pill, Sunny-ah. Once I see you and hear your voice my energy boosts up,” Taeyeon continued seriously.

“Taeyeon, why me? I’m just a simple person, unlike you. You’re the sky and I’m the ground, we’re too far apart.” Sunny rested her head on Taeyeon’s shoulder, trying to hide the sadness in her eyes because she, too, have feelings for Taeyeon.

“You’re different than any other girl I’ve met. I want to know you more and I don’t care if we’re that far, Sunny. I fell for you as the way you are and I don’t care whether you’re just a simple person or a complicated person because love...” Taeyeon played with Sunny’s hand --an excuse just to hold her hand-- and she rested her head on top of Sunny’s. “...can do miraculous things even for the sky to reach the ground.”

“I know you’re not yet ready, Sunny. I think I’m taking this too fast, we just met like a week ago and now I’m telling you that I love you... I’m willing to wait, Sunny, even if it takes forever.”

Sunny blushed. Though it’s not a direct ‘I love you’ it’s still as meaningful. She doesn’t know how to act even though she’s conscious that she also has feelings for this midget but she’s still not sure. She’s still not ready. But, at least, she needed to assure Taeyeon of one thing.

Sunny straightened her position and looked directly into Taeyeon’s eyes. “Please be patient.”

Taeyeon smiled then, knowing that she has a chance with Sunny.

“Yah!” Sunny shouted at Taeyeon who quickly scurried away after she stole a peck from Sunny’s cheeks.

“Come back here!” Sunny started chasing the laughing girl.

“Catch me if you can!” Taeyeon stuck her tongue out and Sunny ran as fast as her short legs could to catch the girl.

And soon, their laughter echoed all over the playground along with the kids’.

CHAPTER 17:'SECRETS'



CHAPTER 17:'SECRETS'

Jessica and Tiffany entered the mall and only the workers were there. They're lined up from the front door of the mall up to every corner of the second floor where Jessica and Tiffany's route would be. They're serving as a human red carpet except that they're wearing black and standing, not lying down.

Jessica wasn't really surprised. In fact she's used to it. Way back in Korea she was having the same special treatment when she and her sister would go out, plus, Taeyeon's father owned the biggest malls not only in Scorchwood but also all over the world so it's not hard to close up the whole mall whenever a relative wanted to go there.

The two passed by The Fashion Gallery and Prada on their way to the escalator that lead to the second floor. Every worker bowed to them and once they're out of sight, they went back to their normal work.

They passed by yet another line of workers with heads bowed and stopped in front of a store. Inventor of the designer knockoff, the ultimate source of fashion, Chanel.

"Friday nights are family dinner nights. We should be at home at least before six thirty," Tiffany said in which Jessica glanced at her wristwatch to check the time. It read 5:09pm.

"Okay." Jessica nodded.

There was no one inside except the cashier, the two of them and four of their bodyguards.

They went out to some random isles to check which clothes would fit their taste. Tiffany flipped every hanged dresses in search of something simple and less revealing since the Welcoming Dance would be at night and it's starting to get cold since winter was coming. She also just wanted to be safe because males these days were finding it hard to control their hormones once they saw a small piece of exposed skin.

Jessica searched at the New Arrivals Section. She scanned each dress one by one to check which fitted her taste. She was currently studying a white dress when Tiffany called her.

“Jessi.”

“Hmm?” Jessica turned to look at Tiffany, who was holding up a dress.

“What do you think of this?”

“I dunno. Why don’t you try it on?”

“Okay. Can you come with me? I might need some help.”

“Sure.” And they walked to the dressing room, their bodyguards following their every move. Tiffany suddenly halted.

“You four.” Tiffany glared at the bodyguards who have been following them since they’ve gone out of the car. Two were assigned to guard Jessica and two were assigned for Tiffany.

“Yes, Ma’am?” They bowed.

“Can you give us our privacy? Why don’t you just stay outside? We’re not going to get kidnapped here.”

“Yes, Ma’am.” The four left only to stay at the store’s door to make sure that no one would enter the store.

“My gosh, why do they have to follow me even to the dressing room?” Tiffany complained, irritated.

“Because they’re being paid for that?” Jessica answered nonchalantly.

“Oh, spare me!” Tiffany rolled her eyes before finally going inside the dressing room, leaving Jessica outside.

“Y’know, you should consider yourself lucky for having only two bodyguards. Back in Korea, I used to have at least five around me when I go out.”

“It’s not my fault your parents cared for you that much,” Tiffany answered from the inside. She looked at her left hand, clenching and unclenching it as she gritted her teeth before she continued, “I’m strong enough to protect myself.” That silenced Jessica.

After a couple of minutes, Tiffany finally came out of the dressing room. Well, not actually come out. She just opened the door only for Jessica to see her in her new dress.

“So, how does this look on me?” She was wearing a strapless white flowy dress that lay down to her thighs, but her hand was at her back trying to hold it close since she couldn’t reach the back zipper herself and was too shy to ask Jessica to zip it up for her.

“You want me to zip it up for you?” Jessica offered as she walked closer to Tiffany.

"No! No, it's okay," Tiffany said as she pushed Jessica away gently.

"Okay." Jessica then took a step back and observed Tiffany. She caught a glimpse of the mirror behind Tiffany which gave her eyes exposure to Tiffany's exposed back. She averted her eyes elsewhere immediately as she gulped. She felt like she's taking advantage of Tiffany.

"It.. it looks great on you," Jessica said nervously.

"Should I take this then?"

"Yeah." With that, Tiffany closed the door and changed into her normal clothes.

"You go ahead and choose your clothes now." Jessica left and when she was about to take her fifth step, Tiffany called her again.

"Oh! And Jessi!" Tiffany shouted from the dressing room.

"Yes?"

"Try to choose the ones that are less revealing. Y'know, winter's coming, I don't want you to catch a cold."

"Okay." Jessica smiled a bit knowing that Tiffany at least cared for her.

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"How 'bout this?"

"No."

"Ugh!" Jessica then trotted back inside the dressing room to change to another dress because Tiffany just rejected her sixth try.

Tiffany was getting bored already. Jessica just tried on her sixth dress and nothing seemed to look good on Jessica for Tiffany.

"How 'bout this?" Jessica emerged from the dressing room after a couple of minutes. She didn't bother to turn around again because she's already feeling dizzy from doing it for the nth time.

Tiffany took her time to observe. From the laced top, down to the ribbon on the waist, and to the laced skirt. It looked great on Jessica. Tiffany drew a circle in the air with her forefinger, mentioning Jessica to do a 180

degree turn and the latter did.

“There!” Jessica flinched at Tiffany’s sudden loud voice. “It looks great on you. I think you should take that.”

“O-okay.” Jessica then closed the door to change into her normal clothes.

Tiffany glanced at her wristwatch; it read 6:15pm. Jessica surely took a lot of time in there.

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The two just arrived at the Hwang’s massive house. They entered and the maids carried their things to their room so that they could go straight to the dining room since they’re a couple of minutes late.

They turned left from the living room and saw that the lights in the dining area were already lit up. Tiffany suddenly stopped walking.

“Give me your hand.” She sounded like a command officer as she offered her own hand which Jessica gladly took. She intertwined her fingers with Tiffany’s.

“Smile.” And they walked into the room hand in hand.

“Hi Mom! Hi Dad! Hi Leo.” Tiffany hugged her parents and patted Leo’s head. Jessica did the same.

When Jessica was about to sit, Tiffany pulled the chair backwards and when Jessica was already seated she slid it forward.

“Thanks.” Tiffany just smiled before taking her own seat.

“So, how’s your first week at school?” Ernest glanced at his left where Tiffany was seated, next to her was Jessica and next to Jessica was Leo.

Jessica was about to answer but Tiffany butted in.

“It’s great. Jessica here...” Tiffany pinched the girl’s cheeks a little too hard. “...already had new friends.” Jessica just smiled and nodded like she’s not hurt.

“Good.” Ernest then proceeded on eating.

“Tiffany,” Jessica called sweetly as she held, or more like gripped, at Tiffany’s hand in an attempt to get her revenge, with a smile. “On Monday, can you help me to sign up for Fencing Club?”

Tiffany just stared at her with a playful smile.

"Yes of course, Honey." She patted Jessica's hand with her right one before going back to her food, thinking, *You can't hurt me. Especially my left arm.*

Why is her arm cold? She doesn't seem to feel any pain, Jessica thought as she ate silently.

"Dad, why didn't you invite Taeyeon noona?"

A certain maid who was serving Leo a drink perked her ears up with the mention of the name. Leo slightly glanced at the maid's name tag, it read Lee Sunny. He smirked.

Though they're in Scorchwood and were speaking English, Leo still haven't forgotten to be polite, knowing the far age gap between him and Taeyeon.

"They're having a family dinner too, Leo."

"Okay. But you know what, Dad? She's been coming here a lot lately. Though Tiffany and Jessica noona isn't here." Leo glanced at Sunny who was now at the corner of the room, waiting for any commands from her masters.

"Maybe she just doesn't know that Tiffany and Jessica weren't here," Sophia, who was sitting on the right side of Ernest, said.

"At least she could have contacted them to make sure if they're here before coming." Leo drank his drink in one gulp as he tried to hide his smile. He, too, was a bully like Tiffany.

"So what are you trying to say?" Tiffany asked.

"Maybe she's coming here to see someone." Leo felt contented with the reaction the maid has given him. He tried so hard to suppress his smile as the maid continued to fidget nervously with her hands. Leo could almost hear the loud bang of her heart from their distance.

Shizz, does Sir Leo knows something? Oh my gosh, I'm going to get fired, Sunny thought, taking a mental note to kill Kim Taeyeon once she saw the girl again.

"Who?" the four said in unison.

Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. I'm so dead.

"Sunny."

SHOOT! Sunny perked her head up in shock, her eyes as wide as an owl's.

“Can you refill my glass?” Leo continued as he smirked, motioning to his empty glass.

Sunny heaved a sigh of relief as her shoulders relaxed and obeyed what she was told to do.

“Hey, you haven’t answered our question,” Tiffany insisted.

“Who else? Of course me!” He smiled innocently. “She played Wii with me last time. She’s so great I can’t even defeat her.” Leo chuckled before he continued to eat with the playful smile of his.

Phew! That was close! But wait... I’m very sure that Sir Leo and Taeng never played Wii before. Everytime she comes here she was always with me, never with Sir Leo. Did he just covered up for us? Sunny glanced at Leo and met his eye. He smiled and winked before going back to his food.

Oh my gosh! Sir Leo does know what’s happening between Taeng and I! Sunny smiled though she was shocked, taking a mental note to thank Leo for what he had done when she had the chance.

CHAPTER 18:'SIGNATURE'



CHAPTER 18:'SIGNATURE'

Saturday morning and afternoon came just like that and Jessica and Tiffany were now getting ready for the Welcoming Dance.

"Is that your idea of less revealing?" Jessica observed Tiffany once she came out of the room wearing a white dress with a v-neckline. It lay down to her thighs with a train at the back.

"What?"

"You told me to wear a less revealing dress but look at your dress, it's so revealing."

"It's not so revealing, okay? Just a little revealing."

"What?" Jessica didn't hear the last part because Tiffany purposely made it like a whisper.

"Nothing. Come on." Tiffany dragged her out of the house to the waiting car in front of their house.

Mr. Baek opened the door for the two and flew to the venue.

"Jessi, Mom is already there. She's representing the Hwangs since our ancestors are one of the builders of the school," Tiffany said out of the blue.

"Okay." Jessica nodded as she kept her eyes on the window, thinking why Tiffany needed to say that.

"You know what I'm trying to say, right?" Tiffany glanced at her left where Jessica was seated. She made sure that her voice was soft enough for Mr. Baek not to hear.

"Of course, and even if Mom isn't there we still need to do that since there are a lot of students there." Jessica was trying not to be direct to the point just in case Mr. Baek was eavesdropping.

“Oh yeah. That’s right.” Tiffany didn’t think of that because she was busy thinking about something.

Partying was Tiffany’s thing and going to a party with Jessica and her mom meant that she couldn’t party all night since she needed to behave and stay with Jessica all the time. But she doesn’t feel anything negative inside her. She asked herself why, but looking at the city’s view below them didn’t give her an answer.

She should feel pissed for not being able to party, she told herself, but why doesn’t she feel anything other than being excited of going out with Jessica for the first time?

Tiffany occupied herself with thinking of what was happening to her the whole ride until the car started hovering down. She shook her head lightly as if it would help her to forget everything she was thinking.

Mr. Baek opened the door for the two and helped them out. Jessica muttered a ‘thank you’ and Tiffany just nodded. ‘Thank you’, ‘Sorry’ and ‘Please’ were not on her vocabulary.

Tiffany slightly shivered when the night’s cold wind brushed her bare shoulders once the car has flown out of sight, but Jessica didn’t miss it.

“You’re shivering. Are you cold?” Jessica asked worriedly.

“No, I’m fine.” Tiffany walked past Jessica, heading to the front door of The King’s Hall.

Jessica fastened her pace to catch up with the girl and quickly wrapped her arm around the girl’s shoulder and pulled her closer to her body.

“Oh yeah. I forgot we need to act.” Tiffany nervously glanced at Jessica because of their close proximity.

“It’s not that. It’s because you’re cold.” Jessica darted her eyes forward, avoiding Tiffany’s eyes, and glared at some of the students who just arrived and were looking at them as if they’re going to eat them.

“It’s because *I’m* cold, or because *you’re* cold?” Tiffany insisted.

“I don’t even feel cold.”

“Why? Is your skin that thick?” Tiffany joked trying to keep her mind from thinking about Jessica’s arm around her.

“You can’t blame me. I love it when the weather is cold.” Jessica then grabbed Tiffany’s right arm and wrap it around her own waist.

“Now that’s the act. Smile.” Jessica smiled and greeted the two teachers, who usually did nothing but sit in their office because the robots did the teachings, standing on the front door, checking the students if they’re drunk before going to the party.

“Good evening, Ma’am,” Jessica greeted politely.

“Good evening, you must be Jessica and Tiffany Hwang?” one of the teachers asked. The two just nodded.

“Sophia told us a lot about you two. She’s at the room on the right, along with the other representatives, if you will be looking for her.”

“Come in.” The other motioned.

“Thank you.” The two entered the hall with their arms still around each other in search for their friends and Taeyeon.

“Jessica! Tiffany! Over here!” Yuri waved her hand to get the attention of the two and Jessica spotted them easily.

“You look stunning tonight, Jessica,” Yoona complimented.

“Thank-“

“I know, right?” Tiffany cut Jessica’s sentence. “It makes me want to kiss her here and there.” She pinched Jessica’s cheeks as she smiled sweetly and snuggled closer to Jessica.

“Oh, Tiffany.” Jessica smiled at her wife and pinched the girl on her side a little too hard and the girl flinched but still had a smile covering up her hurt. Jessica felt like she wanted to puke with all their acts.

“Oh please! I’ve had enough with Yoona and Yuri and now you too?” Seohyun complained with the two’s public display of affection and Taeyeon just laughed.

“Aish. Just find a partner too!” Yuri said irritatingly.

“By the way, Fany, you look great,” Yuri said as she took a hold of Yoona’s waist.

“What do you expect from me? You guys look great too.” Tiffany complimented Yoona, Yuri, Seohyun and Taeyeon.

“Ladies and gentlemen of Philopolis Academy, may I have your attention please?” Said the MC on the stage and the gang took their seat.

“As you all know, this night was especially made for this special person, please welcome, the new headmaster, Chuck Galluzi!” Very few students clapped because they didn’t really care about him. They care about the party and going wild tonight.

“Good evening, everyone.” His voice sounded a little hoarse with his Italian accent. “As the new headmaster, I expect everyone to be obedient and follow all of my rules. Those who wouldn’t follow will receive

detention. I've also changed the kinds of detention, not like any of those common and natural detentions you knew. So you have to watch out. Those students outside are the examples for coming here drunk, we've called their parents to fetch them here. On Monday they'll receive their detention." He smirked.

"What? Is he trying to say that he has all the powers?" Tiffany complained.

The headmaster continued his speech about his background before becoming their headmaster as Jessica and Tiffany slowly entangled themselves since everyone on their table were busy listening to him.

"...I hope everyone will enjoy this night but please be reminded that no freak dancing, no kissing and making out on the dance floor or anywhere around the place. Again, good evening." No one applauded but most of the students growled in complaint, including Yuri.

"We're not minors anymore!" Yuri complained and Yoona smacked her head.

"You're expecting me to do it with you? Here?" Yoona asked in shock.

"Yes?" Yuri grinned sheepishly.

"No," was Yoona's firm answer.

"It's okay, I'll just grab anyone that wants to spend the night with me." That earned Yuri a much harder smack on the head from Yoona.

"Ouch! I was just kidding! You know I respect you, Yoona, I'll wait till you're ready. That's how much I love you."

Seohyun, Taeyeon and Jessica made a mock gagging motion as a reaction from Yuri's cheesiness.

"So, you're still planning to do it?" Tiffany scoffed.

"What? As if like you didn't do it on your honeymoon," Yuri defended.

"We didn-" Tiffany held Jessica's hand to stop her from talking. They just needed to go with the flow.

"So what if we did it? At least we did it when we are wedded to each other. You need to marry Yoona first before you can do what we do." Tiffany cleared her throat and Jessica just hung her head low, biting her lower lip.

What is she doing?! We did nothing that night! Jessica thought. Okay we did something. Who am I kidding? But she just hugged me to sleep! Was that what they're talking about doing when couples are wedded to each other? Just a hug? Jessica blushed a bit remembering that night.

"Soooo, you guys did it?" Taeyeon narrowed her eyes at Tiffany.

“Yeah. So what?” Tiffany looked away.

A song suddenly played and the lights dimmed. Everyone started dancing on the dance floor.

“Oh! I like this song! Come on, Yuri, let’s dance!” Yoona pulled Yuri away, lecturing her about no freak dancing.

“I thought he said no freak dancing? Why is he playing a disco song?” Taeyeon asked out loud.

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After a couple of minutes, the dance floor was heated. Guys and girls could be seen freak dancing or dirty dancing and somewhere in the corners were couples kissing or making out. Jessica didn’t like the view; she’s not used to these kinds of things.

“I’m gonna grab a drink. You want me to get one for you?” Jessica asked Tiffany as she stood up. Tiffany nodded.

Jessica walked in between the tables so that she wouldn’t have to pass across the heated dance floor. She walked fast so she could get back to her seat because there were some guys eyeing her.

She quickly grabbed two glasses of fruit punch and made her way back to their table.

“Here.”

Tiffany took it and drank.

“Fruit punch? What are we, High School?” Tiffany complained.

“Mom isn’t around, right?” Jessica asked as she kept her head down.

Tiffany looked around but all she saw was the heated dance floor and a couple making out in the corner during her search of her mom. “I think so. Why?”

“I’m giving you a permission to dance.” Taeyeon and Seohyun looked at Jessica. It was as if she was letting her wife cheat in front of her.

“Are you sure?” Tiffany was shocked at Jessica’s behavior.

“Yes. You’re just going to get bored here. I’m not going to dance.” Jessica smiled at her, assuring.

“Okay.” And Tiffany left to go to the dance floor.

She danced with some random persons but not that intimate and she kept her eyes at their table, especially at Jessica. She’s not feeling good with Jessica’s sudden change of behavior. And she was not wrong. Not too long after, Jessica stood up and said a word with Taeyeon and Seohyun but Tiffany couldn’t hear it due to the loud music.

Squeezing her way out of the dance floor, she followed Jessica.

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“What are you doing here?” Tiffany said as she stood beside Jessica.

They were now at the back of the function hall where there’s a small lake.

“I thought you’re dancing?”

“You want me to dance with other guys and girls in there? It’s like cheating, y’know.”

“I know. I just want you to have fun.” Jessica looked at the lake and Tiffany did the same.

“I can have fun here. With you.”

“How? I’m no fun.”

Tiffany remained silent.

Silence enveloped them but they enjoyed the moment of silence between them as they silently watched the reflection of the moon on the lake.

Jessica felt something cold grabbed her left hand. She looked at it and trailed the arm up to the owner’s face with her eyes.

“I feel cold,” Tiffany said without looking at Jessica.

She reciprocated by squeezing Tiffany's hand a little, trying to transfer heat to her arm which may be able to help to warm up the shivering girl a bit. Then she had an idea, but she didn't know if she should do it or not. Looking at how Tiffany was slightly shivering from the wind, though, it made her mind up.

She took both of Tiffany's hands in both of her hands and started warming them with her breath. Tiffany was

startled but she didn't pull away as she basked in the warmth of Jessica's warm fuzzy breath. It did help her warm up but her entire body was warming up as well. Not daring to look at the girl in the eyes, she strained her eyes on the lake before her.

Jessica then studied Tiffany's side profile. Starting from her bangs which covered her forehead, down to her eyes with long lashes, to her cute nose, to her lips which especially looked plump from the side view and lastly, to her chin. Tiffany seemed glowing under the moonlight.

"You still didn't answer my question. What are you doing out here?" Tiffany demanded in a soft voice and Jessica averted her eyes back to the view in front of them.

"I couldn't take the atmosphere inside. Everyone was so wild."

A cold breeze passed them and Tiffany shivered again. Jessica let go of her hands and spun her arms around the shivering girl instead. She rubbed the girl's shoulders, hoping that the friction would bring heat to the shivering girl. Little did she know, the heat reached even Tiffany's cheeks.

"That's the typical youth in Scorchwood. You should get used to it."

What's happening to me? Why am I acting this way? It must be the weather. Yeah, the weather, Jessica thought to herself.

Why did I let her hug me? I wouldn't normally allow anyone to do that. And why is my heart beating so fast? Tiffany mused, oblivious of Jessica's own fast beating heart.

After a couple of minutes and cuddling in each other's arms, Jessica removed her arms from Tiffany.

"I think we should get inside." She turned her back on Tiffany and started walking back to the hall. Tiffany followed suit as her eyes were focused on the ground, trying to find the right words to say.

"Jessi, th-th-thank you," Tiffany stuttered since she's not used to saying it.

Jessica stopped in her tracks and turned to face her. "Wow. THE Tiffany Hwang just said thank you? That's a first!" Jessica teased as she crossed her arms on her chest with a teasing smirk.

"Aish! Why can't you just say 'you're welcome'?" Tiffany pushed Jessica's shoulder a little too hard that she lost her balance and her reflexes reacted to catch the girl.

"Ahhh!"

"Oh-mmmphh!!!" Jessica's lips muffled Tiffany shriek as their lips met and both their eyes grew wide.

Everything stopped for a moment. Their breathing. Even their hearts. They stayed at the position where Jessica was inside Tiffany's arms, back bent backwards with Tiffany leaning forward as her arms was wrapped

around Jessica's waist for support, for a few seconds before Jessica pushed Tiffany's shoulder and Tiffany lost the grasp of her. Jessica started running away from her.

"Wait! Jessi!" Tiffany tried to chase her but she couldn't move from her spot. Her eyes still wide in shock. Everything happened so fast that her brain malfunctioned and she couldn't think of anything other than,

Why didn't I feel disgusted?

CHAPTER 19:'FEELINGS'



CHAPTER 19:'FEELINGS'

Tiffany ran as fast as she could and saw Jessica fell onto the pavement. She still tried to stand and succeeded. Though she was limping, Tiffany still didn't catch her as she got inside a waiting cab and flew away.

"JESSI!!" Tiffany yelled but to no avail, the cab was already far and high for Jessica to hear her. "Shit," she cursed before heading back inside the hall.

"Oh, what happened to you?" Seohyun asked when Tiffany, whose eyebrows were knitted and puffing air through her nose, took her seat.

"Nothing." Tiffany kept on sighing through her nose as she thought, *Why does she have to run away like that?! Where does she think she's going? What if something bad will happen to her?!* Tiffany shook her head, which earned a look from Seohyun and Taeyeon at the table.

She fished out her iPadXV from her purse and punched a message for Jessica.

Go home straight. If you feel awkward, don't worry u're not gonna c me till tmrw. I won't sleep with u 2night. Just go home straight! I don't want anything bad 2 happen 2 u.

-Tiffany

Tiffany kept fidgeting in her seat. She didn't know if she's waiting for Jessica's reply or she's just plain nervous because Jessica might ignore her for the whole week. Knowing Jessica, It's not impossible.

"Hey, Couz, what's wrong?"

Tiffany finally steadied her sight at Taeyeon. "Uh, nothing. I think I should go home." Tiffany couldn't think straight because her mind was with Jessica. She stood up, ready to leave the place.

"Wait! Where's Jessica?" Seohyun asked.

“She already left a couple of minutes ago.”

“Okay. Take care.” Taeyeon looked at her cousin worriedly. She knew something’s wrong with Tiffany but she also knew her cousin well enough that she doesn’t want to be pushed on saying things she doesn’t want to say.

Tiffany walked out and dialed Mr. Baek’s number.

“Mr. Baek, did Jessica reach home yet?”

“Yes, Miss.”

Tiffany released a sigh of relief. Jessica at least listened to her. “Great. Now can you prepare the guest room and put some of my comfortable clothes there?”

“But why, Miss?”

“Don’t ask! Just do it and fetch me here NOW!” Tiffany pressed the end call button and waited for a couple of minutes until Mr. Baek could be seen driving the electric flying car. All of the Hwang’s cars were now changed with the electric ones because Tiffany demanded so.

“What took you so long? I’m freezing to death here,” Tiffany scolded the old man after she settled herself at the backseat.

“I’m sorry, Miss.” Was all that Mr. Baek said but he knew that there’s something wrong. Knowing Tiffany ever since she’s nine, he could already read Tiffany like an open book.

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“Good morning, Mom. Why are you still here?” Tiffany greeted her mom who's busy eating breakfast at the table.

Tiffany just woke up and she’s still in her PJs when she walked down to eat breakfast. She’s not expecting someone in the dining area this early in the morning because her parents would be gone for work and Leo and Jessica's still probably asleep since it’s Sunday.

“I took the day off. I’m getting pretty stressed out lately because of the business. I’m really getting old,” Sophia answered casually as Tiffany took her seat in front of her mom.

“How’s business, Mom?” Tiffany asked as she helped herself to her food.

"It's good. Slowly but surely we're starting to stand again with the help of Jung's Land of course. Still I'm hoping, after you graduate, which is a few months from now, you'll handle the company well. Can I count on you on that?"

This was the first time Tiffany noticed her mom's wrinkles and freckles. Her parents were surely getting old and it scared her. It scared her, knowing that one day they'd leave her to stand alone and take care of everything that they'd leave behind.

"Yes, of course, Mom." Tiffany smiled.

"I see you didn't sleep in your room but in the guest room last night," Sophia said after a couple of minute's silence.

When she didn't receive an answer from her daughter, she suspected otherwise. "Did you and Jessica fight?" Tiffany merely shrugged and sighed before sipping her coffee.

"Ah. Y'know, I saw her packing her things--"

Tiffany choked.

"Are you okay?" Sophia asked, concerned.

"MOM! WHAT DO YOU MEAN PACKING HER THINGS?!" Tiffany said in panic once she recovered from being choked.

"Well, I went to your room and saw her packing her things. I asked her, she said--" Sophia stopped herself because Tiffany already ran up to her room in hope to stop Jessica without even seeing Sophia's calmness in explaining.

Sophia sighed and shook her head. "She didn't even let me finish. Don't she dare blame me later." She resumed eating with an amused smile, witnessing how Jessica slowly changed Tiffany in just a week.

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"Door open!" Tiffany yelled at the door in a hurry. Once the door opened, she saw Jessica packing on the bed and she stepped in, blocking the door. Her arms and legs spread wide in an attempt to block the whole door as she panted.

"Where... are you... going?" she demanded as she tried to catch her breath. "It's still too early to divorce! We're only married for a week and you already want a divorce?!" But Jessica wasn't listening to her and

continued packing.

“Jessi! Don’t leave yet!” That came out naturally, like she really meant it. Tiffany, herself, was shocked with her own tone.

“Did I give you divorce papers to sign?” Jessica finally spoke as she limped her way inside the closet.

She must have injured herself from the fall last night, Tiffany thought.

“Uhh, no?”

“Where do you think I’m going?” Jessica raised her bag in sight. It was small and all her stuffs wouldn’t fit inside.

“So, you’re not gonna run away?” Tiffany made sure.

“Why would I run away?”

“Because of what happened last night.” Both blushed from the remembrance of what happened.

“I’m not crazy enough to run away just because of an accidental kiss,” Jessica said but she didn’t look at Tiffany.

But I still feel awkward. Guess I’ll lessen the skinship, eye contact and shorten the conversation the whole day, Jessica continued in her head.

“Then, where are you going?”

“I’m going to visit my grandfather. Today’s his death anniversary.”

Then Tiffany realized that she was still in the same position earlier so she straightened herself as she mentally scolded herself for making fun of herself for thinking that Jessica would run away.

“Where?” Tiffany asked as she hid her face from embarrassment though Jessica wasn’t really looking at her.

“Korea.”

“Are you kidding?! You’re going to Korea with that sprain on your ankle?! And how are you going to get there?” Tiffany asked with an unbelievable look.

“Commute.”

“Aish! You’re really crazy! Do you know how crowded it is when you commute?! You might injure your ankle more! You’re not gonna leave without me!” Tiffany demanded, showing her concern for Jessica.

“What?!”

“You heard me!” Then Tiffany started pressing buttons on her wrist watch and Jessica just stared at her in shock.

This was a new side of Tiffany she’s witnessing and she seemed to like it. She stopped herself from smiling as she observed Tiffany speaking frantically on her watch. Jessica found it cute.

“Pilot Han? I want you to prepare the airtrain for Korea now! Yes, now! I’ll be there in a couple of minutes.” Then she pressed another button. “Mr. Baek, can you send a bodyguard in my room? Now! Hurry!”

After a couple of seconds, a bodyguard came in.

Whoa. That’s hell fast, Jessica thought.

“Miss, you called for me?” said the man in black as he kept his head down.

“Yes. You watch her. Don’t let her go anywhere.” She glared at the man before going to the bathroom to prepare herself.

Jessica slumped herself on the bed while a smile of amusement slowly crept on her lips. She scoffed before shaking her head, still with a smile.

What happened to her? She suddenly changed after what happened last night. And also, what happened to me? Why do I find it cute and... and I liked it... hmmm... It wouldn’t hurt if I’ll play with her today, right? She smirked devilishly.

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They left the Hwang’s residence at 10am and arrived in Korea at 1pm. It’s a good thing that they ate lunch in the airtrain since they didn’t know how long they would take in visiting grandpa Jung.

“Now, how are we gonna go to the cemetery?” Tiffany asked once they stepped out of the station. “Ahh, I know! Just call Mr. Go!” she urged Jessica but the other girl had other plan.

“No. we’re gonna ride a bus.”

“Huh? Why? I dunno how that bus thing works!”

“Don’t worry, you have me.”

Jessica started limping after the closest bus that has the route to the cemetery, climbed in, and swiped her debt card through the swipe slit. Tiffany did the same except that she took a couple of seconds looking for her debt card.

“That’s it?” Tiffany asked as she took a seat beside Jessica who was sitting beside the window.

“Yes.” Jessica looked out of the window and smiled freely because she knew Tiffany wasn’t looking. She just found a frantic Tiffany cute.

“How long would this take?” Tiffany kept on rubbing her palm on her jeans as she looked around the bus uncomfortably.

Jessica just shrugged. “Just enjoy the ride and it’ll be fast.” She smiled and Tiffany nodded.

A couple of minutes later, Jessica felt a hot breath on her right cheek so she turned to her right only to find Tiffany’s face so close to hers.

“Wha-what are you doing?” Jessica stuttered.

“I was just trying to look at the view. I haven’t been in this part of the country before and in land so it’s really new to me,” Tiffany answered without making an effort to move back a bit with amusement visible on her eyes.

“Do you want to exchange seats?”

“You don’t mind?” Tiffany’s eyes beamed in happiness and Jessica just nodded.

“Great!” And they exchanged seats, with Tiffany ever so excited of the view of the forest around them like a kid.

The road was slanted and their bus was taking the upward road, making it hard for the bus to climb up since the bus was half full. Some of the passengers were going to a hostel which was the first stop, then the next stop was the cemetery.

“Oh! A chipmunk!” Tiffany pointed at the small animal on a tree on the side of the road, not too far from their bus. Jessica looked over Tiffany’s shoulder and followed the animal with her eyes until they passed by it.

“That’s not a chipmunk, Tiff, it’s a red squirrel,” Jessica explained, her eyes not leaving the view outside the window.

“Pssh, there’s not much of a difference.” Tiffany pouted.

“Chipmunk’s tail is not like that. It’s less puffy.”

“Look at that brown animal on that tree.” Jessica pointed at the tree that’s getting close to their bus.

“Oh yeah?” Tiffany followed it with her eyes until they passed by the tree.

“That’s a chipmunk. See the difference?”

Tiffany finally turned to look at her, their faces, once again, was so close. “Ohhh. I see,” she answered in enlightenment. Jessica rested her back on the back rest before letting out a small laugh.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because you look like a kid on a field trip.” Then she laughed much harder.

“Yah! You can’t blame me. I’ve never been here before and I don’t even know that this place exists!” Tiffany exclaimed, earning a look from the passengers mainly because they’re speaking foreign language.

“Mianheyo... Mianhe...” Jessica slightly bowed her head at the passengers. “Can’t you keep your voice down?”

“Why are there a lot of animals out there anyways? They’re so... free,” Tiffany changed the topic.

“It’s because we own this place. We keep the animals free and in care. Catching them is not allowed,” Jessica whispered, careful enough so the other passengers wouldn’t hear because if they did they might do something unpredictable knowing that two of the biggest companies’ heiresses were riding a bus like a commoner. Their disguise was pretty good, a normal outfit, a cap for Jessica and an eyeglass for Tiffany.

“Whoa. Cool. No wonder you love nature. The whole Jung clan does!” Tiffany said in dreamy tone.

“They just did it because I said so. Grandpa was the first one to take care of this place. Since he died, they never mind this place anymore until I discovered that it’s on the list of the for sale lands except the cemetery. I stopped them. This place was special to Grandpa.”

Jessica cared for the place though she never got the chance to see her grandfather. When she was still a kid, she heard a lot of stories about her grandfather being a great man and some of his hobbies were enjoying the nature. They said that Jessica inherited it from her grandfather.

“Then what about that hostel?” Tiffany pointed at the building they’re nearing.

“We own that too. The people living there are our workers in the company and their dependents. They’re one of the reasons why I don’t want to sell this land. They’ve worked for Grandpa all their lives.”

The passengers hopped down the bus, leaving only Jessica and Tiffany on the bus.

"I'm guessing we're near?" Tiffany said after a couple of minute's silence.

"How did you know?"

"I dunno. The atmosphere suddenly became solemn and different... I dunno." Tiffany shivered.

Jessica scoffed before smirking and, as if on cue, the bus stopped. Jessica limped her way out of the bus, Tiffany following closely behind.

"Lemme carry that." Tiffany carried Jessica's backpack since she was carrying one backpack and one basket.

"Thank you."

They still walked (in Jessica's case, limped) at least a hundred steps before finally getting to Grandpa Jung's tomb. Jessica grabbed a blanket from the basket and sprawled it wide on the grass in front of the tomb. She stood straight on it, bowed ninety degrees, kneeled down, and then bowed again with her hands sandwiched between her forehead and the blanket before standing up.

Tiffany just stood behind her quietly. Her eyes didn't miss how Jessica bit her lower lip when she stood up because her ankle was aching. Tiffany made up her mind.

"Stop." She grabbed Jessica's arm to stop her just when she's about to kneel.

"Wha-"

"I'll do it, how many more times?" Tiffany asked as she positioned herself on the blanket.

"Two."

And then Tiffany started the ritual. Slowly, she's doing it, careful to not offend Jessica and her grandfather if she did it fast.

Jessica observed the girl. She found it sweet that Tiffany did it for her and she couldn't help but smile though her ankle was aching from all the walking they did. All of her body weight was on her right foot because the left one was injured.

"Done. What else?" Tiffany brushed her hand on her shirt.

"Dance."

"What?!"

Jessica laughed at her expression. "I'm just kidding. I'll do the rest myself."

Jessica knelt on the blanket, grabbed some apples and oranges from the basket and put it beside her grandfather's picture along with the other's offerings. The other offerings were probably from her parents and maybe Krystal too.

Jessica then grabbed Tiffany's hand and pulled her down to kneel beside her. "You talk to him."

Jessica clasped her hands together, closed her eyes and spoke in her mind.

Gramps, this girl beside me is the person you wanted me to marry. Do you even know that it's gonna be a girl? But I don't blame you, Gramps. I respect you and I know what you did, I just don't really understand why. Gramps, please give me an answer soon. I know you don't like the contract thing, but that's the least that I can do so Tiffany would marry me. Why do you even have to choose a stubborn girl? Aish... anyways, what can you say about her, Gramps? She just did the ritual for me! It's very unusual of her, y'know...

Tiffany copied Jessica.

Grandpa Jung, it's very nice to finally meet you, Sir. Excuse the harsh words, Sir, I know you have one kind and caring granddaughter here, but I still don't understand why you and Grandpa needed to fix our marriage. If only Grandpa is still alive, I will really scold him! Aish, that old man. Anyways, please just tell my grandpa my regards, okay? I know you two are together, somewhere, laughing at our situation. I just hope that you wouldn't choke with your own spit from laughing so hard. Bye, Grandpa Jung!

By the time Tiffany opened her eyes, she saw that Jessica was already done and was looking at her intently as if trying to hear what she said to Grandpa Jung.

"Wha-what are you looking at?" she stuttered.

"You didn't say harsh words to him, did you?" Jessica narrowed her eyes at Tiffany.

"I-I... I didn't" Tiffany felt uneasy under Jessica's accusing stare.

Jessica broke into a laughter fit. "You're sooo cute!" She pinched Tiffany's cheeks and the latter blushed.

~.~

"You see that Dogwood tree over there?" Jessica pointed at the huge tree in front of her grandfather's tomb after she took a bite of her sandwich.

"Yeah, what about it?" Tiffany asked as she, too, took a bite of her sandwich and a sip of tea.

They're still sitting on the blanket and having snacks. Jessica doesn't want to leave yet though it's already

3pm, she wanted to enjoy the view and the fresh air in this place and Tiffany couldn't do anything about it.

"That tree is one-hundred and forty-three years old. When my family bought this place it was already there. The old owner says that even before he had this place it was already there. They said my grandfather took care of it until he died. It was his favorite tree."

"Really? Cool. Maybe even if our great-granddaughter or grandson dies, that tree would still be there," Tiffany joked.

"Great-granddaughter and great-grandson? How can we have those if we can't even have a child since we're both girls?"

"How 'bout we adopt?"

"Adopt and then after a year and half, what? We bring the child back to where he/she's from? Since we're going to divorce," Jessica stated the fact.

"Oh yeah. You're right."

Silence enveloped them.

Aish, why did I even say that? Tiffany scolded herself.

"Come on, let's go home."

"Wait, aren't you going to visit your parents?"

"If I'll visit them I might not go back to Scorchwood." Jessica stood up and packed their things. Tiffany carried the backpack then Jessica carried the basket and they went out of the cemetery.

Tiffany was walking behind Jessica, observing her silently.

Limp. Limp. Almost fall. Limp. Almost fall. Jessica bit her lip in concentration to not fall. Limp. Almost fa-. She felt a hand gripped her arm and she looked at Tiffany.

"I can do it." She tried to free her arm.

"No."

"Then just let me hold on you." Jessica looked down.

"What's the difference?"

"If you hold my arm you might let go, but if I hold on your arm I'm not gonna let go," Jessica said with a

serious face and Tiffany let her hold on her arm, helping her with every limp.

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Tiffany was sitting comfortably on the airtrain. Her eyes darted out of the window, looking at the clouds below them. The sun was setting and it's already starting to get dark. She sighed and took a glance at where Jessica was sitting, just in front of her.

Jessica was sleeping with her head leaning uncomfortably on the window. She might have gotten tired from all the walking they did. The airtrain shook a bit and Jessica's head moved onto the other side where there's nothing to lean onto. Tiffany sighed before taking the vacant seat beside Jessica.

She wrapped her left arm around Jessica's shoulder and led the girl's head to her shoulder.

This might be uncomfortable but at least you have someone to lean on to.

Jessica snuggled closer and Tiffany tightened her arm around the girl. Jessica might be cold and needing the warmth of Tiffany's body. Tiffany's heartbeat hastened and she doesn't know what to do about it. She rested her head on top of the girl's and sniffed her scent as she closed her eyes before releasing it as a sigh. She knitted her eyebrows; with eyes still closed. She put her right hand on her chest and gripped her shirt as if it could stop the fast beating of her heart.

What's happening to me?

CHAPTER 20:'FRIENDS'



CHAPTER 20:'FRIENDS'

Jessica shifted on the bed with a sigh. She still couldn't sleep and it's already 10pm. She still has classes tomorrow. The images of last nights' happening kept on replaying in her mind which became the reason for her that she wasn't able to sleep. She wasn't able to sleep last night either.

Though everything happened so fast that night, she managed to remember every bits and seconds of their kiss and it's been bugging her the whole day.

She finally gave up and bolted up with a grunt. She left the room and toured around the house for fresh air in her pajamas and sleeveless shirt only to find Tiffany lying flat on the grass at the back of the house.

"What are you doing here?" Jessica asked as she sat cross legged on Tiffany's right side.

"I should be the one asking you that," Tiffany answered as she sat straight up and sat cross legged.

"I couldn't sleep."

"I'm guessing you didn't sleep last night either."

"How did you know?" Jessica looked at Tiffany.

"Because I wasn't beside you," Tiffany answered with a smirk, earning a smack on the arm from Jessica.

"Ouch! What, it's not true?"

"You're so full of yourself." Jessica turned around and faced her back to Tiffany and silence enveloped them.

The silence wasn't comfortable for the two with Jessica still thinking about Tiffany's lips on hers and the fact that she couldn't even look at Tiffany for a long time. Tiffany was thinking about the incident too but she wouldn't let it affect her unlike Jessica who was obviously affected by it without Tiffany knowing the reasons

why.

Ugh! This is killing me!

“Jessi, can we just... just forget about what happened last night?” She threw her hands in the air, giving up.

“We? So you’re affected by it too?” Jessica answered without looking at the girl.

“Yes,” Tiffany whispered but loud enough for Jessica to hear.

Jessica took a deep breath and bit her lower lip. “Tell me... tell me how can I forget about it if it’s... if it’s my first kiss?”

That busted Tiffany’s serious atmosphere and she laughed hard as if it was the funniest thing she has ever heard. Her laughter echoed in the night’s quietness.

“Go on. Laugh all you want!” Jessica said as she ducked her head down in embarrassment.

“You’re freaking twenty-three for Pete’s sake and you still didn’t have your first kiss!?” Tiffany said as she tried to stop herself from laughing and succeeded.

“Well, now I have!” The girl finally looked at Tiffany only to glare at her and Tiffany froze.

“I’m not like you, OK? I wanted my first kiss on my wedding. You know, I could have given it to you on our wedding but you made the contract so I changed my mind in hope that after two years, I would find the right one for me and marry him, that’s when I’ll give my first kiss. But it doesn’t matter now because you stole it.” Jessica pouted as she crossed her arms on her chest.

“What? You want me to give it back to you? Fine!” Tiffany crawled and leaned forward to kiss Jessica but the girl was fast enough to push Tiffany away from her.

“There’s no use! It doesn’t matter now. You can have it!” Jessica was thankful that her blush wasn’t obvious under the fair moon’s light.

“Oh come on, I know you want it.” Tiffany smirked sexily and started leaning forward to the sulking girl.

“Stop it!” Jessica pushed the girl’s face and turned her back again.

“You should at least be proud that you’ve kissed the best kisser in town!” Tiffany said at Jessica’s back but the girl didn’t retort back, instead she kept still on her position with her hand clenching her chest.

A few seconds of silence passed and something started creeping up Tiffany’s chest: guilt.

I must have really offended her with my teasing.

"Jessi, are you mad?" Tiffany scratched the back of her head.

No. it's just that my heart is behaving differently right now. I don't understand it.

"Come on Jessi, speak up!" She poked the other girl's back.

I'm afraid I might say things I don't mean to say.

"You're making me feel guilty here!" Tiffany played with her fingers as she pouted.

Serves you right for teasing me!

Tiffany let out a sigh before crawling slowly in front of Jessica. "Hey, I was just fooling around." She stopped in front of the girl, and cupped her cheeks but Jessica jerked her head away.

"Say sorry first."

"Is that really needed?" Tiffany complained.

"Yes."

"Aigoooo..." Tiffany sighed in defeat and bit her lower lip.

"S-s-s sorry," Tiffany whispered as she looked down on her hand.

"Is that how you say sorry? With feelings," Jessica demanded.

"You can't blame me! I've never said sorry my entire life!" Tiffany complained. "Fine. I'll try again." She took a final breath to compose herself.

Tiffany raised her left hand and hid it behind Jessica's right ear. When it came into view, she was already holding an artificial flower, made of plastic. Jessica's eyes trailed from the flower up to Tiffany's smiling lips and puppy eyes. "Forgive me?" She offered the flower to Jessica in which the girl gladly took and started laughing.

"You should have seen your face!" Jessica hugged her stomach as she laughed hard.

"Aish! You're the one who made me do it!" It's now Tiffany's turn to turn her back on the laughing girl as she pouted.

"Stop it," Jessica said after her laugh subsided and sat cross legged again.

"What?" Tiffany said without looking at the girl.

“That.”

“What, you don’t like my pout?” Tiffany faced Jessica to tease her and she pouted more, now with puppy eyes.

“Aish! Stop it!”

“Why?” Tiffany scooted closer to the girl with the same expression added with an extra cuteness in her voice.

“You’re sooo cute!” Jessica couldn’t take it anymore and pinched Tiffany’s cheeks.

“Ouch! You’ve been pinching me a lot lately, huh!” Tiffany said as she cupped her reddening cheeks. “I’m gonna get my revenge!” Then she started tickling Jessica’s sides.

“Stop it!” Jessica said in between her laughter as she rolled on the grass in an attempt to stop Tiffany.

“That’s what you get for pinching me!” Tiffany continued tickling Jessica till they started rolling on the grass.

Jessica rolled on her right, making Tiffany’s left hand to trap under her, and they stopped. Tiffany was on top of Jessica, their face so close at each other, their chests brushing, and their breaths hitting each other’s faces. Jessica’s hands were gripping Tiffany’s waist along with the stem of the flower that was still on her hand, Tiffany’s left hand was at Jessica’s back while her right one was supporting her body.

“Ehem,” Tiffany cleared her throat as she pulled herself up and lay beside Jessica instead, cheeks burning.

Silence enveloped them once again. It really helped that they momentarily forgot what they were talking about earlier before they started fooling around for them to be able to breathe freely though it’s just for a short time. The two just stared at the sky; both didn’t know what to do or say next.

Jessica’s breathing finally returned to normal with the view of the stars. Sleep started creeping inside her.

“Sooo... we’re okay now? I can now sleep in our room?” Tiffany asked expectantly.

“Did I even tell you not to sleep with me?”

“But I thought you don’t want to see me after what happened?”

“That’s right. I’m glad that you’re understanding and you stayed away from me without me telling you.” Jessica smiled.

“So, friends?” Tiffany offered her hand for a hand shake with a smile.

“Friends.” Jessica took it gladly with a smile.

Silence enveloped them once again but this time it's comfortable.

"You know, Jessi, Mr. Choi used to tell me a story about stars when I was a kid," Tiffany started with her eyes still on the sky.

"Who's Mr. Choi?" Jessica asked as she folded her arms behind her head like a pillow after putting the flower on top of her stomach.

"My old butler but he already died." Tiffany's voice was full of sadness.

"I'm sorry." Jessica faced Tiffany.

"It's okay." The girl smiled bitterly as she too folded her arms behind her head.

"You want to hear it?"

"Sure"

"Once upon a time, there's a beautiful Princess, the only daughter of the king of the Land of Stars. Her job was to weave clouds on her loom. One day a prince from the other kingdom came to their kingdom and met the Princess and fell in love with her beauty. The Princess fell in love with the Prince too. The Prince told the king that he wants to marry the Princess but the King has one condition: the Princess should continue to weave clouds even if they're already married and the Prince and Princess agreed. They got married and the Princess moved to live with the Prince in his kingdom. They're so happy together, so in love that the Princess forgot to weave clouds on her loom and the king wasn't happy about it so he send the Princess to the south to weave clouds and the Prince to the north to rule his own kingdom. They continued loving each other from different sides of the world and magpies heard that the Prince and Princess' love for each was so strong and the magpies build a bridge over the sea of stars so the two would have a chance to meet. The prince and princess believed that no matter how far their love is, miles wouldn't stop them from staying in love with each other.

You know Jessi, the Chinese say that if you look into the night sky on the seventh day of the seventh month in the Chinese calendar, you would see very clearly this bridge of stars... but I've never got the chance to see it." Tiffany raised her hand up as if she could touch the stars. "Mr. Choi told me that he once saw it with his wife." She smiled bitterly before looking at Jessica only to find the girl was already asleep.

The next sincere words came out of Tiffany's mouth as a whisper,

"I want to see it with you, Jessi."

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Inside one of the bars down town was a girl drinking her heart out. She drank her fourth glass for the night and she still doesn't have any plan to stop and just go home because she's just plain depressed and hungry. Hungry for revenge.

"Another glass of Tequila please!" She shouted at the bartender and the guy gave it to her.

A mysterious girl took a seat beside her and the bartender took her order.

"I think you should stop now," the mysterious girl said casually to the depressed girl as she took a small sip from her drink.

"Who are you? I don't even know you!" the girl retorted loudly to overcome the music's loudness.

"But I know everything about you," said the mysterious girl.

"What?! How?" the depressed girl said, her voice groggy.

The mysterious girl let out a small laugh. "I have been here in this club for a week. I have been your seat mate here since then. You just practically drink your heart out and start telling me about your whole life... I find you really interesting." She smirked maliciously at the girl.

"She owns this club," the bartender butted in as he refilled their glasses.

"That's right. All of the VIP clubs down the street and a couple of cheap bars, I own them."

"Then why are you here in this cheap bar? Why don't you go to your VIP clubs and bug other people there," The depressed girl retorted, not caring about the girl's wealth.

"Honestly, I don't really know but I never regretted that I did because I met you here." She smirked.

The depressed girl narrowed her eyes and studied the other girl's face. She has the sexiest smirk she's ever seen. The calmness on her voice soothed her and she doesn't know why but the girl seemed to glow under the colorful lightings of the bar.

"Who are you?" The depressed girl held her head to stop it from throbbing.

"Y'know, I can help you," the mysterious girl started, not answering the girl's question. She scooted closer and whispered hotly on the girl's ear, "I know the deepest, darkest secret and desires of your heart... Choi Sooyoung."

Sooyoung cringed at the name. She despised it so much because it brings back old, sad and dark memories -- the very reason why she was at this bar, drinking her heart out, and the very reason why she wanted

revenge.

The mysterious girl slid her hand on the girl's back pocket before standing up and started walking away slowly.

Sooyoung slid her hand into her back pocket and fished out a piece of card. She managed to read it though her head was spinning and the lighting was poor.

Dancing Queen: Kim HyoYeon

That was the weirdest calling card she'd ever seen but she doesn't care. She needed the help now. Badly.

"Wait!" Sooyoung called Hyoyeon and the girl faced her with a confident smirk.

"Do you think... do you think you can prepare everything tonight so I can do all my plans tomorrow morning?"

Hyoyeon's smile slowly grew wider, revealing her white teeth. "I'm not called The Great Kim Hyoyeon for nothing."

CHAPTER 21: 'SICKNESS'



CHAPTER 21: 'SICKNESS'

The alarm clock rang loudly, and someone smacked it dead.

"Ugh. Stupid alarm clock," Tiffany complained under the blanket after she literally killed the poor clock.

After a couple of minutes, she finally sat up, letting the blanket slid to her lap.

"Hey, Jessi, wake up." She slightly tapped the girl's shoulder which was still covered by the blanket. Tiffany scratched her head with her eyes half lidded when Jessica didn't wake up.

She sniffed. "Jessi! We're going to be late again!" She rocked the girl's shoulder back and forth but to no avail. "Jessi-" She stopped in mid sentence when she removed Jessica's blanket and found that the girl's arms were all red. She knitted her eyebrows in confusion.

"Hey, Jessi, what's that?" Tiffany asked as she pointed at her arms and Jessica finally woke up.

"What?" Jessica asked groggily as she sat up and observed her arm. "Oh noooooo," she groaned as she lay back on the bed.

Tiffany sniffed again. "What's that?"

"Allergies."

"From what?"

"Grass."

"You mean from last night?" Tiffany sniffed. "Aish, who even told you to lay there?"

"You laid there first! And why do you keep sniffing like that? Do you have a cold?" Jessica demanded.

"I think so." Tiffany shrugged her shoulders as she stood up too.

"What are you doing?" Tiffany grabbed the girl's left arm to stop her from scratching her right arm.

"It's itchy." Jessica complained as she raised her right hand to scratch her left one only to be grabbed again by Tiffany.

"You'll make it worse," Tiffany scolded while holding both Jessica's hands to stop her from scratching as she kept on sniffing.

"Look at you; you have a cold now because you laid outside in the cold for too long," Jessica scolded the sniffing girl.

"It doesn't matter. Yours is worse." Tiffany let go one of Jessica's hands only to speak to her watch. "Mr. Baek, can you bring an ointment for skin allergies in my room now?"

"And a medicine for colds!" Jessica butted in. Once again, her free arm aimed to scratch the other one only to be grabbed by Tiffany again.

"Aish! Stop scratching!" She sniffed.

"And stop sniffing! I can't help it! It's itchy!" Jessica struggled to scratch her tummy.

"What?" Tiffany let go of the girls hands and lifted her shirt, revealing Jessica's tummy.

"Wha- what are you doing?!" Jessica tried to pull down her shirt, totally flushed, but Tiffany was too strong.

"Aish! It already spread all over your body! You could have told me you have allergies with grass, look at your body now!" Tiffany continued scolding the blushing girl, oblivious of the girl's reddening cheeks.

"Stop it!" Jessica still tried to struggle.

"Where else?" Tiffany straightened, still holding up the girl's shirt while sniffing.

"Nowhere else," Jessica assured.

Tiffany turned Jessica around to she could inspect her back. "Lemme se--"

"Miss--" Mr. Baek stopped in front of the door, holding a tray of medicine and ointment.

He just witnessed the two's awkward position, with Jessica totally flushed, Tiffany standing behind her, sniffing and holding her shirt up and her other hand on the girl's waist.

"I didn't mean to interrupt, Miss." Mr. Baek looked down, flushed.

"We- we're not doing anything." Tiffany finally let go of the girl's shirt as she straightened herself, cheeks reddening. "Bring it here."

Mr. Baek handed her the tray and he quickly left.

"Remove your shirt," Tiffany commended before she sniffed again.

"Wha- wha- why?" Jessica's cheeks turned a deeper shade of pink. Tiffany might have mistaken that the rashes reached her face.

"So I can put the ointment on your body."

"I can do it myself."

"But you wouldn't reach your back."

"Then I'll just call you when I need you."

"Still," Tiffany insisted, in which Jessica's eyes narrowed.

"You know what, I'm starting to doubt if you're really concerned with me or you just wanted to see my body," Jessica said slowly.

"Wha-what?! Then do it yourself!"

Jessica smirked, knowing that she won.

Tiffany grabbed the ointment and shoved the girl inside the bathroom.

"Aish... I was just concerned for her." Tiffany complained to herself as she lay back on the bed, still sniffing. She took a glance at the clock and it read 5:40.

She stood up and drank the medicine in hope that she'd get better. She would go to school no matter what happen but she wouldn't let Jessica, since she has allergies.

"Uhm, Tiff, I think I need your help." Jessica stuck her head out the door and Tiffany immediately went to her.

"What is it?" Tiffany asked as the bathroom door closed behind her.

"I couldn't reach my back." Jessica ducked her head down as she faced her back on the girl.

"I'll do it then." Tiffany put an amount of ointment in her hands and lifted Jessica's shirt before rubbing it on

Jessica's back.

Why is it so hot in here? Jessica thought as she unconsciously fanned herself with her hands.

The very moment Tiffany's hands came in contact with her skin she felt a bolt of electricity spread all over her body. Every stroke Tiffany did was making her feel hot and the girl's slow rubbing wasn't helping her at all.

Tiffany's eyes were roaming all around Jessica's back. She didn't fail to notice her awesome curves and milky white smooth skin. She was so lost in her thoughts that she didn't notice herself rubbing so slow until her eyes landed on the lock of Jessica's bra, feeling the urge to unbuckle it and eat the poor girl alive.

Tiffany! What are you thinking?! Tiffany scolded herself before shaking her head to stop her thoughts and just focus on what she's doing.

She's Tiffany Hwang and she's not used to resisting temptation but for the poor innocent girl, she's willing to stop herself. And why was she even tempted in the first place? Jessica's a... girl.

"Erm, Jessi, I won't let you to go to school," she casually said as she sniffed. The hot temperature wasn't helping her runny nose at all.

"What? Why? I can't afford to skip today!"

"Look at all these? You can't go to school with these! It might get worse."

"If I'm not going, you're not going too! You have a cold," Jessica defended.

"Aish! I can go to school with a cold but you cannot go to school with these rashes." Tiffany's face was showing a clear expression of worry.

"Tiff!" Jessica finally turned around and grabbed both of her hands. "I want to go to school, please!" Jessica put up her puppy eyes which Tiffany couldn't counter back.

Tiffany heaved a sigh of defeat. When did Jessica ever say 'please' to her? "Fine. But you bring the ointments. You might need to apply it once in a while." Tiffany then left Jessica inside the bathroom.

~.~

The exact moment Tiffany and Jessica landed their foot in front of the big glass door of their school building, the student started shuffling inside, whispering to each other.

Tiffany knitted her eyebrows. "What's up with them?" she asked after they entered the door.

Though she's used to this behavior of the students when they're around, she sensed that this time was different.

The students started moving aside, making a way in the middle for Jessica and Tiffany.

"Aren't they so sweet?"

"They look perfect together."

The students whispered to each other. Looking at every move the couple did. Tiffany glanced at their intertwined hands. *It doesn't even fit*, she thought. But what were these people talking about?

"Hey, Taeng!" Tiffany called the girl walking to her direction.

"Yes, Couz?" she answered as she hugged her books.

"What's up with the commotion? Why are these students watching us?" Tiffany asked.

"You don't know?!" Taeyeon glanced at Jessica who was uncomfortably standing beside Tiffany, hands locked with Tiffany's.

"What is it?"

"The school's photographer caught you." Taeyeon smirked.

"What?" the two said in unison. They don't have any idea what Taeyeon was talking about.

"Look!" Taeyeon pointed at the huge screen on the wall not too far from them.

Their eyes grew wide, mouth hanged open. On the screen was the two of them kissing under the moonlight, that night of the welcoming dance.

Tiffany quickly spun her arm around Jessica and covered her eyes. "Where the hell was that from?!"

"I already saw it, Tiffany." Jessica removed the hands on her eyes and Tiffany just let go.

"Where was that from?" Jessica calmly asked Taeyeon.

"Like I said, the school's photographer. It was also on the school's newspaper too." She handed the newspaper to the two.

"That guy is so dead!" Tiffany hissed behind gritted teeth. Just then she remembered that most of the students were still around them so she immediately put her arm around Jessica's shoulders. "What are you looking at?! You're jealous?! Find your own partner and mind your own business!" she yelled at the students

and they hurriedly left them and started minding their own businesses in fear of Tiffany.

“Gotta go now, Couz. Need to prepare for later’s radio. Make sure you tune in, okay?”

“Do I have any choice? It airs all over the campus, y’know?” Tiffany said sarcastically. Taeyeon just patted her shoulder with a smile and left the two there.

Tiffany glanced at Jessica only to find her glaring at the huge picture on the front page of the newspaper. Both of them sighed.

“And oh, Couz! You already know what’s the big news on the radio later, right? ‘The Magical kiss!’ ” Taeyeon ran for her life after teasing her cousin, leaving her laughter echoing in the hallways.

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Jessica slammed the newspaper on her table and took her seat. Tiffany was already seated beside her.

“Fany-ah!” Yuri called from the back. “Now I know why you two left early that night,” she continued with a knowing smirk.

“Why?” the girl still asked though she already knew what Yuri was going to say.

“Because you couldn’t control your hormones!” Yuri teased.

“Why... you!” Tiffany grunted with gritted teeth and she stood up, ready to give Yuri what she deserved, only to be stopped by Jessica’s hand on her arm.

“Tiff, let it go,” she said with less energy. Early in the morning and she’s already not in a good mood.

“You’re lucky this time,” Tiffany threatened and sat back down.

“Seriously, Tiffany, you two did what Yuri and Yoona does?” Seohyun asked in disbelief.

“What?!” Yuri and Yoona said in unison. “We’re not doing anything!” Yuri continued.

“You too, Seohyun? Seriously, you need to stop hanging out with that two, they have been corrupting your mind,” Tiffany said before she faced forward and grunted, slamming her head on the table. The robot would start talking in just a few seconds.

“Yah! We’re no-“

“Tiffany and Jessica Hwang!” Yuri was cut by the Headmaster’s loud voice. He entered the room and switched off the robot teacher before calling out again, “Tiffany and Jessica Hwang, stand up.” He was having that arrogant look on his face.

“What?!” Tiffany complained loudly as she stood up, Jessica followed suit. Everybody kept still.

“You probably know why I’m here.”

“I don’t. Why? To annoy me first thing in the morning?” Tiffany was already pissed. So many things were happening and to think it’s still morning. She doesn’t have any idea what would happen later in the afternoon and so on.

“Don’t talk to me like that,” he threatened.

“I can’t? Why? I have the rights! I pay for your salary!”

“Shut up!” He was getting pissed based on how he gritted his teeth.

“Don’t shout at me! You don’t have the rights to do so! Even my own parents never shouted at me!” Tiffany retorted.

“Yo-“

“ENOUGH!” Jessica yelled, earning the looks of her classmates who were looking at Tiffany and the Headmaster a while ago.

“Sir, I’m sorry for her behavior.” Jessica bowed. “Tiffany.” She just looked at the girl and Tiffany saw that Jessica was affected too, through her eyes.

“I came here not to annoy you,” he started in a much calmer voice. “I came here to ask you about the latest news. Didn’t I tell you to not do malicious things on the night of the Welcoming Dance?”

“Yes, Sir,” Jessica answered.

“And what about this picture spreading around the campus?”

“That was an ac-“

“We understand, Sir.” Jessica held Tiffany’s hand to stop her. “We’re accepting the detention.”

Tiffany’s eyes grew wide but she couldn’t talk because Jessica was glaring at her.

“Jessi, you can’t! You have allergies!” Tiffany whispered.

"Tiffany, please? I *need* you to let me deal with this," Jessica whispered back, giving emphasis to the word 'need'.

"Very well. You two meet me at my office after school." And he turned to leave with his chin held up, showing triumph.

"Wait!" Tiffany called.

"Yes?"

"I'm taking her detention," she continued while pointing at Jessica.

"Tiffany?" Jessica said in disbelief but Tiffany's decision was final.

"What?" The Headmaster asked.

"I'm willing to do twice as hard just don't involve her here." Everyone gasped. *The Tiffany Hwang* was taking detention? She never did that. Ever. No matter what she did and how bad it was.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," Tiffany assured.

"Meet me in my office later then." He turned to leave but stopped again. "Oh, I almost forgot. This class would be having another student." He glanced at the door. "Please come in."

A tall girl with long brown hair came in.

"Introduce yourself."

The girl bowed and showed a genuine smile. "Hi, everyone! I'm Choi Summer. I hope we can get along well!" Summer said enthusiastically.

"Just so y'know, her guardian is Kim Hyoyeon," The Headmaster informed the students and they gasped with their eyes sparking at the mention of Hyoyeon's name.

"You mean the owner of VIP clubs in town?" one guy student asked dreamily. Hyoyeon was surely famous with these students because they went to her clubs all the time.

"Yes," Summer answered and the students settled down, thinking that they need to get close to her so they could go inside the VIP clubs easily.

"You can choose wherever you want to sit, Summer." Finally, the headmaster left after turning on the robot teacher.

“What did you just do?” Jessica asked as she and Tiffany took their seat. The whole room was already dimmed and the robot was starting their lesson. Jessica saw, from the corner of her eye, that Summer took the vacant seat beside her.

“I can’t let you do detention. You have allergies and I don’t trust that man. He seems suspicious,” Tiffany whispered as she leaned closer to Jessica so she wouldn’t interrupt their lesson and for Summer not to hear.

“You don’t need to do that. And he’s not suspicious, you’re just over protective.” Jessica accidentally hit it. She realized, *Why is she so protective of me? It’s not as if we’re a real couple to do such things. We’re just friends... friends... do friends do that? Of course,* Jessica tried to fool herself so she wouldn’t jump into conclusions that Tiffany might have feelings for her but that’s one of the possibilities she kept in mind, just that she doesn’t want to believe as long as there’s still other reasons.

But, surely, days would come and there would be no other reasons to believe in but that.

“I want to do it. Don’t you even dare ask why,” Tiffany said as she kept her attention locked on the hologram.

‘Coz I don’t even know myself, Tiffany continued in her head.

Jessica turned to look at Tiffany and she suddenly felt the urge to do something and she doesn’t know why. She kissed Tiffany’s cheek.

“What’s that for?” Tiffany asked as she looked at the culprit, wide eyed. She cupped her cheek and for the first time she was thankful that the room was dimmed and Jessica couldn’t see her blushing cheeks. Little did she know, the culprit, too, was glad that the room was dimmed for the same reason.

“A... a thank you.” Jessica played with her fingers.

Tiffany just nodded and went back to listening to the talking robot. But her mind was somewhere else. Somewhere far from Egypt which the robot was talking about.

That’s okay. Friends do that, they both thought.

Jessica felt a tap on her shoulder and she turned her head towards it. “Yes?”

“Uhh, hi, I’m Choi Summer, and you?” She handed her hand for a hand shake.

“Jessica, Jessica Hwang. Nice to meet you.” Jessica flashed a smile as she shook her hand.

“It’s nice to meet you too. I hope we can be friends.” Summer flashed a smile.

“Of course,” Jessica said.

“Not,” Tiffany butted in from over Jessica’s shoulder. She doesn’t seem to trust anyone other than her friends.

Tiffany spun her arm around Jessica’s shoulder and pulled her closer to her body as she kept her eyes in front, marking her territory. Jessica gave an apologetic smile to Summer and the girl nodded. Just like that and they understood each other.

You’re going to pay, Tiffany, just you wait, Summer thought as she kept her eyes on the teacher as if she was listening.

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“Yoona, Yuri,” Seohyun, who was sitting at the far back, beside Yoona and Yuri, whispered.

“Yes?”

“You two are in love, right?” The two looked at each other, shocked by the younger girl’s question.

“Yes,” Yuri answered.

“I just want to make sure if the passage I’ve read was true. Is it true that when you’re in love, you change and you become a selfless person?”

Yoona and Yuri chuckled before answering at the same time, “Yes, that’s true.”

“How did you know?” Yuri asked Yoona.

“That’s what I observed of you.”

“That’s what I observed of you too, that’s why I knew.” And their conversation continued from then on.

Seohyun didn’t bother listening because her mind was somewhere else, particularly at Tiffany who was sitting not too far ahead of her.

Ahh, that’s why Tiffany changed, it’s because she’s in love, Seohyun told herself.

Seohyun saw how Tiffany immediately changed after her wedding. She wasn’t that arrogant anymore. She doesn’t fight frequently. Normally, she wouldn’t let anyone control her but Jessica could control her just like that, and she became a selfless person too, especially if it involved Jessica. Her speculations were now being proved one by one, leading to one concrete truth-- Tiffany, really, was in love with her wife. No wonder she married Jessica. It’s not that Seohyun doubted it anyway, she just saw it accidentally.

Now, Seohyun's mind wondered about Jessica. Was she in love with Tiffany too? She doesn't know Jessica too well to know if what she's showing was love. Seohyun didn't bother to think deep, for a quiet and observant person like her, answers will come to her in no time. She just needed to wait and observe intently. But she's holding on to one thing: that kiss Jessica gave Tiffany earlier, she saw it and that's her first proof.

Seohyun didn't even know she knew something that Tiffany, herself, didn't know.

CHAPTER 22:'TOGETHER'



CHAPTER 22:'TOGETHER'

"Tiffany, come on. I think she's a good person," Yuri tried to convince Tiffany.

They have done and said anything to convince the girl --they even tried bribing her-- but she was so stubborn to even listen.

"No."

"I think she deserves to eat with us. Hyoyeon is a huge person, y'know? That means Summer, too," Yoona butted in.

"I know."

"Then let her eat with us. The more the merrier," Seohyun said.

"Tiffany, look at her," Jessica said as she pointed at where Summer was sitting and eating alone.

"No."

"Come on! It's not as if she'll steal Jessica away from you." Yuri crossed her arms on her chest.

"What?"

"Isn't that what you think? You're jealous because she wanted to be friends with Jessica," Yoona stated the obvious.

"I'm not!"

"Then let her eat with us!" Seohyun said desperately.

“No.”

“If you wouldn’t let her, we’ll move to her table and leave you here,” Jessica threatened.

“As if like you can.”

“We can! Come on, guys!” Yuri pulled Yoona and Seohyun away with Jessica following behind but Tiffany caught her wrist.

“Aish! Fine!” Tiffany said, defeated. She slumped back on her seat, pulling Jessica with her.

“Cool!” Yuri cheered before going to Summer’s table. She came back after a minute with Summer trailing behind her, tray of food in her hand.

“Hello,” she said shyly.

“I’m Yuri, this is Yoona and Seohyun, Tiffany and Jessica.” Yuri pointed at the girls respectively.

“From now on, you’ll be our friend and you’ll be hanging out with us,” Yoona said.

“Okay. That’s.... that’s cool,” Summer said nervously because Tiffany was glaring at her.

“And don’t mind Tiffany, she’s always like that...” Seohyun said as she pulled Summer to sit beside her.

“...jealous.” Yuri continued.

“I’m not jeal-mmmpphh.” Tiffany’s retort was muffled when Jessica stuffed her mouth with food.

“You were saying something?” Jessica said with a teasing smile. When Tiffany didn’t answer as she chewed the food, she continued, “Good. Just eat,” with a commanding tone.

They ate in silence until Taeyeon’s voice came blaring from the speakers on the cafeteria’s corners.

“Hello, everyone! It’s time for Philopolis’ Radio once again! We’re your DJ for this noon, Kangin and Taeyeon, who else?” Taeyeon’s laugh blended with the background song. “Okay, let’s start. Does everyone already know the biggest news?”

“You’re sooo dense if you still don’t know it,” Kangin, her co-DJ continued.

“Right. It has been all over the campus!”

“The Hwang couple’s making a huge issue in this and I heard the Headmaster made Tiffany do detention!” Kangin said.

“Our new Headmaster is really powerful. Come to think of it, he made my cousin do the detention in which no one ever did!”

Tiffany stopped eating only to listen. She knew this would happen. Because of taking the detention she made the headmaster looked so powerful and scary that even she, the boss, followed him.

“I’m scared of him nooooww,” Kangin joked.

“Be careful! He’s listening!” Taeyeon warned.

“Oops, sorry Headmaster,” Kangin said sheepishly.

“Anyways, what can you say about the kiss, partner? Isn’t it soooo sweet?” Taeyeon said dreamily.

“Yeah. I think they’re really made for each other.”

“I understand my cousin. I mean, Jessica’s really pretty that she can’t take a hold of herself especially when Jessica was in that dress. She looked so pretty in it.”

Tiffany and Jessica ducked their head down in embarrassment with heat spreading on their cheeks. They’ve lost their appetite because of the crowd’s eyes darted at them.

“Kim Taeyeon... you’re so dead,” Tiffany muttered under her breath.

“That’s right! Even I found myself attracted to her. If Jessica isn’t married yet, I would have courted her,” Kangin joked.

“Hey, hey! Don’t ever try to mess with them,” Taeyeon warned.

“I was kidding. Actually I like Tiffany more.”

“Oh no, Kangin! Not my cousin!” Taeyeon defended.

“I was just kidding, partner. Relax!” Kangin laughed.

“Kidding aside. I think we should get their side of the story. Like how much they love each other and all that. I mean, it’s really unusual to get married when you’re still studying, I wonder what made them do it, especially, everyone knows how straight and playgirl Tiffany is. I was really shocked when I heard that she married a girl! They must have loved each other that much... that would be a great feature story, don’t you think?”

“I think so. But knowing my cousin, she wouldn’t make any comment about this and I’m guessing she’s fuming in anger now. I’m so dead,” Taeyeon said dramatically.

“Don’t worry, partner, I’ll attend your funeral,” Kangin joked and everyone who’s listening laughed, save for Tiffany and Jessica.

“You know what; I’ve always believed that love’s power is insane. It can make you do things you never imagined of doing,” Kangin said seriously.

“Agree... and I believe, too, that love can act like a bridge that connects the sky and the ground.” Taeyeon suddenly turned serious and she sighed in remembrance of Sunny. She missed the girl badly.

“Okay, enough of that. We’re in for a music break! Eat well everyone!” She tried to hide her feelings for that final line before playing a song.

“Aish!” Tiffany was fuming in ire, her face red in embarrassment and anger at the same time.

“That’s okay, Fany, we understand that you really can’t get a hold of yourself when it comes to Jessica,” Seohyun said casually as she ate.

“I agree. Isn’t that the reason why you married her?” Summer said.

Tiffany just stared at them, wasn’t sure how and what to answer.

“Why do you keep blaming it to me? Why not blame Jessi for once?” Tiffany finally said.

“What?” Jessica was suddenly alarmed at the mention of her name. “I wasn’t doing anything.” Her right hand was busy scratching her neck.

“What are you doing?” Tiffany pulled her hand away from her neck and pulled the girl’s collar apart to examine her neck. The others were staring at them confusedly.

“Do you have the ointment?” Jessica nodded at Tiffany’s question.

“Let’s go.” Tiffany stood up and pulled Jessica with her.

“What? Where?” were all Summer, Yuri, Yoona and Seohyun heard from Jessica as they left the cafeteria.

“Ooookay, what was that?” Seohyun asked confusedly.

“I don’t have any idea,” Summer said with a shake of her shoulders.

“What’s up with neck and an ointment?” Yoona asked with her right eyebrow raised.

“Those two is really something,” Yuri said. “Are they using the ointment as an...?” She looked at the others suggestively.

“Ouch! Why did you do that!?” Yuri complained after Yoona slapped her arm.

“I know what you’re thinking, Kwon Yuri... Just eat,” Yoona commanded and Yuri followed like a kid scolded by her mom.

A few seconds later they heard a giggle and they all looked at Summer.

“You’re funny.” Summer motioned to Yoona and Yuri.

“Is that a compliment?”

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“Okay, enough of that. We’re in for a music break! Eat well everyone!” Taeyeon kicked the floor to roll her swivel chair away from the table and spun it so her back was facing Kangin.

Images of a certain bubbly girl was clouding up her mind, the slow song in the background wasn’t helping either. Her heart was twitching and she doesn’t like the feeling. She clutched her chest as if by doing so the twitching would stop, but it didn’t.

“Hey, partner,” Kangin removed his headphones and stood up. “I’m going to grab lunch, you wanna go with me?” he offered.

“No thanks, I’m fine.”

“If you’re worrying about the radio, you can leave it for a while, it will go on playing songs by itself.”

“Actually, I already ate before I came here,” Taeyeon lied. “Just go ahead.” Kangin nodded in understanding and he left.

Taeyeon left out a sigh as she clutched her phone at her other hand. She was trying to stop herself from calling Sunny because she knew that Sunny has work. But she badly needed to hear the girl’s voice before she continues on with her day, and so she dialed Sunny’s number on her speed dial one.

It rang twice.

“Come on, pick up.”

“Hello, Taeyeon?”

“Sunny!” Taeyeon’s mood suddenly lifted up.

"No need to shout, Taeng." She imagined Sunny giggling on the other line.

"Sorry... I just... I just miss you." She scratched the back of her head.

"I miss you too. How's school?" She imagined Sunny looking at her tenderly while ruffling her hair as she asked.

"It's okay, just really busy... I want to see you, Sunny." Sunny liked the sound of desperation in Taeyeon's voice.

"Focus on your study first; I don't want to be the reason for your failing grades," Sunny said, though inside all she wanted to say was: "You don't know how much I wanted to see you too."

"Okay," Taeyeon said, defeated. "By the way, how's Leo?" She suddenly remembered when Sunny told her, through the phone, that Leo knew about them.

"He wasn't doing anything lately. He just goes to school, go home, eat then sleep. He never talked about us again."

"That's good. Haven't you tried talking to him?"

"Actually, no. I was busy with work."

"Don't over tire yourself, okay? I don't want you to get sick." Sunny felt soothed at the sound of Taeyeon's concerned voice.

"I'm not gonna get sick, Taeng. There's like... twenty plus maids and butlers here to help with all the works," Sunny assured.

"Still, you should take care of yourself because I'm not always beside you to take care of you."

"Yes, Mom," Sunny joked before giggling. "Speaking of work, there's a lot of it to do. I need to go now, Taeng."

"Okay." Taeyeon felt the twitching feeling was back. "Uhh... take care... I love you." Taeyeon closed her eyes, anticipating for Sunny's answer.

"You take care too, okay?" Sunny was not sure of what to say next, there was a dead air for a while.

"Buh-bye," Sunny said before cutting the call.

Taeyeon clicked her tongue as she opened her eyes. She's a little bit disappointed with Sunny's answer but she's happy, too, because she heard the girl's voice.

"Her voice's enough for me."

~.~

Tiffany locked the restroom's door behind her as Jessica examined her neck in the mirror.

"Tsk tsk." Jessica shook her head before removing her coat, revealing a white long-sleeved polo, and she put the coat beside the sink.

She opened the first two buttons to check on her shoulder. She rolled up her sleeve to check on her arm. After a few more seconds, she's done with checking.

"Most of the rashes are gone except from my shoulders to my neck," Jessica said to Tiffany who was leaning her back on the sink, not looking at Jessica.

"Mind helping me? Lunch time's gonna end soon."

"Sure," was all Tiffany said before putting an ointment on her hand.

She pulled Jessica's collar to reveal the girl's shoulder. The urge --which still made her confused because she only felt it with a hot guy-- was back and images of stripping Jessica's clothes immediately came flooding her mind.

Oh my gosh, Tiffany, what's wrong with you? Tiffany scolded herself and her breathing became ragged.

Jessica, who was busy putting an ointment on her other shoulder, suddenly felt ticklish when Tiffany's hand came in contact with her skin that she slightly flinched. She felt as if her heart would leap out from her throat.

"Does it hurt?" Tiffany asked worriedly.

"U-uhm... N-no," Jessica stuttered as her cheeks turned pink. She realized that Tiffany, too, was flushed because of their close proximity.

Jessica rushed putting the ointment on her shoulder so she could start with her neck. By the time she was putting the ointment on her neck, Tiffany was already back leaning at the sink where she was leaning at a while ago. She checked her watch.

"Hurry up, it's almost time," she simply said, avoiding Jessica's view with the buttons of her polo still open.

Jessica hurriedly buttoned up her polo and put on her coat.

“Thank you for helping,” Jessica said as she opened the door and they went out.

“No problem.”

They walked to Jessica’s class silently, hand in hand. People around was still talking about them. Some were envying them but that did not include a certain girl watching them from afar.

With one last kiss on the cheek, Tiffany left to go to her own class.

Summer, who witnessed the two’s sweetness starting from when they came out of the comfort room, narrowed her eyes as she smirked.

“She’s really that important to you huh, Tiffany?”

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Every student started standing up at the sound of the bell, picking up their things, ready to go home. Another tiring day at school has, again, ended for the common students but not for the Hwang couple.

“Just wait for me in the car; I need to meet the headmaster,” Tiffany said as they went out of their room.

“No. I’m coming with you.” Jessica smiled sweetly as she took the girl’s hand in hers.

“Okay.” Tiffany couldn’t say no to Jessica’s sweetness for she found herself growing fond of it.

They walked in a comfortable silence though the corridor was loud with the students rushing to go home, common girls chatting about who-knows-what, probably about the latest superstar’s news, boys talking about girls they had sex with and a certain group of cheerleaders talking about the hottest girls and guys in the school.

After a couple of minutes, they’ve reached the headmaster’s room.

“Wait for me here.” Tiffany let go of the girl’s hand and pressed a button beside the door.

“Tiffany Hwang,” she said through the intercom and the door opened at the headmaster’s command.

“Uh, Tiffany.” Jessica held her wrist. “Don’t argue with him, okay?”

“Don’t worry.” Tiffany smiled before coming in, leaving Jessica outside, leaning her back on the wall.

Jessica just watched people walk animatedly past her. Friends chatting, couples groping and some robot guards roaming around, checking every room. She realized that people in this school were in different personalities, different than the people from her old school, and all different from her. This was Tiffany's world, what Tiffany grew up with, far from Jessica's world.

A glimpse of the thought about her being the right one for Tiffany crossed her mind and she blamed her mom for opening the topic up with her the last time they talked on the phone. She knew that she shouldn't be thinking about it because in the said date, they're going to part. If she'd ask herself, she wouldn't deny that she hated thinking about it for she wanted to stay with Tiffany for the rest of her life --she believed in the sacredness of a wedding-- but Tiffany asked for it and she stupidly said yes.

She admitted that she wasn't thinking straight when she signed the contract and she blamed herself for it. She didn't think about the possibilities that could happen inside their marriage.

1. Their parents might ask them to adopt a child.
 2. If not adopt a child, one of them were going to conceive with the use of another man.
- And the least that she expected:
3. Fall in love.

Seeing Tiffany's nature right in front of her eyes made her think how she doesn't really fit, how their hands doesn't fit, how their personalities doesn't fit and why she wasn't the right one for Tiffany. Their worlds were far apart from each other.

"We don't really fit."

"What are you saying?" Tiffany said as she went out of the door. She just heard Jessica whispering to herself.

"Oh. Nothing." Jessica straightened herself and she just realized that the hallway was now cleared without any signs of people around. Tiffany seriously took a lot of time in there and she seriously took a lot of time thinking, again.

"I see you've been thinking too much." Tiffany smiled as messed up Jessica's hair. "Let's go." Tiffany took the girl's hand and they walked out of the building with Jessica fixing her hair without any complain.

No one's even around. Why is she holding my hand?

~.~

"Don't you wanna stay?" Yoona asked Yuri as they stood in from of the Im's home.

"Hmm... Mom's asking me to go shopping with her... y'know, bonding."

Yoona's shoulder slumped. "But no one's home."

"Really?" Yuri's eyes beamed.

This is my chance, she thought evilly.

"Yes." Yoona still has the sad look on her face.

"Hmm... I think..." Yuri checked her watch. "I still have some time to spare."

"Yay! Let's go watch movies!" Yoona squealed in delight, wrapped her arm around Yuri's and pulled her inside.

I know you too well, Kwon Yuri, Yoona thought in triumph.

~.~

"Would you stop doing that?" Yoona complained to Yuri who was sitting on her left as she kept her eyes on the huge screen of their home theatre.

"What?" Yuri said innocently.

"That!" Yoona pointed at Yuri's right hand which was busy with flipping the controller in between her fingers - a habit Yuri does, with anything she took a hold of, when she's bored.

"Then give my hand something to be busy with." Both of them suddenly flushed at what Yuri said.

"You wanted me to stay but then you don't even entertain me." Yuri recomposed herself.

"Isn't the movie entertaining to you?"

"No, because only you entertains me." They both blushed again. Yuri really did have tendencies of blurting out unexpected things.

Yoona took Yuri's right arm and spun it around her shoulders.

"Keep it there. And don't play with my hair." Yoona knew that Yuri would, for they have experienced the same thing a couple of times before.

Fine. You're not gonna entertain me? I'm gonna entertain myself.

Yuri tightened her arm around the girl and pulled her closer to her body in which Yoona gladly followed. She started smelling the girl's hair, totally stealing Yoona's focus away from the movie.

"Would you stop doing that?"

"What?"

"Smelling my hair."

"Why do you keep complaining? You know what, I'm starting to get jealous of that movie." Yuri pointed fiercely at the screen.

"Sorry." Yoona buried her face on the girl's chest. "I just wanted you to stay because I miss you."

"We're always together and yet you still miss me?"

Yoona held up her face, a centimeter away from Yuri's, their nose almost touching, before nodding. They just stared at each other, completely ignoring the movie, lost in each other's eyes.

"Would you stop doing that?" It was now Yuri's turn to complain.

"What?"

"Looking beautiful," Yuri said in a dreamy tone.

Yoona let out a giggle. "I can't help it. That's inborn."

They continued to stare at each other until Yoona spoke again.

"I just realized, you're more fun to watch than the movie."

It was now Yuri's turn to giggle. "I told you, you don't need that movie, you just need me." Yoona knew that smile playing along Yuri's lips-- triumph.

"You're so full of yourself... but I like that." Yoona lunged and captured the girl's lips and they kissed passionately.

I'll let you win this time, Kwon Yuri, 'coz you're so irresistible.

~.~

“Sooyoung, don’t you wanna move in with me?” Hyoyeon said as she sat comfortably at Sooyoung’s sofa, eyeing the whole of the girl’s small apartment.

“What for?” Sooyoung said without turning back because she was busy cooking dinner.

“So that we can see each other every day. With that we don’t need to go out all the time just to meet, plus, it would be a good alibi for your disguise if you’ll just live with me.”

“I- I don’t know.” Sooyoung wanted to stay in this apartment because her memories with her father resided here. If her father was still alive, he would insist on living a simple life like how they’re used to.

“Sooyoung...” Hyoyeon stood up and walked to the girl’s direction, she rested her forehead against the taller girl’s back. “I can give you anything you want, anything you need... I’m desperate... please move in with me.”

Sooyoung turned off the fire and faced the smaller girl. “Hyoyeon, I don’t understand... why are you so mysterious?” She looked at the girl’s eyes as if she would find the answer there, but, as expected, even Hyoyeon’s eyes were emotionless.

“If you’ll move in with me you’ll see that I’m not... please trust me, Sooyoung.”

“It’s okay if you want to keep calling me Sooyoung, but not in front of my friends, especially in front of Tiffany.”

No one knew Sooyoung’s real name for she introduce herself to everyone as Summer. Only her father called her Sooyoung and since he died, she never wanted anyone to call her Sooyoung again, because it reminded her of her father and how he died. But the way Hyoyeon said her real name soothed her. It reminded her of her beloved father.

Sooyoung transferred the food in the plate and settled it on the table. Hyoyeon just took her seat in front of Sooyoung.

“So are you gonna move in with me?” Hyoyeon’s eyes were pleading.

Sooyoung smiled. “Later. After dinner.”

She agreed because she believed that Hyoyeon wasn’t bad after all. She could see that behind the girl’s shell was a kind-hearted girl hiding. Someone that reminded her very well of her father.

“And quit your job at the café too,” Hyoyeon added.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Sooyoung joked and they just smiled at each other.

They ate in a comfortable silence with both of them feeling the happiness inside.

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“Uhh... Tiffany,” Jessica called as she took her side of the bed, ready to sleep.

“Hmm?” Tiffany, who was already lying, faced the girl.

“Thank you for carrying me to bed last night.” Jessica pulled the blanket up to her chin.

“How did you know?”

Because I was awake the whole time...

“I dunno... my common sense told me.” Jessica simply smiled.

“It’s nothing. You’re as light as a feather,” Tiffany joked as she put her arm under Jessica’s head.

“Do you mind if I close the blinds?” Tiffany asked as she hugged the girl.

Tiffany insisted putting blinds on their floor-to-ceiling window to her mom, saying that they needed their privacy as a married couple.

“I don’t mind.” Jessica snaked her hand around the other girl’s waist.

“Blinds close,” Tiffany commanded and, all at once, the blinds flipped closed.

“Tiffany?” Jessica called after a couple of minutes’ silence to make sure if the girl was still awake.

“Hmm?” Tiffany hummed with her eyes still closed.

“Why do you keep hugging me to sleep?” That was the time Tiffany’s eyelids slowly lifted up.

Jessica has a point. Why was she still hugging Jessica to sleep when they already have blinds and the door could now be locked from the inside? Tiffany was caught off guard with that question. She wasn’t sure herself, she just felt like doing it. Tiffany guessed that she just got used to doing it for the past few days.

“Think of it this way: we’re friends and you’re sleeping over at my house. So, I think, as friends, it’s normal to do this.”

Jessica simply nodded against Tiffany's chest.

"Stop thinking too much. Just sleep," Tiffany commanded and tightened her arm around the girl.

And stay in my arms 'coz I like it this way.

CHAPTER 23:'CONNECTION'



CHAPTER 23:'CONNECTION'

"Jessica, what's that?" Yuri pointed at the mentioned girl's neck.

They were having their lunch with, as Tiffany observed, Yoona unusually covered up though it's still not that cold, and Yuri who was usually loud was now behaving well until she saw Jessica's neck.

"Huh? What?" Jessica fished out her compact mirror and checked her neck. "Oh, it must be some remains from my rashes yesterday."

"What rashes?" Summer asked worriedly.

"I have allergies yesterday." Jessica put her mirror back to her pocket.

"Oooh, that's why Tiffany was checking your neck yesterday lunch and you guys suddenly left without a word. I thought...." Yuri purposely trailed so Tiffany would react and she was right because, faster than a bullet, Tiffany choked on her food.

"What, Kwon?" Tiffany glared at Yuri after she recovered.

"Nothing, Hwang," Yuri said with a teasing smirk.

Tiffany broke into a short laugh. "Do you think we did it here? And you're assuming that that thing on Jessica's neck is a hickey?"

"I didn't say that." The smirk never left Yuri's lips.

"That's what you're trying to say! Do you even know what a hickey looks like?" It was now Tiffany's turn to smirk like what every villain did, on movies, before doing their evil plan.

She stood up abruptly, chair screeching on the floor, and pulled Yoona's collar apart, revealing red spots on

her neck.

“That’s what it looks like.” She took her seat again with a smile of triumph.

Yuri, who was just caught red handed, blushed because obviously she was the one who did it. And Yoona quickly covered her neck again as she ducked her head down, for the first time she lost interest for food.

“That’s... tha-that’s a, a bruise!” Yuri defended, obviously lying based on how she stuttered.

“Do you expect me to believe that? I know what a hickey looks like even on white or dark complexion. I have made a couple of it before. I can even make it into an animal shape.”

Jessica’s spoon slipped from her hand and landed on her plate, making a loud clang. She froze on her spot when she felt all eyes on their table were on her. She smiled nervously right after she recovered.

“It slipped. Sorry.” She grabbed her spoon again and continued eating, hiding her face from everyone with her hair.

Jessica doesn’t know why but she felt something inside her when she heard what Tiffany said. Was it a twitch or a tug at her heart? She doesn’t know and it’s making her confused.

So what if she’s expert in making hickies? It’s not your business, Jessica, she scolded herself before deciding to just put it at the back of her mind.

“You’re not going to win against me, Kwon,” Tiffany teased as she continued eating.

“Aish... Hwang.” Yuri glared at the girl opposite her and Tiffany glared back.

“Tiffany.”

“Yuri.” Yoona and Jessica scolded at the same time, breaking the two’s glaring battle.

“Just eat, okay?” Jessica continued and the two obeyed quietly.

“Seriously, Yuri, you did it?” Seohyun, who was watching them all the time, asked with amusement in her eyes.

Yuri choked on her food.

“Seohyun-ah! What kind of a question is that?!” Yoona asked disbelievingly as she rubbed her girlfriend’s back while giving her something to drink.

“I’m just asking of you guys did it...” Seohyun pouted. Yuri choked again and coughed even louder.

“Seohyun-ah! Are you trying to kill Yuri?!” Yoona scolded, which shrunk Seohyun on her seat, finally closing her mouth shut.

“Let’s just drop that topic, okay?” Tiffany simply said.

Once the table has quieted, Summer scooted closer to whisper to Seohyun. “Don’t you think it’s cute?”

“What?” Seohyun whispered back.

“That Yoona and Jessica can control Yuri and Tiffany just like that.” What Summer said made Seohyun look at the couples.

Yoona was now feeding Yuri --who just recovered from choking two consecutive times-- and Yuri took it gladly, her eyes saying something like “I’m so lucky to have such girlfriend like her”. Tiffany was busy stealing glances at Jessica and when the girl caught her, she just smiled and Jessica returned the smile before continuing eating. Strong connection could be seen at the couples, so strong it made Seohyun jealous.

“Yeah, it’s cute,” Seohyun simply said before she continued eating until something hit her conscious mind.

What does she mean about ‘just like that’? She’s new, she’s not supposed to know that Tiffany and Yuri are hard to handle and Jessica and Yoona are the only ones that can control them ‘just like that’. She can’t possibly discover it in just two days, Seohyun thought suspiciously as she took a glance at Summer, who just smiled innocently at her.

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Jessica’s last period just ended and she stood up from her chair to head home. Tiffany wasn’t with her because the girl was excused on her last subject to start with her detention. She told Jessica to go home first.

The moment Jessica stepped out from the main door of the building; their car started hovering down just in front of her. Mr. Baek hopped down from it and assisted her in.

Once seated, her iPadXV suddenly vibrated and she answered the call right away.

“Unnie!” Krystal squealed from the other line.

“Krys? What’s up?” Jessica asked as their car started hovering up.

“Oh, nothing. I just missed you,” Krystal said sheepishly.

“I miss you too. How’s Mom and Dad?” Jessica stared out the window, suddenly feeling homesick.

“They’re always out of the country, so, I don’t know.” Jessica sensed the sadness in her sister’s voice. If only she was there, she would never leave her sister alone.

“You don’t have someone to accompany you there?”

“Well, I have Sulli.”

“Sulli? Say hi to her for me, okay?” Jessica smiled as if her sister was just in front of her but it immediately disappeared when their car passed by their school’s parking lot and she saw Tiffany.

“Sure, Un-“

“Krys, I need to go. I’ll call again, okay?” Jessica ended the call hurriedly.

“Mr. Baek, can we go back?”

“Why, Miss?”

“I forgot to do something,” Jessica lied. “Please hurry.”

The moment their car landed on the ground, Jessica hopped down off it, leaving Mr. Baek a message of not going anywhere and just stay there. She jogged her way to the parking lot which was right at the back of the campus building.

“Tiffany,” she called once she spotted the girl brushing one of the cars parked there.

“Oh, Jessi? I thought you’ve already gone home?” Tiffany put the sponge back to the bucket of soapy water.

“Is this your punishment?” Tiffany saw the flare in Jessica’s eyes. She’s obviously angry.

“Yeah,” Tiffany managed to say as she gulped.

“You wasted buckets of clean water for these cars? Do you even know that in year 2050, there wouldn’t be enough water for people to use?!” Jessica scolded.

“I didn’t know.” Tiffany was shocked. This was the first time she heard Jessica yell and saw her angry.

“And what’s up with what you’re wearing?!” Jessica eyed Tiffany’s clothes. A sleeveless plaited polo, revealing Tiffany’s toned abs, short denim shorts, exposing her legs, and a pair of rubber boots.

“Uh, it’s the uniform.” Tiffany pointed at the other car wash girls with the same clothes as hers.

Jessica took a deep breath to calm herself. She removed her coat and handed it to Tiffany, leaving only her

white long sleeved polo on. "Wear this."

"I said wear it!" Jessica yelled when Tiffany just stared at her like she turned into a zombie.

Tiffany hurriedly wore it. "Geez, relax."

"How can I relax when you've just wasted a lot of water here?" Jessica turned her head to her left and eyed the confused girl standing beside them. "Are you the owner of this car?"

"Yes," the girl managed to squeak though she's scared of Jessica's sharp tone and furrowed-in-anger eyebrows.

"Do you really want it clean?"

The girl nodded.

"Lick it." Jessica then grabbed Tiffany's wrist and dragged her away from the parking lot, inside the school's building, through the back door.

"Ouch. That's harsh. Did you see her reaction? You scared her," Tiffany tried to lighten the mood but Jessica kept dragging her angrily.

"Where are you taking me?" Tiffany tried to remove her wrist off of Jessica's grip but she was so strong.

"I can't believe he made you wear these clothes. I don't find it necessary." Jessica didn't answer Tiffany's question.

"So you're angry because I'm wearing these clothes? I thought you're angry because I wasted water."

Jessica suddenly stopped, making Tiffany bump on her back.

"What if I'll say yes?" She faced Tiffany.

"Oh, come on. It's not as if I've never wore something like this out in the public before you came into my life. Why are you so conservative?" Tiffany knitted her eyebrows at the serious Jessica. She's starting to get pissed off too.

"I'm not. I'm just protecting you. I don't want those people to see you wearing something so revealing. If you haven't noticed-- you're almost naked, Tiffany!" Jessica was furious.

"In this place, even if it's at this time of the month where it's almost winter, it's normal." Tiffany bravely looked at the girl's eyes.

"If that's the normal then I don't want you to do anything normal anymore!" Jessica commanded.

"Who are you to tell me what to do and what to not?!" Tiffany retorted.

"I'm your wife, you're married to me and that makes you mine --!" Jessica stopped herself before she would start saying something stupid. She mentally scolded herself. She really has tendencies of saying anything that came to her mind when she's furious.

Jessica took a deep breath to calm herself. "Let's go." She grabbed the dumbfounded Tiffany's wrist and started dragging her again, putting a period in their first ever lover's quarrel.

Tiffany, who suddenly forgot how to talk, simply let Jessica drag her, thinking, *'I'm your wife, you're married to me and that makes you mine...' I'm hers... I'm hers... She owns me...*

Tiffany doesn't know why but she liked the sound of it to the fact that her heart fluttered and her angriness dissolved easily.

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"Sir, I think you should stop the car wash punishment," Jessica said while sitting beside Tiffany in the Headmaster's office.

"And why is that?"

"When cleaning cars, you need water and water is very limited. I have read somewhere that, on the year 2050, there wouldn't be enough water to use. If you continue the car wash punishment, the water -- considering there are a lot of cars in our school-- would be drained as early as 2030, and its 2027 now. Do you want that to happen, Sir?" Jessica said like a lawyer defending her client.

"I think that's an exaggeration Jessica," answered the headmaster like a suspect being interrogated.

"Sir, what if one of the biggest companies who care about nature --like my family's-- visits here and they'll see how this school wastes water just like that? They'll think that this school isn't a nature lover and that'll ruin the school's reputation. When the reputation of this prestigious school was ruined, you'll lose rich students and that means you'll lose money. A lot of money." Jessica narrowed her eyes threateningly at the headmaster.

"What do you want me to do then?" The headmaster asked, making Jessica smirk. She won in just eight sentences over the headmaster.

"I have a suggestion, Sir. Remove the car wash punishment and replace it with the service punishment."

“Mind elaborating?”

Jessica never thought the headmaster was that slow but still, she explained.

“Since the students in this school loves to party, those who are having detention would be on on-call duty and if something happened in one of the parties, or an accident, to one of the students of this school, they’ll call the school’s number and ask for the service. Those on service punishment would go there to rescue them or send them home. That’ll help the students in this school to develop sisterhood and brotherhood, helping each other,” Jessica explained like she was saying that one plus one equals two.

A couple of minutes of silence passed until the headmaster spoke.

“I’ll consider that.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Jessica beamed. “And one more thing, Tiffany and I would be on the service punishment for the remaining days of this week.”

“What?” Tiffany asked only to receive a glare from Jessica.

“I thought it was only Tiffany taking the detention?”

“What happened that night...”--a tint of pink reached the girls’ cheeks-- “...was partly my fault so I think I deserve to be punished.”

“But, Jessi...” Tiffany complained.

“Tiffany, my ankle’s fine now, I don’t have allergies anymore and it’s only three more days left. I can do it,” Jessica assured.

“I’m assuming silence means yes,” the headmaster said when Tiffany didn’t say anything. “Since the two of you are settled now, then it’s final. You’ll start tomorrow, stay in the school after your last period until seven in the evening. Got it?”

Jessica smiled as she stood up, bringing Tiffany along with her. “Thank you, Sir.” And they walked away to leave but Jessica suddenly remembered something.

“And, Sir, no more revealing costumes please.” And she hurriedly dragged Tiffany out the room without letting the headmaster answer.

Tiffany glanced at Jessica, who never let go of her hand though no one’s even around, and saw her huge grin, obviously trying to help herself from laughing.

“What’s funny?”

“The headmaster’s funny. Didn’t he even notice that the service punishment was way too easy compared to the car wash punishment? I never thought he’s that easy to fool.”

“Me too.” And they shared a good laugh, the unhappy spell was shattered.

“It’s good to know that you’re finally in good mood now,” Tiffany said after their laughter subsided.

“Yes and don’t even try to ruin it,” Jessica warned with a playful smile. “Let’s hurry, Mr. Baek is waiting.” Then she dragged Tiffany again.

Jessica was indeed happy. So happy that she just let Tiffany slip away from disobeying rule number five.

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Turned out Jessica was wrong. The service punishment wasn’t even a tad easy. They received a call a couple of minutes ago, needing their help to send one of the Philopolis Academy’s students who was drunk and was picking a fight in one of the parties on Taft Street home. It was their third call though there were a lot of them in the service punishment and it’s not even an hour since they started.

“I thought this is going to be easy, Jessi?” Tiffany said as she kept her eyes on the road since she’s driving.

“I thought so too. I never thought students in this school loves --besides to party-- to fight.” Jessica shook her head disbelievingly.

“You should have known. Look what happened on the Welcoming Dance.”

Jessica remembered. That’s why they’re not the only one having detention because a lot of students were caught drinking, making out and fighting.

“Don’t worry, we only have two days left,” Jessica assured.

“Wait till Friday comes. You’ll regret that you made this punishment because Friday is Party Day for the students.”

A couple of minutes later, they arrived at the said party house and they immediately saw the drunken guy screaming on top of his lungs.

“Let go ovme!!” Scott Tyler, whose father was the owner of the Tyler Airlines, shouted to a couple of guys who were trying to stop him from making anymore damages on the place.

He kept on kicking around until he hit a table which has an expensive vase resting atop it. It fell to the ground

and shattered.

Tiffany whistled. "You're so dead once the parents found out," she said before grabbing Scott's arm. The guy froze and the people around starting shuffling away. "Let's go." She pulled the guy out of the house but once they were out, he pulled his arm out of Tiffany's grip.

"Who var you to pull me away justlikethat?!" he yelled.

"I'm Tiffany Hwang, is my name not enough for you to do what I say?" Tiffany threatened as she glared at the guy.

"Iknowyou're Tiffany vwang, who isn't?" He laughed. "But I'mnotgoing to vollow you!"

Tiffany clicked her knuckles. "Do you want to do this the hard way?" She walked closer to the poor guy, scaring him.

"Tiffany." Jessica stopped the girl before she did something stupid that could make their detention longer. "I'll do this."

"Hey, Scott, do you mind if we'll send you home?" She smiled sweetly at Scott.

"Ov course I don't! Let'sgo!" And he hurriedly ran to the car, leaving the two behind.

"He can make a good dog," Tiffany commented before getting inside the car, Jessica following behind her.

"Address?" Tiffany asked as she started the car.

"So it's vrue that THE Tiffany vwang was takingadetention," he teased as he slumped on the backseat. "Pathetic." He spitted.

"Wait till tomorrow comes, you'll be the one taking your detention, jerk," Tiffany retorted back.

"Tiffany," Jessica warned. "We can't deal with a drunken person. Let's just send him home."

"But I don't even know his address!"

Jessica put up a smile and turned to look at Scott. "Hey, Scott, can you give me your address?" she said sweetly.

"Why, yes! Anythingforyou, Jessica. It's 1413 Mauve Street," he said before totally lying on the backseat, mumbling incoherent words.

"See, you can't always use force for everything." Jessica smiled to Tiffany. "Sometimes you have to be nice."

“That’s not going to work on me, Jessi,” Tiffany said as she started driving them to the said address.

“Thank you, Scott.” Jessica glanced at the guy still with a smile.

“AnythingforyouJessica,” Scott mumbled as sleep started creeping inside him.

“And stop flirting with him!” Tiffany complained.

“Relax! I was just being nice.” Jessica watched the city lights below them as she whistled. “This is going to be a loooooong night.” She sighed.

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“Hey, Tiffany, don’t sleep on the couch!” Jessica called from the hallway to their room.

They just arrived home after two hours of detention and Tiffany slumped straight to the couch, not even bothering to go to their room and rest there.

Jessica went straight to their room, thinking that Tiffany was just resting and she would follow right after to their room but she was wrong because after a couple of minutes later -- she already finished preparing for bed-- Tiffany still didn’t stand up from the couch so Jessica went to her.

“Yah, Tiff.” She shook the girl’s shoulder.

She realized that Tiffany still managed to open the TV before she fell asleep and she grabbed the remote control to turn it off. But the evening news caught her attention.

“A woman has gotten pregnant by another woman?” She broke into a disbelieving laugh. “That’s ridiculous.” She turned it off before sitting beside Tiffany.

“Hey, Tiffany!” She shook the girl’s shoulder again and Tiffany’s head rolled to the side, hair covering her face.

She arranged Tiffany’s hair back to its normal place as she observed the girl’s face.

She must be really tired, she thought worriedly before jumping to her feet, arms akimbo like a superhero that just landed on the ground.

“I guess I have to carry you this time.” She lifted Tiffany off the couch and carried her bridal style up to their room. It was really a good thing that she’s sporty or else she would have given up just getting into the hallway behind the grand staircase that would lead to their room because it was far from the living room.

“Phew!” Jessica said after laying Tiffany on their bed, wiping an imaginary sweat on her forehead.

“You’re getting heavier, huh? The last time I carried you, you were light and that was just a couple of weeks ago.” She observed the girl’s whole body while tucking her inside the blanket, memorizing her wife’s features.

“But it doesn’t look like you’ve gained weight. Maybe I’m just tired.” She clicked her tongue before planting a small kiss on Tiffany’s forehead.

She took her side of the bed, pulled the blanket up to her chin and faced her back to the girl, ready to sleep.

A couple of minutes have already passed but her beloved sleep hasn’t arrived yet.

This is what I fear. She spoiled me too much that I can’t sleep now without her hugging me.

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Everyone knew how Jessica valued sleeping. Not because she wanted to, but because she’s always tired of practicing fencing that when she had free time she’d just sleep. Knowing how she loved sleeping, what’s happening to her right now was something she’s not used to. Thirty minutes have already passed but she still couldn’t sleep and it was starting to frustrate her.

I can’t take this anymore! She complained before facing her wife who was sleeping peacefully.

She scooted closer and carefully lifted Tiffany’s arm to make room for herself. She put it around her shoulder and rested her head on the girl’s chest. She snaked her own arm around her wife’s waist and hugged her lightly, careful to not wake her up.

There. This is much better, she thought contentedly with a small smile.

She fell asleep eventually, the fast beating of her heart along with Tiffany’s scent serving as a lullaby.

CHAPTER 24:'TRUST'



CHAPTER 24:'TRUST'

After washing her face, Tiffany strode down the stairs, going to the dining hall to have breakfast. She woke up with the space beside her empty and though she was sleepy, sleep failed to stop her mind from thinking where Jessica had gone.

"Jessi?" she said once she stepped a foot inside the dining hall and saw the girl arranging the table with the help of Sunny.

"Good morning, Miss Tiffany," Sunny greeted as she bowed her head, Tiffany just nodded at her.

"Uhm, Sunny, you can leave us now," Jessica said with a smile, dismissing Sunny. And the girl left, leaving the two alone.

"Good morning," Jessica greeted Tiffany with a smile. Tiffany only nodded.

Jessica looked at Tiffany expectantly, as if waiting for something that Tiffany would say, but nothing came out.

"Well?" Jessica said after a minute of silence and staring at each other's eyes.

"What?" Tiffany said with a confused look.

"Aren't you gonna greet me a good morning?" Jessica demanded.

"Do I have to?" Tiffany roamed her eyes all over the place and found no one. "No one's even around."

"Oh. Yeah." Jessica forced a smile, trying to push away disappointment. *I could have just let Sunny stay for a while.*

"Forget it. Let's just have breakfast." She grabbed Tiffany's wrist and assisted her to her usual seat.

“Eat a lot. I prepared these.” Jessica mentioned at the hams, eggs and pancakes on Tiffany’s plate.

“You woke up early just to make breakfast?” Tiffany asked in which Jessica nodded.

“I never knew you can cook,” she continued casually as she cut the food in smaller pieces.

“I still have a lot of hidden talents you don’t know,” Jessica joked.

Tiffany took the cup of coffee and eyed the caramel design, it was not the usual grain design but it was a heart. She took a sip of the coffee and she froze. The moment the coffee reached her taste buds, she felt heaven. It was the best caramel coffee she had ever tasted.

“Who made this?” she asked.

“I did. Why? It doesn’t taste good? That’s weird... you’re the first person who said that my coffee doesn’t taste good,” Jessica said disappointedly.

“I never said it doesn’t taste good,” Tiffany said as-a-matter-of-factly. She turned to look at Jessica’s eyes and said truthfully, “It was the best I’ve ever had.”

“How did you do this? Is there some kind of a magic?” she continued.

Jessica chuckled. “There’s no magic, just a machine.”

“The coffee maker in the kitchen doesn’t make coffee this great,” Tiffany said as she continued eating.

“I imported it here from our house in Korea since no one was using it there. It was one of a kind and I was the only one who knows how to operate it.” Jessica then took a piece of pancake from her own plate.

“And why is that?”

“This is just a secret between us two, okay?” Jessica scooted closer to whisper when Tiffany nodded. “I invented it.”

“Really? How?” Tiffany’s eyes widened in shock.

“I didn’t really make the structure of the whole machine but I was the one who made the program that runs it but it still needs an operator, as in a human, because it can’t work alone,” Jessica explained.

“Y’know, I can really get used to waking up every morning with this coffee,” Tiffany joked after taking another sip of her coffee.

“Don’t worry; I’m willing to make you a coffee anytime you want.” Jessica smiled, assuring.

Could you please stop smiling? Tiffany thought.

"The food tastes good, too." Tiffany complimented in which made Jessica blush.

"Thanks."

"Y'know, seeing you made all these, I'm surprised you didn't decide to make it a breakfast in bed," Tiffany joked with a small laugh, earning a light slap on her shoulder courtesy of the blushing Jessica.

They shared a short laugh and when it subsided they continued eating quietly.

Jessica couldn't stop smiling. With Tiffany's compliments, she found her heart fluttering. She, herself, doesn't really know why she woke up early in the morning to make breakfast for Tiffany.

That's what wives do to their husbands, right? she tried to reason out to herself.

Tiffany glanced to her left only to see Jessica smiling. She unconsciously smiled but it slowly faded when thoughts came flooding her mind.

What's up with her? She woke up early to personally make breakfast for us, made the best coffee I've ever tasted, and she keeps on smiling. Is she trying to repay me since she has woken me last night because she's snuggling to me without my permission? Does she even know that I woke up? But I don't really mind... in fact, I like it.

Tiffany's thoughts were interrupted by what she's feeling. The feeling that kept on confusing her, the exact feeling she felt on their way home from the cemetery last Sunday, and the exact same feeling she felt every time she'd touch Jessica. She tried to put it at the back of her mind by shaking her head slightly but her mind refused. Though, there was one thing she wanted to demand Jessica to do,

Please don't make breakfast for anyone but me.

Jessica abruptly turned her head to look at her, eyes wide in shock.

"What?" Tiffany asked.

"You said please," Jessica said unbelievably because Tiffany never said 'please' to anyone.

Shit, did I say that out loud? Tiffany thought frantically.

"I did?" Tiffany can't believe even herself.

Jessica nodded.

“Really?” Tiffany ducked her head down and cursed under her breath. “Shit.”

She felt an assuring hold on her shoulder, followed by the most assuring sentence Tiffany has ever heard.

“Don’t worry; I won’t make breakfast for anyone but you.”

~.~

Tiffany lay sleepily on their bed, Jessica in embrace. They just finished their whole day’s busy schedule and tiredness and drowsiness was what they were feeling.

Just when Tiffany thought she could finally rest and sleep, she bolted up from the bed, sitting up straight in remembrance of something.

“Jessi?”

“What?” Jessica asked as she locked gazes with Tiffany though it was dark.

“Didn’t I promise you that I will help you to sign up for Fencing Club today?”

Jessica averted her eyes. *Why do you have to remember that? I thought you’ve already forgotten.*

“Yeah.”

“Oh my gosh, I totally forgot! But why didn’t you remind me?” Tiffany tried to search Jessica’s eyes, but the girl kept on looking anywhere but her.

“I also forgot,” Jessica lied.

Tiffany sensed that Jessica was hiding something from her. She’s acting odd.

“Look into my eyes,” Tiffany demanded in which Jessica complied. “Now repeat what you said.”

Jessica remained silent. She shook her head slightly before averting her eyes away. *I can’t lie while looking into those beautiful eyes.*

“I knew you were lying.” Tiffany lay back on the bed and enveloped Jessica in a hug --their usual sleeping position. “I’ll ask you again, why didn’t you remind me?”

Jessica bit her lower lip and buried her face deeper in Tiffany’s chest before answering. “You were already tired from school works and the detention; I don’t want to tire you more,” came her guilty answer.

"I'm not that tired, you could have just reminded me. And..." Tiffany's arms tightened around Jessica. "...I'm sorry I forgot."

Jessica's head snapped up, meeting eye to eye with Tiffany, faces only an inch away. *She said sorry...*

"I can still always sign up next Thursday," Jessica assured to at least lessen what Tiffany was feeling.

Jessica knew Tiffany was blaming herself for forgetting and she just couldn't let Tiffany to keep on thinking that.

"I'll keep that in mind. I promise I won't forget it again." Tiffany smiled.

Jessica buried her face back to Tiffany's chest; sleep was finally crawling into their system.

~.~

Tiffany was indeed serious with her promise. The week passed by in a slow pace because she was eagerly looking forward to the coming Thursday, when she could finally help her wife with signing up for Fencing Club. She barely even stood the detention last Friday; it was really what you'd call a 'detention' because it was so hard. Calls after calls, streets after streets and homes after homes. It was like a hell on earth for Tiffany but she managed to survive with the help of Jessica who kept on urging her forward.

She had always believed that time was one of the most playful elements in this world --it lengthens the minutes when you wait and it fastens the hour when you're enjoying the moments.

They were now on their way home, out of the school building, after signing Jessica up on Fencing Club with the girl happily skipping, Fencing Club papers in hands, and the view of her made Tiffany smile unconsciously.

"You're really that happy, huh?" she asked as she kept her arms folded against her chest, watching Jessica ahead of her.

Jessica stopped skipping and turned around to face her with a huge smile, white teeth flashing. "Really happy."

"Why?"

"I sparred with this school's representative on Fencing Competition last year; he was the best opponent I ever had but I still won over him, so I assume this school's Fencing Club was the best next to my previous school."

“Oh, so you’re saying that my school was a loser in Fencing against your old school? Too bad, you’re trapped in this school now,” Tiffany teased with an evil laugh.

“I don’t care about the school or the instructor; I have what it takes to be a Fencing champion against all other schools. I trust in myself,” Jessica said before turning around and started skipping again.

“Why do you have to be so childish today...?” Tiffany asked but Jessica was already a good couple of steps away from her.

...but I like it, she managed to stop herself from saying.

“Yah! Careful! You might trip with your heels that hi-“ Tiffany was too late, Jessica already tripped.

“Oh my gosh, Jessi! Are you okay?!” She hurriedly walked closer to the girl, shocked of what came out of her mouth.

Usually she would say “I told you!” but now she said “Are you okay?!”. Jessica has really changed her in just a month.

Jessica looked at her with pain written all over her face while clutching her right ankle. “Tiff...” she managed to say.

“What? It hurts? I’m going to carry you to the infirmary,” Tiffany said as she spun Jessica’s arm around her shoulders but Jessica refused to move.

“Tiff...” Jessica said in a whisper. “...I’m just kidding!” She exploded in a long hysterical laughter.

It was a good thing that they felt comfortable with each other now that they could fool and joke around together.

Tiffany face-palmed herself. “Oh my gosh, Jessi. You’re lucky no one’s around, it’s a shame you’re a Hwang.” She shook her head disappointedly.

“What? You were the one who wanted me to carry your last name,” Jessica said when her laughter subsided.

Oh yeah, she’s right, Tiffany thought.

“Whatever. Let’s just go home. Who knows what else you’ll do to fool me.” Tiffany stood up straight but Jessica was faster because she was now five steps away from Tiffany and counting.

“Don’t get too happy! I heard after happiness, what’s coming next is bad karma!” Tiffany called out to her.

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Jessica never knew that those words from Tiffany, even after a couple of months, were like a curse that would hunt her until today.

Their class' P.E. instructor came inside their room coolly. He spanked his table to get the students' attention.

"As the only human teacher in this school, I command everyone to go outside in the field. We're going to play football!" He cheered but the only responses from the students were complaining grunts.

"It's snowing outside!" Summer, who was sitting beside Jessica, complained.

It was not a surprise that Summer was in Tiffany and Jessica's class, she was *coincidentally* in their every class, except for the period after lunch where she's taking her major --Criminology.

"You don't have to worry, students! We've closed the glass ceilings of the field and even turned on the heaters for your convenience! Now get your butts out of this room. Only five minutes for changing your clothes!" he commanded energetically. He was always that energetic and loud, which Tiffany never liked.

"I hate P.E.," one female complained to her friend as they went out of the room, passing by Jessica and Tiffany.

"I don't feel like playing football today," Jessica said glumly as she walked like a corpse on their way to the changing room.

"So do I," Tiffany agreed.

They entered the female's changing room while some of the masculine guys, already changed in jerseys, were rushing out from their own changing room beside the girls'.

Tiffany went to her personal locker and quickly changed from her winter uniform --since it already started snowing-- into jerseys without a word. She doesn't really mind girls removing their clothes around her, she's used to it. Plus, she's straight and it doesn't have any malice. But what she doesn't understand was why it was different from a certain girl on her right?

Jessica struggled to remove her winter uniform. She glanced to her left only to see Tiffany already done changing.

"I'll go ahead on the field, okay?" Tiffany said. *Because I can't restrain myself from looking at you while changing.*

Tiffany finally learned to accept that fact, and whatever she's feeling, to herself. But she's still confused what it was, she just decided to accept it because she couldn't do anything to help it.

“Okay.” Jessica nodded and Tiffany left.

“Hey, Jessica, are you doing fine?” Summer asked when she was about to head out of the room and found Jessica struggling with her clothes.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

“Well then, I’ll go ahead.” And then Summer left.

After a couple of minutes, Jessica finally finished changing and she hurriedly jogged out of the changing room, scared of what her instructor might do if she’s late.

When she was close enough to the end of the dugout that would lead her out to the field she heard a couple of voices followed by a whistle.

They’re already starting! With that thought, she ran even faster.

The moment she stepped a foot out in the field, she was momentarily blinded by the field’s bright lights. She never saw the ball come at her. She did hear the roar of the crowd. And she felt the vibrations in the air. The next thing she knew she’d been hit on the side of the head with a loud ‘smack’ that sent her sprawling onto the soft ground, and everything went black.

After a couple of seconds of blackness, she thought she might faint, but she didn’t. She felt a hand on her shoulder, helping her limp body to sit up. She made a total effort to open her eyes, trying to dismiss the headache that was slowly building up inside her head. Everything was blurred in her view, she was certain that people around her were talking but she couldn’t hear a single thing.

“Jessi?” She heard a faint voice called her name.

That voice. It’s Tiffany’s. She tried so hard to clear her blurred vision.

So it really was Tiffany, her sweaty face looking solemn and concerned as she leaned forward and looked deep into Jessica’s eyes. Jessica felt a tremor hit her whole body. Good thing she was already on the ground, or she would have fallen.

And finally, her eyes blurred again, every sound grew muted, and her body gave up. Everything went black again. This time she really fainted.

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Tiffany stood in the middle of the field, face to face with Summer. They were just waiting for their instructor's whistle to begin the match.

She glanced to her right, in the dugout where Jessica was supposed to come out a couple of minutes ago but she still hadn't come out. The class has just finished stretching and everyone was already covered in perspiration but Jessica still didn't come out.

She heard the whistle and her senses went on alert. She never knew Summer was fast that she already kicked the ball away. Since she's not that great in Football, the direction of the ball turned towards the dugout where, Tiffany saw, Jessica was about to come out. Her eyes grew wide.

And then it happened.

Jessica was hit by the ball on the side of her head and she sprawled on the ground.

"Oh my Gosh! Jessica!" Summer ran towards Jessica and kneeled beside her.

"Jessica? Are you okay?" She tried to help Jessica to sit up but someone pushed her away by the shoulder even before her fingers reached Jessica's skin. She looked up only to see Tiffany glaring at her.

"Don't touch her! Move out!" She commanded angrily before pushing Summer again and kneeling beside Jessica.

Everyone has already gathered around them in panic. The instructor was just looking at them.

She helped Jessica to sit up. "Jessi?" She slapped Jessica's cheeks slightly and the girl opened her eyes slowly.

Tiffany leaned forward as if to see into Jessica's eyes if she's okay. But the girl closed her eyes again, totally passing out, with her nose still bleeding.

"Guys! Carry Jessica to the infirmary!" The instructor commanded the males and they hurriedly kneeled beside Jessica, ready to carry her but Tiffany sent them a glare.

"Don't touch her! I can do it!" she said angrily before carrying Jessica bridal style.

She sent a glare to Summer, who was still on the ground, before leaving.

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Tiffany watched the sleeping Jessica on the infirmary's white bed while she uncomfortably sat on the chair near the bed.

The nurse said Jessica was fine, there was no other damage in her head except for the red swell on the side of her forehead. She would wake up anytime soon.

Tiffany was angry at Summer. If Summer didn't kick the ball towards the direction of the dugout, Jessica wouldn't have hit and fainted. But there was nothing she could do; everyone had already gone home, including Summer. They were the only ones left in the building and she's not planning of leaving Jessica there or taking her home while she's still asleep. She'd wait until Jessica woke up.

She studied Jessica's swollen forehead. Moments later, she noticed that Jessica's forehead quivered. Her eyebrows knitted and she started shaking her head from left to right like she was having a bad dream.

Tiffany panicked. She lightly slapped the girl's cheeks. "Yah! Jessi, wake up!!!" she shouted as she continued slapping the girl awake.

"Jessi!" This time she shook the girl's shoulder and Jessica bolted awake.

"Tiffany!" Jessica said with fear obvious in her eyes and hugged the girl tightly.

Tiffany was taken aback but she hugged back nevertheless. She felt Jessica's chest against her, heaving up and down in a pant.

"Jessi, relax. It was just a nightmare." Tiffany patted the girl's back.

She felt her shirt getting wet and she heard Jessica sobbed. Jessica was crying.

"Sshhh... Jessi. Don't cry, I'm here!" Tiffany soothed and Jessica's shoulder relaxed slowly but she did not stop crying.

"Tiff, I'm so scared," Jessica sobbed.

"I'm here... I'm here... I'm not gonna let anything happen to you. Now, breathe in, breathe out," Tiffany instructed as she rubbed the girl's back soothingly.

Jessica stayed silent but she obeyed. Minutes later, not parting from the embrace, Jessica's arms started loosening around Tiffany and she stopped crying but she still did not let go.

Tiffany slowly moved forward to lay Jessica back to the bed without letting go. When Jessica's back came in contact with the bed, she started removing her arms around Jessica but the girl hugged her tighter and pulled Tiffany's upper body atop her own.

"Don't let go." Jessica demanded, fear still clear in her quivering voice. Tiffany thought that she might cry again if she'd let go.

"Ssshhh... I'm not gonna let go," Tiffany assured.

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A beeping sound disturbed Sophia from her typing job in her office and she quickly grabbed the receiver beside her computer.

“Sophia Hwang. Who’s this?”

“Madame, I’m Chuck Galuzzi, Philopolis Academy’s headmaster.” The thick Italian accent of the man sounded muffled over the line.

“How may I help you?” Sophia asked, suddenly interested.

“I called to inform you that something happened to Jessica. She was hit by a ball on the head and she fainted. her and Tiffany are still in the infirmary.”

It was a rule in the school that whatever would happen to the students, the headmaster would alert their parents soon.

“Oh my gosh.” Sophia cupped her mouth. “Is Jessica okay?”

“She’s fine now, Ma’am.”

“I want to see it for myself,” Sophia demanded, worry was clear in her voice. “Network the infirmary’s CCTV to my office, now.”

Though her office was miles away from the school, it was possible. In just a matter of seconds, her monitor lighted up and a view from the ceiling of the infirmary came in view. She wasn’t prepared for what she saw.

On the top-right corner of her monitor was Jessica’s bed. Though Sophia could only see Tiffany’s back, because she was obviously on top of Jessica, it was unmistakably the two. Jessica was hugging Tiffany and her face was buried on Tiffany’s neck.

She helped herself from laughing out loud and let out a giggle instead.

“Looks like Jessica’s really fine. Cut it. They need their privacy,” she said on the receiver before putting it back on its cradle.

Seconds later, her screen cleared and she finally let out a laugh, having no idea of what happened next to Tiffany and Jessica.

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Seohyun stepped out from the library hurriedly, clutching a thick book in her embrace. Her butler has been waiting for her outside for too long and she's not having any intentions of letting him wait anymore longer. She turned to her left and walked into the hallway. Just when she turned to the right corner, where the infirmary was located, she halted to a stop and hurriedly walked backwards and hid behind the wall. She rested her back on the wall for a second before peeking into the hallway where she saw someone standing in front of the infirmary's door.

She carefully and quietly observed everything. Though the girl's back was facing her, it was no doubt that it was Summer. Summer was standing in the hallway in front of the opened infirmary's door, thirty feet away from Seohyun. She was holding something behind her, a bouquet of flowers. Seohyun didn't fail to notice how her hand started trembling from each passing second until it turned into a fist, clutching the flowers' stems in her palm.

Though Seohyun couldn't see the girl's face, she was certain that she was furious. She doesn't know what she was witnessing from inside the infirmary because Seohyun couldn't see it from her view. But one thing was for sure, she doesn't feel good with it.

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"Don't let go," Summer heard Jessica said.

Summer stood frozen in front of the infirmary's opened door, witnessing everything that was happening inside. The two was busy with their moment that they did not notice her.

Summer was furious. The flowers hidden behind her back was gripped tightly that her nails dug into her palm. She couldn't stand to see Tiffany having the best of her life when she still couldn't move on from her father's death.

"Sssh... I'm not gonna let go," she heard Tiffany said and it boiled her blood even more.

She took a deep breath to calm herself and put up her normal innocent face.

I'm not gonna let you enjoy this.

She cleared her throat. "Am I interrupting something?"

Tiffany felt Jessica's arms loosened and she knew that the girl wanted her to get off of her and she did only to face Summer and glare at her.

"What are you doing here?" Tiffany demanded as she got back to her seat.

Summer ignored her and she walked directly beside Jessica's bed. "I'm sorry. I was the one who kicked the ball," she said to Jessica.

"It's okay. I know you didn't want that to happen." Jessica smiled.

Summer smiled back and pulled her hand out, offering Jessica the flowers she bought. "For you."

"What's that for?" Tiffany asked.

I thought she have already gone home? Hmp. It turned out that she only bought flowers, Tiffany thought disappointedly.

"This is a peace offering," Summer said to Jessica, ignoring Tiffany again.

Jessica gladly took the flowers with a huge smile, oblivious of the deformed shape of the stems. "Thank you. You shouldn't have done this."

Tiffany felt so out of place from the two's warm conversation. She couldn't get in the way of the two.

"I just feel like it." Summer smiled. "I'll go ahead now. I hope you'll feel better soon."

"I'm feeling better now. Thank you," Jessica assured.

"Tiffany, I'll go ahead." Summer sent a smile to Tiffany before walking out of the room.

Her smiled turned into a smirk once she closed the door behind her.

I'm gaining Jessica's trust, she thought, oblivious of the pair of eyes watching her thirty feet away.

The field:



CHAPTER 25: 'HELP'



CHAPTER 25: 'HELP'

“What was that?” Tiffany asked with a stern face after a couple of minutes since Summer left.

“What?” Jessica asked innocently as she settled the bouquet Summer gave on the table beside her bed.

Tiffany scoffed. “You don’t know? When Summer came, you totally left me out, like I wasn’t here.” She folded her arms across her chest and looked away.

“Tiffany, I know you don’t like Summer but you don’t have to think that way,” Jessica defended.

“What should I think then? I know you like Summer,” Tiffany accused.

“Yes I like her... as a friend, nothing more. Tiffany, she’s nice.” Jessica felt as if she was defending herself against her jealous wife but she knew it was impossible. Tiffany just really hated Summer.

“Just because she gave you flowers that means she’s nice? If I will give you thousands of flowers, will that make me nice then?” Tiffany looked directly into Jessica’s eyes.

“You will not do that.” Jessica didn’t flinch.

“What made you so sure?” Tiffany challenged.

“Because that’s disobeying rule number five,” Jessica stated as-a-matter-of-factly.

“Really? So it means you’re giving only one person – Summer- the opportunity of giving you flowers?” Tiffany’s eyebrow furrowed.

“No. Yuri can give me flowers. Yoona and Seohyun too,” Jessica defended.

“So I’m the only one who isn’t allowed?” The girl’s eyebrows now rose.

"Of course not! Tiffany, what's your point here?" Jessica felt helpless as she threw her hands in the air. It seemed like whatever she would say Tiffany would retort. There was nowhere to run.

"I don't know!! I... I-I don't like you getting close to Summer!" Tiffany's voice cracked.

"Tiffany, are you... are you jealous?" Jessica asked, almost scared to say the J-word.

Tiffany looked disbelievingly at her. "Me? Jealous? Of course not. I just don't like you getting close to Summer because that will make quite a fuss to Mom. You know Mom has eyes and ears all over the place."

Jessica slowly nodded as she looked at the trash bin beside her bed that was filled with cottons with blood, probably from her nose. "Okay... sorry."

"Just don't get too committed to her... come on let's go home." Tiffany stood up and grabbed the girl's wrist.

"Easy. My head still hurts." Jessica complained as she stood beside Tiffany, slightly unstable.

"Aish..." Tiffany hissed before facing her back to Jessica, knees slightly bent to lower herself. "Get on my back."

"T-Tiffany, you don't have to do that," Jessica stuttered as she held her head.

"I sai- ... what's rule number two?"

"Don't make Tiffany repeat herself," Jessica said unwillingly.

"Now get on!"

Jessica shook her head, feeling defeated, before hopping onto Tiffany's back. Tiffany made a '*hup!*' sound as she stood straight and started walking out of the room, leaving the bouquet of flowers in the table. None of them even remembered about it.

The white hallway was lifeless that it gave Tiffany chills but she somehow felt comfortable with Jessica on her back, good thing that she was light. She felt guilty and sorry after yelling at Jessica but she just needed to get that out from her chest. It's been bothering her since Summer came and she couldn't believe herself that she used her own mother as an excuse. For a second, she thought about what Jessica has said. Was she jealous? If that's the best word to describe it, then she was. But the question still was why? She doesn't know and she was uncomfortable with it.

Jessica stared straight to the floor over Tiffany's shoulder. She couldn't think straight because Tiffany's scent was alluring to her consciousness. She wanted to reach home fast, but Tiffany's slow pace was making it impossible. It was as if she was taking a second before taking another step. Jessica thought maybe Tiffany

was enjoying it and she was walking slowly for a purpose but she didn't entertain that idea. Why? If only Jessica knew, she also wanted to go home fast and drop Jessica off as fast as possible.

Maybe it was the high heels. That must be it, Jessica thought as she looked at Tiffany's feet.

"Stop breathing on my neck," Tiffany pulled Jessica out of her thoughts.

Jessica blushed. "Sorry." She rested her nose bridge on Tiffany's left shoulder instead, head ducked.

The walk was taking slower than Tiffany intended. She doesn't know why she was walking slowly and it's making her uncomfortable, not to mention Jessica's smooth thighs in her grip. Since the argument with Jessica earlier, everything suddenly felt uncomfortable. Or maybe it's just because it's that time of the year again.

"Contact Mr. Baek. Tell him to fetch us now," Tiffany said just to say something and kill the awkward atmosphere.

"Okay." Jessica reached her right wrist to her left hand, locking Tiffany's neck in her right arm.

"I can't breathe," Tiffany complained.

"Just a minute," Jessica said and started pressing some buttons on her wristwatch.

"Miss Jessica?" Mr. Baek's voice came out of the small speaker on the side of the wristwatch.

"Mr. Baek, could you please fetch us now?" Tiffany felt a shiver go up her spine when Jessica's breath hit her neck. She flinched a bit, oblivious to Jessica.

"Yes, Miss. I'll be there in a minute." And the call ended. Jessica loosened her arm around Tiffany's neck and their awkward atmosphere resumed.

Jessica looked to her right, surprised that their faces were extremely close. She observed Tiffany's left side profile and her multiple ear piercings caught her eyes because it was shining from the fluorescent lights. It was irritating in the eyes but she didn't fail to notice how red Tiffany's ears are.

"Tiffany?" Jessica called, breath hitting the back of Tiffany's ear.

"Hmm?" Tiffany hummed as she kept her eyes straight ahead, afraid that if she would turn her head to the left, she would meet face to face Jessica.

"Your ears are red. Are yo--"

"Don't talk when it's not important," Tiffany cut her. *Why do you keep on breathing on my sensitive spots?*

“Sorry.” Jessica ducked her head again, nose bridge to Tiffany’s shoulder.

Tiffany looked straight and restrained herself from thinking too much about Jessica’s breathings on her neck and the girl’s thighs in her hands. She felt relieved when they neared the building’s automatic door. She stepped on the sensors and it opened, letting the December breeze hit Tiffany’s face. She shivered but still thankful for the warmth on her back, Jessica’s body heat.

Not far away she saw Mr. Baek and she walked faster to his direction, eager for the heat inside their car. Jessica, sensing the accelerating pace, looked up and realized that they were almost close to Mr. Baek and the sky was already turning dark.

Tiffany slowly put Jessica down.

“That was fast.” Jessica tried to pull her coat around herself and realized that she was still in her jersey. She would have laughed at herself for being such a fool but she didn’t.

Mr. Baek winked at Jessica. “I told you. I’ll be here in a minute.”

He opened the door for the two to get in and closed it before jogging back to the driver’s seat.

Tiffany rubbed her arms to ease the coldness though she was already changed back in her winter uniform and the car’s heater was high. She looked at her right, through the tinted window, and realized that they were airborne. The city lights below them, most colors were blue, red and green, seemed to bother her. It was that time of the year again. Christmas. And she hated it.

“What happened to Miss Jessica’s forehead?” Mr. Baek asked as he looked at them through the rearview mirror.

“She was hit by a ball,” Tiffany answered as she glanced to her left where Jessica was sitting, rubbing her arms to ease the cold.

Mr. Go snickered. “A nice experience to end the semester, before going to a Christmas vacation, don’t you think?” He spoke as if Jessica wasn’t there.

Tiffany looked into the rearview mirror and met Mr. Baek’s eyes. He was doing it again albeit he has been failing since the past couple of years. Since he became Tiffany’s personal butler, he has tried so many times to cheer the girl every Christmas but still failed. Christmas just really downed Tiffany’s mood.

“Yeah.” Tiffany replied shortly, signaling Mr. Baek that she doesn’t like what he’s doing, before looking out through the window again.

Mr. Baek looked straight and focused on driving, feeling defeated. He failed again. He wondered when Tiffany would move on and be happy, like everyone else, when Christmas. She couldn’t seem to let go of her murky past.

A hissing sound distracted Tiffany's thoughts. She turned to look at her left and saw Jessica blowing her cold hands, trying so hard to ease the coldness since the heater wasn't helping her.

She looks cold. But I can't give my coat to her, Tiffany thought, being her selfish self.

"Come here," Tiffany said, motioning Jessica to scoot closer. Mr. Baek watched them through the rearview mirror.

"Why?" Jessica asked but she scooted closer.

Tiffany observed their positions. It was going to be hard but she would try. She arranged herself sideways, back against the door, put her left foot behind Jessica and left her right foot in the car's floor. She pulled Jessica closer to her body in between her legs, opened the jacket and enveloped Jessica with it, surprised that they both fit inside like they only have one body. She was now hugging Jessica from the back while sharing one coat.

Might as well share the body heat, Tiffany thought.

Jessica relaxed herself inside Tiffany's embrace, glad that she finally has enough heat but bothered at the same time when the heat reached her cheeks and made it pink. She tried to just enjoy the heat and not think about Tiffany's chest against her back.

Mr. Baek watched as Tiffany rested her chin on Jessica's right shoulder, showing her right side profile to him. He didn't miss how Tiffany's eyes somehow glittered from the dimmed yellow light inside the car and his hope sparked to life. He tried so hard to stop himself from smiling because of the overwhelming feeling.

Miss Jessica is the key.

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Tiffany was lying on the bed comfortably, back against the headboard with a pillow serving as a cushion so her back wouldn't hurt. Her right arm was rested behind her head and her left hand was holding a book atop her tummy. She was reading '*Vita Nuova*', trying to refresh her French vocabulary and keep her mind from thinking about the coming Christmas.

She did this every year, locking herself inside her room and letting people outside busy themselves with preparing for the Christmas Eve next week and when the Christmas Eve came, she still wouldn't get out of her room until the next morning. She hated Christmas since she was nine years old. It brought back old, murky memories she's been trying to block away from her present.

She couldn't focus on reading because her mind kept on reeling back to the world outside her door. She looked through the floor-to-ceiling window on her left and saw the sky was already dark. Their servants were probably setting up the Christmas tree by now. The beeping sound of the door being opened brought her back from her thoughts.

"Tiffany," Jessica said as she took a seat beside Tiffany.

"Hmm?" Tiffany hummed, pretending to be focused on what she was reading.

Much to Tiffany's surprise, Jessica laid beside her, rested her head on her chest and her right arm snaked to her waist. Tiffany's heart jumped and she looked at the girl, eyes asking '*what are you doing?!*' because she couldn't trust her voice.

Jessica motioned to the window just below their feet with her eyes. Tiffany looked at the direction and saw, in front of their floor-to-ceiling window was another floor-to-ceiling window overseeing the hallway, the hallway was filled with servants passing by, busy with decorating the whole house for Christmas.

"They're watching us?" Tiffany asked and Jessica simply nodded.

Tiffany sighed before putting the book down on her bedside table. She lowered her right arm and spun it around Jessica's shoulder. "We can't really get our privacy here, huh?" she said as she hugged Jessica tightly.

"So, what brought you here? I thought you're helping them to decorate the Christmas tree?"

"Aren't you going to help?" Jessica asked against Tiffany's chest.

Tiffany scoffed. "We pay them for that. Let them do their job."

"But it's fun. I help our servants decorate our Christmas tree every year and it gives me this feeling, like you're going back to your childhood," Jessica said and she suddenly felt homesick. This would be her first Christmas away from her family.

Tiffany's body tensed and her hands turned into tight fist. "I don't want to go back to my childhood," she said, almost whispering.

Jessica has always wanted to go back to her childhood. Where she could be carefree, where everything seemed to be fine, where there were no problems, and where she wasn't married to anyone. But it was something Tiffany doesn't want to happen. It was the darkest part of her life. Something not worth reminiscing. That's just one fact that they couldn't agree with.

Jessica looked up, worry visible in her eyes. "Tiffany... I don't want to push you... but... but I was thinking maybe you might *need* to decorate the Christmas tree with me."

Jessica felt that there was something wrong with Tiffany; she was never like that, she looked sad. So she chose her words carefully. She said ‘need’ in accordance to rule no.3, not having any idea that the word struck Tiffany.

Need? I might really need to, Tiffany thought. She knew that helping to decorate the Christmas tree would be the first step that she would take to move on. She’s been running away from the past since the couple of years that passed and she thought maybe this was the right time to face it. She was glad that Jessica was there to help her and she would gladly accept Jessica’s outstretched hand.

For a second, she thought if Jessica knew her past. But that was impossible. No one would tell Jessica Tiffany’s past.

Tiffany heaved a deep breath before nodding. “Okay.”

Jessica beamed, though she knew that Tiffany couldn’t say no. “Really?”

“Yes.” Tiffany smiled.

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Tiffany looked at the snow-white, seven-feet-tall Christmas tree in front of her. Four servants were already working around it, putting blue Christmas lights, red and green ornaments all around it. A few more servants were working all over the living room, dangling huge ornaments and ribbons on the ceiling using tall, metal ladders. Everyone was busy and it’s making her uneasy. Jessica, sensing Tiffany’s uneasiness, held her hand and squeezed it lightly.

“Can we help?” Jessica asked the head servant as she pulled Tiffany beside them.

The old woman looked at Tiffany with a mixture of concern and shock before looking back at Jessica. The other servants stopped on whatever they were doing. Slowly, a smile crept across the old woman’s lips. “Of course, Miss.”

The four servants moved aside to give way to Tiffany and Jessica before going back to their jobs. Jessica handed Tiffany a red ornament. She looked at it before looking back at Jessica only to see her staring at her encouragingly. She nodded before dangling it on one of the branches of the tree. She took a step backward to look at it. It blended perfectly with the tree. She could now hear the Christmas bells ringing-- for the first time after fourteen years.

That was the first ornament I have ever put in a Christmas tree after fourteen years.

They continued putting decorations to the tree and the senior servants, who witnessed Tiffany’s past, kept on glancing at Tiffany with smiles playing in their lips. The junior servants, who were new and doesn’t know

anything about Tiffany's past, looked at the senior servants confusedly but they decided to just put it on the back of their heads.

A few feet away from Tiffany, Mr. Baek watched. He also has a smile on his lips. He was right after all-- Jessica was the key for Tiffany to move on. He felt happy but, at the same time, jealous. He has been with Tiffany for a long time but he didn't manage to help Tiffany to move on but Jessica, who just came into their lives, managed to help her. After a couple of minutes, he walked back to the butlers' rooms. He has a phone call to make.

Meanwhile, Jessica was not having any clue what's happening around her. She doesn't even know that she was helping Tiffany to move on with this simple thing. All that she knew was that she's happy though it was her first Christmas away from her family because Tiffany was there to keep her warm inside and out. Though she was happy, it still feared her. That would be a problem when the time came.

For the couple of Christmas that passed, Tiffany was never relaxed. Tonight, however, she felt extremely relaxed and extremely happy. Her hand would brush against Jessica's hand occasionally when they were putting ornaments on the same branch, she would look up and Jessica would smile, she would smile back. Just then she heard a Christmas song playing-- Santa Baby. She turned around only to see Leo has already set up a speaker in the corner and was busy rummaging his iPod for Christmas songs.

Leo, sensing eyes on him, looked up. His eyes grew wide when he saw Tiffany helping with the Christmas tree. "Noona?"

Tiffany understood. Her brother was shocked to see her out of her room and, more shocking to him, trimming the Christmas tree. She smiled. "Nice song."

"B-but... Noona wha-" He stopped in mid-sentence when Tiffany glared at him. Tiffany glanced at Jessica, who was busy decorating the tree, and looked back to Leo. Leo understood immediately-- he was to say no word about this being Tiffany's first time in decorating the tree when Jessica was around.

Leo nodded and Tiffany resumed what she was doing. The corner of his lips itched to rise upward so he smiled. For the first time seeing Tiffany like this, he couldn't believe it. But he was happy and he knew that her older sister was finally taking a step forward. He turned and left, leaving the songs in his Christmas playlist playing. He has to tell his parents about this fast.

Tiffany was so blissful that she felt disappointed when they've already put everything in the Christmas tree and was done trimming it. She was the one who put the glass star on top.

"Miss Tiffany." The main servant bowed as Tiffany climbed down the ladder. "We're happy that you finally helped us to decorate the Christmas tree this year."

Tiffany smiled, surprising every senior servants. She was never kind to anyone, especially to the servants. "I'm happy too."

The four servants who helped them with the Christmas tree left with a final bow, leaving Tiffany and Jessica. Tiffany took a few steps backward to observe the tree. The white branches were barely visible under the wreaths, ornaments, artificial leaves, ribbons and Christmas lights. It was glowing blue like the contentedness glowing inside Tiffany.

She was happy that she finally took a step forward. Though she was taking baby steps, this would be a great start. She was thankful to Jessica for holding her hand till the end without letting go, not even once. She never knew that it was Jessica she needed to have enough courage to move on. She silently wished that this would continue.

Jessica, seeing Tiffany's twinkling eyes as she gazed up the Christmas tree, held her hand, but to her surprise Tiffany enveloped her in an unexpected, tight hug. Tiffany rubbed her back soothingly but it seemed like she was the one needing it. She was breathing deeply like she was about to cry. Jessica hugged her back as thoughts flooded her mind.

The following words Tiffany whispered to her sounded surreal that she thought she was dreaming:

"What would I do without you?"

SPECIAL CHAPTER:



JESSICA'S DREAM

Jessica raced forward blindly. Turning. Winding. Staying out of the straightaways. The footsteps behind her seemed relentless. Jessica's mind was blank. Blank to everything—where she was, who was chasing her—all that was left was instinct, self preservation, no pain, only fear, and raw energy. A shot exploded against the azulejo tile behind her. Shards of glass sprayed across the back of her neck. She stumbled left, into another alley. She heard herself call for help, but except for the sound of footsteps and strained breathing, the morning air remained deathly still.

She searched everywhere for an open door, an open gate, any escape from the suffocating canyons. Nothing. The walkway narrowed.

"Help!" Jessica's voice was barely audible.

The walls grew closer on each side. The walkway curved. Jessica searched for an intersection, a tributary, any way out. The passageway narrowed. Locked doors. Narrowing. Locked gates. The footsteps were closing. She was in a straightaway, and suddenly the alley began to slope upward. Steeper. Jessica felt her legs straining. She was slowing.

And then she was there.

Like a freeway that had run out of funding, the alley just stopped. There was a high wall, a wooden bench, and nothing else. No escape. Jessica looked up three stories to the top of the building and then spun and started back down the long alley, but she had only taken a few steps before she stopped short.

At the foot of the inclined straightaway, a figure appeared. The man moved toward Jessica with a measured determination. In his hand, a gun glinted in the moon's light. Jessica felt a sudden lucidity as she backed up toward the wall. She looked up at the figure approaching. The shadow advanced up the inclined passageway. Jessica saw walls on all sides—a dead end behind her. A few gated entryways between them, but it was too late to call for help.

Jessica pressed her back against the dead end. Suddenly she could feel every piece of grit beneath the soles of her shoes, every bump in the stucco wall behind her. Her mind was reeling backward, her childhood, her parents . . . Tiffany.

Oh, God . . . Tiffany.

For the zillionth time since she was a kid, Jessica prayed. She did not pray for deliverance from death, instead, she prayed that the girl she left behind would find strength, that she would know without a doubt that she had been important to Jessica. She closed her eyes. The memories came like a torrent. They were not memories of Fencing competitions, academic awards, and the things that made up 90 percent of her life; they were memories of her. Simple memories: making breakfast for her, their fights when they were still newlyweds. It was as if every defense, every facade, every insecure exaggeration of her life had been stripped away. She was standing naked—flesh and bones before God.

She stood, eyes closed, as the man in a mask drew nearer. Somewhere nearby, a bell began to toll. Jessica waited in darkness, for the sound that would end her life.

But nothing came.

Jessica bolted up from the infirmary's bed and was relieved to see Tiffany right in front of her. She was shaking and she started crying while hugging Tiffany. For a second she thought the dream was real but glad that she has woken up even before the man pulled the trigger.

She cried in Tiffany's arms. Tiffany kept whispering soothing words to her and it somehow helped her to relax. She felt Tiffany's arms loosened, and her heart started beating fast. She was afraid to let go. So afraid that she unintentionally said words she feared she would say in about a year and nine months from now.

"Don't let go."

CHAPTER 26: 'NEEDS'



CHAPTER 26: 'NEEDS'

Leo, feeling excited to tell his parents about Tiffany's behavior, jogged his way to the backyard where it was more quiet since the house was noisy with all the designing and renovating the servants were doing. But when he turned to the kitchen's deserted hallway he abruptly stopped. He heard a faint girl's voice coming from the kitchen, whispering, but it seemed like she was talking to herself because no one was answering. He rested his back against the kitchen's entrance and listened.

"Taeyeon, when are you going to visit me?" Right then and there, Leo realized that it was Sunny talking to Taeyeon on the phone. He listened intently to Taeyeon's answer but didn't hear anything.

"I..." Sunny trailed and a silence that could only have come from hesitation followed. "I miss you."

Leo's heart shattered. He now understood why eavesdropping was a bad thing. He knew he couldn't have any feelings for the girl but he did anyway. It couldn't be stopped. Since he saw the girl, he felt as if he was hit by a bullet. He didn't feel it at first until he saw himself bleeding. It was love at first sight. He thought he could make the girl like him but hearing her talking to his cousin like this, he knew he has no chance. He has to give up and let Sunny be happy with Taeyeon.

He turned around and left. He couldn't afford to listen anymore. He wasn't in the mood to tell his parents the news about Tiffany anymore. He just wanted to lock himself inside his room and mend his broken heart.

It seemed like he was the one who wouldn't go out of his room this Christmas Eve.

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"Oh my gosh, Ernest!" Sophia squealed once she opened the door of her husband's office.

It was already eight in the evening but they were still in the office. Just when Ernest thought he could rest a bit after the whole day's work, his wife suddenly barged inside his office, squealing as if they just made the World's President sign their sponsorship contract.

Ernest, who was relaxing on his office couch, bolted up.

"What?!" Ernest said anxiously.

"Tiffany! Tiffany!!" Sophia squealed as she ran inside her husband's arms, dopamine overwhelming her that she couldn't even deliver the good news properly.

"What happened to Tiffany?" Ernest asked impatiently as he hugged his wife.

"Robert called. He said Tiffany decorated the Christmas tree with Jessica!" Sophia said excitedly while beaming at her husband. (Robert is Mr. Baek)

"Really?!" Ernest's eyes grew big. "Thank God!" he exclaimed as he hugged his wife tightly.

As Tiffany's parents, they were glad that Tiffany was finally moving on after a couple of years. They felt as if all their problems were gone. All those years, they tried to help Tiffany but failed. They didn't even think that it was only Jessica who would help their daughter. They felt relieved.

"Now I understand why father wanted to marry them," Sophia said against her husband's chest.

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The night of the Christmas Eve came faster than the Hwang family expected. Everyone, especially Sophia and Ernest, was excited because this would be Tiffany's first Christmas. The whole house was busy running errands. Servants were shuffling inside the house as they prepared for the family's dinner, Sophia and Ernest took a week off to spend with their children and it surprised them that Leo was unusually not himself. Every people inside the Hwang's Taecision were excited though most of them wouldn't spend the night with their own families. Despite the cold weather, with the continuous flow of snow outside, the whole household felt warm.

Everyone was indeed busy but what Jessica couldn't understand was why was she standing in a deserted place, eyes blindfolded, with Tiffany's hand intertwined with hers? All that she could remember was Tiffany barged inside their room with a black, thick blindfold in her hand and asked Jessica to wear it, grabbed her hands and assisted her inside their car. After a couple of minutes flying, they softly landed somewhere quiet and cold, like a wide outdoor open area with no other people's presence but Tiffany's and hers.

"Seriously, Tiffany, where are we? It's freezing cold here," Jessica said as she hugged herself, breath creating white mist in front of her face.

“Don’t worry, we’re not going to stay out here for a long time. Are you ready?” Tiffany playfully asked as she tugged at the knot of the blindfold.

“Ready for what?” Jessica asked.

“You’re going to love this,” Tiffany said as she stood behind Jessica, removing the girl’s blindfold.

“I’m going to remove this but I’m covering your eyes with my hands to add more drama,” Tiffany explained, hot breath hitting the back of Jessica’s left ear. Jessica felt a chill run up her spine.

Jessica felt the blindfold removed but was replaced by Tiffany’s hands. She didn’t dare open her eyes because she knew her vision was blurred from wearing the blindfold for a long time. Tiffany’s breath kept hitting the back of her ear and she couldn’t focus. She was sure that her ears were tomato-red already.

“One... two... three,” Tiffany counted before parting her hands, giving Jessica a chance to see what’s in front of them.

When Jessica opened her eyes, her vision was blurred but she caught a silhouette of what seemed like people in different colored outfits. She blinked a couple of times until her vision cleared. Her eyes grew wide. Just when she thought the place was deserted, it wasn’t.

“Oh. My. Gosh... Moooooom!!!” she squealed as she ran inside her mother’s embrace. “Dad, Mr. Go, Krystal! I missed you guys!” she said excitedly as she hugged them respectively. After she hugged Krystal, she was shocked to see there’s another girl. “Oh! Sulli! You’re here too?”

Sulli smiled sheepishly. “My parents were out of the country. I was alone at home so I just decided to go with Krystal.”

“Aww... that’s sad. But you’re welcome here, of course. You’re like a family to us,” Jessica said as she hugged Sulli. The girl smiled gratefully.

“My princess, we missed you too,” Albert said as he ruffled his daughter’s soft wavy hair.

“Oh come on, Dad, stop treating her like a kid.” Krystal rolled her eyes, right hand intertwined with Sulli’s left.

“You’re just jealous,” Judy joked and their conversation, that contained most of teasing, continued.

Tiffany just stood on her spot, a few steps away from the reunited family. Usually she would feel left out but this time she wasn’t. She felt warm and happy inside seeing how excited and happy Jessica was. She was glad that she invited the Jungs to their place this Christmas. (Tiffany asked their personal pilot to fetch the Jungs from Korea in their private plane.) If she only knew Christmas could be this happy, she would have celebrated Christmas before.

The cold breeze passed her and she shivered. The airfield was an open area that they were most likely to catch cold anytime soon but the reunion made everyone warm.

"Tiffany!" Krystal suddenly called, waving her hands as her.

"Yah! You should call her 'unnie'!" Jessica scolded.

"We're in Scorchwood, *Jessica*. I can not call Tiffany 'unnie'." Krystal stuck her tongue out.

"Aishh," Jessica hissed.

"It's okay, Jessi." Tiffany rested a hand atop Jessica's shoulder.

Tiffany bowed respectfully. "Hello Mom, Dad, Krystal, Mr. Go and..." Tiffany trailed. She didn't catch the new girl's name.

"Sulli. Choi Sulli." Krystal informed.

"Sulli, nice to meet you." Tiffany smiled to the younger girl. "Her name sounds familiar," she said to Krystal.

"She was the one I told you who has an eye-smile like yours," Krystal said proudly, making Sulli smile until her eyes turned into crescents.

"Oh... I see." Tiffany then released her own eye-smile directed to Sulli while chuckling.

Jessica looked at Tiffany as if she was mesmerized. She doesn't know why but Tiffany's eye-smile was just that mesmerizing. And she silently wished that someday, somehow, Tiffany would look at her with those eyes.

Meanwhile, Krystal was looking at Sulli as if she was stuck with a lightning. For years the she has been best friends with the girl, she still has this reaction every time the girl did her infamous eye-smile. And she felt jealous. Jealous that she was showing it to Tiffany and not to her.

Judy, seeing her daughters' behavior, elbowed Albert before whispering, "Our kids are... whipped."

"I know, right?" Albert whispered back.

I've never seen Miss Jessica like this before, Mr. Go thought.

"Alright. Let's all go home. We don't want to catch cold here," Tiffany offered and started walking away, leaving the family trailing behind her.

Jessica walked in line with her family but her mind was with Tiffany. She doesn't know how to thank the girl with this special Christmas present.

Maybe a kiss would do, she thought jokingly but even before she dismissed the idea, she found herself jogging to catch up with Tiffany. She tackled the girl from the back, giving her a warm, big hug from behind.

Tiffany looked over her right shoulder and met face to face with Jessica. "What?"

Jessica smiled shyly. "Thank you," she whispered before stealing a kiss on Tiffany's right cheek.

With one swift motion, Tiffany pulled Jessica in front of her, exchanging their positions so she would now be the one hugging Jessica from behind before continuing walking with the awkward position-- Tiffany's knees hitting the back of Jessica's knees, arms wrapped around her waist, chin on her shoulder.

"Don't think of this as something... your parents are watching," Tiffany whispered and Jessica could have sworn she saw on Tiffany's face the hint of a smile.

Meanwhile, Sulli, who was walking behind the couple, has her eyes wide. "Did they just...?" she whispered.

Evidently, when Jessica kissed Tiffany on the cheek, from the view of the people behind them, it looked as if they kissed in the lips.

"No, Sulli, you didn't see anything," Krystal said to her innocent friend.

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The family dinner started at eight o'clock and finished at nine o'clock. The whole dining hall was filled with clatters and conversations thrown here and there. The Jungs and Hwangs were busy keeping up with whatever happened the whole time after Jessica moved in with the Hwangs. But, amidst all the noise, Jessica found herself quiet, just observing everyone. She noticed that Sophia and Ernest are unusually happy... or are they really like that? Jessica couldn't exactly remember because they barely see each other with their busy schedules. Leo, who surprisingly gone out of his room for the first time the whole day --apparently not wanting to miss Tiffany's first Christmas-- was just playing with the food. Krystal was talking to no one but Sulli who was sitting on her right, looking very happy. And Tiffany...

Jessica turned to look at her right. *Tiffany...*

Tiffany kept on smiling (and eye-smiling) and would converse with someone every now and then. She looked extremely happy and she seemed glowing. Jessica found herself looking at Tiffany longer than she looked at the others.

Tiffany, sensing eyes on her, turned and looked at Jessica with a smile. "You need anything?" she asked.

“Uhhh... n-nothing,” Jessica said before acting to be immersed in her food. Tiffany then continued talking to Judy after shrugging her shoulders.

What’s happening to me? Jessica thought as she tried to calm her heart that almost jumped out of her chest after seeing Tiffany’s smile. *Am I already drunk? Ugh stupid Jessica... why do you have to drink too much wine?!* she scolded herself.

Robert (Mr. Baek) and Andy (Mr. Go) were standing at the dining hall’s entrance, guarding the families inside while looking at their smiling faces. They couldn’t help but feel happy but sad at the same time knowing that they doesn’t have their own family because they were so dedicated to their work. But they treated Tiffany and Jessica like their own daughters and seeing them this happy made them happy too.

The two didn’t fail to notice how the merged families emitted a happy atmosphere and how they looked united and more solid that evening.

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“Everyone! Attend me!” Tiffany called the servants’ attention.

Everyone in the servant’s quarter bowed their heads with the sight of her while saying, “Miss Tiffany,” in unison.

“Miss Tiffany, are you okay?” the head servant suddenly asked.

“What do you mean? Of course I’m okay.”

“Your cheeks are flushed,” the head servant said and the others nodded in agreement.

“Oh really? It must be the wine... I drank too much. Anyways, I have an announcement.” Tiffany paused dramatically and she swore she could hear the people’s hearts beating faster with anticipation.

“Y’all now can go home to your families,” she said in one breath.

A dead air followed when the servants just looked at her as if she turned into a zombie and was threatening to bite a chunk of their flesh.

“What? You don’t want to go home to your families to celebrate this year’s Christmas?” Tiffany looked at them with wide eyes.

“A-are you serious, Miss Tiffany?” the main servant stuttered.

“Do I look like I’m kidding?” Tiffany pointed at her serious face.

“Thank you, Miss.” The main servant bowed and the others followed, saying their own thanks and bowing multiple times.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. One thank you is enough. Go ahead. It’s getting late.” Tiffany dismissed them with a wave of a hand and everyone started shuffling, preparing anything they could prepare before leaving.

“But! Make sure to return tomorrow noon, OK?” Tiffany let out a smile before she disappeared.

Tiffany wanted their servants to be happy so she gave them a day-off. Who knew if they would suddenly die one day and they didn’t even manage to celebrate their last Christmas with their family? Tiffany doesn’t want that to happen...again.

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Tiffany couldn’t sleep.

Sure, she contained a small amount of alcohol and was tired, but that didn’t help. Was it because of the girl who’s, surprisingly, still awake while lying on her chest or the fact that the girl was drawing circles on her stomach —she has even taken the liberty of pulling up Tiffany’s shirt-- with the tip of her right forefinger while her right foot was tangled with Tiffany’s or that Tiffany’s heart couldn’t calm down and her urges are rising?... or was it all of the above?

“Can you stop doing that?” she complained.

“Hmm?” Jessica looked up. Her cheeks were unmistakably flushed and Tiffany remembered the girl drank a couple of glass of wine earlier.

“I said stop drawing circles on my stomach,” Tiffany repeated.

“What do you want me to do then? I can’t sleep,” Jessica whined before pouting, making Tiffany’s urges to rise even more.

Jessica couldn’t sleep either so she decided to just play with anything she could get her hands on. She wasn’t sure if it was because of the alcohol but wasn’t being drunk could make you sleep even faster? But that’s not all, what puzzled Jessica more was that something inside her was banging her outer shell as if it wanted to come out-- the feeling she’s been feeling ever since dinner.

“Are you drunk?” Tiffany asked, seeing the girl’s weird behavior.

“I’m not. I only drank a couple of glass,” Jessica said the truth but she knew that tipsiness was visible on her.

“Sure, a couple of glass... but you have low alcohol tolerance!” Tiffany scolded.

“Pssh,” Jessica hissed, eyes narrowing. Her hand then stopped doing whatever it was doing... before it snaked under Tiffany’s shirt, making Tiffany jump.

“God! Jessi!” Tiffany panicked while stopping Jessica’s hand from going any further. Her heart almost leaped out of her throat from shock.

“Don’t act as if you don’t like it,” Jessica said before she could even stop herself. The thing inside her was controlling her but she wasn’t doing anything to prevent it either. Honestly, she kind of liked it.

“Jessi... I’m trying to pull myself together here and you’re just going to...” Tiffany trailed. She couldn’t afford to say ‘tempt me’.

“Why don’t you just give in?” Jessica said as she looked at Tiffany. She was shocked with her own words. She felt as if she wasn’t the one who’s talking but the urges were overwhelming her.

Why don’t you just give in? The sentence repeated inside Tiffany’s head. She closed her eyes and thought. She knew Jessica was drunk and once she woke up the next morning, she wouldn’t remember anything, but Tiffany doesn’t want to take advantage of the situation. But Jessica was asking for it! And she knew she wanted it too.

Knowing the fact that they both wanted it, that Leo was already inside his room earlier than the others, that Sophia and Ernest were already asleep, that Judy and Albert were in the guest room while Sulli and Krystal was on the other guest room, that the servants were already long gone, what’s still stopping her? Everything was in their favor! Answer: Her gender, the immorality, the contract, the things that would happen after a year and nine months... a lot of things were stopping her.

But she was tired... tired of ignoring all her urges.

“Jessi... you know I’m a woman... and I have needs...” Tiffany trailed before looking directly into Jessica’s eyes, hoping the girl understood what she was talking about.

“Tiffany, have you forgotten? I’m a woman too... and I have needs too,” Jessica whispered the last part before lunging herself forward and capturing Tiffany’s lips.

Tiffany’s body tensed with the sudden approach but after a couple of seconds, she relaxed and just let Jessica do whatever she wanted to do. Jessica’s hands were firmly cupping her cheeks and her hands were snaking up and down Jessica’s thighs after the girl pushed herself atop Tiffany. Tiffany doesn’t know what to do. She doesn’t know how girls to girls worked and the least that she could do was to kiss back... a little too excited that she accidentally bit Jessica’s lower lip.

Jessica then suddenly sat up in Tiffany's stomach. Tiffany thought for a moment that the girl was hurt with the sudden bite but Jessica didn't do anything about it. She just sat there, head hung low, eyes wide as if she just woke up from a dream and Tiffany just looked at her disappointedly.

Jessica suddenly regained her old self back. She realized what she did was wrong. She shouldn't have let the monster inside her to take control... she shouldn't have. It was wrong.

"Tiffany... we shouldn't have done that," Jessica whispered breathlessly before sliding back under the sheets, in her normal sleeping place, back facing Tiffany.

Tiffany looked at the girl's back disbelievingly. She scoffed. She couldn't believe it. A couple of minutes ago, Jessica was asking for it and now she changed her mind? Tiffany found it ridiculous.

Ever since she started dating, Tiffany Hwang has never felt this *busted*.

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The memory was still fresh to Sooyoung though fourteen years have already passed. She clutched her necklace's pendant that read 'PS' --which meaning she still doesn't know-- with her right hand while her left was groping her throbbing head, result from drinking too much alcohol. Though the bar was loud and was dark, the memory that was flashing inside her head looked as if it just happened yesterday.

It was Christmas Eve but the young Sooyoung was alone. Sadly, she trudged up to bed. As she climbed in, though, she found a note card lying on her pillow. On the card was written a simple riddle. Even before she solved the riddle, she was smiling. *I know what this is!* Her father had done this for her last Christmas morning.

A treasure hunt!

Eagerly, she pored over the riddle until she solved it. The solution pointed her to another part of the house, where she found another card and another riddle. She solved this one too, racing on to the next card. Running wildly, she darted back and forth across the house, from clue to clue, until at last she found a clue that directed to her father's bedroom. Sooyoung dashed up the stairs, rushed into her father's room, and stopped in her tracks. There, in the middle of her father's bed, sat a small rectangular box. Sooyoung shrieked with delight.

She jumped to the bed and opened the box. Her eyes grew wide. There, in the middle of the box, resting in a red soft cushion was a glowing gold necklace with a pendant that read 'PS'. It was the prettiest her young eyes have ever seen.

The phone downstairs suddenly rang, cutting through her trance. She stood up and jogged to the ringing phone. She picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Sooyoung... your father..."

That was when her father died. He died because of Tiffany and since then, she promised to herself to take revenge on her father's death and continued what her father wanted her to be. Her father has tried her intelligence since she was a kid, giving her riddles after riddles and some online murder games that needed solving. He wanted Sooyoung to be a policewoman and Sooyoung was becoming one.

"Sooyoung, let's go home," a familiar voice cut through Sooyoung's thoughts.

"What for?" Sooyoung asked before gulping another drink. "I'll just go home to no one! My mother died after giving birth to me and father was... he was... killed exactly fourteen years ago."

Hyoyeon knew it. Today was her father's death anniversary but she didn't even visit his tomb, feeling ashamed to face her father when she hasn't taken her promised revenge yet.

"You aren't going home to no one. You're going home to me," Hyoyeon said as she took a seat beside Sooyoung.

"Stop drinking." She grabbed the girl's hands when she attempted to take another sip.

"Who do you think you are?! Tsk... you act like a mother... a mother I never had," Sooyoung spitted.

"Stop it, Sooyoung. Haven't you thought that you're not the only one who's alone here?" Hyoyeon asked, tears threatening to fall.

"What do you mean?"

"The plane we were riding, when I was fifteen, crashed. I thought I was going to die but my parents hugged me until I heard a loud crash and the next thing I knew, they were dead. They died protecting me. Do you know how much it hurts to know that your parents died because of saving you? Everyone in the plane died, I was the only survivor. I wanted to die then!" Hyoyeon's tears flowed. She couldn't help it anymore.

"You mean you're the Kim-- the only survivor of the tragic plane crash eight years ago?" Sooyoung asked as she hugged the crying girl. This was the first time she saw the girl break down and cry.

"Sooyoung, don't leave me... I don't want to feel alone again," Hyoyeon said hopelessly. "I promise I won't leave you too."

Sooyoung's heart softened. She doesn't know why and how but the girl just has this effect on her. Every façade she put up when she was Summer, it all break down whenever Hyoyeon was around.

“I promise. I won’t leave you,” Sooyoung said as she rubbed the girl’s back. She suddenly forgot about her revenge, about her father’s death anniversary, about Hyoyeon’s dark past... everything. What mattered to her right now was the girl in her arms.

As the night passed by, both of them realized how much they needed each other.

CHAPTER 27: 'COMMITMENT'



CHAPTER 27: 'COMMITMENT'

Taeyeon pushed open the Hwang's huge main door while wondering why no one answered the doorbell and why no one opened the door for her. She looked around the bright house but found no one.

"Why do I feel like this house is deserted?" Taeyeon whispered to herself as she made her way to the maid's quarter.

The usual hum of the vacuum cleaner and maid's and butler's footsteps that usually accompany the morning was absent. There was only dead silence.

Taeyeon took a couple of turns before she finally reached the maid's quarter. She opened the door and was shocked to see the room deserted. The beds were properly arranged, as if no one has been there since last night.

"Where in the world is everyone?" Taeyeon whispered to herself, eyebrows knitted and feeling stupid to wake up early in the morning only to see the whole house deserted.

"They're with their families," came a voice behind her. Taeyeon jumped and cupped her mouth to muffle her shriek.

"God, Leo! You scared the crap outta me!" Taeyeon said after she turned around and found Leo behind her.

"Sorry." Leo smiled sheepishly.

"You said they were with their families? How come?" Taeyeon asked. She was sure that Hwangs have never given a day-off to their servants every Christmas or any other holiday.

"Well, Tiffany noona was in a good mood, so she gave the servants a day-off."

"Tiffany? You mean... she actually came out of her room?" Taeyeon's eyes grew wide.

Not even once, for the life of her, that Taeyeon have thought Tiffany would go out of her room on Christmas Eve. She was a witness to Tiffany's past. She witnessed how devastated Tiffany was for the past Christmas that passed and she thought the girl would never move on. But she actually did!

"Yes. It was because of Jessica noona," Leo explained.

"Gosh... I can't imagine I missed Tiffany's first Christmas," Taeyeon whispered to herself.

"You're looking for Maid Sunny, right?" Leo suddenly asked, the change in his facial expression was visible.

The air around them suddenly felt tense. Taeyeon then remembered that Leo knew her secret. But what she couldn't understand was Leo's expression. He looked as if he was... heartbroken.

"Y-yes," Taeyeon stuttered.

Leo turned around and started walking away, hands inside his pockets. "They're not gonna be back until noon," he called over his shoulder.

"Leo, let's talk-"

"No need." Leo stopped in his tracks, back still facing Taeyeon. "I already know. But you don't have to worry, your secret is safe with me. Just... just take care of her."

Taeyeon watched as Leo walked away from her. She now understood why Leo looked heartbroken. He loved Sunny, but for the sake of the girl and Taeyeon's happiness, he has given up his love... like every brave man in love should do when they saw no hope.

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"What should we do today?" Yuri asked as she took a seat in the Im's living room.

"I dunno." Yoona shrugged her shoulders as she took a seat beside Yuri.

It was already ten in the morning and Yoona's parents were at the Im's Automobile, giving Yuri and Yoona some private time together though their families were actually in a dinner together last night. Yuri's parents and Yoona's parents talked about their relationship whole night. They even talked about marriage because of the merging of the Jungs and Hwangs but decided that it's not yet the proper time. They wanted their daughters to be independent, earning from their own hard work, before they would marry them off. Yoona and Yuri were both perfectly fine with that. They aren't rushing everything. Like Yuri have always believed: "Don't run, take a walk. Like birds, leave everything behind and fly light... life is beautiful." They wanted to experience the beauty of life together.

Yuri has never thought that their parents would even agree with their relationship. Yuri and Yoona have been best friends since kindergarten and when they reached puberty, that's when they started to realize their feelings for each other.

"It was mutual," they always say.

They told their parents about it and they surprisingly agreed, saying that it was convenient because their companies could merge when they got married. Kwon's Construction and Im's Automobile was the biggest in the world. But Yuri and Yoona weren't thinking of money and their companies, they were thinking about the future, of what lies ahead for the both of them... together.

"Hey. Can you still remember? Tiffany doesn't celebrate Christmas, right?" Yuri asked as she tapped Yoona's thighs.

"Yeah. What's up with that?"

Both of them knew that Tiffany hated Christmas. They could still remember one time, when they talked about Christmas to Tiffany, she walked out. But they don't know the reason. And they didn't dare ask in fear of dealing with HellFany.

"Taeyeon texted me this morning. She told me Tiffany ate dinner last night with her family."

"Really? That's a good thing!" Yoona nodded with a smile.

"So, I was thinking, maybe we could go to her house right now? You know... just to tease her or something." Yuri wiggled her eyebrows up and down with a mischievous smile.

"Or ask her why she hates Christmas," Yoona offered.

"Oh no no no no. Not that. Do you want the old Tiffany to come back?" Yuri asked with a warning look.

"Ohh... I guess you're right. Let's just tease her then," Yoona said with a mischievous smile.

Teasing was just one thing they loved doing together. Maybe it was also the reason why they actually stayed with each other for a long time, because they understand each other very well and they have a lot of things in common, like twins or [i]soulmates.[/i]

"Let's go!" Yuri stood up and offered her hand to her girlfriend. Yoona gladly took it.

As they walked out of the house, hands swinging, steps skipping, they realized how beautiful life was as long as they stay together.

~.~

"Sulli... you know you're beautiful, right?" Krystal asked dreamily as she traced the girl's eyebrows, eyes, and nose with the tip of her finger.

"Of course. That's the nth time you told me that," Sulli said playfully.

They both woke up early but decided to stay on the bed for a couple of more hours, knowing that they wouldn't do anything once they've gone out. They were quiet a first until Krystal took interest of the girl's facial features.

"You're... you're beautiful too, Krystal," Sulli said, a tint of pink visible in her cheeks.

Krystal abruptly sat up. "Let's go out. It's getting boring here."

"What? You're getting bored with me?" Sulli pouted as she, too, sat up.

"No. It's not you. It's just... Let's just go out." Krystal stood up and pulled Sulli out of the room with her.

She wasn't really bored. She just wanted to distract herself and not think about Sulli and her growing feelings.

~.~

"Tiffany," Jessica quietly called as she walked behind Tiffany in the deserted hallway, on their way to the living room.

"Yes?" Tiffany asked without looking back though she knew what Jessica wanted to say.

"What happened last night--"

"Forget about it. Nothing happened last night." Tiffany's voice sounded firm, the total opposite of what she felt inside. She was actually panicking. Jessica wanted to talk about what happened last night but she doesn't want to. It felt awkward for her. She somehow felt relieved that she was ahead of Jessica, the girl not seeing her expression.

"Yeah. You're right. Nothing happened."

Tiffany sensed the hesitation in the girl's voice.

Jessica sighed as she looked at her feet. She felt bad about what she did last night. If it wasn't for her, nothing would have happened. If only she resisted her urges, she wouldn't be feeling stupid right now. She wanted to make it clear to Tiffany, that she was a bit drunk.

"What's with the noise?" Tiffany asked no one as they neared the leaving room, noises were emitting from it.

"Tae, Yul, Yoong, Seo, what are you doing here?" Tiffany asked when she saw her friends gathered in their spacious living room.

Yuri and Taeyeon, who was playing 'Just Dance' in Wii 2k21 to the tune of 'Girls' Generation' from years and years ago, and Yoona and Seohyun, who was busy munching pop corn on the sofa while watching the two, stopped what they were doing and looked at them.

Yuri suddenly snickered.

"What's funny?" Tiffany glared.

"Couple pajamas?" Yuri asked as she eyed Tiffany and Jessica's clothes.

Tiffany looked at her and Jessica's identical pink mushroom and cupcake patterned pajamas, taking a mental note to kill her mother once she saw the older woman. "It was from mom."

Yuri laughed out loud at Tiffany's embarrassed face. Tiffany's cheeks were flushed from embarrassment.

"I think it's cute," Yoona nonchalantly said. Yuri abruptly stopped laughing and looked at Yoona incredulously.

It was Tiffany's turn to laugh. "Yul, looks like you will wear something like this in the near future," she teased. Yuri flushed and slumped herself next to Yoona on the white sofa.

"It's a gift from auntie?" Taeyeon asked as she took a seat on the other end of the sofa, sweat trickling down from her forehead. She wiped it with her sleeve.

"Yeah. She even gave us two identical tooth brushes, two towels with 'Tiffany and Jessica' written in it, and three sets of couple shirts. I was having a hard time figuring which is mine," Tiffany complained.

"Knowing auntie, I'm surprised she didn't give you a lingerie." Everyone in the room laughed from Taeyeon's remark, save for Jessica and Seohyun who blushed.

"Seo, what's up with the jogging pants and sweatshirt?" Tiffany asked after her laughter subsided.

"I was jogging not far from here and Yul and Yoong saw me. They asked if I wanted to go with them here," Seohyun explained.

“Always the health conscious, I see.” Tiffany nodded understandingly before taking a seat beside Yuri, Jessica taking a seat beside her.

“Good morning!” two sweet voices greeted and everyone looked at the stairs. Krystal and Sulli were there, smiling sweetly at them.

Jessica stood up. “Guys, meet my sister, Krystal.” Krystal waved.

“And her girl friend, Sulli.” Sulli eye-smiled.

“What girlfriend?” Krystal glared.

“A friend who is a girl.” Jessica shrugged her shoulders innocently and Krystal felt like giving her sister a punch right on her beautiful face.

Everyone in the room snickered at the sibling’s little teasing before Yuri spoke up. “I’m Yuri.”

“Yoona.” Yoona saluted.

“Seohyun.” Seohyun smiled kindly.

“Taeyeon.” Taeyeon waved her close-open wave.

Sulli and Krystal bowed. “Nice to meet you,” they said simultaneously.

“By the way, Sulli and I are going out for a while,” Krystal informed Jessica.

“Are you familiar with the place? You might get lost,” Jessica said.

Krystal waved her fist-sized iPad XV. “I have GPS.”

“Bodyguards?” Tiffany asked.

Krystal scrunched up her nose. “Hmm, I don’t think we need that. No one would even recognize us here.”

“OK, take care,” Jessica reminded the two who was already out of the door.

“So, why are you guys here?” Tiffany asked.

“Nothing. We just missed the two of you,” Yuri lied.

“No. Yuri said she will-mhphmp--” Yuri cupped Yoona’s mouth.

“What?” Tiffany asked suspiciously.

"Nothing... nothing. Don't mind her," Yuri denied nervously while glaring at Yoona. Yoona immediately understood.

"Couz, Leo told me that you actually celeb-"

"Taeng!" Tiffany suddenly shouted, cutting Taeyeon's sentence. Tiffany looked at the older girl seriously, shook her head lightly before glancing at Jessica. The message was for Taeyeon, but somehow, Yuri, Yoona and Seohyun understood that they weren't supposed to talk about it when Jessica was around. But the question inside the trio's head was why?

"Uhhh, Leo told me that you gave the servants a day-off," Taeyeon backpedalled.

"Yeah. I think they deserve to celebrate the Christmas with their family. Is there something wrong with that?" Tiffany said as she glanced at Jessica, making sure if the girl wasn't suspecting anything. Luckily, Jessica looked dazed, as if she was thinking something deep.

"Yes. Because I can't see Sunny," Taeyeon whispered to herself.

"What?"

"I said, why?!" Taeyeon blurted out in panic. "Because you gave them a day-off I needed to make this pop corn all by myself." She stuffed her mouth a handful of pop corn.

"Why do you even have to go here early in the morning?" Tiffany asked though she knew the answer, that it was because Taeyeon wanted to ask her about her first Christmas.

"It's not early in the morning. It's eleven! And plus, I haven't been here for a long time," Taeyeon lied.

As the group continued to chat, Jessica was thinking to herself. She couldn't seem to get the scene from last night out of her head and it was bugging her. *Nothing happened... nothing happened... nothing happened...* She chanted repeatedly but it wasn't working. She silently sighed, feeling defeated.

Okay. Something happened and we both wanted it.

"Hey, Jessica, your lower lip is bleeding," Yoona pointed out the obvious.

Jessica quickly dabbed her lip with her thumb and when she looked at her thumb, there really was a droplet of blood. She sucked her lower lip in. "Erm... it's nothing. I just accidentally bit it."

It was nothing, Yuri heard, but Tiffany's blush was telling her that it wasn't. She silently thanked Yoona for pointing that out.

"Are you sure *you* bit it...?" Yuri smiled mischievously. "...and not Tiffany?"

Here we go again. Tiffany sighed.

"Y-yeah. I-it wasn't Tiffany," Jessica nervously stuttered as her cheeks flushed.

"Ookay. But I was wondering, if *you* bit it the wound would be *inside* and not *outside* the mouth," Yuri stated innocently.

Tiffany saw Jessica bowed her head and she thought Jessica couldn't say anything anymore, so it's up to her. But she doesn't have anything to say either.

Tiffany mentally cursed Yuri.

Why does it have to be Yuri who always sees things she shouldn't see?!?!

~.~

"Krystal, New Year's coming..." Sulli said as she tried to keep close to the fast-walking girl.

A lot of people were at the Urban Mall-- one of the malls under the Kim's management. Some were families but most were couples. Sulli tried to remain as close to Krystal as possible, scared to let the girl out of her eyes.

"So what?" Krystal stopped in her tracks and turned around to look at the girl.

"Have you imagined that we will last this long?" Sulli was talking about their friendship.

"It's been what? Six years?" Krystal asked, unsure.

Sulli nodded. "Turning seven."

"Wow, it's been so long." Krystal walked closer to Sulli. Sulli spun her arm around her shoulders and they continued walking.

"I never really thought that we would be friends. You were so weird back then!" Sulli giggled.

"Yah! Don't talk about it. It's so embarrassing." Krystal pinched Sulli's side.

"What's embarrassing? The thick eyeliner, black t-shirts and everything... the fishnets?" Sulli teased.

"Yah! I said stop it!" Krystal covered her face with her hands.

“Emo.” Sulli stuck her tongue out.

Krystal stopped walking. “It was rocker, not emo! You were the one who was so girly back then!”

The people around them started looking weirdly at them. They stopped walking in the middle of the moving bodies, making the flow to slow which wasn’t good with the people who were rushing. They were like a clog in a pipe, the water couldn’t get through.

Sulli looked innocently at her. “There’s nothing wrong with that.”

Krystal just looked at her, eyes narrowed. She doesn’t have anything to say anymore and they both knew that Sulli won this time. But then, all of a sudden, Krystal’s facial expression became serious.

“You want to know what’s weird?” she asked seriously. Their gazes locked.

When Sulli didn’t answer, she continued. “It’s how you actually managed to change me.”

Sulli blushed. “Hmmm... cheesy.” She pinched the girl’s side.

“Yah! I’m serious here!”

Sulli eye-smiled. “I know.”

Krystal suddenly covered the girl’s eyes with her hands.

“Yah! Why are you covering my eyes?” Sulli complained as she tried to remove the hands.

“Those eye-smiles... they’re... aish!” Krystal hissed before walking away, leaving the girl in the middle of the crowd.

Why can’t you notice the things I want you to notice, Krystal? Sulli thought as she watched the girl walk away. Until she realized that she couldn’t see the girl anymore. She panicked.

Krystal couldn’t understand why and how. Everything the other girl does, her heart would stir. A simple smile, pout and eye-smile, her heart felt as if it would explode. Her stomach felt like she swallowed a whole swarm of butterflies.

She continued to walk aimlessly, going with the flow of the people. She bumped to a couple of people until her senses came back. Sulli wasn’t behind her!

Krystal turned around and searched. She couldn’t see the girl. People bumped into her and pushed her back, away from where she last saw Sulli. She tried to move forward, against the flow of the people, but failed, the mass of people were stronger than her. But still, she tried. Krystal held onto people’s shoulders and dragged them behind her so she could move forward, saying words of sorry and excuse.

Krystal reached the spot where she last saw Sulli. Sulli wasn't there. Krystal's shoulders slumped. She was already panting. She looked around the area, heart beating fast, afraid if the girl was lost. She thought of calling the girl but realized that Sulli's phone was left in their room.

Krystal thought she might go insane if she wouldn't be able to find the girl, so imagine her relief when she saw the girl sitting (and pouting) on a bench near the Vera Wang boutique, a few feet away from where Krystal was. Krystal heaved a huge sigh of relief before jogging to the girl. She hugged Sulli abruptly.

"I thought I lost you, Ssul!" Krystal said.

Sulli's pout deepened as she lifted her arms slowly. She hugged the girl back tightly. "I was so scared, Krys," she wailed.

Sulli has no idea how scared Krystal was.

"Promise me you won't leave my side," Krystal said.

Sulli nodded. "I won't." *I can't*, she wanted to say.

Sulli realized that she doesn't care if Krystal would ever notice the things she was hinting. As long as they're together, that's what's important.

~.~

"Sunny," Taeyeon whispered as she locked the door behind her.

Sunny just came back from her parents' house and was actually the first one to arrive. The maid's quarter was still deserted save for the two of them.

"Taeng!" Sunny squealed as she ran to the girl. She hugged her very tight. "I missed you."

"I missed you too."

"What are you doing here?" Sunny asked as she let go of the girl.

Taeyeon took a seat on one of the beds. "Cornering you."

"What?" Sunny looked perplexed.

"It's pretty obvious, Sunny. It's just the two of us here, alone while the door is locked..." Taeyeon looked meaningfully at Sunny.

Sunny felt a chill run up her spine. “T-taeng, it’s almost twelve in the afternoon.”

Taeyeon’s eyes grew wide. “You mean it’s okay if it’s not in the afternoon? How about later at eight?”

“Taeng!” Sunny smacked Taeyeon’s arm.

“Ouch! What are you even thinking?” Taeyeon asked as she rubbed her arm, totally innocent.

Sunny didn’t answer, she just ducked her head and hid her blush. Taeyeon continued, “I was saying, this is the perfect chance for me to give you what I wanted to give.”

“What? Your virginity?” Sunny blurted out.

Taeyeon’s eyes grew. “Who told you I’m still a virgin?”

Sunny’s eyes grew wide this time. “You’re not?!”

Taeyeon exploded in laughter. She rolled over the bed, clutching her stomach. “Of course I am! I was just kidding,” she said in between her laughter.

“Go on. Laugh all you want,” Sunny said as she took a seat at the edge of the bed, arms crossed against her chest.

Taeyeon took a deep breath and composed herself. She sat up beside Sunny. “Soooo, that was what you’re thinking, huh?” she asked teasingly.

“Ugh!” Sunny smacked her in the arm again.

“Ouch! Okay okay. I’ll stop.” Taeyeon turned serious. “So, I have something to give you. I was planning of giving this to you at night because, y’know, it’s much more romantic. Under the sky, stars or something... but we don’t always have the chance.” Sadness was audible in Taeyeon’s voice. She pulled out a rectangular box from her back pocket.

“So I’ll just give this to you here.” She handed the box to Sunny.

“What’s this?” Sunny eyed the brown box.

“You’re not going to know if you’re not going to open it.”

Sunny slowly lifted the lid, her heart beating fast. When the lid was lifted, there she saw it. In the middle of the red cushion was resting a glittering silver bracelet sprawled in a straight line. The lock and the hook were at both ends and in the middle of the chains was a band, a word was inscribed in it in an unfamiliar writing

style, different swirls of vines and flowers decorating it. It wasn't that fancy but what's important to Sunny was the sentimental value. It was from Taeyeon-- the girl she loved.

"Who's SunYeon?" Sunny suddenly asked.

"Aish! It was Sunny and Taeyeon combined!" Taeyeon defended though she knew Sunny was just trying to lighten up the mood.

Sunny giggled. "I know." She suddenly turned serious. "Thank you... but I don't have anything for you."

"That's okay. I wasn't expecting anything. Your existence itself is like a present to me," Taeyeon said truthfully. She smiled fondly at Sunny.

"You want to put it on?" Taeyeon asked and Sunny nodded.

"There," Taeyeon said after she put the bracelet to Sunny's right wrist. "Take care of it, okay?"

Sunny slowly nodded.

"Taeng," Sunny called with her head bowed.

"Yes?"

"I love you," Sunny muttered under her breath.

"What?"

"I love you," she repeated a little louder.

"What? Can you repeat that again?"

"I SAID, I LOVE YOU!" Sunny screamed.

Taeyeon's jaw dropped, eyes grew wide. She was dumbfounded. She doesn't know what to say. All her senses suddenly shut down. She never thought that all her efforts were going to be appreciated but she was happy. So happy that she would have shouted and jumped around if only her senses didn't go on a vacation.

"Really?" Taeyeon asked after she recovered from shock.

Sunny nodded.

"Ye-mhpmhpmh!" Sunny covered Taeyeon's mouth and it muffled the girl's squeal.

"Do not shout! Someone might hear you!" Sunny hissed.

Taeyeon removed Sunny's hand and covered her face with a pillow instead. There she screamed, against the pillow, something like 'yes!' as what Sunny comprehended.

Sunny glanced at the wall clock. "Taeng, you have to leave now. The others might arrive anytime soon."

Taeyeon stopped in her spazzing moment and stood up quickly. Sunny lead her to the door.

"I love you," Taeyeon said, feeling excited that Sunny would surely reply to her this time, not like last time.

"I love you too. Now go!" Sunny pushed the girl out of the room.

Before the door was totally closed, Taeyeon extended her thumb and pinky and put it in her ear, saying that she'll call. Sunny nodded before finally closing the door.

As Taeyeon walked, or more like skipped, her way to the living room, where Yoona, Yuri, Seohyun, Jessica and Tiffany were, she felt like flying. It was her best day ever!

CHAPTER 28: 'FIXED'



CHAPTER 28: 'FIXED'

New Year came in a snap of a finger that people barely even remembered that it came. All Taeyeon and Sunny remembered was they were finally together. All that Jessica and Tiffany remembered was the awkward atmosphere between them because of what happened last Christmas night.

New Year, in Hwang's Taecssion, was celebrated with grand pyrotechnics on their half-mile backyard. Albert, Judy, Sophia and Ernest set up a barbeque grill and cooked the meat themselves, not asking any help from the servants. After the grand pyrotechnics, Krystal and Sulli played around with some of the fireworks they bought from Urban Mall the last time they visited the mall. The two youngsters kept on running around, fooling and playing with the elders. They even tried to fool around with Leo but the boy was really quiet, as if he wasn't in the mood, so Sulli and Krystal teased Jessica and Tiffany instead, but also stopped because the two seemed awkward. The two hyperactive kids just played with Robert and Andy just because they don't have any choice.

Albert, Judy, Sophia and Ernest didn't fail to notice the awkward atmosphere between Jessica and Tiffany that night but they didn't dare to ask. Maybe they were just having some problems with their relationship and in order to grow up, and to get used to the married life, they have to solve it themselves. Parents aren't going to be around them to help them all the time.

And that was what Jessica was trying to do today. As she stood in front of their window, pores absorbing the heat of the January first's afternoon sun, she rummaged her brain for ways on how to approach Tiffany and fix everything up.

The door suddenly hissed and parted, Tiffany came in but stopped when she saw Jessica in the room. She tried to turn around and leave because she couldn't stand to be alone in a room with Jessica-- she still felt awkward-- but failed because Jessica was already gripping her wrist, stopping her from going anywhere.

"Tiffany, let's talk."

Tiffany sighed. She knew she couldn't run away anymore. "Fine."

Jessica slowly let go of her wrist and watched as Tiffany took a seat on their bed-- the same bed where *something* almost happened last Christmas night.

"I'm sorry." Jessica stayed rooted on her spot as she lowered her head in shame.

"For what?" Tiffany asked, feigning ignorance.

"For what happened *that* night."

"I told you to forget about it." Tiffany stood up and tried to walk out of the room but Jessica blocked her way.

"Yes, you told me to forget about it, but you were the one ignoring me because of it!"

Tiffany looked into Jessica's eyes, for the first time noticing the black circles around them. Jessica hasn't been having any decent sleep lately. Tiffany felt guilty, knowing it was her fault.

When Tiffany didn't say anything, Jessica continued. "Do you know how hard it is that the only friend you wanted to talk to doesn't want to talk to you? Tiffany, it hurts," Jessica whispered, scared that if she said it out loud she would break out and cry.

Tiffany walked back and sat on the bed, her legs suddenly felt jittery. She realized how wrong she was to ignore Jessica for the past week. She was only thinking about herself that she didn't even notice Jessica was hurting because of her.

"I'm sorry," Tiffany whispered.

"You don't have to feel sorry. I know it was my fault," Jessica said as she sat beside Tiffany.

"No, it's not yours. It's mine," Tiffany admitted.

"I know it's mine. You don't have to make me feel better. I just want you to... forgive me."

"How can I forgive you if I didn't even blame you in the first place?" Tiffany looked at Jessica.

Tiffany wasn't really blaming Jessica for what happened. She was blaming herself because she gave in. She shouldn't have. She shouldn't really have.

"Then I guess we just have to move on," Jessica proposed.

Tiffany slowly nodded. "I guess so too."

Tiffany was about to stand up when she felt Jessica's arms wrapped around her waist, hugging her from the side. "Can we start off with sleeping? I'm really, really, really, really sleepy," Jessica groggily said as she pulled Tiffany with her until they were finally lying on their backs.

"We're just gonna sleep, OK? Nothing more," Tiffany lectured.

Jessica slightly chuckled. "Nothing more," she agreed.

Jessica heaved a sigh of relief. After a week without any decent sleep, she could finally sleep because Tiffany was hugging her... and humming a soft melody for her.

Tiffany started humming to the tune of 'Almost', a song from a couple of years ago that she heard somewhere, as she ruffled Jessica's hair. She felt the need to do it because she knew she was the reason why Jessica hasn't slept for days. It was the least she could do.

Before the both of them fell asleep, they didn't miss the feeling like they were closer to each other this time. Problems could really make a relationship stronger once solved.

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Tiffany expected that dinner was going to pass by smoothly, until Sophia suddenly dropped an unexpected news.

"Tiffany, dear." Sophia softly called.

"Yes, Mom?" Tiffany asked after she swallowed her food.

"We've..." Sophia motioned to Albert, Judy and Ernest. "Rented a rest house in Zeigesar Island for one night and two days."

Zeigesar Island was five countries away from Scorchwood. It was inside the country Mulberry. The country was actually called the '*late country*' because it wasn't still modernized like the rest of the world. The people who live in Mulberry were the traditional people. They don't like the modernization to reach their country, so Tiffany assumed that the island --Zeigesar-- was also not modernized.

"What for?"

"For you and Jessica's out of the country honeymoon vacation," Sophia casually said.

Jessica, who was about to swallow the food, choked. Tiffany, being the one closest to her, concernedly rubbed her back.

“Are you okay, Jessica?” Judy asked.

“I’m okay,” Jessica said after she recovered. “I was just surprised. I mean, it’s been a long time since our wedding, I wasn’t expecting this,” Jessica reasoned.

“Oh, you should get used to it.”

Jessica thought what Ernest meant with that. Are there more surprises up their sleeves? Jessica doesn’t know if she would still be alive for the last surprise. She might choke from the first ones and eventually die before they even reach the last surprise if they kept doing that.

“But school’s starting in a couple of days, Mom,” Tiffany tried to reason.

“That’s why you two are leaving tomorrow morning,” Sophia informed. “You’ll stay in Zeigesar for two days and *one night*,” Sophia repeated, giving emphasis on ‘*one night*’, as if trying to say that make something out of it. Specifically: grandchild. What else?

A night was really that necessary, huh? Tiffany thought.

It’s not that it was an issue though. They have been sleeping together for a couple of months now, so they were sure that the night would pass by just like the normal ones.

“O-OK. Thank you Moms and Dads.” Tiffany faked a smile, so was Jessica.

As the family continued eating, Jessica and Tiffany knew that the honeymoon would pass by just like their normal days.

No hassle at all.

~.~

Jessica has always felt like something was missing in her life ever since she moved in with the Hwangs. And when her parents and sister went to Scorchwood, she felt complete. The attendance of her family was all that was missing in her life and she was glad that she celebrated Christmas and New Year with them. As she walked her family to the front door, however, she felt the feeling like something was missing was seeping back into her.

“Mom, Dad, watch out for your health OK? Don’t get too stressed with works,” Jessica lectured her parents as she hugged them.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Albert joked as he patted his daughter’s head.

"Krystal, stop playing around. You're not a kid anymore. Take care of Mom and Dad instead," Jessica said to her sister as she hugged her.

"I'm *just* fifteen," Krystal defended.

"You're fifteen *already*! Get serious in life!" Jessica messed up Krystal's hair, the younger girl pouting as she fixed her hair.

"Sulli, take care of *my* Krystal, OK?" Jessica pointed a finger to herself. "My Krystal," she repeated as she glared at the younger girl playfully.

"Unnie," Sulli whined as she lowered her head, trying to hide her blush.

Jessica chuckled. "You're so cute. No wonder..." Jessica trailed as she hugged Sulli.

No wonder what? Sulli thought but didn't have the chance to ask when Jessica moved on to the most trustable man she has ever met.

"Mr. Go, take care of my family, OK?" Jessica hugged the older man.

That was one thing Andy loved about Jessica. She was so down to earth, she expressed her feelings to others even if the person has a low status in life.

"Yes, Miss," Andy obediently said.

"I guess we'll go ahead now. It's getting late," Judy said as she bowed goodbye to the Hwangs. "Thank you for accommodating us."

"Anytime." Ernest smiled as he waved to the retreating family.

Jessica watched the flying car, that was containing her family, until it was out of her sight. She sighed. She fought the need to feel sad because she knew they'll meet again.

Jessica felt an arm wrapped around her shoulders and she instantly felt relaxed. The girl just has that effect on her.

"Let's get inside," Tiffany said.

Jessica let Tiffany lead them back inside the house, all the while thinking why Tiffany was this gentle to her. It's starting to scare her.

But tonight wasn't the right time to think about things. They still have to pack their things and catch their own flight tomorrow morning.

CHAPTER 29: 'GONE'



CHAPTER 29: 'GONE'

When Tiffany and Jessica arrived in Zeigesar Island, everything was just fine.

No.

Nothing seemed fine... at least for Jessica.

Jessica felt like her stomach turned upside down and there's nothing she wanted to do but to throw up. Seated at the rear compartment of the helicopter, her face contorted, looking constipated, as she clutched her stomach, fighting what was inside her from coming out of her mouth.

She started feeling this way when they boarded their private plane from Scorchwood to Mulberry, and when they transferred to the private helicopter that would send them to Zeigesar Island, everything she was feeling suddenly worsened. She never felt like this with the air train.

"Are you okay?" Tiffany concernedly asked as she removed Jessica's buckles after the pilot safely landed just on top of the water level.

Jessica nodded, not trusting her voice. The craft slightly shook when the low waves hit it and Jessica cupped her mouth.

"Really?" Tiffany doubted. "It doesn't seem like it. Do you want to go back now?"

"No, I'm fine, and plus, we're already here." Jessica pushed herself to talk.

The pilot hopped down from the craft and walked to the rear compartment's door, assisting the two as they hopped down. Tiffany climbed down first, the pilot holding her hand gentlemanly, and assisted her to the shore, a couple of steps away from the helicopter. When the pilot got back to the rear compartment, he doubted that Jessica could climb down all by herself.

“Miss, are you okay?” the pilot asked.

“I’m okay. Just help me to get down.”

All to Jessica’s (and Tiffany’s) surprise, when Jessica stood up and aimed to hold the pilot’s assisting arm, the pilot suddenly scooped her up and carried her bridal style, the man not really trusting if Jessica could do it by herself.

Jessica violently blushed, suddenly forgetting about vomiting.

If looks could kill, the pilot would probably be dead by now by the way Tiffany was glaring at him, but the pilot was oblivious.

“I’m sorry, Miss,” the pilot said as he put Jessica down beside Tiffany. “I could have been more careful with flying the helicopter... but you didn’t tell me you’re pregnant.” He sheepishly scratched the back of his head.

If it was possible for Jessica’s cheeks to turn even brighter, it would have. Tiffany opened her mouth to speak but the man beat her.

“I’ll go ahead now, Miss.” He bowed politely. “I’ll be back tomorrow afternoon, like what Madame Sophia said.”

And with that, he hurriedly went back to the helicopter and flew, sending white sands flying all over the area.

“You’re pregnant?!” Tiffany suddenly asked.

Jessica’s eyes grew wide. “What?! I’m not!” she defended, still clutching her stomach.

All of a sudden, Jessica felt like something climbed up her throat and she involuntarily retched, attempting of throwing it out, but nothing came out.

“Hey! Geez! Don’t throw up on me!” Tiffany said as she held both of Jessica’s shoulders.

“Ma’am Tiffany, Ma’am Jessica,” a woman came out from the woods and greeted the two.

For the first time since they reached Zeigesar Island, Tiffany and Jessica looked around the place, suddenly noticing the white sand, the wide blue sea, the feeling of the sea spray gather on their skins- raising gooseflesh, the trees not too far from the shore... but a house was nowhere to be seen.

“I’m Laine, the manager of this place.” The woman has auburn hair that flowed down to her shoulders, at least five feet tall, has milky white skin, not beautiful but not ugly either, and was wearing a casual office wear. “You can call me if you need anything.” As the woman introduced herself, a couple of butlers came from behind her and they started carrying Jessica and Tiffany’s things.

“Uhhh, where’s the house?” Tiffany glanced around the place.

“It’s a five-minute walk from here, Ma’am.”

“Five minutes?!” Tiffany suddenly blurted out. “We’re both tired from the flight and everything and now we need to walk?!”

“Tiffany,” Jessica squeaked as she removed a hand from her stomach and held Tiffany’s hand to calm her down.

“I mean...” Tiffany backpedalled. “My wife here isn’t feeling well. I don’t think she can walk for five minutes,” she said, feeling kind of proud with the ‘my wife’ part.

Oh, the things I do for you, Jessica, Tiffany thought sourly.

Laine didn’t look amused or shocked to hear Tiffany said ‘my wife’. She’s used to it, she have entertained a couple of guests that has the same situation. Her eyes moved downward though, to Tiffany’s left hand and then to Jessica’s. Seeing the wedding rings somehow made her feel jealous that another happy couple was about to stay in their island again.

“Uhm, we’ll just have a man carry her, Ma’am.”

“What?!?!” Tiffany yelled and felt Jessica squeezed her hand. “You’re not going to do any of that,” she said more calmly.

Laine bowed her head in shame. “I’m sorry, Ma’am, but there are no vehicles that can fit the path.” She motioned to the ‘path’ behind her. The entrance was narrow, only two people wide, and the path was actually paved out so no one would get lost.

Tiffany cursed under her breath. It was times like this that she hated places that are not modernized... and her mom for choosing it.

“Fine, I’ll carry her,” Tiffany impatiently said, scooped Jessica up and carried her bridal style.

Tiffany walked closer to the entrance, feet dipping into the sand, but stopped when Laine didn’t follow them. She looked back and saw Laine looking incredulously at them.

“What are you waiting for? Lead us!” Tiffany nodded to the so-called ‘path’.

“Yes, Ma’am.” Laine looked like she just got back to herself when she hurriedly walked ahead the couple.

Tiffany didn’t notice the blushing Jessica in her arms as she thought to herself:

Five minutes. Oh gosh... five minutes!

~.~

“What to do... what to do...?” Tiffany mumbled repeatedly to herself as she thought, a retching sound coming from the bathroom not too far from the bed where she was sitting in her background.

She looked around the room, hoping she would see something that can give her an idea on what to do with Jessica. The house was just normal... if you’re to say that thirty years ago.

Everything was manual, the door wasn’t like the ones on the Hwang’s Taecssion, and everything was NOT automatic. The bedroom has a huge canopy bed in the middle with white sheets, a bathroom, a bedside table and a lamp on top of it, a walk-in closet, an arm-wide lined up wooden drawers on the foot of the bed-- against the wallpapered wall, and a floor-to-ceiling window overseeing the blue sea. The room was on the second floor of the rest house, giving a private view of the beautiful sea, and it seemed like it was inviting Tiffany to come closer and play with the waters and sands and to Jet Ski, maybe.

But Tiffany couldn’t do it yet. First things first, and it was Jessica.

Tiffany’s eyes caught the innocent iPad XV resting on top of the bedside table. She hurriedly picked it up and tried to search anything that could help a person who kept on throwing up... but to no avail.

“Ugh! Why does this place have to have no signals at all?! Not even Wi-Fi!” Tiffany hissed under her breath.

Another retching sound coming from the bathroom was heard.

“Ugh... what did she even eat? I ate what she ate this morning, so why am I not feeling the same?” Tiffany asked herself.

Then, all of sudden, what the pilot said replayed in her head.

“Pregnant? Impossible. She never left my side, and nothing happened between us either... and she’s not gonna get pregnant if ever there was.”

Tiffany violently shook her head when she realized she was utterly concerned about Jessica and thinking about ridiculous things. She stood up and threw the innocent iPad XV on the bed. It bounced twice.

“What to do with someone who keeps on throwing up? Stocked knowledge, Tiffany. Think...” Tiffany whispered to herself as she marched her way out of the room.

Why am I even so concerned?

~.~

Jessica wiped her mouth with a clean towel when she felt like nothing was going to come out anymore. She flushed the toilet manually and washed her mouth before stepping out of the bathroom. She groaned. She really hated the feeling of throwing up, it seemed like all of her internal organs were going to come out.

When she stepped into the bedroom, she saw that it was empty. Tiffany was nowhere to be seen, but something was in the middle of the bed. She walked closer and realized that it was a small tub of vanilla flavored ice-cream, all sorts of candies surrounded it, and a note was fastened on the tub.

Eat. Just don't eat it ALL.

It was simple but Jessica was slightly smiling as she took the tub and the spoon and scooped a spoonful. The acidic taste on her buds was overwhelmed by the sweetness. She took another spoonful, and another, and another... until she finished the whole small tub.

When she stopped eating, that's when she noticed that the feeling inside her stomach was somehow gone, and she's sure that a couple of minutes of rest could help for the feeling to totally disappear.

Jessica put the tub on the bedside table and transferred the candies there. She lay on the bed and waited for everything she ate to go down her stomach before sleeping.

But then, Tiffany suddenly entered the room, pushing a trolley of food ahead of her.

"You ate the sweets?" she casually asked.

"Yeah."

"Feeling better?" Tiffany put the trolley beside the bed before sitting next to Jessica, who was lying down.

"Yeah. Thanks," Jessica truthfully said.

Tiffany just smiled.

"What's that?" Jessica asked, motioning to the trolley of food.

"Erm, it's past lunch already and we haven't eaten anything yet, so I just brought it here."

"You brought it all the way up here?" Jessica asked.

"Yeah?" Tiffany said, unsure. "I was down there and was planning of going up here, so I thought; why not bring it up here?"

Jessica smiled. *Tiffany has never done that before.*

“But I’m not really in the mood to eat. It feels like, when I eat, I’m just gonna throw it all up again.”

“Oh, really?” Tiffany paused, and for a moment Jessica thought Tiffany would feel upset. But then, she continued, “Just rest then, or sleep. I know you love sleeping.”

“I do... only when you’re beside me,” Jessica said before she could even stop herself. When she realized what she said, she ducked her head and hid her blush.

Tiffany let out an uneasy laugh. “I’ll sleep with you then.”

Tiffany stood up and pushed the trolley away from the bed before settling herself beside Jessica, the girl on the right side, and Tiffany on the left side-- just like the normal.

Tiffany proceeded on hugging Jessica and rubbed her back, not having any idea that the gesture slowly lulled Jessica to sleep.

Oh, the things I do for you, Jessica.

This time, the thought didn’t sound sarcastic to Tiffany. It sounded more like when she admitted she’d done a thing she should not do but would gladly do it again if given the chance.

~.~

Jessica awoke slowly. She felt the space beside her and realized it was empty. Tiffany was missing again, but the sound of the humming coming from the bathroom told her Tiffany was there.

Slowly, she sat up and sensed her stomach felt normal again. She felt normal and she’s glad, knowing she’s not going to vomit again.

By the time Tiffany came out of the bathroom, Jessica was already on her feet, about to knock on the door.

Tiffany took a step back when she came face to face with Jessica, clutching her chest. “Gosh! You surprised me!”

Jessica smiled sheepishly. “Sorry. I was just about to knock.”

“Why? Are you going to use it?” Tiffany moved aside to give way to Jessica.

“No. I’m going to check on you?” Jessica said, unsure.

“Check on me? You’re the one who isn’t feeling well and you’re going to check on me?”

“I feel better now.”

“Really?” Tiffany’s eyes shone brighter.

“Yeah. Why?”

“Can we go out now?” Tiffany held onto Jessica’s arm and tugged on it. “We don’t have much time to enjoy the place tomorrow since we’re leaving in the afternoon, so this time was the perfect timing to go out there. I so want to Jet Ski!” Tiffany wailed like a kid.

Jessica glanced at the window to see if it was safe to Jet Ski. “But the waves are quite high.”

“That’s the thrill!” Tiffany beamed.

Jessica faked a dramatic sigh. “Fine.” She sounded unwilling but deep inside, she was willing. Tiffany made her a favor when she slept with her and this was the least Jessica could do to make up for it.

“Let’s go!” Tiffany excitedly pulled Jessica out of the room, but Jessica stayed rooted on her spot.

“Let me change first,” Jessica said.

“Oh yeah.” Tiffany said, realizing that she has already changed but Jessica hasn’t. “And let’s eat first, too, before going out there.”

“You haven’t eaten yet?” Jessica asked, shocked.

“I haven’t.”

“Why?”

“I was waiting for you to wake up,” Tiffany said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“Aish, you shouldn’t have waited for me.”

Tiffany shrugged her shoulders. “I figured we should eat together.”

Jessica paused before dropping the subject with a simple “OK.”

Jessica then proceeded to change in the bathroom, Tiffany sat on the bed as she waited. Jessica was thinking about Tiffany’s unusual behavior. The girl became so much gentle, kind of juvenile, and so *not* like the Tiffany Hwang Jessica have known. Jessica thought since when Tiffany started being like this. Was it only today? Or since a long time ago it’s just that she hasn’t noticed it?

Jessica doesn't know how, why, when, but one thing she was sure: she liked it and it scared her more for liking it.

~.~

After eating, the couple went straight to the white-sand beach. Jessica sat on the beach chair, not really tanning her skin since the sun was about to set, while watching Tiffany who seemed to be having fun Jet Skiing.

At first, they doesn't even know if the island has any Jet Ski at all, but was lucky enough to find two blue colored Jet Ski SII for the both of them, courtesy of Laine. Tiffany excitedly ran to the shore and Jet Skied while Jessica stayed on the shore for a while, saying she'll wait for the food to go down her stomach first before Jet Skiing. She might throw it all up again if she didn't.

Jessica watched Tiffany Jet Ski around the wide, clear blue sea, the girl's black thin and lousy shirt almost flying off of her thin frame because of the strong wind, but did nothing to lessen Tiffany's cool charm while fighting the strong waves. She looked like a professional Jet Skier-- a very charming one at that. Just watching her made Jessica's mind at ease and everything felt great, with the white sand and the sea spray and the salty smell and the cold wind and the setting sun and that beautiful girl looking like she's the sea's best friend... everything just felt great.

Until Jessica realized that Tiffany has climbed down the Jet Ski and was already tugging on the sleeve of her plaited blouse.

Jessica gave a questioning look at her.

"Let's go!" Tiffany said, urging Jessica to Jet Ski with her.

Jessica gave up and walked to the other Jet Ski that seemed to be only waiting for her, bare feet digging into the sand, but stopped when she felt a hand on her wrist.

"Where are you going?" Tiffany asked.

"I'm gonna get the other Jet Ski," Jessica said as-a-matter-of-factly.

"Oh no. You're not going to ride on that." Tiffany shook her head.

"Why not?" Jessica raised an eyebrow.

Tiffany broke in a mischievous smile. "You're going to Jet Ski with me."

Jessica doesn't know what happened but the next thing she knew, she was on the same Jet Ski with Tiffany driving it, arms wrapped tightly around the girl's thin waist, and screaming her head off because of Tiffany's reckless driving.

"Tiffany, can you please go easy on me!?" Jessica screamed over the loud roar of the waves.

Tiffany just laughed it off and continued to fight with the strong waves, going farther and farther from the shore.

"Don't get too far! The waves are higher here!" Jessica managed to say before a wave suddenly hit the side of their ski and soaked them from head to toe. Neither of them seemed to bother.

"The higher the waves, the better!" Tiffany simply said.

Jessica looked up at the sky, not minding Tiffany's ponytailed hair that kept on hitting her face, and realized the sky was turning dark. Not the "night is coming" dark, but the "storm is coming" dark.

"Tiffany, we should get back now!" Jessica said.

"Why?!"

"I think it's about to rain!"

That was the second time that Tiffany looked up, and all of a sudden, like a dam bursting, the rain started falling on them, the waves became much stronger. Tiffany was too focused on the sky that she didn't see a huge wave coming from the side and hit the ski. She didn't even have enough time to finish the word "Shit" when the Jet Ski suddenly turned upside down and sent both of them on the body of waters.

Jessica didn't see what happened because her eyes were closed when a huge wave sent them flying on the water, but she felt something hit the right side of her torso, pounding the air out of her lungs. She assumed it was the ski. What else could it be? She imagined a sound of breaking bone, but wasn't really sure if her ribs were broken, though she felt the extreme hurt. She was under the water, eyes tightly closed, so she couldn't hear and see anything.

Jessica felt like taking the phrase "everything just felt great" back as she waggled her feet and arms in an attempt to swim, blindly searching for the surface. But her torso hurt so much that she couldn't even move both her arms.

She couldn't do anything.

Carbon dioxide was starting to accumulate in her blood, bringing with it the instinctual urge to inhale. The reflex to inhale was increasing in intensity with each passing moment. Jessica knew very soon she would reach what was called the breath-hold breakpoint—that critical moment at which a person could no longer voluntarily hold her breath.

Her core muscles had begun burning, and she knew hypoxia was setting in.

She could feel the breath-hold breakpoint arriving.

The moment was upon her.

Jessica's lungs forced out their spent contents, collapsing in eager preparation to inhale. Still she held out an instant longer. Her final second. Then, like a man no longer able to hold his hand to a burning stove, she gave himself over to fate.

Reflex overruled reason.

Her lips parted.

Her lungs expanded.

And the liquid came pouring in.

The pain that filled her chest was greater than Jessica had ever imagined. The liquid burned as it poured into her lungs. Instantly, the pain shot upward into her skull, and she felt like her head was being crushed in a vise. There was great thundering in her ears.

There was a blinding flash of light.

And then blackness.

Jessica Jung was gone.

CHAPTER 30: 'FEAR'



CHAPTER 30: 'FEAR'

Tiffany inhaled a lungful of oxygen once she reached the surface of the water. She looked around frantically, deeply concerned about Jessica, but she didn't see any trace of the girl, only a wide volume of water and strong waves, even the Jet Ski have already sank.

Fear gripped her trembling body.

No Jessica...

No Jessica...

No-

"No!" she screamed before inhaling deeply and expertly dived under.

Tiffany looked around underwater, a tiny ringing inside her ears, but saw nothing. Not even a silhouette or something that could make out as a human. She stayed under the water for a moment until she felt the need for oxygen. She resurfaced, inhaled, and dived again. Tiffany swam farther and farther. Deeper and deeper. Expertly. *Desperately.*

Tiffany realized she'd done this before. Except that, before, she was desperately swimming upward in search for the surface.

She resurfaced again when she needed oxygen. She stayed there for a while. Tiffany doesn't know if she's crying or not because of the rain and since she's all wet, but the hot liquid trailing down her cheeks told her she was.

All of a sudden, memories came flashing inside her head. Way back thirteen years ago. The ten-year-old Tiffany was ice skating when the ice suddenly cracked and ate her whole. The water was cold. Her body froze. She couldn't open her eyes. And most importantly, she couldn't breathe. She tried to swim upward but the

cold water froze her limbs. She knew she would die then, knowing she's not capable of the right way of swimming, but a hand grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the cold water.

That was when she felt glad that Mr. Baek was there but it would've been better if it was Mr. Choi.

Then Tiffany got back to herself and instantly, she blamed herself. If she didn't insist on Jet Skiing when she first handedly noticed the dark sky, none of this would have happened. This was her fault and it terrified her more that she knew what Jessica was experiencing at the moment.

The feeling of wasn't able to breathe.

The feeling that you know you're going to die right then and there.

But, as quickly as it came, the feeling disappeared. Replaced by hope-- something Tiffany has never had for a long time.

I can't give up now. I can't! Jessi might still be around.

With the new found hope, she inhaled again and dived. She continued swimming, searching, and occasionally resurfacing when she needed air.

This was the reason why she learned swimming when the accident when she was ten happened-- So that when the time came that she had to deal with waters again, she could overcome it.

And she did.

All of a sudden, Tiffany saw a dark silhouette, like a shadow in the water. She swam closer to it, feeling the heavy feeling in her chest somehow lighten. Finally, she has gotten closer enough for her to decipher that it was Jessica. She swam faster now, closer to Jessica who was slowly sinking deeper and deeper into the hollow sea. She hooked her arm around Jessica's neck and pulled her to the surface with her.

Once in the surface, Tiffany looked around and realized that, with her continues swimming and the waves' continues rocking, they were close to a shore, but not the shore of the Zeigesar Island. She paddled both her feet and her free arm and swam closer to the shore, unconscious Jessica in tow.

Finally, they reached the shore. Then Tiffany went to work. Compressing the girl's chest, Tiffany pumped the water from her lungs. Then she began CPR. Counting carefully. Deliberately. Resisting the instinct to blow too hard and too fast.

"Don't you dare leave me now, Jessi!" Tiffany threatened, fighting the urge to cry.

Tiffany continued pumping and blowing but Jessica stubbornly refused to wake up.

"Yah! Wake up!" Tiffany couldn't help but slap Jessica's arm helplessly and let her tears flow.

Tiffany continued, crying now. Her lips trembling as they came in contact with Jessica's cold and violet ones. Her arms wobbly as they tried very hard to pump the water out of Jessica's lungs.

For three minutes Tiffany tried to revive Jessica. After five minutes, Tiffany knew it was *over*.

The girl that managed to change Tiffany Hwang... dead before her.

"You can't leave me now, Jessica Hwang!" Tiffany screamed, desperately hoping Jessica would hear. "After making me what I am now you're going to leave me just like this?!"

Tiffany pounded on Jessica's chest. "I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!!!"

"You're a coward! We promised in the altar, in front of God, that we're going to run life together! Why are you leaving me now?! You're scared of what's ahead of us?! Huh?!" Tiffany sobbed as she hunched over Jessica's chest. "That's not the Jessica I knew!"

Tiffany felt like the sky was crying with her. It continued to pour down heavy droplets of water.

"Wake up! We still have a two-year contract to finish!!" Tiffany tried a different approach... but still, nothing.

All of a sudden, she toned down. "I promise..." she whispered against Jessica's chest. *Desperately*. "I swear I'm not gonna be hard on you again... just come back to me."

Tiffany continued to cry, feeling guilty that she has never made Jessica happy when she was still alive. That she's never been a good friend or wife to her. Tiffany regretted it. Everything. If only someone, *anyone*, would give her a chance to change things, she would. She gladly would.

But Tiffany knew it was impossible. It's too late for everything now.

As if someone actually listened, and it was fate playing with her, Tiffany heard coughing sounds. She looked up in time to see Jessica coughing the waters out from her lungs. Tiffany found it ridiculous that when she stopped pumping, that was when all the waters came out.

"Jessi!" Tiffany hurriedly pulled Jessica's head closer to her chest in a hug. She continued crying, though relieved.

When Jessica opened her eyes --and was glad that she actually did when she thought she was dead-- the first thing she saw was Tiffany's angelic face and the tears running down her cheeks. All of a sudden, Jessica felt nothing but Tiffany's arms around her, saw nothing but Tiffany's tears and heard nothing but Tiffany's sobs.

It was all about Tiffany Hwang.

Jessica has even forgotten about herself and her bruised torso.

"You scared me, Jessi! I thought I lost you! Don't do that again!" Tiffany scolded.

"I think..." Jessica weakly said. "I heard you... saying something... before I... opened my eyes." Jessica couldn't talk properly when her torso suddenly ached again, but she didn't let Tiffany to notice it.

Tiffany stopped crying, wiped her face and recomposed herself. "I wasn't saying anything," she denied.

Jessica nodded, which took a lot of will power for her to do knowing that any small movements triggered the hurt in her body.

"Are you hurt somewhere?" Tiffany asked, concerned, and Jessica could see it through her eyes.

Jessica shook her head.

"Are you sure?"

Jessica nodded. She never thought lying required a lot of will power too.

"Let's go find for a refuge." Tiffany helped Jessica to sit up and then to stand up. She hooked Jessica's arm over her shoulder and carried half of the girl's body weight.

For the first time since Tiffany reached the island, she looked around and realized that it was worst than Zeigesar Island. The trees are thicker here, no other things in sight but trees and sand and a boat tied to one of the trees. It just indicated that someone was in that island.

The two of them dared to enter the thick forest, with Jessica limping. It took them a couple of minutes of walk, and limp, and precious energy before they reached a bungalow in the middle of the island. It looked deserted, but they tried anyway.

Tiffany knocked thrice. No one answered. She banged thrice, wasting precious energy. Finally, an old man opened the old, wooden, creaking door.

"What do you need?" The old man looked at them from head to toe. The expression in his face clearly showed that hospitality wasn't his thing.

Tiffany swallowed any negative words and spoke politely, "Sir, we were caught in a terrible accident. You see, my..." Tiffany paused and thought for a while, but she said it anyway. "...wife is kinda hurt. We badly need a refuge. Only for the night, Sir."

"And you chose my house?" The old man raised an eyebrow.

"There isn't any house around, Sir," Tiffany reasoned.

The man's expression changed, as if he just realized that what Tiffany said was right.

"Are you sure you're caught in an accident or you're a couple of teenager running away from home?"

"We're twenty three already, Sir, and we're married." Tiffany held Jessica's left hand with her own left hand and raised it up proudly so the old man could see their rings.

The man looked shock, for the first time seeing a couple on the same gender.

"Who's there, Pa?" A younger man suddenly came from behind the old man, looking like the old man himself, just younger.

The old man was wearing an old checkered polo and a baggy pants, he's fat, like Santa Claus minus the white beard and mustache. The young man was about as tall as the old man, wearing a simple long sleeved brown shirt and a denim pants, he's not that thin and his body looked fit.

"Who are you?" the young man asked with the same expression his father first had.

"I'm Tiffany and this is Jessica, my wife," Tiffany said as she slightly glared at the man whose eyes were slowly taking in Jessica's features.

The man got the message and backpedalled. "What do you need?"

"A refuge," Tiffany simply said, not wanting to elaborate everything.

"What happened?"

"We were Jet Skiing, got caught up in the storm, the waves became stronger and hit out ski-"

"We're not going to entertain teenagers who love making up stories," the younger man cut in, apparently not convinced with Tiffany's explanation.

That pulled the last straw. "She almost died, for Pete's sake!!" Tiffany yelled.

The two men seemed to consider it for a moment. And then, for another, they don't. Finally, the older man spoke up. "Get inside."

Tiffany sighed in relief. "Thank you. Thank you."

~.~

Once inside the old wooden house, the young man that Tiffany and Jessica learned to be Chester and the old man Tom, assisted the two of them. They sat in front of the fireplace, absorbing its heat, while a thick blanket was wrapped around their trembling body. There was no electricity in the house, only oil lamps, no appliances, only furnitures, and everything was wooden. The floor, the wall, the ceiling, the dining table and chairs, the door-- all's wooden except for the fireplace that was concrete. The small house looked as if it lived in the 1980's. Tiffany and Jessica were both amused that a place like that still existed.

"Get over here," Tom called them over to the small, square dining table.

The two girls obeyed and sat side by side, in front of Tom and Chester. Tiffany could almost feel Tom's knees brushing against hers under the table and she was sure that Jessica's knees were brushing against Chester's too, because of the small distance.

"I've heated porridge. I hope that can help." Tom smiled for the first time. He wasn't that bad after all.

"This is too much, Sir," Jessica said, talking about all the help the old man has given them.

"Stop calling me sir. Tom is alright. And that's not too much; it's the least I can do." His accent was hard to place.

"Thank you, Tom."

As Jessica and Tiffany started eating, Tiffany kept on glancing at Chester, who kept on looking maliciously at Jessica. It irritated her. She so much wanted to kick Chester in his crotch under the table but hurting someone and get them kicked out from the house was the least she wanted to do. Jessica was oblivious though. She was too immersed with the food and maybe something more which Tiffany doesn't have any idea what.

"Are you sure you two are married?" Chester suddenly asked, eyes strained on Jessica.

Jessica looked up and answered, "Yes."

"Really?" Chester doubted.

"Really," Tiffany answered with a firm voice.

Finally, Chester looked at Tiffany. "Prove it." His eyes and tone are challenging.

Tiffany gritted her teeth. *I really don't like this man.*

"Is our wedding rings not enough?" Jessica asked, still oblivious.

"That can be any other ring."

"Son, stop it," Tom scolded.

“W-what are you trying to say?” Jessica was confused.

And more confused when she felt a hand on her chin and the hand pulled her face closer and the next thing she knew, she was lip locking with Tiffany.

Tiffany understood what Chester was trying to say.

Jessica had her eyes wide open and Tiffany has hers closed. Jessica doesn’t know what to do, everything happened so fast for her to comprehend. But as the seconds passed that Tiffany didn’t stop, her eyes slowly dropped and she just enjoyed it as it is.

Jessica kissed back.

Slowly. Ever so gently. Their lips moved and in sync, as well as their hearts beat in sync. It was an innocent kiss, no tongues involved. Jessica’s arms slowly snaked around Tiffany’s neck to hold her firm, Tiffany’s hands were already on her waist, pulling her closer into her as if attempting to merge their bodies. Jessica totally forgot about her bruised torso.

The two couldn’t hear the nonstop pour of rain on the roof, only their fast beating heart.

Tiffany felt like she was drunk. Drunk with the feeling of Jessica’s soft lips in hers. She wanted to eat Jessica whole, but she couldn’t. There are other people in the room.

Other people...

As if having the same thought, they both stopped and parted. They just stared at each other for a moment, equally shocked of what they did.

Nothing felt wrong this time, not like the previous ones.

Everything seemed right... especially for Tiffany, and she didn’t regret what she did.

Meanwhile, Tom and Chester were as shocked as Tiffany and Jessica, seeing the two almost wanting to make out right then and there, in front of them. Tom felt like calling for whoever was up there to stop the two but was glad that he didn’t. He saw it in their movements. They’re really a couple. Chester was fuming though, he has obvious interest with Jessica but seemed like the girl really loved her wife.

“I’m convinced,” Chester cut through everyone’s thoughts, breaking the confused spell around Jessica and Tiffany.

Tom abruptly stood up, chair screeching against the floor. “Let’s go, Chester.”

“Where are you going?” Jessica asked.

"My daughter gave birth to my first grandchild yesterday, I haven't gone there yet."

Chester stood up and prepared the things they needed-- two capes, an axe, and an oil lamp.

"But it's raining outside," Tiffany said.

"That's why I'm bringing Chester with me. An old man can't go out in the rain by himself, you know?" Tom winked.

"Can't it wait till tomorrow?" Jessica asked.

"I don't think so. Her husband's not there. I'm supposed to take care of her."

"You're going to leave the two of us here?" Tiffany asked.

"Why not?" Tom shrugged his shoulders. "I don't think something's going to be stolen in this house," he said as-a-matter-of-factly.

"We'll go ahead," with that being said, the two men walked out of the house and made their way into the forest.

The two girls remained seated there, in the dimly lighted house, not knowing what to do.

"Now what?" Tiffany whispered.

Jessica stood up and collected the bowls, attempting of putting it in the sink, but all of a sudden, she felt dizzy, as if someone smacked the back of her head. She staggered, but Tiffany caught her arm.

"Are you okay?" Tiffany concernedly asked. "Geez, Jessi! You're burning!" Tiffany realized for the first time.

Tiffany snatched the bowl from Jessica and put it back to the table and carried Jessica bridal style. She pushed open the only door that she assumed that would lead to the bedroom and was glad that it was. She put Jessica on the bed and ran to the kitchen. She heated water, transferred it to a container she found on the sink, and grabbed a towel hanging on top of the sink. She hurriedly ran back to the half-conscious Jessica.

"Yah, Jessi! Don't sleep yet." Tiffany slightly slapped the girl's cheeks.

"I'm not..." Jessica whispered weakly, eyes closed.

Tiffany dipped the towel in the hot water and put it on Jessica's forehead before pulling the blanket up to Jessica's chin.

Jessica knew Tiffany was doing her best to keep her warm, yet nothing seemed to work. She kept on shivering, and her wet clothes weren't that great of a help.

"Are you still feeling cold?" Tiffany asked.

Jessica nodded, eyebrows knitted.

"I think you should remove your clothes."

Jessica tried to sit up, but failed, so Tiffany helped her. When Jessica started removing her blouse voluntarily, Tiffany turned her back on the girl, cheeks burning.

"Ugh," Jessica grunted when her wobbly fingers couldn't remove even the first button, and her long nails weren't helping at all. Her eyes are partly closed.

"Urgh," Jessica grunted again.

"Aren't you done yet?" Tiffany asked without looking at Jessica, intrigued with the girl's continues grunting.

"I...I can't." Jessica weakly said. Her hands dropped back to her lap.

Tiffany impatiently turned around. "I'll do it?"

Jessica nodded, head still bowed, not having enough energy to look up.

Tiffany went straight to work while trying to straighten her mind and not think about what she was actually doing-- undressing Jessica, which she only did to a couple of guys before.

She started on the upper button, her head facing the other direction so she wouldn't see those burning flesh under that goddamned shirt. Once done with the first one, she proceeded on the next one, but she felt worse. Her knuckles are brushing against Jessica bosoms, but the girl doesn't seem to notice. She blocked every perverted thoughts and hurriedly went to finish all of the buttons.

Once done, she stood up straight, back facing Jessica, and she let the girl removed her blouse before laying back and covering her body with the blanket. When Tiffany was sure that the girl was totally covered with the blanket, she turned around, grabbed the girl's removed blouse and went to hang it in front of the fireplace, hoping it would get dry faster.

Jessica felt Tiffany's presence beside her. She doesn't really have enough energy even to open her eyes. Then she heard soft thuds on the wooden floor, together with the sound of the rain outside. Tiffany was walking out of the room again. After a minute, she heard Tiffany's steps coming closer to her and the next thing she knew, she was being lifted.

"Tiffany," Jessica weakly protested.

“Shh, just rest--” Tiffany stopped when she accidentally stepped on the tip of the blanket around Jessica’s body and it fell straight to the floor.

“Good God! Jessi!” Tiffany gasped and jogged her way to the sofa and put Jessica there. “Where did you get this?!” She poked the huge bruise that covered the entire right half of Jessica’s torso, not bothered that Jessica was wearing only her bra.

Jessica winced. She has seen it earlier when she removed her blouse and it shocked her that the bruise was that big, but luckily, her ribs aren’t broken, and she doesn’t really want Tiffany to see it. Being a burden to Tiffany was the last thing she wanted to be.

“Why you didn’t tell me earlier!!” Tiffany scolded.

“I don’t want...you to worry... about me,” Jessica breathed.

“You’re making me worried more with what you’re doing!” Tiffany said as she walked back where the blanket have fallen and draped it around Jessica. “Where else are you hurt?” she asked, softly now.

“Nowhere... else.”

“Are you sure?” A hint of sharpness was still in Tiffany’s voice and her eyebrows are furrowed.

Jessica suddenly grasped her hand. She pushed her eyes to open and looked into Tiffany’s eyes. “Sor...ry.” She closed her eyes again.

Jessica’s sincere eyes and soft voice melted Tiffany’s heart and the anger was suddenly pushed at the back of her head. She couldn’t really stay mad at Jessica for a long time.

Tiffany sighed dejectedly and slumped herself on the floor, back against the sofa. “There’s nothing we can do about that. But once we came back to Scorchwood, we’ll go straight to the hospital and have that checked, okay?”

“Hmmm.” Jessica nodded.

“Just take a rest for now,” Tiffany whispered as she pushed away the strands of hair covering Jessica’s face.

For the first time since Jessica was transferred on the sofa, she felt the heat emitting from her right side and realized what Tiffany did. Tiffany moved the sofa next to the fireplace so Jessica could absorb more heat.

How thoughtful of her.

“Sleep,” Tiffany commanded as she continuously ruffled Jessica’s hair.

“Only when you’re... beside me,” Jessica whispered.

Tiffany considered it. Why not? A body heat could help Jessica too, but her clothes were still wet, it would just make Jessica feel cold.

Tiffany stood up and, without second thoughts, removed her black thin and lousy shirt, and hanged it in front of the fireplace along with Jessica’s, just a foot away from the sofa actually. She lifted the blanket up and settled herself next to Jessica before covering their bodies with the blanket.

Bare flesh brushing against bare flesh. But the two of them were in control this time.

The space was cramped, but no one seemed to notice, or no one seemed to care. They surprisingly fitted on the sofa like they only have one body.

Jessica hugged Tiffany and buried her head on the girl’s chest, hoping that with the gesture, she has sent her gratitude to Tiffany for taking care of her. Tiffany rubbed the girl’s back soothingly, knowing she needed it.

For the first time since she rescued Jessica, Tiffany felt exhausted. Only now that the tiredness seeped into her muscles and was picked up by her brain. She was so worried about Jessica that she totally forgot about herself.

Finally, after the whole afternoon and night’s incidents, together, they both felt at ease as they drifted off to dreamland.

CHAPTER 31: 'HAPPY'



CHAPTER 31: 'HAPPY'

Tiffany, fully clothed now, checked her wrist watch, reading seven-seven in the morning. Her eyes caught a glimpse of the signal and it's still nix, not even a single line. She dropped her hand back to her lap and sighed, eyes taking in Jessica's features that seemed to look better and better by the hour. Her sitting position on the floor didn't even stop her from looking over Jessica.

She felt her eyelids becoming heavy. She actually hasn't had any sleep last night since she had to constantly change the towel in Jessica's forehead and monitor if the fever was getting higher or lower. Luck seemed to be on her side because the girl's temperature was almost normal now. Almost.

She looked into the window and saw the sky turning orange. The rain has stopped since three in the morning.

Why Tom and Chester aren't back yet?

As if the two men heard her, she heard rustling sounds outside the house, and then a voice. She hurriedly stood up and ran to the door. But alas, she didn't see any male around, but a female.

A woman was standing in the middle of the tall trees, on the spot where more sunlight were seeping through the leaves. She was tall, white-skinned, slim, but the lump in her tummy was still obvious, long haired. As what Tiffany could see, she looked kind of like Chester. In the woman's arms was a baby and she was talking to the baby, making faces to make him laugh.

Feeling eyes on her, the woman looked up. She kindly smiled before beckoning Tiffany to come over.

Tiffany closed the door behind her and made her way to the woman.

"Good morning, I'm Evie," the woman introduced. Tiffany realized that the woman was more beautiful in close-up.

"I'm Tiffany." Tiffany was confused. *Why do I feel nervous around this woman?*

Evie smiled. "So, you're Tiffany." She looked over Tiffany's shoulder as if looking for someone. "Where's Je-je...?" Evie seemed to forget the name.

"Jessica," Tiffany said.

"Yes, Jessica. Where is she?" Evie asked, continuously rocking the baby in her arms.

"She isn't up yet." Tiffany hesitated, but she asked anyway, "How did you know about us?"

"Papa told me about two girls needing a refuge last night." Evie suddenly laughed. "Chester seemed to like Jessica based on what I saw in his expression."

Tiffany felt uneasy as she rubbed the back of her neck. The woman was so blunt.

"So, you're Tom's daughter who just gave birth the other day?"

"Uh-huh." Evie nodded. "Papa is so excited to see him."

"What's his name?" Tiffany asked as she moved closer to Evie, daring to look at the baby in her arms. Evie adjusted so Tiffany could see him.

"His father's name is Jacopo, so I named him Jack."

Tiffany's right hand slowly lifted on its own, closer to Jack's face, and Jack immediately gripped her forefinger. His hand felt small and soft in Tiffany's, and he looked small too. His cheeks are puffy and had a pink tinge on it, making Tiffany want to pinch them. She felt a smile slowly itching its way to her lips. And when Jack giggled, seeing her face, Tiffany's smile grew full until it reached her eyes.

"He seemed to like you." Evie smiled.

"He's so small... and so cute." Tiffany said dreamily, seeing a baby for the first time since Leo was born.

"Do you want to carry him?"

Tiffany took a step backward and removed her hand from Jack's weak grip. "I don't think I can. He might fall. I've never carried a baby before."

Evie laughed, revealing a perfect set of white teeth that Jack was most likely to inherit.

Tiffany looked at Evie with an envious feeling. Evie looked happy and contented despite living a simple life in the middle of the forest. She kept on smiling and laughing, like nothing mattered in the world but her child. Tiffany, who lived her life having what she wanted and more than what she needed, have never felt that happy and contented. Tiffany suddenly felt like money isn't everything, and, in the middle of this simple

country-- Mulberry, was hiding the happiest life that countries like Scorchwood would never have. Mulberry wasn't that bad after all.

"Don't worry. I'll assist you," Evie insisted and carefully passed Jack over to Tiffany. Tiffany doesn't have any choice but to fold her arms and secure Jack in them.

Jack giggled happily, bringing smiles to Evie and Tiffany's lips.

Even Jack seemed happy, Tiffany thought.

"Ahh, he's so light," Tiffany muttered and suddenly realized the sunlight directed to Jack's face, the only part of his body revealed while the rest was wrapped in a white sheet. He looked like a cocoon. "Isn't sunlight bad for his skin?"

Evie shook her head. "Morning sunlight is actually good for his skin, it's less intense than the afternoon sun. Afternoon sun, that, that's bad for his skin," she lectured.

Tiffany slowly nodded, realizing that she, too, liked the feeling of morning sun in her skin ever since she was a child. She liked the warm tingly feeling of the sunlight in her skin every morning, but not in the afternoon. That's burning hot.

Standing under the sun, baby in her arms, skin feeling warm, even her insides are feeling warm, Tiffany wondered if she'll ever be able to hold her own child. But thinking about making one, conceiving for nine months and hours of giving birth scared her.

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Jessica stirred with the sound of a closing door. Her eyelids slowly lifted as she sat up. She yawned but suddenly froze with her hands still covering her mouth. Her eyes grew wide with the realization. She felt normal. Not even a part of her was aching except her neck that was probably stiff from sleeping on the sofa. She felt her forehead and realized that her temperature was almost normal again.

She stood up and realized that she has her blouse on already. She assumed Tiffany put it on her while she's still fast asleep. She poked her right torso and didn't feel any hurt. The bruise wasn't that worse after all, and her ribs aren't broken.

She heard voices outside the house and walked over to the window. She saw Tiffany with a woman unfamiliar to Jessica. Jessica watched silently as the two talked among themselves. Jessica couldn't hear anything other than murmurs because of the distance.

Is she Tom's daughter? Jessica thought.

The woman passed the baby in her arms to Tiffany and Jessica watched amusedly. Tiffany's smile looked different. Tiffany was also radiating a different aura, Jessica could feel it. Tiffany looked *happy*. Jessica have never seen Tiffany looking that happy before.

I never knew she liked babies, Jessica thought and made her way out of the house.

Tiffany and the woman looked at Jessica as she walked closer to them. She bowed respectfully to the woman. "Hello, good morning. I'm Jessica." She gave a genuine smile.

Evie smiled. "Figures." She slowly nodded as she looked at Jessica from head to toe. "Hmm, now I know why Chester likes you. By the way, I'm Evie, Tom's daughter."

Jessica ducked her head to hid her blush after hearing Evie said that Chester liked her.

"By the way," Tiffany suddenly chimed in. "What are you doing here? And where's Tom and Chester and your husband?"

"My house is actually a couple of minutes' walk from here and I decided to pass by. I'm intrigued with the two girls Papa has told me, y'know?" Evie winked, seeming a lot like Tom. "My husband's stuck on the other island since it rained yesterday, he haven't gone back yet. Papa and Chester are out to get woods."

"Ahh." Tiffany nodded and, all of a sudden, Jack started squirming. Tiffany panicked. "Oh! Get him! Get him! He might fall."

Evie calmly took Jack from Tiffany and laughed... again. "Relax, will you? How are you going to take care of your own child if you're like that?"

Evie continued laughing without noticing that the sentence struck Tiffany and Jessica.

Own child? Tiffany and Jessica thought. As much as they wanted to, the two girls knew it was impossible.

Evie abruptly stopped when she noticed the change on the couple's expression. She remembered that they were married. And two girls married meant that it was impossible for them to have their own child unless they're going to adopt or one of them was more than willing to conceive a test tube baby.

"Sorry," Evie muttered.

"What for?" Jessica asked.

"Tiffany, Jessica!" Tom's voice suddenly rang, saving Evie, and the three girls looked at the direction of his voice.

Tom came out of the woods, from the direction of the shore, with Chester and a couple of men Tiffany and Jessica doesn't recognize. Laine was noticeable though, being the only woman in the herds of men.

“Laine!” Tiffany exclaimed when she saw the older woman.

Laine bowed apologetically. “I’m sorry, Miss. We could have found you earlier if it didn’t rain last night. I’m really sorry.” Laine looked like she was ready to kneel on the ground just for the two to forgive her.

“That’s alright,” Tiffany, out of all the people around, said. “But we need to leave now. Jessica has a huge bruise on her torso. We need to have that checked.”

“Yes, Miss. Please follow me.” Laine motioned for them to leave but the two didn’t move.

Tiffany faced Tom and Evie, totally ignoring Chester. “Thank you for all the help. We’ll make sure to repay you sometime.”

Tom waved his hand dismissively. “There’s no need. Go ahead.” He motioned for them to hurry.

Tiffany patted Jack’s head lightly, seeing his toothless smile for the last time. “Grow up to be a handsome gentleman, okay? ‘Till we meet again.” Jack giggled as an answer.

Jessica bowed respectfully. “Thank you. We’ll go ahead now.”

Tiffany took Jessica’s hand and, along with the rest house’s butlers and Laine, they hurriedly left.

Tom, Chester, Evie and Jack watched as all of them walked away until they couldn’t see them anymore.

“Those two...” Tom said. “They’re really a couple.”

“I know, right?” Chester said sourly.

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School started right after and Jessica needed to skip the first three days so she could rest until the bruise on her torso totally disappeared. The bruise wasn’t really that bad, the ribs aren’t broken, Jessica just has to rest so her fever wouldn’t come back, said the doctor. And resting Jessica means no Jessica-made breakfasts. Tiffany had to put up with the tasteless coffees the maids made.

Those whole three days seemed to pass by in a slow motion for Tiffany. She had to wake up alone, go to school alone, and go home alone. It’s not that she missed Jessica, honestly, she’s just really used to always have Jessica around.

But, as crazy as it sounds, Tiffany somehow felt glad that Summer was around, the girl always trying to get into her nerves, reminding her to come back to earth when her mind has started to drift off back to Jessica

during lunch time when Tiffany was just pricking on her food but not really eating. She also needed the distraction named Choi Summer.

No matter how hard Tiffany tried to hide, Yuri and Yoona always have their ways to notice the different aura around her when Jessica wasn't around. Seohyun just kept everything to herself though she was worried too, seeing how in those three days, Tiffany seemed to come back to her old self before she married Jessica-- the arrogant, cold, and heartless Tiffany. They asked Tiffany about what happened on their vacation but gotten no answer. Tiffany just said that they should wait for Jessica to come back and ask her themselves.

Yoona, Yuri, Seohyun and even Taeyeon suspected that they fought, seeing how lifeless Tiffany was. Tiffany said no before walking out of the cafeteria and into her next class --Tourism-- half an hour early. No one dared to insist. Summer seemed to have a good time though, secretly smirking behind their backs.

Tiffany felt funny. On the second day that Jessica wasn't around, at lunch time, Summer and her fought. They debated until their faces were closer to each other, already feeling Summer's breath against her face. That was when she realized how familiar Summer's face was. Her nose, eyes, cheekbones-- all reminded Tiffany of one man she used to know. And their similar surnames didn't help at all in Tiffany's confusion.

On the fourth day of class, the cafeteria served French cuisine cooked by a male French chef especially imported from his mother country just to cook for the VIPs, namely: Kim Taeyeon, Kwon Yuri, Im Yoona, Seo Juhyun, Summer Choi, Tiffany Hwang, and Jessica Hwang. But Jessica was still not around, so it resulted for Tiffany to play with her food served in a white platter with gold linings.

"Yah! Tiffany, stop playing with the food," Yoona scolded, slipping into her Korean accent.

Tiffany looked up at Yoona but didn't really hear or see anything. She looked dazed, her eyes have a distant look in them.

"What's wrong with her?" Yoona whispered to Yuri.

"It's because she misses Jessica."

That pulled Tiffany back to earth and instantly glared at the offender, that being, no other than, Choi Summer.

"What?" Tiffany looked disbelievingly at Summer.

"What?" Summer shrugged her slender shoulders. "It's too obvious."

The others nodded in agreement.

"Why would I miss her? She's just having a meeting with that stupid fencing club." Tiffany looked away so she wouldn't see Summer's face. Every time she's seeing it, her blood boiled, and Jessica told her not to fight with Summer.

“Is she jealous of the fencing club?” Yoona whispered to Yuri with a raised eyebrow.

“By the way,” Summer exclaimed before rummaging inside her shoulder bag. She pulled out a bond paper and held it in front of everyone. “I signed up for Mr. and Ms. Philopolis Academy beau. con.”

Wrong move, Yuri thought. No one should mention, ever, in front of Tiffany that someone signed up for Mr. and Ms. Philopolis Academy while Tiffany was still the reigning queen. She tended to overreact and plan for a sabotage, thinking someone was trying to steal the crown from her though she has been the queen for three years straight.

“What?!” Tiffany yelled. She suddenly remembered that Taeyeon and Kangin have talked about it on the school radio last Monday.

Summer nodded proudly. “I think you should get ready to remove the crown from your head, Tiffany, ‘coz I’m going to take it away from you.” Summer clasped her hands together and had a dreamy look in her face. “Oh my gosh, I’m so excited! They’re going full glitz this time!”

“Full glitz?” Seohyun asked. Philopolis have never held a full glitz beauty contest before. They’ve always held natural beauty contests that’s why Tiffany always won, because of her natural beauty.

Tiffany scoffed. “Full glitz.” She shook her head.

“I think that’s cute,” Taeyeon butted in. “Every candidates looking like Barbie dolls and Ken dolls. You can’t even recognize them.”

Full glitz only has few differences from the natural beauty contests. Full glitz required, well, a lot of glitz. The wigs, fake tiaras for females, fake eyelashes, colorful superb dresses, and thick make-ups even for males. The contestants’ natural features are totally covered with the artificial/fake ones.

Tiffany suddenly stood up and stormed out of the cafeteria, leaving the others looking confusedly at her.

“Where is she going?” Taeyeon asked.

“She’s going to sign up.”

Seohyun felt uneasy with all the eyes staring at her as if she just said the most ridiculous thing on earth.

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Beauty contest in Philopolis Academy was different than the others. If you joined, you could ask help from every other school organizations. If you need someone to make a dress for you, you could ask the fashion

club. If needed help for postures and balance (which was very important in catwalk and to be able to do the three-sixty degree turn) you could ask the sports club. If needed help for fliers and posters, you could ask the arts club. If needed help for back-up dancers for the talent portion, you could ask the performing arts club.

Anyone could join. If one have already joined last year, you could still join this year. If you already won on the previous ones, you could still join so you could defend you title. Like what Tiffany have been doing for the past three years. Even if she already won as the Queen, she still joined so she could defend her crown. Most of the beauty contests in this generation were all like that.

Tiffany was proud to say that she won fairly. She never cheated, never sabotaged anyone. Yes, she used to plan for sabotages. But that's it, just a *plan*. She never really executed them.

Now, as Tiffany stared at the signed paper in her hand, she found herself thinking of another plan to sabotage someone very annoying that goes by the name of Choi Summer. A minute passed before she decided to stop thinking. She's just going to tire herself because she'll never execute her plans anyways.

Tiffany strode her way into the girl's empty powder room. She stopped in front of the mirror and observed her face.

Am I still going to win this year?

Tiffany's face was still like the normal. Her eyes, brows, lashes, nose, cheek bones and her kissable lips that every male wanted to taste and every female wanted to have-- all the same, all still made her beautiful. She took a couple of steps back so she could see herself from head to waist. She stuck her chest out, stomach in, and put her hands on her hips. She turned to look at her right side, and then left side.

She sighed and dropped her hands down, shoulders slumped. She suddenly felt conscious of her vanity. She never really cared about it before-- her slightly imbalanced shoulder, the left one was lower than the right one. She understood it, it has been like that ever since the incident when she was nine that cost her old butler's life, but she's not going to let it just like that this time.

I'm not going to let someone steal the crown from me... especially if it's Choi Summer.

Beauty contest and drag racing have been her things ever since she was ten, and she's not going to lose on those.

Hurriedly, she ran out of the powder room.

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"As you all know, two weeks from now, the Worldwide Fencing Competition will be held in our country. This is the first time our country will ever hold such a competition, and since our school is the most prestigious in

the country, the representative of Scorchwood would come from our school,” Jessica listened intently as Fencing Club Manager Dylan Johnson explained though she doesn’t really have to. She’s been waiting for this competition ever since she read it on the internet, and searched everything about it.

Knowing that Jessica was the most experienced member of Fencing Club in Philopolis Academy, she’s certain that she would be the representative. It still scared her though, fighting with different people from all over the world and the judges would especially come from planet Mars-- the second world.

“Y’all probably know by now who will be our representative. It’s Miss Jessica Hwang,” Dylan Johnson informed.

There were few who cheered, but mostly rumbled in annoyance, and those people were actually the ones who hated Jessica because she’s the best. They couldn’t really stand having Jessica beat them all the time, and Jessica being a transferee in the school irritated them more. But Jessica understood them, she never held grudges against them.

It’s part of the fame, she said to herself.

“Okay now, listen.” The members quieted down. “You guys need to understand. Not all of you are experienced and if there are few, they’re aren’t the best.” A few members groaned. “Face it! It’s the fact!”

“Fine! Fine! Whatever!” a male member from the farthest corner of the room said. Jessica remembered that it was the same guy she sparred with last year on a competition. He’s the strongest opponent Jessica had.

Dylan sighed, his rock-hard chest heaving down. “Moving on-” Dylan stopped in mid-sentence when the door hissed open and Tiffany Hwang strode in coolly with her arms crossed against her chest.

Tiffany didn’t even glance at the other people in the room and stood right in front of Dylan, staring at the taller man with her commanding aura around her. Dylan felt intimidated by the way her eyes bore through him, and he knew the whole room shared the feeling with him-- everyone in the room suddenly stiffed and quieted down, so quiet that if you’ll drop a needle you would hear it.

Dylan forced a smile. “Miss Tiffany, how may I help you?” He felt like he was under a police’s investigation by the way his muscled legs felt jittery. Dylan feared only few people, and the powerful and influential Tiffany Hwang was one of them.

“I expect that you already know that the Mr. and Ms. Philopolis Academy would be in two weeks time.” Tiffany missed doing this-- scaring people. She loved doing it before, watching people be intimidated by her, but when Jessica came, she couldn’t do it anymore. She doesn’t *want* to do scare Dylan this time, though. She just really has to so she could get what she wanted.

“Yes, Miss.” Dylan forced his lips not to quiver.

“If you haven’t noticed, I badly need someone’s help for my posture, and so I chose your club to help me.”

Dylan looked at Tiffany from head to toe, realizing that her left shoulder was lower than the right one. Being a professional fencing coach, he knew that all Tiffany needed was a proper back posture, but his club doesn't specialize in that, they specialize in balance.

"Miss, I think the Archery Club can help you more with that," Dylan proposed. To be an expert in archery, members are trained to have a perfect back posture so they could measure the distance properly and shoot the bull's eye. Dylan knew that.

"Can't you just feel..." Tiffany waved her hand as if it could help her to choose the right words. "*Blessed* that I chose your club?"

Dylan ducked his head in fear. He knew he couldn't argue with Tiffany because that would mean the end of his teaching career and being one of the few human teachers in the academy. "I'm sorry, Miss." He bravely looked up and forced another fake smile. "Who do you—" He stopped when he realized the perfect candidate to help Tiffany without anymore problems. "I think there's no other member of this club that is more capable than your own wife to help you, Miss."

Tiffany glanced at Jessica who was seated in the middle of the room. *I expected this*. She mentally smirked.

"Miss Jessica, do you think you can do it?" Dylan asked.

Jessica, who was silently watching everything, looked at Dylan with wide eyes with the sudden mention of her name. Everyone's attentions were all in her now, and Dylan's eyes stood out among the others. His eyes seemed to be begging for her to save him from being eaten by a huge beast.

She dared to glance over at Tiffany who was looking directly at her. Why? If Tiffany wanted Jessica to help her, there's no need to ask Dylan. Why didn't she just say so?

Jessica felt her face flushed and her hands shook. She thought about saying she couldn't do it. If the beauty contest would be in two weeks time, that would be on the same day of her fencing competition, and plus, she wouldn't be able to focus on training if Tiffany's around. But then she heard herself say, "Sure, why not?" as if someone else had spoken the words and she'd just moved her lips like a puppet.

"Good enough." Dylan said. "Get your stuffs and meet Miss Tiffany in the practice room. I'll handle your excuse letters." He seemed eager to remove Tiffany out of his sight.

"Remember," a male member dared to chime in. "It's a *practice* room. If we hear something out of it other than the usual, we're coming in." The Fencing Club members chuckled. There are few ribald comments, which Jessica pretended she didn't hear as she grabbed her duffel bag and scurried out of the room before they noticed how red her face was.

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Jessica furiously scribbled on a paper while seated cross-legged on the floor of the practice room. Tiffany, who just finished changing into designer's black sweat pants and a simple pink shirt, sat on the other end of the room, back resting against the floor-to-ceiling mirror that covered the four walls of the spacious, empty room, watching Jessica.

Jessica slammed the ballpoint pen down, stood up, treaded over to Tiffany and kneeled in front of the girl. "Do you know you're interfering with my own personal training?"

Tiffany shrugged her shoulders obliviously. "I don't. I'm not the one who chose you though, it was that Dylan guy."

Jessica sighed. "You, of all people, know how important fencing is to me, and this is a worldwide competition I'm joining here. It's important that I have a peace of mind and a proper training, so if there are tricks up on your sleeves, I'm telling you to forget about it."

Tiffany scoffed. She couldn't believe it. Jessica just turned into another person when it came to fencing. "Just get straight to the point. You don't want to help me, do you?" She stood up and threw her hands in the air. "Fine! I don't want to interfere with your first love." She walked pass Jessica, to the door, but a hand grasped her wrist.

"It's not that." Jessica forced Tiffany to face her, voice turning soft. "It's just that I can't afford any distraction now. I hope you understand." Jessica sighed and handed the paper to Tiffany. "Here. Since you're interfering with my training, I made a program, we both should follow that so both of us will benefit."

Tiffany read the program.

Day 1- Stretching = Body conditioning.

Day 2- Horseback riding = Balance.

Day 3- Archery = Proper back posture.

Day 4- Ice skating = Balance.

Day 5- Fencing = Feet workouts, balance.

Day 6- Swimming = Arm workouts.

Tiffany felt her whole body trembled when she saw day four. *Ice skating? Why does it have to be ice skating?*

"Tiffany?" Jessica pulled her from her thoughts.

Tiffany cleared her throat. "Why is it all about balance? There's already training for balance on day two and five, I think we can cancel the ice skating."

"It's because that's what we both needed. I need balance so I wouldn't be tripped, and you so you can do the three-sixty degree turn in five-inch high heels," Jessica explained.

Tiffany pushed herself to stay calm. "Only six days?"

"Nope. That would be seven days. And, just so you know, there's a day rest after the training days, so we can maximize the two weeks' time to prepare without being exhausted."

"What's on day seven?"

A mysterious smile slowly formed on Jessica's lips. "I'll tell you about it if you reached day six." Jessica clasped her hands together. "Day one starts today, tomorrow is rest day, the day after tomorrow will be the second day... and you get the drift."

She clapped twice. "Alright! Let's start!"

CHAPTER 32: 'BULLIED'



CHAPTER 32: 'BULLIED'

Tiffany stood looking stupefied as she watched Jessica. Jessica wasn't really doing anything unusual, she was just stretching-- doing yoga to be exact, but what's unusual was the flexibility of her slim body. Tiffany has never imagined Jessica could stretch her body like a rubber band.

"Do that." Jessica stood up from the mat on the floor.

"What?!" Tiffany's head snapped to look at Jessica disbelievingly.

She didn't even pick up anything from what Jessica did because she was so amazed. All that Tiffany remembered was that Jessica did some stretching, like her feet reaching the crown of her head, some splits, standing on both her feet and leaning backwards until her hands reached the floor, creating a perfect arc-- body bending, as if not contented with the body bending, she even lifted up a foot, and some other things Tiffany failed to pay attention to.

She's even better than Yuri, Tiffany thought.

"What?" Jessica raised an eyebrow.

"I don't think I can do that."

As if Jessica didn't hear her, she pulled Tiffany to the mat. "Let's start with the easiest-- splits. Get into position."

Tiffany involuntarily did what she was told. She spread her legs wide but not so wide. Jessica, not contented with the small effort Tiffany had put into, slid her foot in between, close to Tiffany's right foot, and pushed Tiffany's foot farther away and away from the other until Tiffany started sliding down.

Tiffany felt like her tensed thighs are going to split in half as her upper body automatically bended forward and her hands found support on the floor. "OW! THAT HURTS!"

“Endure it!” Jessica commanded and continued pushing Tiffany’s foot away from the other one until Tiffany’s legs were finally flat on the floor. “Stay like that for a minute... or two.”

“What?!” Tiffany complained.

Jessica sat right in front of Tiffany, knees to chest, clearly enjoying Tiffany’s pained expression. “Are you complaining? Make that three then.”

Tiffany hissed. “You’re enjoying bullying me, huh?!”

“I’m not bullying you!” Jessica defended. “Discipline” --she tapped Tiffany’s nose with her right index finger twice-- “is important on a training.”

“Make it two,” Tiffany pleaded.

Jessica smiled. “OK,” --she made a peace sign-- “Two.”

Tiffany sighed, and ducked her head down. She bit her lower lip as if it could stop her tensed thighs to relax so it wouldn’t hurt so much.

She might be complaining, and she’s sure that she would complain a lot more in the future, but deep inside she’s contented. Jessica’s attention was all in hers, which was her plan from the start.

Tiffany thought she deserved to be punished like this. She risked Jessica’s life in Zeigesar, and she did say that she’s going to go easy on Jessica if only she would wake up, and Jessica did, so it’s time for Tiffany to do what she said because she’s a woman of her words.

The tables have turned.

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Jessica’s eyes narrowed as she focused her attention to the rubber-made, life-sized training doll right in front of her, Shinai (wooden sword used in Kendo) held by bare hands down low to her waist, right foot ahead of the left one in a firm stance. Her full blue Kendo attire and pony tailed hair gave her a fierce aura. She took a deep breath, raised her arms and hit the right shoulder of the doll. She felt the sword bounced on the rubber that sent her sword up, but she held firm, arms all tensed.

The door hissed open and the unmistakably happy Tiffany skipped in. “Hi, Jessi.”

That beautiful girl totally eradicated Jessica’s focus on what she was doing. It was actually their rest day after the tiring exercises yesterday that was not really a rest day because Tiffany still has to go to school and

practice their ramp with the other candidates and Jessica, being bored at home alone, decided to try Kendo in their very own training room at home, complete with mirrored wall and all. She has to keep her body condition fit anyway.

“You look happy,” Jessica commented as she hit the doll on the left shoulder, a loud ‘*smack!*’ echoed the four-walled room. Perspirations that formed on her forehead were already sliding down to her chin, dripping on the neckline of her Keigoki (Kendo attire’s top).

“I am.” Tiffany grinned as she took a seat on one of the two available seats in the room, the other one occupied by Jessica’s towel, while keeping an eye on Jessica’s straight back.

“Mind telling me why?” Jessica took a deep breath and stopped herself from glancing at Tiffany on the mirror in front of her and from being attracted to her perfect smile. *Seriously, I should stop noticing how beautiful she is.*

“I met my partner today. He’s such a gentleman,” Tiffany said dreamily.

“Who is it?” The question was out even before Jessica had the time to think. She suddenly regretted asking it, knowing that she wouldn’t be able to handle the answer be it the most gentleman in school or not.

“Choi Siwon.”

“The soccer team’s star player?” Jessica set her jaws firm and gripped the handle of the Shinai tightly until her arms shook.

Choi Siwon was a fine young man with rock-hard chest, chocolate abs, firm biceps and all that. If you get to know him, you would realize that he’s really a gentleman, no wonder every girl in Philopolis Academy liked him... save for Jessica.

“Yep! I like him already!”

smack!

Jessica suddenly hit the training doll on the head with too much force that the wooden sword split in half, the upper half flew across the room and the lower half remained gripped by her hands.

It all went unnoticed by Tiffany though-- Jessica’s ragged breathing, clenched jaws, shaking hands, and narrowed eyes.

Jessica took a deep breath and collected herself. She threw the remaining half of the poor Shinai on the floor and seated beside Tiffany. She wiped the sweat on her face and neck with the towel.

“Tiffany, you’re someone who’s married...” Jessica looked at Tiffany and pointed to herself. “To me.”

“So what?” Tiffany shrugged obliviously. “It’s not like we wanted to get married, anyway.”

From her tensed expression, Jessica’s face turned into a hurtful one. Tiffany knew what she said had hit home and she immediately regretted saying it. She’s hurting Jessica again. Didn’t she just promise that she won’t do it again?

Why do I even have to say that?! Tiffany mentally smacked herself.

“Oh yeah, sorry, I tend to forget,” Jessica said sourly.

Tiffany acted like she didn’t hear the hurt in every word Jessica have said and smiled playfully. “I never thought you know him. Do you check other guys out too?” she joked.

“I don’t.” Jessica looked away. She only heard about Siwon on the school radio when Taeyeon just blabbed and blabbed everything about him, and when Summer would sometimes talk about him at lunch, saying how amazing it is to share his last name like Siwon was her husband.

“Oh, come on!” Tiffany playfully nudged her with her elbow. “Tell me, who else catches your eyes?”

“No one.” Jessica stood up and snatched another Shinai on the rack and went on a fighting stance.

“Why?” Tiffany wailed. Jessica’s answer caught her by surprise and kept her quiet the whole afternoon watching Jessica beat the crap out of the already beaten-up training doll.

“Because I only look at you.”

-- The mistake I’ve been doing that I only noticed now. I never looked at anyone like how you look at Siwon... and I know I never will.

Jessica gave another hit to the poor training doll... and continued until the wooden sword crushed into bits of pieces.

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“Hey, Aphrodite! How are you? I missed you!” Tiffany gleefully exclaimed as she rubbed Aphrodite’s firm, brown trunk, voice echoing all over the 800 square feet stables of Philopolis Academy that contained every student’s horses. She inspected her muscled legs, her silk-like brown tail, and lastly, her face.

“Are they taking very well care of you here?” she asked fondly to the obedient horse, rubbing its cheeks.

Tiffany glanced on the next stable and saw Jessica slowly pulling Venus, an all-white and gorgeous horse, out of her stable. Tiffany immediately put on the strap to Aphrodite's mouth and pulled the horse out of her own stable.

"You guys seemed close," Tiffany commented as she saw Venus licking Jessica's cheek sideways as the girl led her horse out of the stables. It has only been three months since they bought Venus and she already liked Jessica.

"I don't like it though. She keeps on licking my face." Jessica slowly pushed Venus' head away from hers and wiped the horse's saliva off her cheek. "Eeeww. How come Aphrodite never licked your face?" she complained.

Tiffany laughed at Jessica's cuteness. "It's because I taught her some good manners."

"Good manners," Jessica mumbled silently. "How can you teach a horse some good manners?" she mocked.

"Yah! I heard you!" Tiffany, a good forty feet away from Jessica, exclaimed.

Jessica halted and looked back to Tiffany, eyes wide. "How did you...?"

Tiffany easily climbed up Aphrodite's back and held tightly on the strap. She smiled proudly. "Heh. It's because my ears are as sharp as Aphrodite's!" She kicked the horse's sides and Aphrodite raced forward, passing by Jessica and Venus and out into the yard, purposely sending some hay flying to Jessica's direction.

Jessica scoffed and shook her head. "Are you asking for a race?" She immediately climbed up Venus' back and kicked her sides, ready to run after Tiffany and Aphrodite.

It only took three minutes for Venus to catch up with Aphrodite on the track, and once she did, Jessica sent a triumphant smile to Tiffany.

"Is that the fastest you can get?" she teased.

"Why you...?!" Tiffany glared and furiously kicked Aphrodite's sides, not bothered by the bounce.

As Aphrodite dashed forward, Jessica took it as a chance to observe Tiffany from behind. She didn't fail to notice how Tiffany seemed uncomfortable on her huddled position on Aphrodite's back, her brown riding boot's heels barely locking on the saddle under her black skin-tight riding jeans.

"Yah! Tiffany! Stop!!!" She called after the girl. Tiffany slowly stopped and waited for Jessica to park Venus beside her.

"What?"

"Hook your heels on the lift of the saddle. Otherwise, you'll fall."

"I know. It's just that my legs barely reach it," Tiffany complained.

"Straighten your back and you'll reach it," Jessica started. "If you hunch too much, you see, your knee automatically bends." Jessica hunched and indeed, her knees automatically bended, heels barely reaching the lift of the saddle. "...But if you straighten your back, your legs will be comfortable to stretch and reach the lift." Jessica straightened and her heels easily hooked on the lift.

"But if I keep a straight back while running so fast, it will be hard," Tiffany reasoned.

"That's why we're here to train, not to race. Control Aphrodite slowly and let her walk and keep your back straight."

Tiffany sighed dejectedly. "That's no fun," she muttered though she did what she was told. She straightened her back and kicked the horse's side lightly. Aphrodite started walking forward slowly, leaving Jessica and Venus watching their retreating backs, oblivious of the two pair of eyes that have been watching them from afar.

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Summer, or rather, Sooyoung, giggled silently as she watched Jessica and Tiffany with their horses ran around the field. Being a candidate for Mr. and Ms. Philopolis Academy, she also has the privilege to do whatever she wanted for two weeks and only lend some time for their practice, and so she had enough time to bask around, and play with Tiffany and Jessica without them knowing that they are being played with.

She knew it was not fun to play alone, so she invited Hyoyeon over to the academy and introduced them to her '*friends*' except for Tiffany and Jessica with a firm command to be careful of her words and not divulge who Summer really is.

"What's funny?" Hyoyeon asked as she stood beside Sooyoung on the window of the school building overseeing the field where Tiffany and Jessica are horseback riding.

"Just wait and see. This is going to be fun." Sooyoung never tore her gaze away from the couple.

"What did you do?" Hyoyeon demanded.

"When they reached that part over there..." Sooyoung pointed to the right wing of the field. Jessica and Tiffany were on the left wing. "You'll see."

Hyoyeon sighed. "Can't you just forget about this?" She was talking about the girl's revenge.

“I’m just playing around, keeping myself entertained as I wait for the right day to get what I want.” Sooyoung misunderstood it, she thought Hyoyeon was talking about what she planned for the two for that day, but Hyoyeon didn’t insist.

Hyoyeon tore her eyes away from the couple and studied Sooyoung’s right side profile, seeing all the desires in those beautiful shining eyes.

Hyoyeon thought she could make Sooyoung change her mind once she’s under her custody, but she couldn’t. Hyoyeon thought Sooyoung would forget about the two innocent girls and just focus on her, but Sooyoung didn’t. Hyoyeon thought it would be easy to influence Sooyoung, but it wasn’t.

Hyoyeon doesn’t know what to do anymore. But she wouldn’t give up. Not yet, not now that her heart was starting to beat for Sooyoung and not for Summer, now that her mind kept screaming her name every time the younger girl wasn’t around, and not now that she knew Sooyoung needed her though she never said so.

Hyoyeon was certain-- surely, she wouldn’t give up on Sooyoung even if everything’s too late... even if she doesn’t know what would happen next.

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Both Jessica and Tiffany don’t know what happened that made them riding on Venus’ back together with Tiffany seated sideways between Jessica’s arms that are holding the strap controlling Venus. If Jessica’s mind was still working at that time, Tiffany stopped in the middle of the track to take a rest, complaining about her tensed back, and then Jessica just asked her to ride with her so they could see the whole field. Tiffany agreed.

And now, neither of them was breathing because of their closeness. Just a simple inhale made Jessica’s chest brushing against Tiffany’s right arm, and her nose almost in contact with Tiffany’s brown hair, already smelling her strawberry-scented shampoo mixed with her perfume. The fact that the girl was inside her embrace made Jessica more tensed, but she was thankful enough that Tiffany wasn’t seeing her flushed cheeks.

Too close. Too close. I can’t breathe, Tiffany thought frantically as she focused her eyes ahead, full of effort in trying not to turn her head even a bit and come face to face with Jessica.

She couldn’t help but to think that they were like protagonists in a fairy tale story. Tiffany being the saved princess, Jessica being the savior prince, and the fairy-tale-like environment and the white horse just completed the image, except for their equestrian attire that seemed off for the picture.

Everything was just so calm, so quiet. The distance of the track from the school building kept the noise muted to them, and they were the only ones on the track. But the last time Jessica remembered the scene being this serene was way back in Zeigesar, before something bad happened to them, so she assumed that, again, something bad was going to happen. Something told her so.

And yet again, she was proven right. All of a sudden, Venus staggered; her right front foot suddenly kneeled, like she tripped onto something. Tiffany shrieked as she searched for something to hold onto, but her sideways position made her vulnerable to the sudden movement that she slid backward. Frantically, she held onto the first thing that her hand grasped, it being Jessica's shoulder.

Jessica, not knowing what to do, held onto Tiffany too. Her weight just bought more weight to Tiffany that pushed her even more backward until she fell to the ground, left shoulder first, bringing Jessica along with her in a protective embrace. It was a good thing that they were both wearing safety helmets.

Tiffany thought she heard something cracked the moment she hit the ground with the impact. She felt a sharp pain ran up her spine.

"Ahhh!" she screamed.

Jessica, hearing Tiffany's hurtful cry, immediately stood up and made Tiffany to lie on her back. Tiffany held her left shoulder, biting her lower lip, face scrunched up in a hurtful expression.

"Oh my God! Tiffany, are you okay?!" Jessica inspected the girl's left shoulder, but Tiffany swatted her hands away.

"Don't. Stay away!" she hissed.

"Tiffany..." Jessica hesitated.

"Stay away!"

Jessica hesitantly moved two steps backward as she kept her eyes on Tiffany. Worry was written all over her face. She nervously chewed on her nail, anxiously waiting for what Tiffany would do next.

Tiffany stayed still on the ground. Feeling her body for anymore damages, and luckily, there's none. She breathed slowly, calming herself, right hand still not leaving her left shoulder. No pain emitted from it other than the one earlier, and she hoped nothing would occur again for another pain meant that she needed to go to the hospital. She knew she cannot go to the hospital yet, after the competition maybe, but not now.

Slowly, she sat up like nothing happened. She stood up and dusted her clothes.

"T-Tiffany."

"Don't worry, I'm fine." It doesn't matter what would happen to Tiffany's shoulder, what's important for her was that Jessica's fine. "What about you?"

"I-I'm fine."

After brushing her white top and black skin-tight jeans, Tiffany went to suspect if there really are no scratches on Jessica's skin. She checked Jessica's arms, and face. Nothing. *Good*. When Tiffany was checking Jessica's legs, that was when she noticed a rope tied as high as Venus' knees, almost as high as Jessica's hips.

Both sides of the track have white metal fencings, and a rope was stretched taut in between-- the reason for Venus' stumble.

"Shit!" Tiffany cursed. "Who tied this rope here?!" she complained as she pointed at the rope.

Jessica stared at the rope, then to the already calm Venus, then to the furious Tiffany, not knowing what to do.

A couple of kilometers away, Sooyoung was laughing her heart out with a serious looking Hyoyeon beside her, apparently not finding anything funny.

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When they got back home, Tiffany went straight to the shower, leaving the still-concerned Jessica to wait for her in their bedroom. Tiffany took a quick shower, and once she's done, she wrapped herself in a bath robe and studied her left shoulder in the whole-body mirror. She pushed the sleeves down until her left shoulder was totally exposed. She focused.

What's that? Is that a... dent? Tiffany suspected. Indeed, there was a dent on the back of her shoulder like someone punched her there and the person's knuckles left the mark. *There must be a pebble there when I fell.*

There was nothing on her whole arm but the dent on her shoulder, no bruise, no scratches, and no swell either. Good thing they were wearing long sleeves that time.

Her whole left arm doesn't even hurt but she decided to close her hand and open it again a few times just to make sure. She circled her arm a couple of times before sighing in relief.

"It's working well. Good." She heaved another huge sigh of relief.

Tiffany took a step backward to observe her whole body. A second later, her right eyebrow rose.

Strange. Her shoulders were suddenly balanced.

CHAPTER 33: 'CHANGES'



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Why do I even have to accompany her here?! Jessica scolded herself. I should be at home, relaxing.

She couldn't take it anymore. Her blood was boiling, her breathing ragged, and her jaws clenched. It was unmistakable, she was furious.

She was fuming because of that stupid Choi Siwon who kept on touching Tiffany everywhere, and more furious of Tiffany because she's letting him. They were supposed to be practicing for their intermission number, weren't they? Why were they flirting?

Another person that made Jessica angry was that gay choreographer, Kim Heechul. He kept on teaching flirtatious dance steps that included caresses and touch and hold in different body parts.

Jessica looked away, she couldn't take the happenings on the stage anymore. She just studied the place.

The Philopolis Coliseum was a wide area with a round roof, like a dome. The maximum capacity was a hundred thousand people. This afternoon, only few lights were on, and they are mostly on stage because the contestants in the beauty pageant were practicing. There are a lot of vacant seats, and Jessica was sitting on the front row, giving her a closer view of what's happening on stage. If she squinted hard enough on the sides, she would be able to see some parts of the backstage.

Jessica regretted giving in to Tiffany when the girl asked her to accompany her to their practice since she wouldn't do anything at home anyway. If she knew this was what awaited her, she could have said no.

A sudden commotion brought Jessica's attention back on stage. Some female candidates were squealing, and the rest of the female are rumbling in jealousy, that included Summer. All of the male candidates are rumbling in jealousy too, and if looks could kill, Siwon would be dead on the spot by the way the guys are glaring at him.

The reason for their hyper activeness was pair number nine-- Choi Siwon and Tiffany Hwang. Heechul was currently teaching them some sexy dance moves for their solo, which included:

*Siwon standing behind Tiffany with his hands on her shoulders and would slide down to her legs until he was kneeling on one knee.

*Tiffany sitting on Siwon's propped leg as he knelt, and wrapping her arms around his neck.

And those were just a few.

"They look perfect together aren't they?" candidate number three whispered to candidate number six.

"Good thing she's already married," the jealous female candidate replied.

"Okay, next," Heechul started, "You two need to have an eye contact. If you can lean anymore closer, do it."

And so pair number nine did. They looked at each other's eyes in a very intense eye contact, noses almost brushing and... did Tiffany just give Jessica a sidelong glance?

That pulled the last straw. Jessica's jaws clenched tighter than her teeth were about to be crushed, hands closed into tight fists, long nails digging into her palm. She checked her watch, stood up and ran out of the coliseum.

Five feet away from Tiffany, Summer smirked. She's surely enjoying this.

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Jessica ran as fast as she could to the only place where she could release whatever she was feeling, legs already feeling sore. She entered the school building, climbed up three flights of stairs, turned to the right, then another right on the third turn, passing by tons of the candidates' posters that are posted on the walls, and stopped in front of a gray, metal door with the words 'Boxing Club Training Room' written on it. She was panting heavily as she felt her pockets in search for the chip-key. She found it on the back pocket of her jeans and hurriedly rubbed it against the sensor. The door parted in between and shut close behind Jessica.

She knew this room would be vacant at this time. Classes were still on-going.

She immediately ran to the hanging black-colored punching bag and started releasing her stress. She doesn't care if she's not wearing protective gloves and her knuckles were most likely to have bruises. She doesn't care if she's wearing jeans and a blouse and not comfortable clothes. She doesn't care if she's punching too hard that her wrists were probably going to be injured. All she cared about was to relieve her stress while hoping that in every punch, her heart was feeling better even though her knuckles and wrists weren't.

Jessica punched the poor punching bag as hard as she could, and yet it only swung a little because of its heavy weight. She punched until her knuckles are bruised, until her arms felt sore, until the sweats are rolling from her forehead down to her neck, until she was already panting, and until she felt weak.

“AAAAHHH!!” she shouted at the top of her lungs followed by her final punch-- the strongest one she could muster.

Jessica kneeled, and leaned her bruised knuckles on the floor for support, heavily panting. She watched as little droplets of sweat fell on the floor.

“Why do I feel like this?” she whispered to herself, eyebrows knitted. “Why am I so affected?”

“Am I--?”

No. Any affection for Tiffany was simply not allowed. Gratitude, yes. Friendliness, yes. Appreciation, yes.

Love? No.

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Tiffany watched Jessica ran away with a heavy heart. *Where is she going?*

She detached herself from Siwon, excused herself and went to the backstage. Siwon watched her back worriedly, aware of the change in her mood. Heechul moved on to the next pair.

She walked back and forth for a couple of minutes, thinking really hard. Should she call Jessica and ask what's up or not? Tiffany saw her checked her watch, did someone paged her? Was it an emergency that she needed to run out of the coliseum? Or, was she... was she... affected of Tiffany and Siwon's closeness?

Tiffany furiously shook her head. *That's impossible. She's probably not.*

She couldn't take the anxiousness anymore. She pressed a couple of buttons on her wristwatch and Jessica answered. “Yes?” She sounded breathless. Certainly because of running.

“Why did you left?” Tiffany asked.

“Uhhh... Sir Dylan paged me. He said it was urgent. It's about the fencing competition,” Jessica reasoned.

“So how is it?”

“Don't worry, it's nothing.”

“OK. Next time, if you’re leaving, tell me!” Tiffany scolded. “You don’t know how worried I am!” Oops. That slipped.

“Yes. Sorry.”

Tiffany couldn’t remember when she started feeling this way, like she couldn’t breathe when Jessica was out of her eyesight and earshot.

“Apology accepted. Get back here as soon as you’re done with whatever you’re doing, OK?” And Tiffany ended the call just in time to Siwon calling for her on stage.

“Fany, Heechul needs you there,” he said, jutting his thumb over his shoulder where Heechul was setting up another dance formation for the female candidates.

“I’ll be there in a sec.” Tiffany strode back to the stage.

So Jessica’s not affected after all.

Tiffany doesn’t know if she should feel relieved or disappointed.

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Jessica did came back *as soon as she’s done with whatever she’s doing*, like what Tiffany said. It was exactly the time Tiffany’s practice ended though. Tiffany noticed that she changed, as if she’s drawing a line between them, keeping herself a good distance away from Tiffany.

Jessica kept at least a foot distance from her while walking, and when they slept that night, she was almost falling off the edge just to keep herself away from Tiffany. She didn’t talked that much too, only when she was asked and only when she asked to pass the gravy over to her at dinner.

And now, as Tiffany stared at the red dot of the bull’s eye twenty-five feet away in front of her, she wasn’t really seeing anything. She was busy thinking what’s wrong with Jessica.

“Are you waiting for the arrows to come out of your eyes and shoot that bull’s eye?” Jessica commented beside Tiffany before charging her own bow, aimed at the bull’s eye and shot. Her arrow passed over the board and stuck to the ground. She’s obviously distracted too.

Tiffany would have retorted at that statement if only she heard it clearly. All she heard were incoherent words. She shook her head and turned to face Jessica. “I dunno how to use this.” She held up her bow and arrow.

Jessica looked incredulously at her. “You don’t?”

Tiffany shook her head innocently.

“Watch me.” Jessica loaded an arrow on her bow, charged, aimed and let go, the arrow flying almost as fast as a bullet. This time, it stuck on the third red circle away from the bull’s eye. A little more measure and it would’ve been the bull’s eye.

“Hmmm, I’ll try.” Tiffany loaded an arrow on her bow, charged, aimed and let go. The arrow fell only a foot away from her.

Jessica snickered. She covered her mouth with her free hand to stop herself from laughing at the hopeless looking Tiffany...to no avail. She exploded in a fit of laughter.

“Go ahead! Laugh at someone’s misery!” Tiffany complained as she hid her flushed cheeks. *Well, at least she laughed, right? Not bad, Tiffany*, she thought.

“S-sorry... give me a minute,” Jessica said in between her laughter that sounded like a beautiful melody to Tiffany’s ears.

“It’s OK, take your time,” Tiffany said seriously. “I love seeing you smile and hearing you laugh.”

Jessica abruptly stopped. She cleared her throat and composed herself. “Put an arrow on the bow.”

Tiffany obediently did.

Jessica put her bow on the ground and walked over to Tiffany but suddenly stopped. She hesitated. Should she touch Tiffany? That meant that she would cross the lines she drew. Her hands weren’t listening to her though, they lifted up on their own and held Tiffany’s shoulders, pushing her to face the target.

“Charge, and make sure to keep your back straight for a good aim.” Jessica’s hands never left the girl’s shoulders.

Tiffany straightened, raised the bow and charged, waiting for the next step.

Jessica moved closer so her toes were already in contact with Tiffany’s heels, chest brushing against Tiffany’s back. She stared down at Tiffany’s shoulders, seeing imaginary imprints Siwon’s hands have left. *He touched you here, huh?*

The moment Tiffany felt Jessica’s chest against her back and breathings on her nape, her heart did a couple of backflips, resulting for it to beat at the speed of light. *Too close. I can’t breathe.* She feared that Jessica might be able to feel it pounding against her chest.

God... when did Tiffany ever smelt this good? Jessica stared at Tiffany’s exposed neck, wondering if how good would it feel if she pressed her lips against those milky white skin, but dismissed the idea immediately.

If it was possible for Tiffany's heart to beat anymore faster, it would have when Jessica's hands traveled the length of her arms and rested on top of her own hands, assisting her in holding the bow. Jessica was now officially hugging her from behind.

Tiffany then saw the bruises on her knuckles. Red scratches, dried droplets of blood, and pink bruises.

"Jessi, you're knuckles..."

"Don't mind it. Focus."

Tiffany nodded hesitantly. She doesn't know if it was just her imagination or Jessica's voice did really turn into a hoarse and slow whisper, sounding totally arousing.

Jessica took a deep breath, trying to calm her pounding heart. *Take a hold of yourself, Jessica!*

"Close your left eye, look into the target, tilt your head if needed, and measure where you wanted the arrow to hit." Jessica's breath hit Tiffany's nape, making her shiver.

Tiffany immediately regretted tilting her head on the right because Jessica just had a 'private breathing spot' on the left side of her neck, making her shiver more, but she tried so hard for Jessica not to notice it.

"Once you're done, let go of the arrow," Jessica whispered, still assisting her.

Why is she whispering? Seriously. Anymore and I'll become crazy! Someone please end this! Tiffany thought.

A second later, Tiffany realized that the phrase "Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it" existed for a reason.

"What are you two doing?" The headmaster, Chuck Galluzi's stern voice startled them and Tiffany accidentally let go of the arrow and it stuck on the ground, next to Jessica's first arrow. Not bad for a beginner.

Jessica immediately let go of Tiffany and ducked her head, trying to hide her blush. Tiffany just looked away, cheeks also flushed. They looked like two kids caught cheating on an exam.

They totally forgot that they're inside the school's shooting grounds.

"I-I'm teaching her how to use the bow and arrow, Sir," Jessica breathed out.

"I think that's way too intimate. Isn't PDA-ing written under the 'don'ts' in your students' planners?"

It was. Jessica remembered reading it last year when Chuck was just a newly-elected headmaster. The new students' planners were e-mailed to them and everything was there.

“Yes, Sir. We’re deeply sorry, Sir,” Jessica muttered.

“Just because you’re married doesn’t mean you’re exempted. I don’t want any of that happening in my school again, understand?” he scolded.

“This is not even *your* school!” Tiffany retorted, visibly irritated with the headmaster.

Chuck just looked at her incredulously.

“You know my mom is one of the builders of this school. You can’t afford to offend me because if you did, in a snap, you’re outta here.” Tiffany crossed her arms in her chest. “Now get outta my face, will you?!”

Tiffany looked away and mentally scoffed. *How dare him to interrupt. He totally killed my mood!*

Jessica cleared her throat and picked up her bow on the ground once the headmaster was out of the place.

“Hey, Jessi,” Tiffany softly called and held Jessica’s wrist. “What really happened to your knuckles? Those bruises and scratches totally looked awful.”

“It’s none of your business.” Jessica harshly pulled her wrist out of Tiffany’s hold. “I’ll go out for a while. Stay here and continue the training. Remember to keep your back straight,” with that being said, she strode out of the shooting grounds while shaking her head, leaving Tiffany confused.

Jessica silently thanked the headmaster for interfering. She didn’t even notice that she crossed the lines she drew yesterday just like that. She told herself not to indulge to Tiffany, and yet she did again. She couldn’t really help it. *Stupid Jessica! Stupid!*

The next morning, she woke up to her knuckles treated and swathed in bandages. Apparently, Tiffany made it her business.

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Wind scoured against the black-tinted window of the Hwang’s black limo. Sitting just behind the driver’s seat, Tiffany was busy thinking, nose catching a whip of Jessica’s vanilla perfume as the girl drove the flying car. Lately, she found herself thinking a lot. Mostly about Jessica and her behavior that seemed to change from time to time. *Maybe she just has her monthly visitor*, Tiffany tried to believe.

She have been thinking a lot that even the other candidates for the beauty contest have asked her why she looked bothered yesterday on their practice. Of course she didn’t say why and pretended that she’s fine. It was obvious that Siwon wasn’t convinced though, the man kept glancing worriedly at her every five minutes and even asked why Jessica wasn’t around.

There are times that she almost tripped on their ramp, and dancing the wrong dance steps for their intermission number, earning some irritated comments from the others because they needed to start from the beginning again.

Tiffany was indeed bothered, and distracted to the point that today, when she stepped out of the car, she was bewildered to see a huge, oval, outdoor ice skating rink that Jessica rented just for the two of them in front of her. She totally forgot that their training on day four was ice skating.

Her old fears had come creeping back.

The moment she laid eyes on the rink, her body automatically trembled. She gulped and tried to control her shaking body. Jessica went over to her and shoved a pair of pink ski shoes in Tiffany's hands and walked to a nearby bench. Jessica started putting on her ski. Tiffany just sat beside her, not knowing what to do with the ski resting in her lap.

"Nothing's gonna happen if you'll keep looking at it," Jessica broke through Tiffany's trance. She already finished putting on the shoes. "Hurry and put it on." She stood up and was about to walk to the entrance of the rink if not for the hand on her wrist.

"J-Jessi..."

Jessica studied Tiffany and knitted her eyebrows. "Why are you shaking? Are you cold? Are you feeling unwell?" Jessica bombarded her with questions.

"I-I'm fine. Wait for me, I'll just p-put this on." Tiffany then started putting on her own ski shoes.

The moment Tiffany stood on the entrance her body trembled more, legs feeling wobbly. She felt as if her life depended on a step she was about to take to enter the rink. She felt as if it was judgment day and she was to be evicted out of this world.

Relax, Tiffany. Relax. This is just an artificial rink. There's no water underneath but solid ground. The ice isn't going to crack and you're not going to drown. Relax, Tiffany chanted, hoping that she's believing it.

Jessica stepped inside first and glided easily a yard away from Tiffany before stopping and facing Tiffany who seemed to be rooted on her spot. "What? Are you just going to stand there?"

"I-I dunno how to skate." It was the truth. Ever since Tiffany was ten, all her knowledge about ice skating totally disappeared and she tried to stay away from any ice skating activities as far as possible.

Jessica sighed, went in front of Tiffany and offered both of her hands to the girl. "Hold on me."

Tiffany hesitantly held Jessica's hands, and when Jessica pulled her into the rink, she yelped.

“Trust me.” Jessica slowly glided backwards while pulling the unsteady Tiffany with her, eyes not leaving Tiffany’s shivering form.

“What are you so scared about? You’re always good with water, don’t tell me you’re scared of *frozen* water?” Jessica asked, Tiffany’s strong grip serving as the evidence that the girl was scared.

Tiffany bit her lower lip and didn’t answer, tears brimming in her eyes. Her mind kept on showing images that she thought she has already forgotten. All her memories when she drowned kept on replaying again and again inside her head. She’s getting paranoid, and now, she’s expecting for the ice to crack and eat her whole.

She let go of her grip on Jessica’s hands and held her head. Her legs slid apart and she fell seated on the ice. She closed her eyes, trying to block the images out but to no avail. “AAhhh! Get away! Get away!” She was already crying.

Jessica worriedly kneeled in front of her. “Hey! What’s wrong?” She tried to remove Tiffany’s hands from her head but the girl kept on clutching her head. “Hey, Tiffany! Tell me!” Jessica was already panicking.

Tiffany suddenly held Jessica’s hands with her trembling ones and pleaded Jessica through her tear-filled eyes. “Get me out of here,” she sobbed.

Tiffany doesn’t know how Jessica did it, but somehow, she managed to bring Tiffany out of the rink and sat on a nearby bench.

Jessica knew it was bad. Really bad. Tiffany’s whole body was trembling, she’s clutching her head, and she kept on crying. But she doesn’t have any idea what’s happening. What did she do to make Tiffany like this? What was she supposed to do? She knew she doesn’t have any choice but to cross the line she drew.

Jessica’s feelings claimed superiority over her self-made promise, and she hugged Tiffany. “Hey, tell me what’s wrong? I might be able to help.” She rubbed Tiffany’s back.

It took a lot of strength for Tiffany to tell Jessica the whole story.

--Flashback--

The ten-year-old Tiffany Hwang dully skated around the huge frozen pond, at least sixteen pairs of trained eyes watching her surroundings for any unusual person-- those were of her body guards’. She couldn’t seem to enjoy anything after her first personal butler died in her little arms last year, exactly at Christmas Eve. She doesn’t really want to go out, but her parents insisted that she should spend some time with her new butler, maybe they could get along too like how she’s so close to Mr. Choi. But the young Tiffany doesn’t want to. After being close with Mr. Baek, and then what? He would suddenly die in Tiffany’s arms and make her grieve again and blame herself for another death of an innocent person?

It was 2pm in the afternoon, the sun was high up, no dark clouds, and despite the day being a sunny afternoon of November fifteen, no one guessed that the ice, at that certain day, would be thin.

Tiffany suddenly heard a crack under her. She lost balance and flew forward, eyes tightly closed in panic.

The fall was at least three feet, and as Tiffany's face hit the ice she felt like her face had hit pavement at fifty miles an hour. The ice then totally cracked, the liquid that engulfed her body was so cold it felt like burning acid, pulling her downward and into the cold body of water underneath the thin ice. It brought an instantaneous spike of panic.

Upside down and in the darkness, Tiffany was momentarily disoriented, not knowing which way to turn toward the surface. Her heavy camel-hair coat kept the icy blast from her body—but only for a second or two. Finally righting herself, Tiffany came sputtering up for air, just as the water found its way to her back and chest, engulfing her body in a lung-crushing vise of cold.

"Hee... lp," she gasped, but Tiffany could barely pull in enough air to let out a whimper. She felt like the wind had been knocked out of her.

"Heee... lp!" Her cries were inaudible even to herself.

Tiffany's muscles were already having trouble responding. She kicked her legs harder, trying to propel herself high enough up the surface to grab the rim. Her body felt like lead, and her lungs seemed to have shrunk to nothing, as if they were being crushed by a python. Her water-laden coat was getting heavier by the second, pulling her downward. Tiffany tried to pull it off her body, but the heavy fabric stuck.

"Help... me!"

The fear came on in torrents now.

Drowning, Tiffany had once read, was the most horrific death imaginable. She had never dreamed she would find herself on the verge of experiencing it. Her muscles refused to cooperate with her mind, and already she was fighting just to keep her head above water. Her soggy clothing pulled her downward.

Her screams were only in her mind now. *What's taking those stupid bodyguards so long to help me?!*

Tiffany went under. The sheer terror of being conscious of her own impending death was something she never imagined she would experience. And yet here she was... sinking slowly down the sheer ice wall of a fifty-foot-deep frozen pond. Multitudes of thoughts flashed before her eyes. Moments from her short life. Her dreams.

Tiffany's lungs were screaming for oxygen. She held her breath, still trying to kick toward the surface. Breathe! She fought the reflex, clamping her insensate lips together. Breathe! She tried in vain to swim upward. Breathe! She tried raising her hand upward, blindly finding for something to grasp. At that instant,

like a light in the middle of the dark, a strong, square hand gripped her little hand and she was pulled out of the water.

“Miss, Tiffany!”

She immediately inhaled a lungful of precious oxygen while Mr. Baek carried her away from the frozen pond and into the land. She felt grateful that she survived. Trapped beneath the surface, she was certain she would die. It had been Mr. Baek’s powerful grasp that finally yanked Tiffany’s waterlogged body to safety.

--End of flashback--

Ever since that harrowing ordeal, Tiffany had battled a persistent case of hydrophobia—a distinct wariness of open water, especially cold water, and so she learned swimming so she would know what to do next time that would happen again. Mr. Baek and Tiffany have been very close since then.

“I-I’m sorry, Tiff,” was all that Jessica could say. She knew it was her fault. She brought Tiffany in this place, and to think she even mocked Tiffany for being scared of the frozen water earlier.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know,” Jessica whispered as she tightened her arms around the still-crying girl.

“I’m so scared, Jessi,” Tiffany sobbed against Jessica’s chest.

“I’m sorry... I’m really sorry.” Jessica doesn’t know what else to say but that.

She continued rubbing Tiffany’s back, hoping it could help. She doesn’t know what else to do to stop Tiffany from crying.

Three more minutes have passed before Tiffany’s sobs died down, but she remained inside Jessica’s soothing embrace, not really willing to let go.

“Why you didn’t tell me earlier?” Jessica’s carefully asked. “I could’ve cancelled today’s training.”

Tiffany kept quiet.

Jessica understood. Maybe she’s not really ready. That was one hell of an accident she had. If it happened to Jessica, she wouldn’t be able to share it too. But there’s one moment in Jessica’s childhood that was totally traumatic to her that she managed to overcome.

“Hey, to be fair, I’ll tell you what.”

“What?” Tiffany muttered, still not looking up.

“When I was thirteen,” Jessica started, rubbing slow circles on Tiffany’s back like she’s just telling the girl a fairy tale story. “I was so immature, I don’t have any plans and dreams for my future, I just hang out with my friends, go on a date and of course, what I do with most of my time, shopping.

“One afternoon in July, I went out to go shopping and I finished at around seven in the evening. I was alone that night because I never really wanted any bodyguards following me and monitoring my every move. I was walking in the mall’s parking lot, going to my car, when a red Van3N hovered down in front of me. A man climbed down, covered my face, shoved me inside the vehicle and brought me to some unknown place.” Jessica slightly laughed. “I know I was being kidnapped and yet I don’t really care.

“They never removed the cover of my eyes. They stole my debt card, and everything I have with me. They tortured me for two days. I was so weak, I dunno what to do but to cry. I thought they’re gonna kill me.” Jessica winced. “But then they called my parents for a ransom. My parents immediately gave what they wanted and good thing that they’re men of their words. They accepted the money and let go of me without the need of any police. No one really knew about that incident but my family and I.

“Since then, I became sporty. I tried everything to be physically strong, but my feelings remained weak. I understood what life means. I planned for my future and cherished every day because, who knows, that might happen again and this time I’m not going to survive from it. I overcame it, and look at me now, looking at life in a difference perspective.”

Tiffany finally looked up, eyes all red and puffy. “Is that true?”

Jessica let out a small smile. “Do you think I’m kidding?”

Tiffany buried her head back to Jessica’s chest and shook her head.

“Do you want a proof?” Jessica detached herself from Tiffany and faced her back on the girl. “Raise my shirt up and look at my back.”

Tiffany did what she was told. She slowly lifted up Jessica’s shirt and she saw a line-like scar on her fifth vertebrae. She continued lifting the shirt up and realized that the scar almost ended on Jessica’s nape. Tiffany’s eyes grew wide. *How come I’ve never seen this before?*

“The doctor said it is thirteen inches long. Funny, huh? I was thirteen years old then, and the scar was thirteen inches long.” Jessica chuckled.

“How did you get that?” Tiffany asked as she lifted down the girl’s shirt.

Jessica faced her again. “Didn’t I say that they tortured me? I didn’t really saw it since my eyes are covered, but I felt something sharp sliced down my back. It’s probably a knife or something.”

Tiffany looked at Jessica enviously. Jessica could shrug that matter off just like that, while Tiffany can't even let go of her own dark past and stayed grieving over it. She didn't even notice that she has restrained herself from enjoying life because of it.

What should I do without Jessica to teach me a lot about life?

"I don't worry only about myself now, I worry about Krystal too. What if that happens to her too? Honestly, until now I still can't really go out comfortably alone, like right now, there's just the two of us here with no bodyguards."

"That must've been hard on you," Tiffany said.

"Before, it is. Now, it's not anymore. Like me, you should move on too, let go of those things that happened to you because that's just a part of being from a wealthy family, no matter how traumatizing it is." Jessica patted Tiffany's head. "OK?" Jessica smiled fondly.

Tiffany slightly smiled. "I'll try."

Jessica removed her and Tiffany's ski shoes before standing up. She offered her hand to Tiffany. "Let's go?"

Tiffany just looked at her.

"Don't worry, we're not going back to the rink. We're going home."

Tiffany gladly took her hand and they made their way back to the car.

Once they got back home, they spent the rest of the day playing Wii 2k21 (the newest version of Wii where you're like inside a virtual room and everything looked real. If playing some action, you would be the one who would fight the hologram enemies personally) until they felt exhausted.

CHAPTER 34: 'KISS'



CHAPTER 34: 'KISS'

Tiffany couldn't help but find Jessica extremely cool while doing her thing—Fencing. With her legs opened wide in a taunting fighting stance, right hand stretched all the way out, holding the foil firm, left hand tucked behind her back, Jessica looked threatening that no one would dare to spar with her.

Tiffany couldn't focus though, no matter how cool Jessica looked, there's something that's bugging her. Her shoulder's been balanced since day two, why did she still continue the training with Jessica? She, herself, doesn't know.

"Watch carefully, OK?" Jessica started. "Keep your knees far apart, but not your heels. If you'll move forward, the foot that's ahead would move first before the other one. You can't move them at the same time, and you can't move the back foot first, you'll trip." Jessica swiftly but gracefully advanced forward, moving her right foot first followed by the left one. She looked like she's just gliding.

"Now, if you'll move backward, the back foot would move first before the front foot." As Jessica did what she was saying, Tiffany helped herself from laughing but a snicker escaped her.

Jessica stood straight and eyed her. "What's funny?"

Tiffany chuckled-- the least she could do because a laugh could surely offend Jessica. "You look like a crab."

Jessica looked away and hid her blush. She knew that was true. Fencing stance could really look like a crab's stance, but what could she do? She doesn't have the rights to change it.

Finding something to escape from embarrassment, Jessica walked over to the corner of the training room, grabbed a white fencing jacket and another foil. She handed it over to Tiffany. "Wear the jacket. We're going to spar."

Tiffany just looked at the foil and the jacket in her hands.

“Hurry!” Jessica impelled.

Tiffany slowly put on the jacket over her shirt and loose cotton pants, just like how Jessica wore hers. They stood face to face and Tiffany couldn’t help but to gulp nervously when Jessica went on a fighting stance.

“U-uhm, Jessi, you’re gonna be easy on me, right?” Tiffany hesitantly went on a fighting stance.

Jessica shrugged a shoulder. “Let’s see.”

They just stayed on a fighting stance for a moment, both foils pointed at each other, until Jessica spoke up. “Be alert. You don’t know when I’ll strike—”

Even before she had the chance to finish her sentence, Tiffany has already hit her on the chest before taking two steps backward, away from Jessica.

Jessica scoffed and shook her head. “Are you trying me?”

Jessica advanced forward at the same time with Tiffany taking a step backward, looking scared. Jessica was just actually taunting her. Tiffany was starting to shake inside, scared of Jessica’s serious face, but hid it to herself. She wouldn’t want Jessica to see her scared.

Jessica took three fast, sudden steps forward, aiming the foil to Tiffany’s chest. Tiffany, shocked with the sudden fast movement, panicked and hurriedly took steps backward without thinking. Her front foot moved backward first and it stepped right on the heel of her back foot, losing her balance.

“Ahh!” she yelped and closed her eyes, waiting for her back to hit the floor.

Acting on impulse, Jessica launched forward in a fail attempt to catch Tiffany.

The sound of the foils spilling on the floor filled the room, and then silence.

Tiffany peeled her eyes open only to realize Jessica, with her eyes all wide, was on top of her.

“I-I-I was trying to catch you. I’m s-sorry,” Jessica stuttered. She moved into a straddle and tried to get up if not for Tiffany’s fast arms that immediately wrapped around her body, restraining her from going anywhere.

Tiffany’s eyes looked different. There’s something in those deep brown eyes, and it feared Jessica. She could already feel Tiffany’s heart pounding hard against her chest, and she’s sure Tiffany could feel her pounding heart too.

They locked glances and Tiffany felt a connection, like a cord stretched taut in between them, something she’d never felt with any guy before. She couldn’t breathe. All the air had been sucked from her lungs. Even though she might die of asphyxiation, she wished they could stay like this forever.

Jessica looked deep into Tiffany's eyes and she felt a shiver went up her spine. Tiffany's hand unconsciously ran up Jessica's back and stopped on Jessica's nape, holding her head firm. She leaned towards Jessica and closed her eyes.

Jessica doesn't know what to do. Tiffany was going to kiss her? What was this nervousness she was feeling? It's not as if they've never kissed before. She never expected to be kissed by someone in the training room, and yet something told her it was going to happen now.

Or it would have happened if the door hadn't opened and Yuri hadn't burst in. "OK, you guys," she said with a knowing smirk as Jessica stumbled on her feet. "Time's up, it's lunch time. We're waiting for you on the cafeteria for ten minutes already."

Tiffany watched as Jessica grabbed her bag that contained her clean clothes and hurry out of the room. She sat staring into space for a long time, totally pushing Yuri, who was still standing beside the door, at the back of her head.

What was this strange feeling she felt? Girls have never had an appeal to her. Jessica had beautiful hair, well-built body, normal height, but normally, Tiffany required more than that to be attracted to someone. She'd almost kissed her. Had wanted to kiss her. She still did. She would have if that imbecible hadn't barged in.

Why? Why do I feel... disappointed that I wasn't able to kiss her? And Jessica being a girl just confused Tiffany more.

"Yah! Are you going to stay there forever?" Yuri prompted.

Tiffany scampered to her feet, removed the fencing jacket and threw it on the floor.

They walked quietly through the crowded hallway. All students were running everywhere but once they saw Tiffany and Yuri, they would clear the way for them to pass through. Tiffany's mind was wandering off somewhere, and Yuri knew it. She knew Tiffany too well.

"Hey, you wanna talk about that?" Yuri asked after a couple of minutes' silence.

"About what?" Tiffany asked obliviously.

"Whatever you're thinking." Yuri shrugged.

Tiffany studied Yuri for a while. Yuri's face was serious, like she wasn't the one who caused Tiffany's feeling of disappointment, and she kept her eyes ahead, not even glancing at Tiffany.

Tiffany sighed and focused her eyes ahead. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to talk to Yuri. Though she's evil most of the time, she knew when everything gets serious, and she's actually trustable.

“Yuri, imagine that I asked you this question when you still don’t know that you already love Yoona. What would you feel if someone shows interest with Yoona?” Tiffany started with the simplest one.

“Because I believe that I don’t love her yet, I would still be jealous but wouldn’t want to admit,” Yuri stated simply.

They reached the elevator and Yuri pressed the ground floor button. They were alone inside the elevator, and they were both quiet for a moment before Tiffany asked again, “What do you think is the reason why you wanted to make Yoona happy?”

“It’s because I like her... or cares for her at least.”

“Why would you care for her?”

“Because I like her?” Yuri shrugged her shoulders, unsure with her own answer.

Tiffany sighed and looked down as they walked out of the elevator. They turned right. Even though they’re still far, the noise coming from the cafeteria was already audible.

“What if you badly wanted to do something to Yoona, but then you weren’t able to do it because of a certain reason, what would you feel?”

“I would feel disappointed of course.”

“Why would you feel disappointed?”

“Because I badly wanted to do it to her.”

“Why do you badly wanted to do it to her?” Tiffany’s heart was pounding hard as she waited for the answer.

“Maybe it’s because I like her.” Yuri stopped on her tracks and faced Tiffany. “Haven’t you felt all those feelings with Jessica?” she asked before walking away, leaving Tiffany rooted on her spot. *They’re married after all. Of course she already felt those with Jessica.*

“I do.”

It was almost a whisper, but Yuri heard it. She didn’t even realize that Tiffany’s answer to her past-tensed question was in a form of present tense.

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Jessica stretched her arms up as high as she could before bending on her right side, and then left. She felt her back, arms, and legs being flexed and she liked the feeling. She dropped her arms down until her fingers reached her feet. She stayed on the hunched position for a moment before taking a deep breath, and diving into the swimming pool.

Tiffany heard splashes of water right after she came out of the changing room. She looked around the deserted indoor pool and realized that Jessica was swimming already. She quietly took a seat on one of the cushioned lay-out chairs and enjoyed watching Jessica.

Jessica did some freestyle on the first half of the pool, and when she reached the last half of the pool, she did the butterfly style. Tiffany wouldn't deny that Jessica could swim like a pro, but she would still believe that she's better.

Reaching the other end of the Olympic-sized swimming pool, Jessica rose out of the water. Tiffany couldn't help but to stare at Jessica in her blue skin-tight one-piece swimming attire, her brown hair simply ponytailed and she didn't bother wearing goggles or ear piece.

Tiffany suddenly remembered something that's been bugging her since she talked to Yuri that she only managed to forget today. *I like her? How can I? That's... that's ridiculous.* She said 'ridiculous' instead of 'impossible' because liking Jessica was not entirely impossible. It took a lot of time and arguing with herself about her sexuality for Tiffany to learn to accept that though.

"You OK?" Jessica's small hand settled on Tiffany's shoulder.

Though Tiffany has her eyes on Jessica all the time, she hadn't saw her approach, but there she was, her touch radiating peace and comfort like nothing Tiffany had known. What was it about this girl? Tiffany's only been with her for four months, and yet it felt as if her soul was with Jessica since the beginning of life.

"I'm managing." Tiffany slipped away from her touch, pivoting to get the towel from the other lay-out chair beside the one she's currently on. Instead of handing it to Jessica, she stood up and draped it around Jessica's shoulders.

Jessica looked at Tiffany's hands that were on her shoulders before looking up at her. She walked away and sat on the lay-out chair where Tiffany got the towel from. "You don't have to do that. No one's even around."

Why did Tiffany's heart twitched at that? "Uhh, I guess I just grew used to doing these kinds of things to you."

Jessica doesn't know what to say, she just looked down and pulled the towel around her body to keep her warm. Oh Tiffany would so much love to volunteer to wrap her arms around her and hug her warm instead.

Tiffany shook her head at the thought. *Gosh! Why am I being like this?! Since when I started being like this?! Why I only noticed these things now? Do I really like her?* She's starting to be annoyed to herself. She could already feel the veins on her forehead pulsating, a headache on its way. She's been thinking a lot lately that her brain's most likely to explode at any moment now.

Tiffany wanted to splash cold water to her face to wake herself up. She's being ridiculous, or that's what she wanted to believe. She just couldn't have any feelings for Jessica. She couldn't. *Curse Yuri for saying those!*

Seeing nothing to distract herself, she ran towards the pool and dived straight. She stayed under the water for a long moment, waiting for a hole to appear on the ground and swallow her and the waters and end her sufferings. But the time that she has to breathe came so she went for the surface and inhaled, like how, sooner or later, she wouldn't be able to ignore everything anymore and just accept the fact that she liked Jessica.

She's almost at the end of the cliff, and she's just trying to keep a weak hold on a thin web for her dear sexuality.

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"Jessi, today's the day seven of the training. What will we do today?" Tiffany asked right after Jessica came out of the bathroom, hands busy combing her wet hair.

"Hmm..." Jessica sat down on her side of the bed. "What do you want to do?" she asked Tiffany.

"What? You haven't thought of any yet?"

"Honestly, day seven is actually what I call 'Give yourself a treat'. It's doing whatever you love to do. If you love doing nothing, then you can do that the whole day," Jessica stated as-a-matter-of-factly.

"Like, a day-off or free day?"

"If you want to put it like that." Jessica slowly nodded.

Tiffany let out a huge sigh of relief. "I thought day seven's gonna be so hard! Turned out you just scared me." She whispered the last part.

Jessica slightly laughed. "I didn't. It was supposed to surprise you. I never thought it scared you instead."

Tiffany's eyes narrowed. "You said doing what I love to do, right?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure you can put up with me?"

"What do you mean?" Jessica's eyebrows furrowed.

Tiffany stood up, grabbed Jessica's hand and pulled her out of the room, into the garage and stopped in front of a car covered with gray car covers.

Jessica have noticed this car before, but it always has its covers so she never really saw what it looked like, and she never saw anyone ever used it before.

Tiffany let go of her hand and removed the covers, revealing a shining pink-colored, gorgeous racing car. It was two-seater, only has two doors and by the looks of it, it was top-down. The windows aren't tinted, giving Jessica a glimpse of the Louis Vutton patterned seats and steering wheel. There was an air-painted logo on its pink hood-- a silver crown decorated with garnet stones and diamonds with 'Queen' written under it in neon red paint and unfamiliar writing style. Its bumper was pointed, custom made so it could run faster than the normal cars. Jessica assumed that once she opened its hood, she wouldn't be looking at what's inside a car's hood but what's inside a computer. And it has black thick wheels. Yes, wheels, meaning: it can't fly.

"This my baby—Queen. Isn't she gorgeous?" Tiffany introduced as she caressed the car's pink-painted body like it was the most precious thing she has.

"What are we going to do with it?"

Tiffany stood straight and faced her. A smirk made its way on her lips. "We're going to ride her."

"Ride, as in, on the road? It can't fly, right?"

Tiffany didn't answer and proceeded on opening the door to the driver's seat. Jessica realized that it was a vertical door. Tiffany pressed a couple of buttons on the dashboard, and a beep was heard. All of a sudden, there were four stands that came out under the car and lifted it off the ground, the wheels automatically twisted sideward and tucked under the car. The stands then came back to where it's from, leaving Queen flat on the floor.

"Now what?" Jessica asked.

"She can fly now."

"How?"

"The wheels that tucked under the car, their rings are actually propellers, and it's enough to lift the car off the ground for two hundred and fifty feet," Tiffany explained.

"We're not going to fly that high, right? I mean, it's illegal." Jessica was obviously trying to reason anything just not to ride Queen. She knew Tiffany was a drag racer.

"Don't worry. I have a legal certification saying that I can fly that high, even higher than that. Have you forgotten that I'm *Tiffany Hwang*?" Tiffany jutted her right thumb to the passenger's seat. "So, hop in."

“Not until you agree with my condition first.” Jessica crossed her arms.

“What’s your condition?”

“We’ll bring one of the bicycles and I’ll teach you how to ride it. It’s up to you where you want me to teach you.”

Tiffany already has a place in mind the moment Jessica explained to her what they would be doing on day seven. It was the place where she used to bring Queen when she’s practicing for a race. And it would be a perfect place to learn how to use a bicycle.

“Sure,” Tiffany simply said. *Learning to use a bicycle isn’t as hard as learning how to drive a car, right?*

After putting Tiffany’s pink bicycle on the trunk, leaving it open for it can’t be closed, Jessica hesitantly sat on the passenger’s seat. Right after she closed the door, Tiffany started the car and they hovered for a while, waiting for the garage’s ceiling to open up. Once it was opened, Tiffany maneuvered Queen upward, and then dashed forward.

Jessica yelped.

“Oops.” Tiffany smiled sheepishly. “I forgot to say, this is a racing car, and I’m a drag racer, so we’re probably not gonna be slow. Buckle up!”

Jessica already did even before Tiffany said it and held tightly onto her seat. She still wanted to live.

“Where are we even going?” Jessica demanded.

“You’ll see.” Tiffany smirked before pressing on the gas harder, earning Jessica’s scream.

She just laughed it off, like how Jessica laughed it off when they rode a bicycle together.

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Jessica wasn’t surprised to see a clean road when she hopped off Queen, she kind of expected it. They were on a mountain, the road was zigzag and sloping upwards, on their right was cliff and they were separated from it only by metal road railings. The place looked totally dangerous.

“Tell me, how can I teach you how to ride a bicycle here?” Jessica looked incredulously at Tiffany.

“I know this place looks dangerous but it’s actually safe. I practice drag racing here and I never encountered any accident. The whole place is exclusively for us.”

“Why? There are no residences?”

Tiffany told her to climb back up the car and Tiffany drove Queen by wheels. They went straight ahead. A minute later, there was a street on the left, going to some place Jessica doesn't know. They turned into the street. On both sides of the road were trees and nothing else, and the end wasn't visible because the street was very long.

Another four minutes have passed before Jessica saw a lone house on the end of the street, a good five kilometers away from them. Tiffany pressed on the brake.

“That TaeCsion there you see? That's the only house here.” Tiffany pointed.

Jessica studied the huge TaeCsion. It looked huge even from their distance. Jessica was sure that it was much bigger if they're closer. It was all white, and has pointed roof, like a castle. Well, most of the houses now are like that so it wasn't that much unique.

“You wouldn't want to know who the owner is.” Tiffany climbed off the car. Her comment just made Jessica more curious.

“Who?” Jessica asked as she climbed off the car too.

Tiffany sighed. “Kim Hyoyeon.”

Jessica perked up. “You mean, Summer's there?”

“Unfortunately, yes.” Tiffany removed the bicycle from the trunk.

“Can we go visit her?” Jessica enthusiastically asked.

“No!” Tiffany said a millisecond after Jessica's question. She sighed. “I knew I shouldn't have told you knowing that that would be your reaction.”

There she goes again, Jessica thought. Of course, she noticed that Tiffany's been acting weird lately. When they were swimming, she was just staring into zilch and when Jessica asked her if she's okay, her answer was 'I'm managing.' What does that mean? Jessica assumed that she has some problems but doesn't have any idea what and didn't dare to ask.

“Sorry.” Jessica decided to just drop it off so she wouldn't add on Tiffany's problems.

“Now what? Are we just going to stand here? I thought you're gonna teach me how to use this thing?”

~.~

“Why is it so hard to use this thing?!” Tiffany complained as she kicked the poor bicycle, not caring if it has her favorite color.

She looked at Jessica who was getting something on the trunk. Tiffany couldn’t remember putting anything there other than the bicycle, so what was Jessica getting there?

Jessica walked back to her and handed her some knee pads. “Put it on so you wouldn’t have scratches even if you fall.”

“Aren’t you gonna catch me?” Tiffany’s voice came out soft. She was obviously talking about something else Jessica doesn’t have any idea what.

Jessica just chuckled uneasily, feigning obliviousness. “How can I catch you? I’ll just assist you, OK?”

Tiffany looked down to her knees and realized that she was wearing denim shorts. Oh no, not her legs, they’re important for Tiffany, especially now that the Mr. and Ms. Philopolis Academy beauty contest would be tomorrow. She hurriedly wore the knee pads and hopped on the bicycle.

Jessica held under the seat and readied. “On the count of three, lift your feet off the ground and kick on the pedals, OK? One... two... three!”

Tiffany kicked on the right pedal, then left, but she lost balance so she stopped and put her left foot down as a stand.

“I keep on losing balance!” she complained.

“If you feel you’re going to fall on the left side, move the steering handle to the left side, if you feel you’re going to fall on the right side, move it to the right, and you have to keep pedaling too,” Jessica explained. “OK, try again.”

They tried again and this time, they advanced by five feet.

They continued and Tiffany stumbled many times that she just wanted to give up, but not if Jessica was there that kept on urging her to go on. There are times that Tiffany would just press on the brakes and the bike would suddenly stop, making Jessica’s feet to bump on the back wheel, but she never complained though it hurt, it was Tiffany who kept on complaining.

Jessica doesn’t know why but she liked Tiffany’s smile every time she would reach at least ten feet away from her starting point. She’s unconsciously smiling too. Tiffany’s smiles and eye-smiles were just that contagious.

No more than later, Tiffany could finally balance the bicycle on her own, leaving Jessica standing behind her, watching her back as she cycled off. Jessica couldn’t help but to think that in about a year and a eight months from now, she would just also watch Tiffany’s back as she walked away.

But Tiffany turned around and came back to where she left Jessica, smile almost reaching her ears. It was foolish, and somehow impossible, but Jessica silently wished that Tiffany would do that too after their divorce while having the same smile she's having at the moment. But that was false hope and Jessica knew it very well. She has to let go of it as early as now before she realized that she couldn't.

No matter how hard Jessica tried to stay away from Tiffany, and how thick the lines she drew, she would still cross it without hesitation. Tiffany's just that attractive. Jessica couldn't stand to stay away from her even just for a minute, and it scared her. Feelings for Tiffany were the least thing she wanted to have at the moment, what she needed to have was strength. Enough strength to be able to let go of Tiffany once the time came.

Jessica forced a smile and slightly shook her head to keep herself away from the sad thought. It was hopeless to think such things. So hopeless.

"You can finally ride a bicycle on your own now!" she praised.

Tiffany stopped right in front of her. "Thanks to you!" She laughed but gradually stopped when Jessica just gawked at her.

Tiffany noticed the change on the girl's mood, as if Tiffany's habit of thinking has rubbed off on her. Jessica looked bothered, but still very beautiful.

Like being hypnotized, Tiffany climbed off the bicycle and walked over to Jessica, their toes five inches apart. Slowly, her right hand lifted up and held Jessica's left. She gently jerked Jessica forward and her left hand automatically wrapped around Jessica's body, pressing Jessica hard against her body. Jessica's head surprisingly fitted the nook of her neck.

"Thank you," Tiffany whispered. She could finally let that phrase go easily now, not like before. She wasn't thanking Jessica for teaching her how to ride a bicycle though, it was for something else.

Jessica didn't do anything, she didn't hug back, she didn't talk. She just stayed there, trying to enjoy everything but still slightly holding back. She couldn't afford to be carried away.

Tenderness blinded Tiffany. She breathed in the wholesome, vanilla scent of Jessica's shampoo and treasured silken feel of her hair against the bottom of her chin.

There was no stopping the turn of the world on its axis, no stopping the seconds slipping past like water through Tiffany's fingers, and there was no stopping herself for falling for Jessica. Yeah, she was falling for her—hard and fast and deeper than hell. There was no stopping it.

Tiffany was finally ready to give name to what she was feeling. To what was happening to her. She was falling for her, for gentle, caring, captivating Jessica.

The problem was, she didn't know if she was ready for this. Or more importantly, if Jessica felt this way for her. Jessica never hinted anything.

Any hopes for a future had to be impossible. She'll just keep it to herself and make the most out of the remaining days that she has to spend with Jessica and pretend that she's unconsciously doing it. After all, wasn't lying better than breaking their marriage?

~.~

"Guess who I saw outside your house," Sooyoung said as she took a seat beside Hyoyeon on the black couch in the all-white living room. It was inevitable, Queen's pink color was really obvious even from a far distance.

Hyoyeon tore her eyes away from the eighty-two-inch 3D TV and looked at Sooyoung. "I think I know. It's been a long time that *she* hasn't gone here."

Sooyoung gasped. "You mean... Tiffany has been here before?"

"Yes." Hyoyeon slowly nodded. "When she's practicing for drag racing, she goes here. I've seen her for a couple of times before, sometimes with Taeyeon, but she stopped coming here since she got married."

"Why you didn't tell me?" Sooyoung demanded.

"You know I don't like you seeking for revenge. I'm just supporting you because I want you to be happy. We've agreed that I'll just give everything you need, I won't say anything and you don't have to say anything if you don't want to. That has been our relationship since the beginning." Sadness was audible in Hyoyeon's voice. She obviously wanted more than that.

Sooyoung looked deep into Hyoyeon's dark eyes. It portrayed Hyoyeon very well—dark, mysterious. Despite her eyes being dark, Sooyoung could see the shadows of happiness behind them, something Sooyoung wanted to have. They looked warm too. It's giving Sooyoung an idea of how warm Hyoyeon could be if she wanted.

Hyoyeon has been very honest to her since the beginning. She answered everything Sooyoung asked without hesitation. She said everything she wanted to say-- even her real feelings for Sooyoung. She was like an open book but the language was foreign that no one could understand.

Looking into those dark eyes has unlocked an unfamiliar longing inside Sooyoung. She wanted to know Hyoyeon more, but the older girl kept everything to herself.

"We've been living together for what? Four months? But you know what, Hyo? I feel like I don't know you at all." Sooyoung stood up and tried to walk away but Hyoyeon was fast enough to hold her hand to stop her from going anywhere.

"I'm sorry." Hyoyeon buried her face on Sooyoung's back as she hugged the taller girl from behind. "It's just that I've been alone for almost half of my life that I never learned to properly open up."

"That's why I'm here, Hyo! I'll help you with anything, just ask me!"

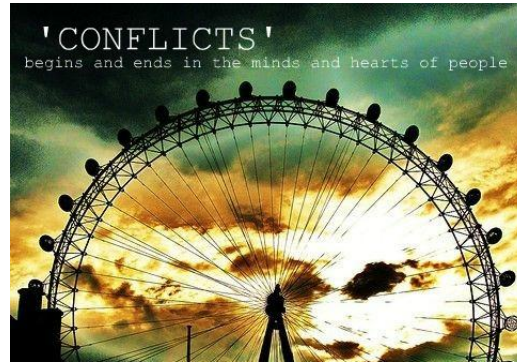
"What if I asked you to love me?" Hyoyeon knew she's being selfish, but she couldn't help it. Sooyoung was that important to her, and if she could steal Sooyoung's attention, maybe she would forget about her revenge.

Sooyoung sighed dejectedly. "You know my father's my priority at the moment. I'm sorry, but I can't." *No matter how much I want to.*

She felt the back of her shirt getting wet. Hyoyeon was crying. But that's the truth. Hyoyeon have known that ever since the beginning, why couldn't she still get over it?

No matter how much it crushed Sooyoung's heart, no matter how hard for her to do it, she slowly removed Hyoyeon's arms around her waist and walked away. She went straight to her room and cried her heart out.

CHAPTER 35: 'CONFLICTS'



CHAPTER 35: 'CONFLICTS'

Tiffany felt extremely light as she climbed down Queen. She felt great, her heart felt light and it seemed like everything's alright. If she knew this would be the result of accepting her feelings, she would have accepted it earlier.

As Tiffany walked over to the passenger's seat to open the door for Jessica, she noticed a familiar car on their garage. A silver car from Im's Automobile with its propellers on each side was parked smugly like a boss, exactly like the owner. The owner of it was not from their house though.

"You don't have to do this," Jessica complained.

"Someone might be watching," Tiffany whispered carefully.

As they walked back inside the house, Tiffany couldn't help it, so she caught up with Jessica and swiftly slid her left hand to hold Jessica's right. When Jessica looked at her, she looked away as if she's innocent.

What's up with this girl? Jessica thought, eyebrows furrowed.

Tiffany glanced at Jessica to check if the girl wasn't looking at her. Seeing Jessica looking straight ahead, she let out a small smile to herself. *I could really get used to this.*

But when they reached the living room, Tiffany's smile dropped. There was Sophia in one of her facial expression that meant serious business. She's rarely serious, so the matter must be very important. She looked exactly the same when she said Tiffany's going to marry Jessica.

"Good evening, Mom," Jessica politely greeted, oblivious of Sophia's serious face.

"Good evening." Sophia forced a smile. "Jessica, can you do me a favor and go straight to your room while I talk to Tiffany?"

“Of course, Mom.” Jessica let out an innocent smile that almost broke Sophia’s heart before walking away.

She rounded the grand staircase and into the hallway that would lead to their room on the first floor of the house, and went straight to their room. She dropped on their comfy bed face first, feeling tired for all the things they did the whole day... but the night was still long.

The door hissed open and Jessica rolled over, anticipating to see Tiffany coming in. But it wasn’t Tiffany. It was a guy. By the looks of him, he seemed taller than Jessica. His masculine body looked well-built in his black Armani suit. Though the room was dark, Jessica could figure out his hair and square eyes were black, his eyebrows were furry, his nose was tall and his lips were kissable.

Jessica immediately stood up. “Who are you?”

The door beeping caught Jessica’s attention. She knew the door was locked from the outside. Her heart started beating fast in fear. She doesn’t want to assume, but there’s just one reason why a man was inside her room, and why the door was locked at this time of the night.

The man bowed politely. “I’m Hwang Chansung. My father is uncle Ernest’s younger brother.”

“What are you doing here?” Jessica slowly backed away though Chansung never took any step away from the door.

“I know you have an idea why, and I’m telling you that it’s right.” Chansung loosened his tie, unbuttoned the top button of his polo and pulled at the collar to loosen it as he took a step closer to Jessica. “Don’t worry, I’m a nice guy.”

Scared, Jessica took steps backward until the back of her knees hit the bed and she instinctively sat down on it.

Chansung removed his black suit, leaving a white long-sleeved polo on, and threw it on the bed, just behind Jessica.

Jessica doesn’t know what to do. She knew this night was coming, but not this sudden. Sophia or Ernest could have told her so she prepared herself, but no, no one said anything. She wanted to run, but, despite the room being spacious, there’s no place to hide. Chansung’s already there, all ready and so much willing, so what could she do?

Chansung sat down beside her and cupped her cheeks. “Have Tiffany ever told you you’re beautiful?”

Jessica flinched under his touch, but there’s no escaping this.

Chansung started leaning forward and Jessica just closed her eyes.

Whatever happened that night would remain a secret between them two.

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"Follow me," Sophia said seriously after Jessica disappeared on the second floor and walked pass Tiffany.

Tiffany hesitantly followed. The moment they entered the hallway that would lead them to the back of the house, Tiffany already knew where they were going-- to the most secluded room in their house where the histories of their ancestors are kept like they're in a museum.

And she was right.

Sophia went straight in front of the farthest wall of the room where there was a long mahogany table pressed against the wall. On top of the table were a hundred pictures of the old Hwangs --the first ones are hand-drawn and the latest ones are pictures-- that took over their company, all males for they are all first born, and Tiffany knew her picture was next on the line-- the only female first born.

"Ernest and I are growing old, Tiffany. We're afraid that sooner, we wouldn't be able to work anymore," Sophia started as she walked over to the last picture, Ernest's, and before it was Tiffany's grandfather, Daniel Hwang. Sophia picked up Daniel's picture. "We've promised to father that were not going to leave this world without someone that would take over the company after you."

"Is this about a grandchild, Mom?" Tiffany asked.

"Yes, it is." Sophia put the picture down and rested her hand on the table, holding for support because she knew Tiffany's outburst would be coming soon. "Honey, we don't want to do this, but this is what we have to do. This is the family's tradition."

Tiffany's hands turned into fists. She already has a guess what Sophia was talking about, but she doesn't know who. Her or Jessica?

"Who?" Tiffany braced for the answer.

Sophia sighed before biting her lower lip. She couldn't afford to say it. Everyone would be affected, Tiffany, Jessica, Ernest and Sophia, but she has to do this.

Sophia looked away. "Jessica."

"WHAT?!" Tiffany screamed. "Why her?! Why not me?!"

"You can't. We had to fix the unexpected differ of you being a female, so the male has to be Hwang's first born to ensure the child's bloodline and gender. You can't conceive a child with your own cousin."

That explained it. Even a test tube baby was not allowed for it was important that the child has the Hwang's blood and genes. And their family was very traditional to even think of test tube baby in the first place.

Tiffany remembered the familiar car on their garage. "Is it... is it Chansung?"

Hwang Chansung was Tiffany's cousin on the father side. His father was Ernest's younger brother, Jeremiah, but older than Taeyeon's mom, Cristy. Chansung wasn't very nice to Tiffany. They've been rivals ever since childhood, but he never won against Tiffany.

"Yes."

Tiffany bit her lower lip hard before scoffing. "So this is why you've been prompting me to touch her? So that I--the wife-- have already touched her before anyone else does?"

Sophia ducked her head down before nodding.

"MOM!" Tiffany bellowed. Her breathing was already ragged, and she felt like crying. "I don't agree with this. NO! She's mine, and no one's going to touch her, especially if it's Chansung!"

"It's too late. They're probably at it by now," Sophia whispered.

"I'm so sick and tired of you and Dad planning everything for me!!! This is my future we're talking about here! Are you the one who's going to suffer if you chose the wrong thing!? From now on, Mom --listen to me and remember everything-- I will be planning for myself, and you're not going to stop me!!"

Tiffany stormed out of the room. Sophia lifted up her hand to grab Tiffany's hand, but she hit Daniel's picture instead, sending it sprawled on the floor, glass cracked.

The noise it created filled the room, and then stillness.

Sophia just stood there, looking at Daniel's picture on the floor, wondering if she did the right thing. She slowly knelt and lifted up Daniel's picture. She turned it around, and read Daniel's favorite quotation written at the back with his own familiar cursive writing. Sophia already knew that quotation. She knew it very well by heart.

Believe with all your heart

Sophia pressed the picture against her chest as she sobbed. "I'm believing, Father... with all my heart... that this is the right thing to do."

Leo sat dejectedly on the last step of their front portico, deep in thought. He couldn't seem to get Sunny out of his mind lately, and living at the same house with her, seeing her everyday, made it more impossible. He's so in love with the wrong person under the wrong circumstances and at the wrong time.

He looked up at the dark sky, only few stars are out, as he enjoyed the fresh, cold breeze that brushed against him. He felt as if it carried the hurt he's feeling away with it.

The sound of chains running on gears cut through his thoughts. He looked down and stared at their huge, golden front gate. It was at least a kilometer away from him, but he could see a short girl climbing down a bicycle. She's not wearing anything fancy, just casual clothes, but Leo was sure that it was Taeyeon. She seemed to be waiting for someone.

As if that someone heard his wondering thoughts, the front door slowly creaked open, and he stood up in alarm. It was Sunny.

Sunny cupped her mouth when she saw Leo. Screaming at this time of the night would be the last thing she wanted to do. "Gosh, Sir Leo, you scared me." She rested her hand on her chest.

"Sorry," Leo simply said before lowering his head. He just couldn't look at Sunny for a long time.

An awkward silence enveloped them.

Sunny never imagined that she would be caught by Leo tonight. Taeyeon and her have wanted to do this for a long time. Just the two of them alone, outside the Hwang's residence, without her bosses knowing. But she's caught, and to make it worse, it was Leo who caught her.

A flying car's humming engine rang through the silent air. They both looked up and Leo recognized the car. It was Queen.

"Is that Miss Tiffany? It's already eight in the evening, where is she going?" Sunny asked herself.

Leo sighed. "Go ahead, Sunny. Taeyeon noona's waiting for you outside."

Sunny blushed in embarrassment and just stayed on her place, head ducked down.

"Don't worry. Your secret is safe with me. Go ahead before she freezes from cold there." Leo jerked his head to the direction of their front gate.

"Thank you, Sir." Sunny bowed before jogging away.

Leo just looked at her retreating back, not knowing what to do. He wanted to run after her, hug her, tell her he loved her, but he couldn't. Sunny loved Taeyeon, there's no Leo in the picture. He would just make everything even complicated than it already was for the two.

His heart crushed when Sunny hugged Taeyeon, but a few pieces still remained intact. He knew his place, he couldn't get in between the two, so he needed to keep a firm grip on his heart to keep it whole.

He stayed standing there until Taeyeon and Sunny left, listening to his own heartbeat that kept on telling him to fight for Sunny, and his mind arguing that he shouldn't.

He knew he wouldn't be able to sleep again tonight.

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"Taeng, where are we going?" Sunny asked as she kept a firm hug around the girl's waist while sitting behind her bicycle.

Taeyeon has been cycling for more than thirty minutes now. They've already turned a couple of turns and Sunny couldn't see anything other than trees, empty road and cliff. She doesn't even know that a place like this *still* existed.

"Someplace Tiffany and I used to go to." Taeyeon sounded breathless. Probably from cycling too much and the sloping road just made it harder.

"Taeng, stop," Sunny requested and Taeyeon hesitantly did. "I know you're already tired. I can walk for a while." Sunny climbed down and started walking.

Taeyeon also climbed down and started pushing the bicycle. She caught up with Sunny, but Sunny, being the playful girl she was, slightly jogged ahead, leaving Taeyeon behind.

"Yah, Sunny! Don't leave me! You're not even familiar with this place!" Taeyeon called after Sunny as she, too, started jogging while pushing the bicycle, but Sunny ran faster.

"The road's just straight, there are no turns, so I'm assuming that we'll just go ahead. Catch me if you can!" Sunny started running away, her laughter echoing around the quiet place.

Taeyeon stopped on her tracks when she saw a glimpse of light seeped through the trees not far ahead, on the direction of the curve of the road Sunny was aiming. She's sure that the only house in this place was still far, and there are no one going in this place other than Tiffany and her.

Oh shit!

Taeyeon let go of the bike and ran after Sunny, too frantic to even think of climbing back up on it. “Sunny! Stop!”

Sunny stopped, turned around and faced her. “What? Can’t catch up on me?” She smiled playfully.

Taeyeon glanced at the light again, it seemed to be approaching close... and fast... behind Sunny.

Taeyeon ran as fast as she could. “SUNNY!”

Sunny’s beautiful smile was the last thing Taeyeon saw before a blinding flash of light.

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“AAAAHHHHH!” Tiffany slammed her fist on Queen’s steering wheel and continued sobbing. She’s so sick and tired of everything. Of following her parents. Of being weak. Of not being able to stop what’s happening to Chansung and Jessica at the moment. Of her life. She’s sick and tired of all this.

She wished she could just remove her heart so she wouldn’t feel so much pain. She just accepted to herself that she loved Jessica, and this was what happened? She felt as if fate was playing with her. Everything’s just so ridiculous.

She couldn’t even properly see the road because of the tears that’s blurring her vision, but she pressed harder on the gas, wanting to fly off the cliff and end all her sufferings.

But she suddenly caught a glimpse of a silhouette ahead.

With the speed she’s going, it was impossible not to hit that thing, but she pressed hard on the break while hoping that she pressed it at the right time. Her body jerked forward that her head almost hit the steering wheel if not for her arms that immediately shielded her face.

Four screeching tires.

Two loud thuds.

And then there’s only Tiffany’s fast heartbeat.

She hesitantly looked up and saw a girl’s body ten feet away from her bumper. She gasped. “Oh shit.”

She climbed down in panic and kneeled next to the girl. There’s so much blood everywhere, even on her car.

“SUNNY!” a shout called Tiffany’s attention and she looked at the direction of the voice.

“Taeyeon?”

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Taeyeon anxiously waited outside the huge metal doors of the Scorchwood Medical Hospital’s emergency room that’s separating her from the girl she loved. She covered her face with her hands and continued crying helplessly. She prayed to whoever would hear her first to not let anything bad happen to Sunny. If something did, she thought she’s going to die.

Sunny’s appearance in her life has been unexpected. Taeyeon never knew that she would find what’s missing in her life that day when she went to visit Tiffany after her wedding. She have been living alone in her flat then, she’s used to being alone, but when Sunny came, that all changed. She wanted to be next to her all the time, and not let her out of her sight.

Especially now. Now that Sunny’s inside that room, fighting for her life, Taeyeon realized how important Sunny was to her. She couldn’t live without her.

They haven’t been together for so long, and now this happened?

“Taeng...” Tiffany put a hand on the girl’s shaking shoulders. Her cheeks had trails of dried tears in them. She doesn’t have any tears to cry anymore.

Taeyeon harshly slapped her hand away and glared at her with her teary eyes. “Don’t touch me!”

“Taeng...” Tiffany’s lips started to quiver. “I – I – I’m sorry.”

“Tiffany, I swear, even if you’re my favorite cousin, if something bad happened to my girlfriend, I’ll never forgive you!”

“G-girlfriend? Isn’t she one of our servants?” Tiffany asked carefully.

“Yes, she is, and she’s my girlfriend.” Taeyeon stood up and started walking back and forth in anxiousness.

“Taeng... I- I didn’t saw her.” A tear escaped Tiffany’s eye and the rest followed. She knew she wouldn’t be able to stand alone anymore if Taeyeon would be angry with her too. Everyone that’s important to her have already left her. Her parents, Jessica... and now, Taeyeon? The whole world might as well just leave her too.

“Dammit Tiffany! Just shut the hell up! Your sorry wouldn’t take anything back! That wouldn’t rewind what happened and that couldn’t make Sunny better!” Taeyeon bellowed as she continued to cry.

Tiffany started trembling and she found it hard to breathe. Taeyeon has never said such harsh words to her before. It totally crushed her heart.

"T-taeng... it was an... accident," she sobbed harder.

She felt like the whole world was crushing down around her. All of the problems just have to appear now all at the same time and she doesn't know what to do. Her mind's in a wreck, her heart's broken, and her body felt beaten up. She felt hopeless, but not faithless. She still prayed in her heart, that this was just a dream, and soon she would wake up.

She found it awkward to find herself praying. She has never done this before, but right now, she doesn't have anyone to hold on to but God. It was a desperate call, the last lifeline she has. And she prayed for this all to end.

Tiffany's body felt tired, and she's starting to take in short breathes. All at once, the exhaustion settled over her beaten-up body, her eyes drooped down and she slumped on the floor lifelessly.

"Tiffany? Tiffany?!"

Tiffany fainted.

The Hwang family:



*Tiffany would inherit "Tiffany & Co."

*TaeYeon would not inherit their family's business ("Urban Mall") because her older brother would

CHAPTER 36: 'RUN'



CHAPTER 36: 'RUN'

Jessica tossed and turned on the bed, careful to not awake Chansung who's fast asleep beside her-- on Tiffany's side of the bed. She couldn't help but feel like she cheated. In a sense, yes, it was cheating, because she's married with Tiffany and now she's here with Chansung, but she couldn't understand why her heart twitched, as if Tiffany has ties to it and was constantly pulling at it.

She made a final turn and faced the ceiling, thinking what Tiffany might be feeling at the moment. Jessica assumed that maybe she's fine, not thinking about anything but herself, just like how everything was from the start. Maybe Tiffany's sleeping peacefully somewhere, waiting for Chansung to leave the house tomorrow so she could move back to her own room but without furiously changing all of the covers and sheets first, like Chansung has some kind of a transferrable disease.

Jessica smiled slightly, as if too much of the action would hurt her heart. She doesn't know that in just a few months she'll know Tiffany to the core to be able to say such thing. It actually wasn't that she knew Tiffany very well, she just assumed, but she would never assume that Tiffany was out there somewhere, crying, or at least affected with whatever that happened to Jessica and Chansung.

She tensed when Chansung moved to a comfortable position. A second later, Chansung didn't moved again, and his breathing was even-- he's back to slumber, and Jessica sighed in relief. She silently wished it was Tiffany who was beside her. It was the least she could do --to wish but not hope. It was just merely impossible.

Suddenly, her hand phone on the night stand vibrated. She immediately grabbed it and raised an eyebrow when she realized it was Leo who sent her a message.

From: Leo
Noona, we're going somewhere.

The moment she finished reading the message, the door beeped. It was unlocked. *I thought only Sophia has the key card to our door?*

Jessica carefully stood up, wore outdoor clothes and ran out of the room with her shoes in hand. If she would wear it, it would just create noises.

She almost bumped into Leo when she stepped out of the room. He was standing right in front of the door.

“Gosh, Leo, you scared me.”

Jessica studied Leo. He looked like a zombie with his emotionless eyes and dark circles around them.

“Are you having any sleep lately?”

“It doesn’t matter. There’s an emergency. Taeyeon noona contacted me and she said Tiffany noona’s in a hospital,” Leo whispered.

“What?!” Jessica hissed, cautious to not awake everyone in the house.

“Let’s go.” Leo grabbed her hand and pulled her in a hurry.

Jessica almost toppled over Leo as they hurried down the stairs of the front porch, her foot tripping over her other foot. Thankfully, despite Leo being young, he was strong enough to hold Jessica firmly with his square hand and strong arm, but that didn’t stop Jessica from kneeling unsteadily on the step of the stairs, her right shin throbbing as it just hit the corner of the step.

“Noona, are you okay?” Jessica couldn’t really help but find him very admirable with the sound of his soft voice and his comforting brown eyes that finally showed an emotion—worry. It kind of reminded Jessica of Tiffany’s own brown eyes.

“Yeah, I-I’m fine.” Jessica forced herself to stand up, his right shin still aching but chose to ignore.

Jessica realized that Leo was leading her to the garage, and once they were there, he handed her the key of one of the flying cars parked in the spacious garage. “That’s for the gray one. That third car from the corner.” He pointed as Jessica wore her doll shoes. “You drive it why I roll up the cover of the exit. We can’t open the roof, it would wake everyone up. Try not to be so noisy,” he ordered and he ran to the roll-up metal cover of the exit as Jessica started the said car.

Once Jessica was out at the back of the huge house, Leo rolled down the cover and hopped on the passenger’s side.

“What hospital?” Jessica anxiously asked, eager to press the gas though her right shin still ached.

“Scorchwood Medical Hospital.”

It was a ten-minute drive from there, but Jessica knew if she would hurry, it would be less.

Her right shin twitched when she floored the gas, but ignored. She just focused ahead, eager to get to Tiffany and see if she's safe.

"Noona, I know what happened inside your room," Leo said after a minute of silence. He has rounded the whole house at least thrice to tire himself so he could fall asleep, but that didn't work. He did catch a glimpse of Jessica and Chansung in their room, since the blinds weren't closed.

Jessica glanced at the boy before focusing on driving again. There are no hints of anything malicious in his face and voice, in fact, he's so calm. *How can he be so calm at times like this?*

Jessica sighed. "Leo, just... please don't tell Tiffany... or anyone." Her knuckles were white from gripping the steering wheel tightly. She's so ashamed of herself.

"I never planned on telling anyone, Noona. I know that you should tell Tiffany noona yourself. I don't have the rights to intervene with you two."

"Thanks for understanding, Leo. You're such a nice *man*." There was a hint of fondness in Jessica's voice.

Leo looked at Jessica in surprise, because surely he's not a man yet, he's still a boy. A boy that understood situations like this from reading books and watching romantic movies. But still, he's thankful that Jessica could see through him, and knew that there's more inside his little body and young mind to what everyone thought. If he's not yet in love with Sunny, he would have fallen in love with Jessica instead.

"But, Noona, you have to explain everything soon."

Jessica sighed. She's not sure if she would lie to Leo or not. She doesn't have any choice. "I will, Leo. I will."

It was a lie.

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Leo walked back and forth in front of his older sister's hospital room. It has been an hour since they arrived, and since Jessica came inside and haven't gone out yet. The nurse that aided Tiffany said that it was just fatigue. She would wake up soon, depends on her. They asked who sent Tiffany there and the nurse said the girl introduced herself as Tiffany's cousin. It was Taeyeon. But she's nowhere to be found at the moment.

Leo wanted to put something in his ears to block out the weeping sound running down the quiet and dimly-lit hallway of the hospital. It seemed to be coming from a room not far from Tiffany's room, and it was giving him goosebumps. It sounded very rueful, almost grieving.

Unable to still himself, he walked pass Tiffany's room, and carefully checked the next doors for the source of the sound, and he saw the third door from Tiffany's room ajar, the sound coming from there. He peeked in and felt a shiver ran up his spine, anger coming along with it.

So this was where Taeyeon has been all the time.

"T-Taeyeon Noona?"

Hearing her name being called, Taeyeon's head snapped up from its position on Sunny's bed, beside the unconscious girl's left hand.

"Leo?" Taeyeon asked as she stood up from the chair beside Sunny's bed. She momentarily stopped crying.

She has intended of keeping Sunny's condition from Leo. Guess fate has its own plan.

"What happened to her?" His voice sounded accusing, intimidating Taeyeon.

Taeyeon looked over her shoulder, to Sunny who's sleeping with different tubes and machines connected to different parts of her body, a white bandage wrapped around her head, and a white cement-like cast keeping her broken hip bones down to her toes in place.

The car's hit has been bad, really bad that Sunny hasn't woken up since she arrived at the hospital and she still has to stay there for six months to totally heal her broken hip bones and a few ribs, and two dozen scratches on her elbows, arms, and even on her beautiful face.

"Leo, let me explain." Taeyeon pulled Leo out of the room and closed the door behind her. Leo harshly jerked his hand off Taeyeon's hold and glared at the older girl, keeping all the anger down his throat.

Taeyeon took his silence as a cue to explain. "She ran away from me. You know she's very playful, she wanted me to run after her. And then I saw the car and ran after her. I tried to warn her, or jerk her away from her place before the car arrived. But I was too late. The car's going too fast and wasn't able to see Sunny. Leo, I'm sorry." She started crying again.

"I only asked one thing from you in exchange to *my everything*, Noona. Why aren't you able to do it?!" Leo hissed behind gritted teeth, tears brimming in the corners of his eyes.

"Leo, I tried..." she said helplessly.

"Didn't I tell you to take care of her?! If you can't do it, I'll do it!!" His voice was gradually increasing.

"It was an accident! Leo, please... don't... don't take her away from me... I'll die," Taeyeon sobbed.

Leo took a deep breath to calm himself. "Tell me who hit her," he whispered.

Taeyeon swallowed hard. “Tiffany.” He didn’t miss the sound of hatred in her voice.

Leo felt numb. Of all the people, why his own sister? He never imagined that his own blood relative would push Sunny, the girl he most dearly loved, to the verge of death. And now Taeyeon hated Tiffany. Why did everything suddenly become so complicated?

“Leo... I’m sorry...” Taeyeon continued sobbing as she sat on the floor, her jittery legs couldn’t carry her weight anymore.

“If Tiffany noona would ask for your forgiveness are you going to give it?” Leo put his shaking hands inside his pockets.

Taeyeon didn’t answer for the next two minutes. Leo knew she hated Tiffany so much.

He sighed. “Noona...” Taeyeon felt warm that Leo still respected him after everything. “You said it was an accident... do you think Tiffany noona saw this would happen?”

Taeyeon shook her head.

“It was an accident, no one expected this, but why are you blaming her?”

Taeyeon couldn’t say anything. Leo has a point, but she still wouldn’t want to forgive Tiffany just like that. She almost killed Sunny, how could Taeyeon forgive her? Taeyeon suddenly realized that it was the same as what Leo was feeling, except that his hatred was for Taeyeon and not for Tiffany. They’re feeling the same for different persons.

Leo felt his heart slowly crushing, and he couldn’t stop it. He knew he has to sacrifice again, for the sake of the three girls important in his life—Tiffany, Sunny and Taeyeon. He doesn’t want to forgive Taeyeon either, but he would gladly do it if it would repair Tiffany and Taeyeon’s relationship.

“Taeyeon noona...” He turned his back to Taeyeon. “Consider yourself forgiven the moment you’ve forgiven my sister.”

Leo walked away, leaving invisible trails of his broken glass-like heart behind, gleaming from the hallway’s dim light.

~.~

The morning came. It wasn’t just a simple morning though, today was Jessica’s fencing competition and Tiffany’s beauty contest. Tiffany has been sleeping for a long time in the hospital. The midnight’s happenings really tired her off.

Tiffany narrowed her eyes at the brightness of the room, the sun seeping from the opened window above her head was keeping her skin warm. She didn't panic, thinking about the contest later, she knew it was still early by the warmth of the sun. She still has a few hours to waste.

The moment her eyes finally adjusted with the brightness, the door opened and Jessica came in. She was very slightly limping.

Everything that happened suddenly came in torrent inside Tiffany's head without warning. She looked away from Jessica to the other side of the room, keeping a scoff from coming out of her mouth.

"You're sore?" For Tiffany, it was just the same as asking "Had a rough night?"

I knew Chansung's never been gentle.

Jessica simply pushed aside the question. "Did you like the sun's warmth? I know you've always liked the morning sun."

Of course. It was Jessica who opened the window. She always does that every morning, opening the blinds to their room's floor-to-ceiling window for Tiffany to feel the sun.

"Why are you here?"

Jessica looked down, noticing Tiffany's cold voice. "Taeyeon contacted Leo, and he asked me to go with him."

"Why are you *still* here?"

"I..." Jessica doesn't really know but still came up with a reason. "I wanted to wait for you to wake up."

"I'm awake now. You can leave."

"Don't you want me to give you a ride back ho—"

"Just leave!" Tiffany yelled and Jessica flinched.

Jessica took a deep breath. "OK." She took a step closer to Tiffany and cupped her right cheek.

Tiffany instinctively gripped the blanket on her lap but didn't do anything to stop Jessica when she kissed her forehead before limping out of the room.

Tiffany stared sadly at the closed door, trying to fool herself that this was what they should have been ever since the beginning—far from each other. Wasn't this what she wanted that's why she made the contract? To keep Jessica away from her. But why was it that *she* wanted to be close to Jessica every second of the day?

Even now that she knew Jessica slept with her own cousin.

That didn't lessen her love for the girl. But that made Tiffany keeping herself away from Jessica. No matter how much she doesn't want to, she has to, to save her heart that's nearing its death.

In the end, the Tiffany Hwang that was once so selfish has turned into the Tiffany Hwang that was so selfless because of one Jessica Jung-Hwang.

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Tiffany knew she was looking at her reflection in the mirror inside her and Siwon's shared dressing room, a set of hands busy with her make-up and another set busy with her hair, but she wasn't seeing anything. Everything's blurred and her mind has drifted off somewhere. Probably to a certain girl that she's trying to run away from.

A familiar warmth that reminded her of the morning sun's warmth suddenly draped over her right hand and broke through her trance. She looked down at her hand that was resting on the arm of the chair she's sitting on, another hand atop it. She knew that ring very well, it matched the one she has on her own left ring finger. Her eyes traveled up the arm of the owner until she met Jessica's soft eyes.

Jessica smiled, almost breaking Tiffany's heart. "Good luck." She squeezed Tiffany's hand once before leaving.

Tiffany closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *Please... don't run after me. I might do something stupid... like turn around and come back.*

~.~

Jessica sighed for the nth time that day. The whole day's activity has been very tiring. She fought with 121 delegates from all over the world all in just one day. She looked out of the window as Butler Han busied himself with driving.

The city lights below them looked soothing in the eyes, and yet it did nothing to sooth Jessica's worry. She looked over the tall buildings, to the sky. The stars did nothing to help Jessica either. She looked at the tall trophy beside her, and she slightly smiled. At least knowing that she won as a champion all for Tiffany somehow soothed her feelings.

She grabbed the trophy and rested it on her lap. The square base was thick glass with her name engraved on it, then there were four golden columns on the four corners of the base, atop the columns were another plane of thin glass, and the top was a small golden doll of a man in a fighting stance, right hand stretched all the way out with a foil.

Jessica wondered what happened to Tiffany's beauty contest. She hasn't had time to call earlier because she's too focused on the competition.

She couldn't remember when was the last time she stayed this long far away from Tiffany. It felt unbearable, that's why she decided to pass by the school's coliseum first before heading home to see if Tiffany's still there.

Once they arrived at the coliseum, she saw Mr. Baek's designated car parked outside. She ordered Butler Han to head home first and change all the covers and sheets in their room and flip the bed on the other side before heading to the dressing room. She wouldn't want Tiffany to notice any hint of Chansung being in their room last night though she probably already knew it.

Jessica went straight to the dressing rooms and realized that the whole place was already empty. The contest must have ended thirty minutes ago and all the audience and contestants have already left. She saw Yoona, Yuri and Seohyun standing beside the door of Tiffany and Siwon's shared dressing room. All quiet and looking sad.

"Guys."

The three girls put a finger on their lips before pulling Jessica away from the room.

"What happened?" Jessica couldn't take their silence anymore.

Yoona sighed. "She lost over Summer."

"What? How?"

"She looked bothered. She tripped a couple of times, she danced the wrong dance steps and she wasn't able to answer in the Q&A portion. She kept staring into nothing as if her mind's not at the place," Yuri stated her observations.

"Where is she?" Jessica demanded.

"Crying in her dressing room..."

Jessica walked away but Seohyun was fast enough to hold her wrist before continuing, "...with Siwon."

Jessica gritted her teeth. She doesn't know why she hadn't expected Siwon would be there. It was to be expected, but she didn't. Maybe she's just too busy worrying about Tiffany to think about anyone else.

"You go ahead, guys. I'll take care of her."

With an understanding nod of their heads, the three left.

Jessica walked over to Tiffany's dressing room and stood in front of the opened door. The first sound she heard were Tiffany's sobs and it broke her heart. Tiffany was seated on one of the chairs in the room, face buried in her lap, and Siwon was standing beside her, rubbing her back comfortingly.

Jessica would have hated Siwon right then and there, but she didn't. Instead, she was thankful that Siwon was there. He never left Tiffany's side ever since the end of the competition, proving how gentleman he was.

Siwon felt her presence and looked at the door, eyes meeting Jessica's. He put a finger against his lips before motioning Jessica to move closer.

Jessica did. Carefully taking noiseless steps as to not let Tiffany know that she's there. If Tiffany knew, she would just push Jessica away again.

Siwon continued rubbing Tiffany's back up and down as he grabbed Jessica's left wrist with his free hand. He waited for a perfect timing to put Jessica's hand in exchange to his. Jessica uneasily rubbed Tiffany's back as Siwon stepped away, giving way to Jessica so she could stand next to Tiffany.

Siwon intended to walk out of the room as fast as possible, but Jessica tapped his wide shoulder and he looked back only to meet Jessica's thankful smile. He smiled back in return before nodding and leaving.

That moment, Jessica completely admired him.

Jessica stared at Tiffany's back, heaving up in down with her sobs as her snivels filled Jessica's ears and bounced at the walls of her skull. Jessica cried with her. But without shedding tears. Tiffany's state totally saddened her.

Tiffany was too busy crying at her loss to even notice the hand that's rubbing her back had turned smaller and much warmer and that her sobs accompanied someone else's.

WARNING: CAUTION-- WOMEN AT WORK. CHOKING HAZARD. KEEP OUT OF READ OF CHILDREN. THE FOLLOWING SCENES ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR KIDS UP TO 15 Y/O. STRONG PARENTAL GUIDANCE. AND WHATEVER WARNINGS YOU COULD EVER THINK OF.

CHAPTER 37: 'MISTAKE'



CHAPTER 37: 'MISTAKE'

Everyone knew that it was improper to eavesdrop, even Seohyun knew that herself, but she couldn't help it. Yoona and Yuri have already left thirty minutes ago and she was left on the coliseum's backstage, waiting for her personal butler. She was supposed to head out, if not for Summer and Hyoyeon's intriguing conversation inside Summer's dressing room.

And now, she found herself standing beside their partly closed door, back resting against the wall while listening at the two's conversation.

"Don't you feel bad, Sooyoung?" It was that girl Summer introduced to them a couple of days ago—Kim Hyoyeon.

"Didn't I tell you to not call me that in public?" Summer's voice sounded different than the usual sweet one Seohyun was accustomed to. "And why would I feel bad?"

Seohyun heard Hyoyeon loudly sighed through her mouth. "Even I feel bad. She looked so devastated."

Summer scoffed. "Tiffany deserves more than that."

Seohyun couldn't take it anymore. It was just so wrong. She's listening to other people's conversation and her conscience couldn't take it. And to make it worse, what she's hearing was a part of Summer and Hyoyeon's evil scheme against Tiffany.

She silently sashayed away from the place and walked out of the coliseum, to the parking lot, all the while thinking: *Sooyoung? Sooyoung... Summer, who are you?*

~.~

Jessica nervously walked out of the bathroom after a much needed refreshing shower, thinking about what she's about to do. She sat on her legs on the bed, facing Tiffany who was lying flat with her face down on the bed.

Butler Han did change the sheets, but Jessica couldn't help but find it weird that the usual pink covers were now changed into red silk. The bed cover, pillow covers, and even the blanket was red-colored silk, feeling so smooth against Jessica's skin.

"Tiffany?" Jessica quietly called.

"Hmm," Tiffany mumbled, consciousness way too far from sleeping though her energy felt drained.

"Are you tired?"

Tiffany simply nodded, too tired to even talk.

"Do you want me to give you a massage? It can help you to fall asleep faster."

Tiffany pondered first. She's not comfortable having Jessica's hands roaming all over her back, but did nothing to stop the girl when she moved closer and started massaging her back without waiting for her permission.

Tiffany couldn't help but find the warmth emitting from Jessica's hands familiar and comforting. Earlier, when she stopped crying in her dressing room, she discovered that it wasn't Siwon who was beside her anymore, but Jessica. She didn't know how it happened, but she was undeniably glad that it was Jessica.

No words were exchanged in between them as they went home. They busied themselves with thinking, Tiffany about everything that happened yesterday and today, and Jessica about how she could make everything feel fair for Tiffany.

Tiffany gritted her teeth when Jessica's hands traveled down her waist, keeping herself from squirming. That was one of her most sensitive spots.

Jessica felt her muscles tensed though, so she immediately removed her hands. "What's wrong?"

"It's ticklish," Tiffany mumbled against the pillow, silently thankful that her face was buried on the pillow.

Jessica slightly chuckled before rubbing Tiffany's back again, gradually applying some pressure on the spot where she knew muscles are more stiffed than the others—the sides of her spinal bone, her hip bone, and in between her shoulders blades.

Tiffany bit her lower lip to stop herself from whimpering when Jessica gently applied some pressure on her shoulders, close to her nape. It just felt good. She could hardly contain herself when Jessica's hands rubbed down to her hips. She hastily flipped herself up and caught Jessica's wrists.

"Stop before I..." Tiffany doesn't know what's next. There's just something inside her that woke up from Jessica's touches and she's afraid that it might eat Jessica whole if she wouldn't stop anytime sooner.

"Before what?" Jessica hinted on her voice that knew what Tiffany was talking about. It was actually her plan to arouse Tiffany's libido with her massages so she wouldn't feel guilty when it comes to her matters with Chansung. Tiffany and Chansung would be fair if something would happen to her and Tiffany.

Feeling like Jessica was playing with her, Tiffany jerked Jessica's arms until the girl toppled on top of her. Jessica's voice obviously hinted that she knew whatever Tiffany was talking about, and Tiffany doesn't want anyone playing with her. Two could play this game.

Looking down into Tiffany's lustful eyes, Jessica found herself slowly backpedalling. For the last minute, she realized that she wasn't ready yet so she tried to pry her wrists off of Tiffany's firm grip. She succeeded, but Tiffany only let go of her wrists to wrap her arms around Jessica's waist.

"T-Tiffany... let go." Jessica could clearly see Tiffany's gleaming eyes though the room was dark.

"Jessi, your body feels warm. Are you fertile?" Tiffany mentally smirked when Jessica looked away. They both knew Jessica was losing.

Jessica struggled out of Tiffany's embrace and Tiffany let her... just so she can exchange their position. Once Jessica has lain down on her side of the bed, Tiffany rolled over on top of her.

"What? Isn't this what you want?" Tiffany whispered hotly on the girl's right ear.

Earlier, yes, that was what Jessica wanted. But thinking about it now, she knew she couldn't do it yet. This was a huge step they're taking, and to think they shouldn't even take it. Ever.

"This isn't what I want."

"Too bad... because this is what *I want*," Tiffany breathed.

Jessica couldn't say no to that.

"T-Tiffany." Jessica's breathing was becoming ragged.

Jessica's helpless calls just encouraged Tiffany more. There was no stopping the monster from coming out of Tiffany. She moved her left leg in between Jessica's parted ones. Jessica tried to push Tiffany off but the girl caught her wrists once again and pinned her hands down on the mattress.

Tiffany rolled her hips down, putting all her weight down onto Jessica so she could pin her down. Jessica struggled to remove her hands but to no avail. It's awkward, they way Jessica felt under Tiffany. Different, having a woman against her. Chest brushing against another chest. But she doesn't mind it.

"What are you doing to me?" Tiffany asked, almost pleading.

Jessica shut her eyes tightly when Tiffany kissed her exposed neck straight to the back of her ear while inhaling deeply at the same time, sending shiver up her spine. Her heart started beating at the speed of light as her hands instinctively turned into tight fists. She doesn't want to do this, and yet a part of her really wanted it.

"Tiffany..." It sounded like a desperate cry, but that wouldn't stop Tiffany from moving, in fact, it just encouraged her more.

She searched for a sensitive spot on Jessica's neck. She licked it first before gently sucking.

"Tiffa—"

Tiffany harshly shut her off with her lips. "Stop talking," she whispered.

"Tiffany, oh, this is not good," Jessica breathed. But even as she spoke the words, she moved against Tiffany, lifting her chin and seeking her kiss. She's losing a hold of herself.

Tiffany felt Jessica's arms loosened up and assumed that it's safe to remove her hold on Jessica. She tugged Jessica's hair instead, and her left hand on the girl's thigh that was near her waist.

She kissed Jessica's lips again. It was chapped and rough. It just encouraged her to kiss Jessica roughly. More roughly than she used to kiss the guys she has made out with. She licked it once, trying to wet it, but Jessica misunderstood it as a plead to enter so she opened her mouth. Tiffany's all too willing to come in.

Jessica felt uncomfortable, feeling Tiffany touching her in different places. She's too aware of them and couldn't enjoy it the way she should. She wanted to be moderate and noninterventionist, to not just give damn about whatever they were doing. But this was her first time and it meant everything to her.

Though she's giving out a good performance, Tiffany was actually nervous. It wasn't because she's afraid. It might just be arrogance, but she's sure that they would figure it out later on. Maybe sex between her and Jessica couldn't be so bad.

Jessica gritted her teeth to stop a moan from coming out when Tiffany's hand slid down inside her pajama pants. She stopped Tiffany's hands from going further as she momentarily kept her lips away from Tiffany's to talk. "Tiffany, I'm... I'm scared."

"Trust me, OK? Just tell me where it feels good."

Then Tiffany's kissing her full in the mouth. It really felt different, having a woman under her. It's just too soft, too feminine, not like the masculine and firm ones she's used to. But then she realized, if she found it weird, how much more Jessica?

Tiffany's mouth felt warm, Jessica realized for the first time. They're kissing more roughly than earlier and yet none of them were bothered with the clashing of teeth and tangles of tongues. Only then that Jessica finally felt comfortable, and Tiffany's nervousness vanished.

Jessica was almost disappointed when Tiffany straddled to strip off her top and threw it off the bed while commanding the blinds to close. The room just suddenly turned hot, and dark. Tiffany went back to Jessica's mouth as her hands busied themselves with unbuttoning Jessica's pajama top. She was taking it slow, one by one unfastening the buttons.

Jessica grew impatient of Tiffany's slow hands so she pushed Tiffany away by the shoulders, their lips parting with a wet plop. "What's taking you so long?" She hastily unbuttoned her pajama top and threw it on the floor.

Tiffany hadn't had enough time to enjoy the private view of Jessica's tight abs and well built body when Jessica's right arm went back around her neck, left arm wrapped around her waist, and captured her lips once again while taking Tiffany down with her back on the bed.

Tiffany's body isn't bad, Jessica realized once their bodies came in contact. It was one of a goddess'. The silk blankets and covers just made their movements easier and smoother.

Tiffany's hands returned back to Jessica's thighs and Jessica raked her blunt nails on Tiffany's back as they started to rock against each other. Tiffany slightly flinched but it was nothing compared to the pleasure she's feeling. She started kissing lower. To Jessica's neck, collarbones, chest, stomach, and stopped on her navel.

She looked up at Jessica as she pulled off Jessica's pants, seeing preparedness in the girl's eyes. "I don't know how this works, but I'll do my best to be gentle."

Jessica gave a firm nod, and closed her eyes. Tiffany went back to Jessica's mouth as her hand busied itself with its business.

The rest of the night was spent with Tiffany proving to Jessica how real good she was with her words while Jessica's "Tiffanyyy", "There!" and "God, you're—ngh" were almost muffled by Tiffany's mouth.

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"Hey, Yoona, y'know what?" Yuri said as she dropped herself on Yoona's bed, bouncing twice.

No matter how bad Tiffany's condition was, Yuri still wanted to sleep over at Yoona's, and Yoona wholeheartedly let her. Why would she say no? Yuri's almost living in the Im's house now anyways.

"What?" Yoona asked as she turned to face Yuri who already settled herself comfortably on her bed.

"Tiffany asked me a couple of weird questions earlier this week."

"Like what?" Yoona traced Yuri's eyebrows with her forefinger.

"She asked me if what I would feel if someone showed interest in you, why I want to make you happy, and what I would feel if I badly wanted to kiss you but someone interfered."

"She asked that?"

"Well..." Yuri shrugged a shoulder. "She didn't phrased the last question like I did, but it's just the same. I know her too well." Yuri grasped Yoona's hand to stop it from tracing her facial features. Yoona seemed to be more focus on her face than what she was saying.

"And what did you say?" Yoona finally showed interest.

"It all equated to one answer: it's because I like you. I don't think she asked those because she wanted to know what I'm feeling about you though, I think it's what she's feeling about someone," Yuri said.

"Yeah, I agree." Yoona nodded.

Yoona bit the right corner of her lip as she contemplated. She remembered her parents' conversation last Christmas Eve about her and Yuri's future marriage not being like Jessica and Tiffany's. It was just all too sudden, and Tiffany was well known as a player of boys before her marriage. Why suddenly marry a girl? Her parents also mentioned about Tiffany & Co.'s sales going down and after the marriage, it somehow survived.

"Yuri, do you think we're right? That they're married because of their companies?"

"If so... it means that they don't really love each other, and their sweetness are all just an act," Yuri assumed.

"And Tiffany's starting to have feelings for Jessica!" they both said in unison.

"Oh my gosh." Yoona cupped her mouth in surprise of the realization. "It all fits."

"But we don't have the rights to get involved with their matters, Yoona," Yuri lectured.

“Not even a help?”

“Maybe a few, but let them settle their matters.” Yuri possessively wrapped her arms around Yoona’s waist and pulled the girl closer. “For now, maybe I can start practicing how to make animal shaped hickeys.”

Yuri leaned in but Yoona put her palm flat against Yuri’s face before pushing it away. “Noooo! I’m not in the mood.”

Yuri let go of her and Yoona took the chance to face her back to Yuri. Yuri hissed in irritation. She just hugged Yoona from the back and whispered on the girl’s ear. “Fine.” She kissed the shell of the ear once. “You’re lucky I love you so much.”

Yoona giggled and closed her eyes, enjoying Yuri’s warmth that’s wrapping all over her body. “I love you too.”

Five minutes later, they’re both already fast asleep contentedly. There’s just nothing better than the life they’re having at the moment.

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Tiffany woke up to a numbing right arm. She slowly opened her eyes and the first thing she saw was Jessica’s serene face, perfectly fitted on the space between Tiffany’s shoulder and chest like she’s made to fit there. Tiffany couldn’t remember when was the last time she saw Jessica’s face this close. Seeing the girl’s tall nose, thin eyebrows, rosy cheeks, and chin, she momentarily forgot her numb arm and she unconsciously smiled.

She noticed Jessica’s lips were a bit swollen from the night’s activity. She mentally scolded herself. She should have treated Jessica daintily. Tiffany’s lips were actually swollen too and there are tiny stinging pains on her back—scratches made by Jessica’s blunt nails.

Tiffany carefully removed her arm under Jessica’s head. Jessica stirred and Tiffany froze, only to sigh in relief a second later when Jessica went back to sleep. She slowly scooted closer and kissed Jessica’s forehead. Jessica didn’t moved. She kissed the girl’s eyes and nose. Still, Jessica didn’t react.

She must be so tired.

She slowly leaned in and kissed Jessica’s lips. She lingered there for a minute, thinking it was the last chance she would have to be able to kiss Jessica. And she swore to herself that it *would be* the last time she’ll kiss Jessica.

She leaned away before she couldn’t contain herself anymore.

Thinking about the night's activity, Tiffany couldn't help but to think it was wrong. Somehow it was wrong. It was a mistake. But she wouldn't deny that she wanted it. She doesn't know about Jessica though. So Tiffany decided that this would be the last time she'll do this to Jessica. She'll start moving away, and act like she doesn't love Jessica. She doesn't have any reasons to hold onto Jessica anymore, and if she'll use her feelings as a reason, it would be unfair to Jessica.

It might be hard. And heartbreaking. And deathly. But Tiffany knew this was all her fault. She just has to stop all this nonsense at once. Who knows? Maybe keeping a distance could allow things to be more glorious.

She silently slipped out of the bed and went to the bathroom, passing by their strewn clothes on the floor.

Once the bathroom's door beeped close, Jessica opened her eyes. Unconsciously, a tear rolled down her pillow.

CHAPTER 38: 'BROKEN'



CHAPTER 38: 'BROKEN'

It has been three weeks since Tiffany accidentally hit Sunny and since then, Taeyeon has never eaten lunch with them at in school. She wasn't that bubbly on the school's radio anymore either and her friends have noticed it. Yoona, Yuri, Seohyun and Summer have asked, but gotten no answer and no one dared to ask again. They've learned that once they asked Tiffany, surely there wouldn't be any answer.

Tiffany tried a lot of times to visit Sunny on the hospital, to say sorry to her and Taeyeon, but Taeyeon was guarding Sunny like a mother hen not wanting anyone to touch her chicks. She would push Tiffany out of the room without second thoughts, and Sunny, who luckily woke up the day after the accident, couldn't seem to do anything. If only she could, Tiffany would have exchanged herself on Sunny's situation.

It has been three weeks since Tiffany lost over Summer and she still couldn't look at the girl's smug eyes every time they're seeing each other. It crushed Tiffany's confidence. It was very rare for Tiffany to feel embarrassed around someone and Summer was lucky that she's the first one that made Tiffany feel that way.

It has been three weeks since Tiffany started moving away from Jessica, keeping a safe distance while walking, while sleeping, and answering short answers when Jessica asked something. Jessica has actually foreseen it coming. She knew that the kiss Tiffany gave her the morning after they made love was some kind of a warning-- a goodbye kiss-- and more than that. Jessica believed that that was for the best. It was Tiffany who's making a reason for them to not grow any feelings for each other and, *somehow*, it was working.

It all has been just three weeks... and Tiffany already felt like giving up. She couldn't stand the students' eyes looking at her while she's walking in the corridor just because she lost over some new student in something she's best at. She already lost her name. She couldn't stand Taeyeon's hateful glare every time they would accidentally see each other in school and when Taeyeon pushed her out of Sunny's room every time she's visiting the girl. She already lost Taeyeon. And she couldn't stand seeing Jessica grew fonder and fonder of Summer every passing day. She already lost her wife. Nothing's left on her side.

And now, as Tiffany sat uncomfortably on their usual table in the cafeteria, far away from the other students, she was just eating quietly. It was nothing new. Her friends have gotten used to it the first week she started being like that.

“Jessica, do you not like the food?” Yoona suddenly asked.

Tiffany gave a sidelong glance on her left and saw Jessica was just picking the food on her plate but not really eating. She looked tired, like she hasn’t had any sleep recently. But she has. She was actually the reason why Tiffany and her were always late the whole week because Jessica always woke up late.

Jessica looked up, smiled sheepishly and nodded.

“What do you want? I’ll get it for you,” Summer kindly offered. She’s been acting the role of the wife lately.

“I want something like... tangerines... or peaches.” Just talking and thinking about them made Jessica salivating.

“What? Tangerines and peaches? It’s lunch time, aren’t you gonna eat something heavier?” Yuri asked.

Jessica shook her head. “I don’t want to eat anything other than that.”

“Ok. I’ll get it.” Summer stood up and left to get what Jessica wanted.

The whole table resumed eating while Jessica waited. She didn’t touch the food on her plate anymore and just watched Yoona, who was seated in front of her, devour her steak and salad. Jessica couldn’t help but think that Yoona was like making a commercial for it. She made the food look appetizing that Jessica wanted to eat them.

Jessica looked down on her plate, seeing the same steak and salad on her plate. But why doesn’t she find it any appetizing at all? She looked back at Yoona again, feeling her mouth salivating by the way Yoona ate happily. She gulped.

Yoona looked up at her. “What’s wrong?”

Jessica shook her head impulsively. “Nothing.” All of a sudden, Jessica felt like something climbed up her throat and she covered her mouth. Acid immediately filled her mouth and she felt like throwing up. She ran out of the cafeteria as fast as she could with a hand on her mouth and the other on her stomach.

Everyone that’s left on the table just looked at her back, confused.

“What just happened?” Seohyun asked.

“I think she’s gonna throw up,” Yoona proposed.

“Don’t you think you should go after her, Tiffany?”

Tiffany, who still has her eyes to where Jessica has disappeared on the entrance of the cafeteria, looked at Yuri. She wanted to say, “Why not wait for Summer to come back and let her take care of *my* wife?” but decided against it when she saw Yuri’s smile. She seemed like a real best friend by how comforted Tiffany felt with her smile. She’s not alone after all. There’s still Yoona, Yuri and Seohyun left for her.

Tiffany nodded and ran after Jessica. She found the girl on the nearest powder room to the cafeteria, hunched over the sink and throwing up while holding all her hair on one side as to not stain it. Tiffany walked over to her and held up the girl’s hair as Jessica put both her hands on the corner of the sink, bracing for another retch. Tiffany rubbed her back the whole time.

Jessica remained hunched over the sink even though she could feel that nothing’s going to come out anymore, just to be sure. After a minute, she washed her mouth. Tiffany offered her handkerchief to wipe the girl’s mouth.

“Thanks.” Jessica handed back her handkerchief and Tiffany immediately put it on the pocket of her school uniform’s pink coat.

“Did you eat spoiled food?” Tiffany doesn’t want to ask, but it just came out of her mouth.

Jessica shook her head. “I didn’t.” She didn’t ride an airtrain either.

She rubbed her stomach gently. She doesn’t really like the feeling of throwing up.

“Do you want to go home?” Tiffany asked as she opened the door for Jessica and they stepped out of the restroom. They walked back to the cafeteria.

“No. I’m fine.”

Once they got back to the cafeteria, Jessica was utterly glad that Summer was already back with the tangerines and peaches she requested. She ate them happily like nothing happened.

~.~

The feeling like wanting to eat a lot of strange things but then constantly feels like throwing up, and feeling sleepy all the time continued for another two days. Jessica always woke up in the morning only to throw up, and anytime of the day, when her body felt like it, she would throw up again. But it was worse in the mornings. After throwing up in the morning, she wanted to get back to sleep, but couldn’t because she still has to go to school.

What's happening to her was starting to freak her out that on the second day, (fortunately it was a Saturday) after throwing up early in the morning she stayed longer inside the bathroom. She looked at herself in the mirror and started thinking.

"Vomiting, feeling like I never get enough sleep no matter how much I've slept, feeling like wanting to eat a lot of strange things but then constantly feels like throwing up... oh God... this can't be. When was the last time?" Jessica counted on her fingers the last time she had her monthly period. She stopped when she counted over ten. "I'm over ten days delayed... oh no no no no no... this can't be... I can't be... that's impossible."

She stormed out of the bathroom and sat on her side of the bed, luckily Tiffany was already out of the room to go somewhere (she's been like that lately, Jessica noticed) so she wouldn't see Jessica panicking. She grabbed her hand phone on the night stand and dialed a number. Good thing he left his number that night.

"Hello?" a voice with a low baritone answered the rings.

"It's Jessica."

"Oh! Jessica! What's up?" The man was obviously glad.

"I don't know how to say this... but we have a problem. Chansung, I think... I think I'm pregnant." Jessica's voice cracked.

"WHAT?!?!"

~.~

Chansung's feet kept bouncing up and down the floor in nervousness. He was continuously pulling at his collar too as if it wasn't wide enough to give him sufficient air to breathe in.

"Explain," he prompted.

"There are things that are happening to me lately. It was pregnancy symptoms, I know it!" Jessica doesn't want to go with the details.

"Have you gone on a check-up? Or tried pregnancy test?"

"I can't. You know I can't. No one should know about this. There are still two months of school before graduation and I can't let anyone know that I'm pregnant. I can't buy pregnancy test either, someone might see me."

Chansung's feet stopped bouncing as he held his hands up in the air, seeing Jessica's suggestive stare. "Oh no no no. I'm not gonna buy that for you!"

"Please, Chansung! You have to help me with this!" Jessica held his arm.

"Wha--?!"

"Please!" Jessica begged, eyes teary.

"I'm a man! I'm not gonna buy that thing!"

"Ask someone! Your maid or something."

Chansung sighed in defeat when he saw Jessica's pleading stare. He knew this was hard for Jessica and as a gentleman, he couldn't turn down a woman's plead, he has to help.

He stood up from Jessica and Tiffany's bed. "Fine. Fine. I'll get it for you."

"Thank you, Chansung. Thank you so much."

Chansung just smiled before commanding the door open. He saw at the corner of his eye, before he left the room, that Jessica slumped on the bed, looking defeated and hopeless. He couldn't help but pity the girl. Being pregnant at a young age --while still studying-- and couldn't let anyone know about it, it's really hard. He wasn't the one to blame though.

When he was walking down the stairs, he saw Tiffany walking up. They stood face to face for a moment, glaring at each other.

"What are you doing here?" It was stupid, because Tiffany knew why he's there.

"Visiting Jessica?" He shrugged his wide shoulders with a teasing smirk.

Tiffany hissed before pushing him aside and continuing up the stairs. Chansung just looked at her back, his teasing smirk had grown into an amused smile. He shook his head.

"It's really fun teasing my favorite cousin." He let out a manly chuckle before leaving the house.

~.~

A pair of brown eyes stared intently at four unfamiliar things laid sprawled in the bathroom's sink. The first item was plain square, the next one was a thin straight plastic that has round end while the other end was

pointed, the next one was oval, and the last one was a digital type. All of them are what most people called a pregnancy test—something Jessica never imagined she would use at the age of twenty three.

All of their panels showed one straight red line and Jessica found herself wishing that it should just stop there.

“Aren’t you done yet?” It was Chansung. He was still inside Jessica and Tiffany’s room, feeling as nervous as Jessica.

“Just a minute!” Jessica answered, eyes not leaving the tests in the sink as if it would explode anytime soon. But by the speed her heart was beating, it was most likely to explode first.

“Oh no... please no...” she chanted repeatedly in a whisper while biting her nails in nervousness.

Alas, ten minutes have passed, and all of the four tests have two red lines in their panels, and the digital one has **POSITIVE** written in red bolded letters.

Jessica covered her face with her hands. She felt her throat tightened, lips quivered, tears brimmed. She doesn’t want to be pregnant. At least not yet. Not this early. She’s not yet ready.

She scooped up the tests and walked miserably out of the bathroom. She shoved them in Chansung’s hands before dropping herself face first on the bed. A lone pregnancy test fell on the floor, but neither cared to pick it up.

The man’s eyes grew wide, seeing the same results on every tests. “Y-y-you’re...?”

He doesn’t have to continue anymore. They both knew the answer.

Chansung sat on the bed and rubbed Jessica’s trembling back as she tried so hard to stop herself from crying but to no avail. “Jessica... are you okay?”

Jessica harshly sat up beside him. “Of course not! I don’t know how... I-I... I don’t want this...” she sobbed as she covered her face with her hands.

“Do you want to... abort it?”

She looked up and glared at him. “No! Of course not! I could never do such heartless thing!”

“I’m sorry. Calm down,” he soothed. “I’ll be beside you. I’ll support you. Don’t worry.” Obviously giving Jessica a chance to move away if she wanted, he slowly lifted his right arm and wrapped them around Jessica’s shoulder before pressing the hopeless girl against his hard chest, not caring if she would wet his silver Armani suit.

A lot of questions were swirling in his mind. That life inside Jessica's stomach couldn't be his. But looking at Jessica, he knew she would never sleep with anyone. She looked so innocent and too nice to sleep with anyone. Unlike his cousin.

He couldn't ask Jessica if she did sleep with another guy though. It seemed inappropriate and rude. He doesn't want to offend Jessica while she's currently having a distress. So the least he could do was to stay beside the girl, knowing she doesn't have anyone to share this ordeal with.

"Don't you think you should tell Tiffany about this?"

"I-I ... I don't know how," Jessica cried.

Chansung sighed and remained quiet. He knew he doesn't have to talk for Jessica to appreciate his presence. She's such a nice girl after all.

He really pitied Jessica. She looked so vulnerable at the moment that it seemed like in just a simple blow, she's going to stumble down like a house of cards, no matter how beautiful someone built it. In his eyes, Jessica's very gentle, caring, and very attractive.

How could Tiffany not appreciate such sweet girl?

He could never really understand his cousin.

Chansung was too absorbed in his thoughts that he didn't realize Jessica has already stopped crying and was now asleep inside his embrace until he heard the door hissed open.

He looked at the door and saw Tiffany standing in front of it, clearly shocked to see her wife inside her own cousin's embrace. He acted as if he didn't see her and he carefully laid Jessica on the bed as to not awake her. He tucked the girl under the blankets before standing in front of Tiffany, hands inside his pockets, gripping the pregnancy tests inside his strong fists.

Tiffany glared at him, obviously fuming, but he just looked at her calmly. "She doesn't deserve someone like you, Tiffany."

The outcome was still unsure, but he could at least try to make Tiffany care for her own wife. Maybe if Tiffany felt like he's taking Jessica away from her, she would instinctively start caring for Jessica. That was if Jessica was really important to her. He couldn't always be around Jessica for the next nine months, and he could only leave Jessica in Tiffany's hands. He might not know Jessica for a long time to care for her so much, but he just wanted to secure the girl's safety, both emotionally and physically.

He walked pass her but halted when Tiffany spoke.

"So are you saying she deserves someone like you?"

“No. I’m no better than you, Tiffany. We’re very much the same,” and with that, he left the room.

Tiffany just listened as the door closed. She took a deep breath to calm herself. She just came back from another round of Taeyeon’s harsh acts in the hospital and now here’s Chansung. He’s really getting into her nerves. How dare he to touch her wife like Jessica was his wife? How dare he to walk in and out of their room as if it was his own? How dare he...

Tiffany’s thoughts were cut when she saw something on the floor. It looked knowingly familiar. She walked closer to it and picked it up. It was a pregnancy test... with two red lines. She looked at the test in her hand, and then to Jessica, who was asleep on the bed. She repeated it for a couple of times until her tears blurred her vision and her hands shook.

So that’s why she keeps on throwing up... and wanting to eat strange things... and that’s why Chansung’s here...

She ran out of the room as fast as she can, almost stumbling on the stair case, until she reached her ancestors’ room. She stopped in front of the pictures, all of them looking at her, as if mocking. Silently laughing at her. For her unfortunate life.

“Is this what you want, grandpa?” She glared at Daniel’s picture. “IS THIS WHAT YOU WANT?!?!?”

“Why are you doing this to me? WHY?!?!?”

She picked up the old man’s picture and slammed it on the floor. The glass that bounced on the floor almost hit her cheek. She continued crying helplessly. And is if Daniel’s broken picture wasn’t enough, she swept her arms all over the whole table, sending all of her ancestors’ pictures on the floor, all broken.

She knelt on the floor, knees smashing the broken glasses but felt no pain. The pain in her heart was much stronger. She continued crying, shouting and cursing. Stupid Hwangs... stupid family tradition... stupid Chansung... stupid parents... stupid life... stupid... everything’s stupid.

Suddenly, the door opened and the obviously concerned Leo rushed in.

“Noona!” He knelt before his sister and hugged her. Tiffany clung in his little arms like her life depended on it, still crying.

Leo’s heart shattered even more, feeling his sister’s heart was as broken as his. He has never seen Tiffany like this before. Maybe she was exactly like this when Mr. Choi died, but Leo doesn’t know since he’s not yet born when Mr. Choi died, though he knew the whole story about it.

He would have wondered why Tiffany was acting like this if not for the pregnancy test in Tiffany’s grip. It has said it all. But Leo was wondering about something else. *Is it Jessica noona’s?*

Tiffany moved away from Jessica three weeks ago because she's more than sure that Jessica would get pregnant with Chansung's child. She thought that when Jessica really did get pregnant, it wouldn't hurt so much. But now that it's certain that Jessica was pregnant, why does it still hurt?

She figured she shouldn't have fallen in love, because *everything that fall gets broken*.

~.~

The day has been long for Jessica, but she didn't know that it was long for Tiffany too. She woke up at around four in the afternoon and that's when she realized that she actually slept. All of a sudden, the images of the red lines on the pregnancy tests flashed inside her head. She couldn't do anything but to sigh. She doesn't have any tears to cry anymore, and she's too tired of crying.

There's nothing she could do but to deal with it, she knew that. She's not going to cry for so long for this ordeal, she'll stand up on both of her feet without anyone's help and, if needed, she'll take care of herself and the child inside her. What else could she do?

She stood up from the bed but froze while she was still seated on the bed, feet dangling off the bed. She remembered Tiffany. She hasn't seen the girl the whole day. She only caught a glimpse of Tiffany when Chansung left to buy the pregnancy tests, but she went straight to the bathroom, after doing whatever she has to do inside, she walked out again.

The feeling was weird... somehow... Jessica missed her.

Jessica shook her head before standing up and walking out of the room only to realize the whole house still. Only the butlers and maids were around. No Tiffany, Leo, Sophia or Ernest.

She called the maid that passed by her that was carrying a brown disposable box. "Where's everyone?"

The maid bowed. "Madame Sophia and Sir Ernest are in the company. Miss Tiffany and Sir Leo went out."

"Did they tell anyone where they are going?"

The maid shook her head. "I'm sorry, Miss. They left in a hurry."

Jessica looked down at the box in the woman's arms. The lids are open, giving her a view of what's inside. There were tons of broken glasses and wooden frames.

"What's that?" Jessica pointed at the box.

"Miss Tiffany went to the ancestors' room this noon. She broke every glass she saw. I think she has some big problems, Miss."

“What happened?” Jessica suddenly felt worried about Tiffany.

“I don’t really know, Miss Jessica. Its personal matters, we’re not supposed to know anything. But I think that Sir Leo brought Miss Tiffany out to have some fresh air.”

Jessica sighed. “Ok. Thank you.” She dismissed the maid with a wave of her hand.

She slumped down on the sofa in the spacious living room. She wondered what’s wrong with Tiffany, but nothing came up. Her right hand unconsciously rested on her stomach while still deep in thought, gently rubbing it.

Tiffany, where are you? I’m... I’m so scared.

SPECIAL CHAPTER:



DON'T LET GO, PLEASE.

The whole month has been busy that when the academy's headmaster announced all over the academy through the intercom that it was the academy's foundation day, Tiffany and Jessica were both surprised. They totally forgot about that.

The headmaster said that in celebration of the academy's foundation day, which fortunately landed on the same day of Valentine's Day, the whole school was going to play a matchmaking game.

He just said simple instructions: *"The rings we gave you on the main entrance before you entered the school earlier are what's going to bind the couples together. Males have bolts, and females have sockets. The males get to choose the girl he likes and all he has to do is to lock his bolt ring on the girl's socket ring, but that is, if the girl would accept him. They can spend the whole day around the school grounds tied together, go to the booths outside and have fun! Good luck!"*

Now, Jessica was sitting dumbfounded on her chair on her first class. *What did the headmaster just say?* She pulled out the ring from her coat's pocket and laid it flat on her palm. The ring's thick band was gold-coated, and in front, instead of any fancy stones, was a socket where the male's bolt was supposed to be placed.

Suddenly, there was a commotion inside their room, all the students have already stood up and was rushing out of the room, mostly are males, and some that are from the other classes are going in, searching for the girls they liked.

Jessica couldn't understand what was happening, suddenly there was so many people going in and out of the room, and maybe the whole academy was in a wreck too. All the males are rushing to get the girls they want. Jessica caught a glimpse of Yuri, Yoona, Seohyun, Summer and Tiffany from the corner of her eye. They all have the same surprised expression she has.

Out of nowhere, a guy stood in front of Jessica, panting. He apparently rushed his way to get to Jessica, seeing his disheveled hair, tousled uniform and small droplets of sweat on his forehead.

He smiled shyly. “H-h-hi, Jessica. I’m Schmidt Martins. I-I’ve been fancying you...”

Tiffany recovered from shock and glared at poor Schmidt. He didn’t notice her though, he continued introducing himself to Jessica.

A tap on Tiffany’s shoulder disturbed her and she harshly turned to look at the direction. An unfamiliar guy was standing in front of her desk.

“Hi, Tiffany. I’m Carlos Lorian ... and I’m hoping I can put my bolt into your socket.” He ended his introduction with a suave smile and a wink.

Tiffany wouldn’t deny that he’s charming, but his greasy words just made her want to hurl. She glared at him instead and hissed, “You wish.”

She looked back at Jessica and saw that the lone guy earlier has rivalries now. Loads of them. All handing their rings to Jessica and introducing themselves all at the same time. Jessica just looked at them with wide eyes that are asking ‘what in the world is happening?’ while sinking deeper and deeper in her seat, scared of the towering men.

Tiffany’s hands turned into fists when her own lone admirer earlier was added with more men and started filling in the room. They’re seriously shortening her patience. They’re too loud.

“STOP!” she screamed at the top of her lungs.

The whole room turned still and looked at her-- even her friends that are bombarded with men too.

“We’re not interested, okay?!” She glared at every man in the room before holding Jessica’s right hand and running away with her out of the room.

I know I swore I’ll keep a distance from you, Jessica... but I just can’t help it when other men are close to you.

~.~

Tiffany doesn’t know where to bring Jessica so she stopped in front of the first restricted room she saw. The hallway on the third floor was deserted. The students have already ran out of the building to enjoy the booths outside.

She swiped the chip key in her necktie on the censor with her free hand and the door hissed open. Being a daughter of one of the builders of the school really has its advantages. Without looking at what’s inside, she pulled Jessica in when they heard running footsteps coming their way. *Those men don’t know how to give up.* But she suddenly halted, making Jessica bump on her back as the door automatically closed behind them.

Tiffany stopped because she almost hit the railing in front of her, and if she happened to walk anymore closer, she must've fallen off it. She realized that they were standing on a metal outdoor staircase, connected to the wall. And below them... below them was the most beautiful place Tiffany and Jessica have ever seen. One word: magical.

There were different kinds of flowers everywhere. They were arranged in a colorful design, and from above, it really looked beautiful. It looked like one of those flower arrangements Chinese used to make while the flowers are planted on the soil. There were four straight cobbled pathways that met in a circle pathway, surrounding a huge tree that served as the center of the place.

The place was actually a greenhouse. Above was a white screen shaped in a half-sphere, sunrays seeping freely through it. Tiffany remembered entering the room from the third floor, and the huge tree in the middle, from the first floor, was almost reaching the white screen. It was almost three-storey tall.

Why did the management of this school hide this place?

The two girls were mesmerized, especially Tiffany. She has never seen a place like this. And to think she's been in this school for three years.

Recovering, Tiffany cleared her throat and pulled Jessica down the stairs. It was three floors worth and Tiffany couldn't help but to gulp.

Great. Just great.

No matter how much she wanted to rush climbing down, she couldn't, Jessica was pregnant and she couldn't risk the girl falling down the stairs. Instead, she took slow steps and tensed her left arm to support Jessica.

"Careful." Her right hand was itching to hold Jessica so she could support her firmly with both hands. But she couldn't.

Jessica slightly smiled, appreciating Tiffany's obvious care.

~.~

Jessica looked at her right hand that was intertwined with Tiffany's left. The girl didn't let go of her even after they sat on the only wooden bench in the place, which was under the gigantic tree. The place was so romantic, and if only she's not thinking about a lot of things, she would have enjoyed it.

She wanted to enjoy the place. She so much wanted to touch the flowers but couldn't move because Tiffany ordered her not to go anywhere before dozing off on the bench, head tilted on the right uncomfortably. But it's alright, she'd rather stay by Tiffany's side anyway.

She lifted up her left hand and carefully moved Tiffany's head on her right shoulder. Tiffany reacted by nuzzling her nose on the girl's neck instinctively. Jessica slightly smiled at Tiffany's serene face, the smell of the girl's strawberry shampoo mixed with the flowers' fragrance caught in her nostrils.

She suddenly felt bad and her smile turned into a frown, remembering another life forming inside her. She doesn't know what to do about it. Tiffany doesn't have any idea that she's pregnant, and she doesn't know how to tell her.

Jessica looked at their intertwined hands once again. It's been a long time since she felt Tiffany's soft hand in hers, and she liked it, though they didn't really fit.

When was the last time you held my hand? She couldn't remember it. It felt so long, based on how she missed holding the girl's hand.

Will you ever hold my hand again after this? That she couldn't be sure. And she couldn't hope either.

~.~

The school ground was filled with different kinds of booths. All colored red and pink. There were food kiosks, games, horror booths and a few carnival rides, like a small rollercoaster and a small merry-go-round. And Tiffany and Jessica could be found on the area where there are more food kiosks around, still hand in hand.

Tiffany scoffed. Everything was just so childish, and the other students seemed to be enjoying it. That just disgusted her more.

I knew that stupid headmaster isn't good for this school.

She suddenly halted when she saw a guy buying on the hotdog stand. He's alone and the frown on his face just confirmed that he's not having fun. Tiffany pulled Jessica next to the guy and tapped his arched back with the back of her free hand twice.

The guy turned around and flinched, obviously scared of Tiffany. "Yes?"

"You're gay, right?" Tiffany accused.

The guy slowly nodded and Tiffany smirked. *I knew it just by looking at his face.*

"Wanna trade rings?" Tiffany opened her right palm in front of the guy, revealing a female's socket ring.

The guy was more than glad to trade. He immediately drew out his ring from his pocket and snatched Tiffany's before putting his in exchange.

“Nice doing business with you.” Tiffany turned around and let go of Jessica’s hand. “Give me your ring.”

Jessica hesitantly did.

Tiffany put the bolt ring inside the socket ring. She twisted it a couple of times for it to lock. It looked like little handcuffs. She put a ring on Jessica’s right ring finger and the other on her own left ring finger, next to her wedding ring.

They don’t have to hold hands anymore since their rings are already connected. Their knuckles and fingers are brushing though, but it doesn’t matter.

They continued walking around until Tiffany realized Jessica was eyeing a fruit stand. She followed Jessica’s gaze and realized that she was looking at the tangerines. Without second thoughts, she pulled Jessica to the stand and bought three tangerines from the robot seller.

Jessica just watched Tiffany’s weird actions confusedly.

~.~

“You should have just told me you want it,” Tiffany said before drinking the bottled juice that she bought for herself. She’s already feeling tired with all the walking.

Jessica, who was seated beside her on a bench they found around the place, just looked at her and slightly smiled. *I like it more when you’re doing it willingly... without me telling you.*

“What?” Tiffany asked, bothered by the girl’s stare, before rubbing her palms against her face. She momentarily removed her ring so Jessica could eat properly.

Jessica shook her head. “Nothing.” She put a piece of juicy but still slightly sour tangerine in her mouth. She smiled in satisfaction when its taste filled her mouth. Little did she know, Tiffany was secretly smiling to herself too.

They just sat quietly there, watching the couples that seemed to be having fun pass by them.

After finishing her tangerines, Jessica spoke up hesitantly, “Aren’t you curious why I want to eat a lot of strange things lately?”

Tiffany sighed and looked down. She knew where this talk was going, and she doesn’t like it.

“Why would I? Isn’t that normal?” She feigned ignorance.

Jessica's hands turned into fists on her lap. She knew she has to tell Tiffany. She couldn't just leave the girl in the dark and surprise her when her tummy was already big. It's now or never.

"Tiffany, I'm pregnant," she said in one breath. She wanted to hear Tiffany's outburst, but nothing came. *Figures. She wouldn't really care even if it's Chansung's.*

There was a silence between them for a long time, only the people's chats and screams and the machines' hums are heard.

It broke Tiffany's heart hearing it straight from Jessica, but why does it still work? Why does it still beat for Jessica? Why does it still scream Jessica's name? Why... why does she still love Jessica?

"I know."

Jessica looked sharply at Tiffany, but the girl was looking anywhere but Jessica. "And you didn't even tell me?"

"Is that really important? I don't really care about that child." Tiffany turned to look at Jessica square in the eyes.

It wasn't a lie. She doesn't really care about the child, but she cared about Jessica. If anything bad happened to Jessica during her pregnancy, she'd surely kill Chansung.

Jessica's fists clenched tighter. She hated Tiffany. So much. *How could she not care?!*

"Really? You don't really want to have anything to do with this child?" Jessica needed to restrain herself not to shout. Her voice sounded like an angry whisper.

"Yes," Tiffany answered shortly.

"Then don't take care of me. Don't treat me nicely. Stop acting in front of Mom and Dad."

"That's great. That's what I've been wanting to do." Tiffany lifted her chin up like everything was alright with her though deep inside she was slowly dying.

Jessica felt her chest tightened in anger. She clenched her jaws to stop herself from shouting at Tiffany. She wanted to scream at her, hit her, slap some senses into Tiffany's head, but she couldn't. *How can she say things that easily? Doesn't she really care about me? How dare her...*

She took a deep breath and swallowed the bile in her throat. "Alright then."

Jessica was all alone in this ordeal now, and with a few help from Chansung. No matter how much she hated Tiffany now, she still wanted Tiffany to take care of her. It would have been better if it was Tiffany.

“Let’s go.” Tiffany stood up and Jessica simply followed.

Tiffany never held Jessica’s hand again.

When they went back home, the walls between them had began rebuilding itself once more. And this time, maybe it was permanently. It was for the best.

CHAPTER 39: 'OVER'



CHAPTER 39: 'OVER'

The whole Philopolis Academy's coliseum was filled with pink—the color of the students' robes and caps for graduation, the designs on the stage and even the congratulation banners. Two women can be seen sitting coolly on the stage while a man was standing behind the podium on the right corner of the stage, calling the graduate's names. One of the women was Sophia Hwang—a representative from the Hwangs as one of the builders of the school--, the other woman was Shaunee Devaughn —a representative from the Devaughns as one of the builders of the school--, and the man calling the graduate's names was Chuck Galluzi, the headmaster.

Jessica's fingers nervously fidgeted on her lap as she waited for her name to be called on stage. Finally, she's graduating after three years of studying. She doesn't know if she would be glad or not because it just meant that she'll have to take over the Jung's Land soon, and she doesn't want that big responsibility yet. Maybe she could postpone it if she would tell her parents that she's more than two months pregnant now. But she's not yet ready for that either.

She glanced at her right and saw that Tiffany was just seated comfortably on her seat, looking bored with her right hand on her cheek. Anger instantly built up inside her. She still couldn't believe that Tiffany neglected her just like that.

Jessica focused her eyes ahead again and met Sophia's gaze from the stage. The older woman looked away almost instantly.

Tiffany saw from the corner of her eye that Jessica glanced at her but acted like she didn't. She's not enjoying any of this. It felt torture for her—waiting for her name to be called, sitting beside Jessica with the girl's perfume wafting to her nose, and feeling Taeyeon's dagger-like eyes piercing through her bones from a couple of seats away from her right. She's just glad that Yoona was the one sitting on her right.

Tiffany, Jesssica, Yuri, Yoona, Seohyun and Summer's courses only has three years, and Taeyeon's course has four years that even though she's a year older than the six, they get to graduate on the same year with her. It

felt unfair for Taeyeon though. She studied four years and the others are just three years? But she couldn't really do anything about it.

After a couple of minutes' wait, Summer was finally called, then Jessica, Tiffany, Yoona, Taeyeon, Yuri and lastly was Seohyun with a few students interlude since it was alphabetically, and Chuck gave them their diplomas. Right after the ceremony, the students ran out of the coliseum, utterly glad that it was finally done. Most of them started boarding their vehicles, going somewhere to celebrate.

Jessica was surprised when she saw Chansung outside the coliseum and she halted on her steps. She already told Chansung that Tiffany knew she's pregnant, but why was the man here?

Chansung smiled, waved and walked over to her. "Congratulations."

"What are you doing here?"

"What? I can't watch your and my cousin's graduation?" He smiled innocently.

Jessica narrowed her eyes, suspicious. "Really?"

"Yeah." Suddenly, he looked over Jessica's shoulder and raised his right hand to get someone's attention.

"Hey, Tiffany!" He just saw Tiffany walking out of the coliseum with her friends minus Taeyeon.

Tiffany stopped on her tracks when she saw Chansung, making the others bump into her. Her blood started boiling.

"Congratulations, *cousin*." He walked over to the girl with a smile and patted Tiffany's head like a kid.

Tiffany slapped his hand away.

"Ouch, you're harsh," He commented while still smiling.

"Jessica, we were just talking about where we should celebrate, do you have any place in mind?" Yuri asked, not minding Chansung. They already knew him as Tiffany's cousin who's actually her rival at anything, so he didn't made it to their good side.

Before Jessica had the chance to talk, Chansung butted in, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a minute. Celebrate? Does that include alcoholic drinks?"

"Yes, and why do you care?" Yoona glared at the taller man but Chansung ignored her.

He turned on his left and held both Jessica's shoulder before stooping low to meet Jessica's eyes. "Promise me you're not gonna drink. You know it's not good for you and your..." Jessica already knew it, he doesn't have to continue.

That boiled Tiffany's blood more and she silently scoffed before looking away. *As if like I can't take care of my pregnant wife.*

Jessica obediently nodded. "I promise."

Chansung stood straight and smiled. "Good girl. Ok! I'll go ahead!" He tapped Jessica's shoulder twice before disappearing on the sea of students loitering around the place.

"Jessica, you guys are... close?" Yuri hesitantly asked.

Jessica uneasily rubbed the back of her neck and shrugged. "Kinda."

Yoona and Yuri looked at her with wide eyes while Seohyun remained quiet, Tiffany looking anywhere but Jessica, and Summer looking clueless.

"Who is he?" Summer asked.

"He's someone unimportant so just forget about him," Tiffany said sourly before walking away. The others simply followed.

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"Sunny." Taeyeon happily walked inside Sunny's hospital room when she saw the girl awake.

"Taeng." Sunny weakly smiled.

"The graduation just ended." Taeyeon held up a white folder with the school's logo printed in it. "I already got my diploma." She grinned.

"Congratulations." Sunny slightly raised her left hand and Taeyeon immediately held it. Sunny squeezed her hand weakly. "I'm proud of you."

"I wouldn't have done it without you."

Silence overtook them for a minute and Taeyeon's face suddenly turned serious. The beeping and whirs of the machines were the only sounds that kept the room noisy.

Taeyeon finally decided to speak up. "Leo and I talked the night you were hit by Tiffany. Sorry I didn't tell you earlier."

"It's alright. What did you two talked about?"

“We talked about you. Sunny... he loves you so much but he still let me have you with one condition—that I should take care of you. When he knew that I wasn’t able to do it, he wanted to take you away from me...”

Sunny was surprised. She never imagined that Leo loved her. It never occurred to her. She thought Leo just accidentally knew all her movements and nothing more. It turned out that the younger man was watching over her like a guardian angel.

“He does?”

“... but he didn’t. He didn’t take you away from me. He’s so brave, you know that? He gave up his love for me and you to be happy.”

“Even if he did try to take me away from you, I wouldn’t let him. I only want you, Taeng.”

“Sunny, I can never let go of you either... but right now, I’m starting to think that he’s better than me, and you deserve someone better than me.” A tear rolled down Taeyeon’s cheek. “He can protect you more than I can... he can make you happy more than I can.”

“Taeng, don’t say that.” Sunny felt her throat tightened.

“He’s better than me... but I would still be selfish and keep you with me. I’ll die without you around, Sunny. I almost died that night when you were in the emergency room.” Taeyeon wiped away Sunny’s tears but did not bother to wipe her own.

“Even if he’s better than you, I’d still choose you. I cannot live without you too, Taeng.”

“But I can never guarantee your safety. I don’t know if I can keep you safe. I already failed the first time,” Taeyeon said hopelessly.

“Don’t look forward to the dangers of our relationship, Taeyeon. I don’t care if you can’t keep me safe... as long as I’m happy with you. Look forward to the happiness and to the things we can do together after I get well.” Sunny caressed Taeyeon’s right cheek as Taeyeon’s hand supported her weak hand by the wrist. “What about Miss Tiffany? I know you’re blaming her because of what happened to me.”

Taeyeon shook her head. “I don’t know. I can’t forgive her yet. You almost died, Sunny, how can I forgive her?”

“It’s my fault, Taeng. I ran away from you and didn’t look at where I was going. It’s my fault so please forgive her. And aren’t her efforts to say sorry to you and me even after so many times you’ve rejected her enough to show how sincere she is?”

Taeyeon remembered talking harshly to the girl, pushing her out of Sunny’s room every time she wanted to visit, and glaring at her all the time. But despite all those, Tiffany still tried to fix their relationship. She has never seen her cousin that persistent. Heck, she’d never even heard Tiffany said sorry to anyone before.

Taeyeon smiled as the tears on her cheeks started drying. "Ok. For you, I'll forgive her."

Sunny slightly shook her head. "Don't do it for me. Do it for you and Miss Tiffany's relationship."

And for Leo and I's relationship too...

Looking back at the two months that passed by so fast, Taeyeon realized that refusing to forgive was like drinking poison while wishing somebody else would die. It did more damage to her than to the person whom she chose not to forgive.

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The music was too loud, the place was too packed, the smell was too strong, and Jessica found her head slowly throbbing. It all hurt her head. She couldn't enjoy the food and drinks that was served to them in the VIP room, just above the sea of bodies dancing on the first floor of the club. It wasn't actually a room. It was a balcony on the second floor and there were no walls or anything that could divide them from the loud music and strong smell of smoke and alcohol coming from the first floor.

Summer invited them over to Hyoyeon's VIP Club to celebrate since no one could think of any other place. Yoona, Yuri, Seohyun, Summer and Tiffany seemed to be alright with the place, but Jessica wasn't. Maybe it's because of her sensitive condition.

Tiffany saw Jessica's uncomfortable state from the rim of her glass as she took a sip of her drink. It instantly hit her.

I'm starting to understand what you're not saying.

She wanted to ask Jessica if she wanted to go home since she's not having fun, but she couldn't because Jessica told her not to treat her nicely. She had to think of a different approach.

Tiffany emptied her glass and put it on the table before pressing a button on the table. A minute later, a waiter arrived.

"Give me another glass of Vodka."

The man bowed before leaving.

"Tiffany, that's like... your fourth glass," Seohyun reminded.

"I know."

“Are you trying to get drunk?” Yoona asked.

“I’m not, ok? Chill.” *I’m not even going to drink it.* Tiffany crossed her arms against her chest and looked away.

When Tiffany saw the man climbing back up the spiral staircase, she hastily stood up. “I’m going to the restroom.” She walked faster to get to the man before he totally stepped a foot on the last step. She purposely bumped into him and he clumsily spilled the drink on Tiffany’s designer’s cocktail dress.

“What the fcuk?!” she exclaimed as she looked down at her wet chest.

“I-I-I’m sorry, Miss.” The waiter produced a napkin from his pocket and attempted to wipe Tiffany’s clothes.

“Don’t you dare touch me!” She blocked the man’s hand before he could even grope her.

Hearing Tiffany’s complains, Summer finally looked at her and realized that the waiter just spilled a drink on Tiffany. She immediately stood up and wiped Tiffany’s clothes while muttering “I’m sorry” repeatedly.

“Stop!” Tiffany slapped her hand away. “Is this how this club works? And to think we’re even VIPs!” She shouted at Summer.

“I’m sorry, Tiffany. It’s not everyday that this happens, alright? I’m sorry!” Summer defended.

“Look at this?” Tiffany pointed at her wet clothes. “I smell like alcohol now!” She sighed dramatically. “I’m outta here! I’m going home!” Tiffany climbed down two steps before stopping and looking back with a furious facial expression, just to add on drama. “Jessi, are you going to stay here?!”

Jessica scampered to her feet. “I-I’m coming.”

She’s more than glad to go home with Tiffany and leave that place.

~.~

Tiffany and Jessica have gotten home five hours ago and Jessica went straight to bed. After talking to Sophia about taking over their jewelry company, Tiffany couldn’t sleep that’s why she decided to walk around outside the house to tire herself.

She stopped at the side of their house-- the place where Jessica and her became ‘friends’ and the place where Jessica had her allergies. Tiffany has been spending a lot of time on that side of the house lately, reminiscing.

Tiffany sat on the grass and instantly, memories came back.

--Flashback--

"What are you doing here?" Jessica asked as she sat cross legged on Tiffany's right side.

"I should be the one asking you that," Tiffany answered as she sat straight up and sat cross legged.

"I couldn't sleep."

"I'm guessing you didn't sleep last night either."

"How did you know?" Jessica looked at Tiffany.

"Because I wasn't beside you," Tiffany answered with a smirk earning a smack on the arm from Jessica.

"Ouch! What, it's not true?"

"You're so full of yourself." Jessica turned around and faced her back at Tiffany and silence enveloped them.

The silence wasn't comfortable for the two with Jessica still thinking about Tiffany's lips on hers and the fact that she can't even look at Tiffany for a long time. Tiffany was thinking about the incident too but she wouldn't let it affect her unlike Jessica who was obviously affected by it without Tiffany knowing the reasons why.

Ugh! This is killing me!

"Jessi, can we just... just forget about what happened last night?" She threw her hands in the air, giving up.

"We? So you're affected by it too?" Jessica answered without looking at the girl.

"Yes," Tiffany whispered but loud enough for Jessica to hear.

Jessica took a deep breath and bit her lower lip. "Tell me... tell me how can I forget about it if it's... if it's my first kiss?"

That busted Tiffany's serious atmosphere and she laughed hard as if it was the funniest thing she has ever heard. Her laughter echoed in the night's quietness.

"Go on. Laugh all you want!" Jessica said as she ducked her head down in embarrassment.

"You're freaking twenty-three for pete's sake and you still didn't have your first kiss!?" Tiffany said as she tried to stop herself from laughing and succeeded.

“Well, now I have!” The girl finally looked at Tiffany only to glare at her and Tiffany froze.

“I’m not like you, OK? I wanted my first kiss on my wedding. You know, I could have given it to you on our wedding but you made the contract so I changed my mind in hope that after two years, I would find the right one for me and marry him, that’s when I’ll give my first kiss. But it doesn’t matter now because you stole it.” Jessica pouted as she crossed her arms on her chest.

“What? You want me to give it back to you? Fine!” Tiffany crawled and leaned forward to kiss Jessica but the girl was fast enough to push Tiffany away from her.

“There’s no use! It doesn’t matter now. You can have it!” Jessica was thankful that her blush wasn’t obvious under the fair moon’s light.

“Oh come on, I know you want it.” Tiffany smirked sexily and started leaning forward to the sulking girl.

“Stop it!” Jessica pushed the girl’s face and turned her back again.

“You should at least be proud that you’ve kissed the best kisser in town!” Tiffany said at Jessica’s back but the girl didn’t retort back, instead she kept still on her position with her hand clenching her chest.

A few second of silence passed and something started creeping up Tiffany’s chest: guilt.

I must have really offended her with my teasing.

“Jessi, are you mad?” Tiffany scratched the back of her head.

No. it’s just that my heart is behaving differently right now. I don’t understand it.

“Come on, Jessi, speak up!” she poked the other girl’s back.

I’m afraid I might say things I don’t mean to say.

“You’re making me feel guilty here!” Tiffany played with her fingers as she pout.

Serves you right for teasing me!

Tiffany let out a sigh before crawling slowly in front of Jessica. “Hey, I was just fooling around.” She stopped in front of the girl, and cupped her cheeks but Jessica jerked her head away.

“Say sorry first.”

“Is that really needed?” Tiffany complained.

“Yes.”

"Aigoooo..." Tiffany sighed in defeat and bit her lower lip.

"S-s-sorry," Tiffany whispered as she looked down on her hand.

"Is that how you say sorry? With feelings," Jessica demanded.

"You can't blame me! I've never said sorry my entire life!" Tiffany complained. "Fine. I'll try again." She took a final breath to compose herself.

Tiffany raised her left hand and hid it behind Jessica's right ear. When it came into view, she was already holding an artificial flower, made of plastic. Jessica's eyes trailed from the flower up to Tiffany's smiling lips and puppy eyes. "Forgive me?" She offered the flower to Jessica in which the girl gladly took and started laughing.

"You should have seen your face!" Jessica hugged her stomach as she laughed hard.

"Aish! You're the one who made me do it!" it's now Tiffany's turn to turn her back on the laughing girl as she pouted.

"Stop it," Jessica said after her laugh subsided and sat cross legged again.

"What?" Tiffany said without looking at the girl.

"That."

"What, you don't like my pout?" Tiffany faced Jessica to tease her and she pouted more now with puppy eyes.

"Aish! Stop it!"

"Why?" Tiffany scooted closer to the girl with the same expression added with cuteness in her voice.

"You're sooo cute!" Jessica couldn't take it anymore and pinched Tiffany's cheeks.

"Ouch! You've been pinching me a lot lately huh!" Tiffany said as she cupped her reddening cheeks. "I'm gonna get my revenge!" Then she started tickling Jessica's side.

"Hahahah! Stop it!" Jessica said in between her laughter as she rolled on the grass in an attempt to stop Tiffany.

"That's what you get for pinching me!" Tiffany continued tickling Jessica till they started rolling on the grass.

Jessica rolled on her right, making Tiffany's left hand trap under her, and they stopped. Tiffany was on top of

Jessica, their face so close at each other, their chests brushing, and their breaths hitting each other's faces. Jessica's hands were gripping Tiffany's waist along with the stem of the flower that was still on her hand, Tiffany's left hand was at Jessica's back while her right one was supporting her body.

"Ehem," Tiffany cleared her throat as she pulled herself up and lay beside Jessica instead, cheeks burning.

Silence enveloped them once again. It really helped that they momentarily forgot what they were talking about earlier before they started fooling around for them to be able to breathe freely though it's just for a short time. The two just stared at the sky; both didn't know what to do or say next.

Jessica's breathing finally returned to normal with the view of the stars. Sleep started creeping inside her.

"Sooo... we're okay now? I can now sleep in our room?" Tiffany asked expectantly.

"Did I even tell you not to sleep with me?"

"But I thought you don't want to see me after what happened?"

"That's right. I'm glad that you're understanding and you stayed away from me without me telling you." Jessica smiled.

"So, friends?" Tiffany offered her hand for a hand shake with a smile.

"Friends." Jessica took it gladly with a smile.

Silence enveloped them once again but this time it's comfortable.

"You know Jessi, Mr. Choi used to tell me a story about stars when I was a kid," Tiffany started with her eyes still on the sky.

"Who's Mr. Choi?" Jessica asked as she folded her arms behind her head like a pillow after putting the flower on top of her stomach.

"My old butler but he already died." Tiffany's voice was full of sadness.

"I'm sorry." Jessica faced Tiffany.

"It's okay." The girl smiled bitterly as she too folded her arms behind her head.

"You want to hear it?"

"Sure"

"Once upon a time, there's a beautiful Princess, the only daughter of the king of the Land of Stars. Her job

was to weave clouds on her loom. One day a prince from the other kingdom came to their kingdom and met the Princess and fell in love with her beauty. The Princess fell in love with the Prince too. The Prince told the king that he wants to marry the Princess but the King has one condition: the Princess should continue to weave clouds even if they're already married and the Prince and Princess agreed. They got married and the Princess moved to live with the Prince in his kingdom. They're so happy together, so in love that the Princess forgot to weave clouds on her loom and the king wasn't happy about it so he send the Princess to the south to weave clouds and the Prince to the north to rule his own kingdom. They continued loving each other from different sides of the world and magpies heard that the Prince and Princess' love for each was so strong and the magpies build a bridge over the sea of stars so the two would have a chance to meet. The prince and princess believed that no matter how far their love is, miles wouldn't stop them from staying in love with each other.

You know, Jessi, the Chinese say that if you look into the night sky on the seventh day of the seventh month in the Chinese calendar, you would see very clearly this bridge of stars... but I've never got the chance to see it." Tiffany raised her hand up as if she could touch the stars. "Mr. Choi told me that he once saw it with his wife." She smiled bitterly before looking at Jessica only to find the girl was already asleep.

The next sincere words came out of Tiffany's mouth as a whisper,

"I want to see it with you, Jessi."

--End of flashback--

Tiffany smiled sadly at the memories. "I still want to see it with you, Jessi."

She couldn't remember when was the last time she ever felt that comfortable around someone. She could only be carefree around Jessica. It was only Jessica who could pull out a rare side of her without even trying. Tiffany figured that maybe that exact day was the same day she started falling for Jessica.

Tiffany laid flat on her back, staring up at the sky, arms on her side, and hands unconsciously plucking the grass off the soil.

The memories are bittersweet, but Tiffany didn't stop herself from remembering them. All of a sudden, all she could see was Jessica's beautiful face that night they made love. She couldn't forget that night—having the chance to kiss Jessica endlessly, touch her in different places, and keep her inside Tiffany's embrace. It seemed like yesterday though over two months have already passed. Tiffany wouldn't want to forget that night. She wanted that to happen again but it was just merely impossible at the moment. Especially now that Jessica was pregnant with Chansung's child.

Jessica being pregnant, her matters with Taeyeon and Sunny, her feelings for Jessica, Chansung's obvious interest with Jessica, her fight with her parents, and taking over their company starting next month were also another problem for Tiffany.

A cold breeze brushed against Tiffany's thin frame and she shivered. She crossed her arms and rubbed them to keep her warm. The pajama's fabric was too thin.

She stared at the brightest star in the sky-- her new found friend, the one she's been talking to for the past two months, and the one who accepted her outbursts without complains.

"You knew all this things would happen, right, Grandpa? Are you having fun seeing me miserable? I can never understand you." A tear rolled down to her ear as the star's light dimmed. "What are you trying to tell me, Grandpa? That I should just give up?" She sighed, feeling defeated. "Maybe you're right... maybe it's time to let go."

Tiffany quickly stood up but halted when she suddenly remembered their divorce contract. There's still at least a year and a half left. But she couldn't stand to stay inside this marriage anymore. She's going to die anytime soon if this continued. But she couldn't just divorce Jessica while she's still pregnant. Chansung wouldn't always be there for her, and that left Jessica on Tiffany's care.

Perhaps after she gave birth.

Tiffany continued her way into the house, and the next thing she knew, she was already standing beside her and Jessica's shared bed, the latter already fast asleep. She couldn't help but admire Jessica's peaceful sleeping face. She looked so innocent, sweet and vulnerable.

Tiffany's heart twitched at the thought of divorcing with her and it tugged on her tears.

"When you were on the verge of death I promised that I'm not gonna hurt you again... that I'll take care of you... and yet here I am, running away from you... making you suffer alone."

After four minutes of just standing there and watching Jessica, she has finally gotten her mind straight.

She couldn't just let go of Jessica. Not now. Now that her feelings for the girl was deeper than Mariana's trench, higher than the seventh Heaven, and even bigger than the sun.

"I can't just give up. I'm not gonna give up yet."

End of Book One

Book II

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CHAPTER 1: 'SORRY'



CHAPTER 1: 'SORRY'

Jessica's third month of pregnancy.

Tiffany & Co.'s main company in Scorchwood was a massive zigzag-shaped edifice constructed of three interconnected buildings—each building larger than a football field. The building's bluish metal exterior barely hinted at the glamour hidden within—a three-hundred-thousand-square-foot glitzy world that contained rooms for jewelry designers, storage rooms for the most precious genuine stones such as ruby, emerald, garnet, diamonds, gold and silver, and more than nine miles of working facilities grounded by heavily guarded walls.

Today, a shining black flying car hovered down in front of it. The driver hopped down of the car and opened the door of the backseat. Tiffany Hwang climbed down of the said car like a supermodel walking down the runway in her designer's clothes. She held her chin up and straightened her back, hoping that her composure didn't reflect whatever hurt she's hiding inside.

Mr. Baek closed the door and climbed back up the car as Tiffany started walking into the building. All of the staffs were lined on both sides of the pathway, ready to welcome their new boss, and they bowed one by one like a domino once they saw Tiffany.

Tiffany didn't greet anyone as she continued walking as if no one was around. She boarded the elevator that was waiting for her. Two usherettes were inside, waiting for her, and once the door closed, one of them pressed the button that has number three engraved on it.

Tiffany left the usherettes inside as she boarded off the lift, turned right, and into the lone door on the whole floor. It was known to every staffs that the president has the whole third floor to herself and no one was allowed to step in there unless ordered by the president herself.

She commanded the metal door open and stepped inside. Once the door was closed behind her, she sighed heavily, and dropped her shoulders, letting her strong façade down.

“Oh gosh... I’m so not in the mood to work,” she complained as she dragged her feet and slumped on the couch in the middle of the spacious room.

The room was very, very spacious that even five adult elephants could fit in. There was another door next to the door where she came in and Tiffany knew that it was a restroom. A receiving area was in the middle of the room. Tiffany thought it wasn’t like a receiving area, it was more like a living room with two love seats, a wide black couch, and a coffee table (It was literally a *coffee* table because by pressing the button that was on top of it, the table would split in half and a coffee machine would rise up ready with a cup of steaming hot coffee) minus the television set.

On a corner stuck another machine that Tiffany knew to be the *refrigerator*. It doesn’t look like the refrigerators people used way back fifty years ago. It was the modern one that with just saying what kind of food or cold drink you want on the little microphone built in it, the food or drink would automatically come out of the machine.

On the farthest corner from the entrance door was where Tiffany’s working table was settled. It looked different from the last time Tiffany saw it—when her father was still the president. It was changed to look feminine but still fierce, unlike the old one which was so manly.

Tiffany sighed again. “Ugh... the interior design of this room didn’t really help me—”

Her morning complains were cut off by the hissing of the door. She looked at the door as if a monster would come in, but it wasn’t a monster. It was Kim Taeyeon --her cousin whom she fought with three months ago-- who walked in hesitantly without looking at all at Tiffany.

“T-Taeng?” Tiffany stuttered as she got on her feet, already expecting Taeyeon’s harsh words.

Taeyeon stood in front of her and spoke without looking up. “T-Tiffany... I...” She paused to gain courage and once she had, she looked up at Tiffany and continued, “I’m sorry for being mean to you, for saying harsh words to you. I’m sorry that I didn’t listen to you. I’m sorry that I acted like a jer—”

Her apologies were cut off when Tiffany unexpectedly hugged her very tight. “Oh God, Taeng, don’t say sorry!”

Taeyeon froze for a moment before lifting her arms up and hugged Tiffany back. “I’m sorry,” she whispered as tears filled the corners of her eyes.

She felt totally bad for treating Tiffany so harsh and she missed the old times when they were like sisters, fooling around and teasing each other like little kids. She missed hugging Tiffany like this. Simply, she missed her *Couz*. She wouldn’t have let three months to pass by without fixing their relationship if she knew she would miss Tiffany this bad.

“No. Don’t...” Tiffany paused, trying hard not to cry. “It is me who needs to say sorry. I almost killed your girlfriend. I deserved your treatment.”

“Tiffany.”

“I’m so sorry, Taeng. I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to do it. It was an accident.” The tears finally rolled down Tiffany’s cheeks.

“You’re forgiven, Tiffany. Now, forgive me,” Taeyeon said in her natural voice, not the serious or mean one. It sounded almost like a joking one.

Tiffany smiled through the tears, missing how Taeyeon used to use that voice on her. “I never really hated you, Taeng, so there’s no reason to forgive you for.”

“I missed you, Couz,” Taeyeon said sincerely.

Hearing Taeyeon’s unique nickname for her, Tiffany grinned and pulled away, holding Taeyeon’s shoulders in an arm length. “Y’know, I missed you calling me that.”

Taeyeon rolled her eyes jokingly. “I’ll call you more of that from now on, but for now, wipe your tears. You’re snotting on yourself and, just so y’know, it doesn’t make you look attractive.”

Tiffany slapped her cousin’s arm playfully before fishing out a pack of Kleenex from her purse that was on the couch. She unattractively blew her nose on the tissue, making Taeyeon look incredulously at her. Tiffany Hwang never did that in front of anyone.

Remembering something, Tiffany’s eyes lit up. “Hey, am I allowed to go inside Sunny’s room now?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Let’s go! I wanna say sorry to her too.” Tiffany grabbed Taeyeon’s wrist and started dragging her, but the shorter girl jerked her back.

“She can wait, but your work can’t.” Taeyeon nodded her head to the direction of Tiffany’s table, a pile of papers settled on top of it.

“Oh great. Tons of paper works on the first day of work,” Tiffany said dryly.

“Finish your work first and then you can go visit Sunny, alright?” Taeyeon smiled fondly at Tiffany and was about to leave the room but Tiffany called her again.

“Taeng!”

Taeyeon looked back at her. “Hmmm?”

"You graduated with a major in Business Management, right? Maybe you want to be my adviser in this company?" Tiffany looked expectantly at her.

Taeyeon paused to think, making Tiffany nervous.

"Come on, Taeng. My major never tackled anything about managing a business. I can surely use your help."

The corners of Taeyeon's lips were itching to twitch up but Taeyeon wouldn't let it. She's really going to say yes, but she would just tease Tiffany for a little bit of fun. When she saw Tiffany unconsciously started pulling off her puppy eyes, she finally gave in and laughed.

"Alright, alright." She took a deep breath and released it as a contented sigh. "I'll help you with running this company since Hyunjoong oppa manages our own company anyway."

Tiffany squealed in happiness and ran smack to Taeyeon, hugging her tightly. "OMG! Thank you so much, Taeng!"

"Hey, I never heard you say sorry and thank you before on a single day," Taeyeon said softly.

Tiffany suddenly turned serious and pulled away. She looked down at her stiletto boots, remembering Jessica.

Her problems were lessened with one, but they still felt heavy for her, being her problem with Jessica as the heaviest one. She has made up her mind that she would divorce Jessica after she gave birth, but just the thought of it could already change her mind. The result of the divorce was still unsure, but no matter what would happen, she would divorce Jessica.

"Who taught you that, huh?" Taeyeon asked with a teasing smirk.

Tiffany covered up her sadness with a forced smile. "My wife."

Might as well call her my wife while I still can.

Anyone would be fooled by Tiffany's smile, but not Taeyeon. She knew Tiffany so much to not see the sadness behind those brown eyes. "What's wrong, Couz?"

"Nothing. You should go ahead now, I'm sure Sunny's missing you already. Is it alright if you'll already start working tomorrow?" Tiffany kept her forced smile.

Taeyeon knew very well that strategy. Tiffany doesn't want to talk about it, and she understood. *It must be personal.*

Taeyeon hesitantly nodded. “I’m cool with that. I’ll see you later then.” With that being said, she left the room.

Tiffany sighed yet again and walked to her table to drown her feelings with loads of work.

~.~

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

“Happy birthday.”

“Thank you.”

“You don’t look happy.”

“Maybe it’s because I’m not.”

Hwang Chansung shook his head pitifully and sat in front of Jessica. She looked around the café to keep her mind off of Tiffany, but it doesn’t seem to work. The feeling was still there deep inside her chest—guilt. She never wanted to fight with Tiffany three months ago, but somehow it just happened, and it’s making her feel bad, not anymore angry. She couldn’t really stay angry at Tiffany for a long time.

Today was her twenty-fourth birthday but Tiffany didn’t even greet her. She couldn’t really blame Tiffany. She was the one who brought up the argument.

“What’s wrong?” Chansung gently asked.

“Everything.”

“Jessica.”

“Everything’s wrong, Chansung.” Jessica looked sharply at him. “Me being pregnant, me fighting with Tiffany, and me being here with you.”

“Jessica, you know that’s not good for your condition. You have to think positive.”

“How can I think positively if everything that’s happening is negative?” Jessica absentmindedly stirred her coffee.

“Jessica, look at me.” Chansung pointed at his chest. “I am positive. Look at me for now and think about nothing. I’ll handle Tiffany... uh... later.” He shrugged.

Jessica felt grateful that Chansung was there for her though he doesn’t know the whole story. For the past three months, he’s been there beside her while Tiffany did her best to stay away from her. He kind of reminded Jessica of Leo in terms of kindness.

“I don’t know what I’ll do without you, Chansung.” Jessica smiled sadly at him. She knew Chansung has problems of his own, but he still tried to choose the best words to say to her just to make her feel better, and she’s thankful for that.

“Are you starting to like me now?” Chansung joked with a confident smirk.

Jessica laughed and shook her head. She knew Chansung was full of himself, but there’s really nothing wrong about it. What he said about him was true, except his last sentence.

Silence enveloped them for a moment as Jessica looked out of the window beside their table, watching average people pass by the cozy café. Not far from the café were clothing stores, food chains, and other places that average people usually went to and places Jessica has never been to.

Chansung observed Jessica. She looked stressed but still beautiful. The lump on her stomach was barely visible yet but she preferred wearing one piece dresses topped with a cardigan, because pants or shorts were too tight for her stomach, and flat shoes which she have no problems with because she preferred flat shoes ever since.

He followed Jessica’s gaze and smiled to himself.

“Let’s go take a short walk outside. I heard pregnant women should take a walk from time to time. They said it helps, but I don’t know how. It wouldn’t hurt to try, right? And don’t worry, we’re inside a community of average people, no one would recognize us here.” He stood up from his chair and helped Jessica to stand up.

“No need.” Jessica waved away his help. “I still can stand up myself, y’know?” She chuckled as she walked out of the café, leaving Chansung behind.

“Hey, wait!”

~.~

“Oh, Sunny, I forgot to mention, Tiffany’s coming here...” Taeyeon glanced at the digital wall clock. “Anytime soon.”

Taeyeon has gotten back to Sunny's hospital room a couple of hours ago. She spent her whole day with Sunny and Mrs. Lee, who was also taking care of the injured girl, and told her about forgiving Tiffany and Tiffany forgiving her in return.

If only Sunny's hips and legs weren't casted, she would have stood up and hugged Taeyeon right then, but she only managed to hug Taeyeon when the girl scooted over to her. She was undeniably glad that Taeyeon has finally forgiven Tiffany. She has never seen Taeyeon this happy talking about Tiffany for three months. There was a certain shine in Taeyeon's eyes as she mentioned everything to Sunny, including her working for the company.

Before Sunny had the chance to reply to what Taeyeon said, the door hissed open and there stood Tiffany, looking nervous.

"Oh here she is. Come in, Tiffany!" Taeyeon happily stood up from her chair beside Sunny's bed and pulled Tiffany in.

"Miss Tiffany." Sunny straddled her arms and tried to pull her body up.

"No!" Tiffany ran to her and held her shoulders to stop her from doing so. "No need... just rest."

Sunny laid back and looked at Tiffany's hands that were on her shoulders. Tiffany Hwang never touched any of her servants before, only Mr. Baek.

"Couz, this is Mrs. Lee," Taeyeon introduced her girlfriend's mother.

The older woman looked like an older version of Sunny, sitting on the other side of the bed.

Mrs. Lee stood up and bowed respectfully at her. "Miss Tiffany."

"You don't have to bow, Mrs. Lee."

Tiffany felt really, really bad seeing how respectful the Lees were. How could she have almost killed someone as respectful as Sunny? How could she have almost took her life away from her mother who gave birth to her? How could she have almost taken yet another innocent life?

She has taken Mr. Choi's life --a very loyal butler-- before, and three months ago, she has almost taken Sunny's life --a very respectful servant-- too. Why did every good-hearted person seem to die in her hands?

Tiffany's hands started shaking as dark and haunting memories flashed in her head. Sunny's blood in her car's hood. Mr. Choi's blood in her little hands. Sunny's limp body on the cold pavement. Mr. Choi's lifeless body in her little arms.

She slightly shook her head to push away the memories.

Sometimes Tiffany wondered what did she do wrong to be the reason for someone's death or, in this case, almost death. Was she somehow cursed? Destined to take away an innocent soul?

But, pushing everything at the back of her head, she's grateful that this time, Sunny didn't die. She couldn't afford to witness yet another death with her own two eyes and made by her own two hands.

"Mrs. Lee and Sunny, I'm sorry." Tiffany swallowed every pride she has and bowed. "I don't know how to pay for what I've done."

"Miss Tiffany." Sunny, being the closest one to Tiffany, lifted her left hand and tapped Tiffany's shoulder to tell her that it's alright for her to stand straight. It was all too overwhelming for Sunny—hearing Tiffany say sorry to her, and bowing to her. She felt like she won a lottery.

Tiffany straightened her back and looked at Sunny, waiting for what she has to say.

Sunny smiled. "It's alright, Miss Tiffany. But because of this you lost your most charming maid at home," she joked and, though on the verge of tears, Tiffany managed to smile.

Taeyeon proudly smiled. Sunny really has her ways to lighten up the mood.

"Don't worry, Sunny. I'll pay for your hospital bills." Tiffany looked at Mrs. Lee. "Any therapy, Mrs. Lee, I'll pay for it and everything she needs. This is the least I can do."

Taeyeon put a hand on Tiffany's shoulder. "Too late, Couz, I already did that."

"Taeng, let me do it... please?"

Taeyeon's eyes narrowed. "For the record, Couz, you've said sorry, thank you, and please all in a single day. That's some huge improvement, y'know? I have to congratulate Jessica sometime."

Taeyeon once again witnessed the change in Tiffany's expression and her eyes narrowed. *Now I'm sure. Something's wrong with Jessica and Tiffany.*

"OK! I'll let you do it," she suddenly said.

Tiffany grinned, and the sadness in her eyes somehow lessened. "Thanks."

Mrs. Lee smiled at the reunion of the three. She used to know Tiffany as a spoiled brat, but seeing this now, she has changed her mind. She's not that bad after all.

She offered Tiffany to stay for the remaining of the afternoon and they spent the time talking about unimportant stuffs, and for a short time, Tiffany felt warm on the inside like she'd never did before.

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Jessica tiredly slumped on the sofa, feeling her legs numbed. She grunted before bending on the waist and started massaging her tired legs.

“Hey, you said we’re just going to take a *short* walk! Look at my feet now, they’re tired,” Jessica complained as she massaged her legs, a pout adorning her face.

Chansung sat beside her and chuckled. “That’s normal with pregnant wom—”

“Shhh!” Jessica cut his sentence. No one at home knew that she’s pregnant, even her father and mother-in-law. She couldn’t find the courage to tell anyone yet, and even if she has, she believed it’s still not yet the perfect time.

“What?”

“No one knows yet, except you, Tiffany and I. So don’t go saying it so carelessly!” Jessica hissed.

Chansung sighed dejectedly. “Alright. Just give me your feet then.”

Jessica just stared at him as if he just turned into a vampire and was threatening to suck her blood, hands frozen from massaging her legs. Chansung eventually grew tired of Jessica’s stone-like expression and pulled Jessica’s feet up to his lap, making the girl blush.

“I’ve read somewhere that husbands should massage their pregnant wives’ legs because it tends to get tired so easily,” Chansung said as he experimentally massaged Jessica’s right leg, clearly showing that it was his first time doing it. He put his thumb on the side of her ankle, and her forefinger and middle finger on the other side, and then he started moving it in a circular motion. “But I’m not saying I’m your husband.”

Jessica watched as he tilted his head to a side, concentrating on what he was doing, and for the first time she realized that he’s actually cute.

She suddenly chuckled. “You seemed to know a lot about ‘these’ stuffs. Have you studied them?”

He looked at her guiltily. “It wouldn’t hurt, right?” He shrugged and resumed massaging Jessica’s leg in a circular motion, gradually moving up to Jessica’s knee.

Jessica laughed. “Really? You’ve studied them and yet I haven’t read anything about pregnancy yet.” She whispered the word ‘pregnancy’ as if it was a forbidden word.

She felt her leg slowly easing, relaxing. Chansung was right. The massage was really helping.

"It's alright, at least one of us knows the basics. BUT! I still believe that your wife should be the one doing this." He switched to massage Jessica's other leg. "I mean, she's *your wife!*"

As if it was a cue, the front door opened and Tiffany came in, looking better than she used to for the past couple of months. There was a certain glow on her, like she's happy, but the glow dimmed when she saw Jessica and her cousin, Chansung.

Jessica and Chansung looked at the direction and Jessica met Tiffany's eyes. Jessica frowned. So did Tiffany. The light atmosphere earlier turned heavy, and Chansung felt instantly out of place.

Tiffany's eyes casted somewhere and Jessica followed her gaze. She was looking at Chansung's hands on Jessica's leg.

Tiffany gritted her teeth, trying to stop herself from lunging at Chansung and punching him till he's unrecognizable. How could he touch her wife like that? How dare he?

She doesn't want you to care, Tiffany. Just do what she wants you to do.

Before she couldn't stop herself anymore, Tiffany forced her feet to take steps in the direction of the stairs and she's glad that she was able to move them. She looked away and rounded the grand staircase as if she didn't see anything and disappeared in the hallway.

Jessica sighed dejectedly and took her feet off Chansung's lap, putting them on the floor. She felt sad that Tiffany didn't even say anything. But then again, they've exchanged harsh words before. She couldn't blame Tiffany for acting that way.

"It's OK." Chansung somehow sensed that Jessica was feeling sad.

"She's been ignoring me for three months now." Jessica looked down at the thick fur of the carpet below her feet, mostly whispering to herself than Chansung. "I can't breathe."

"Well, you can't blame her."

"I know. I just hated the fact that I really can't blame her. I've been blaming myself for what's happening to us, I hope I can blame someone else."

Jessica felt like crying. Again. She has spent a couple of nights crying to herself when she knew Tiffany was already asleep.

She has spent her entire life following what her parents wanted her to do, following what her parents-in-law wanted her to do, and now she's following what Tiffany wanted her to do, and this was what she would get? Nothing but pain.

She has given up her own self for people she cherished the most. They doesn't have any idea how much she wanted to do things she wanted to do but couldn't do just because it wasn't the one planned for her. They doesn't have any idea how much she wanted to rip off that obedient-girl mask she has on just so she could satisfy others and be selfish and just satisfy no one but herself. She badly wanted to break free from their chains. They've been pulling her away from her happiness.

But what else could she do?

She has been this selfless ever since she could remember. She knew that she's living for someone else's happiness-- though it meant that she has to suffer. And her suffering was never worth the price she received from having to do what people wanted her to do. Her price has always been nothing.

So why doesn't she just stop?

Because she doesn't want to disappoint them. And she knew somewhere in the end God would give her a price so great it would surpass twice the worth of all her pains and sufferings.

"Just don't think about her, Jessica. It will not be good for your condition."

"I'm just so tired of all this, Chansung."

"Are you really tired?"

Jessica nodded.

Chansung stood up and Jessica, surprised with the sudden movement, looked up at him. "Come with me. We're going to find people that will back you up."

He took the girl's hand and gently pulled her up to her feet.

CHAPTER 2: 'TRUTH'



CHAPTER 2: 'TRUTH'

"This is your idea of finding people that will back me up?" Jessica whispered discreetly to Chansung as they sat on one of Ernest and Sophia's sofas in their spacious room, lips barely moving.

Chansung has just pulled Jessica to the elders' room without really telling what his plan was. When Ernest had let them in, Chansung left Jessica on the sofa before walking pass another door that would lead to the main room. After a couple of minutes, he walked out, and here they were now, Jessica glaring at the man and the man just shrugging it off as they waited for Ernest and Sophia to come out of their room.

Sophia and Ernest finally came out of the main room and Chansung was instantly on his feet, Jessica didn't bother doing the same.

Jessica met Sophia's eyes and the older woman looked away first. She really felt guilty of having to do what she did to Jessica.

"Aunty, Uncle." Chansung bowed respectfully.

"What is it that you need to tell us, Jessica?" Ernest gently asked.

Jessica just looked at him, clueless, then she looked at Chansung, confused.

"Tell them." He jerked his head to the elders' direction.

Jessica's eyes grew wide, finally realizing what Chansung was telling her to do. *He wants me to tell them I'm pregnant?!*

She shook her head and glared at him, saying through her eyes that she couldn't. Chansung widened his eyes jerked his head again. Jessica finally gave up. They would eventually know soon anyway.

She sighed, heart beating fast, eyes casted down. "I'm... three months pregnant."

Ernest and Sophia's eyes grew wide in shock. They couldn't find the right words to say. They were utterly dumbfounded by the unexpected news.

It was Ernest who recovered first, though slightly stuttering. "That's... t-that's great, Jessica."

It's actually everything but great, Jessica thought for she couldn't voice it out.

"Congratulations. We're happy for you!" Sophia exclaimed, sounding excited and genuinely happy.

There's nothing to be happy about.

"I think you should start buying the baby's stuffs now. We'll close down the Urban Mall tomorrow for you. Chansung, you should come with her." Sophia looked expectantly at him.

"Yes, of course, Aunty." He kindly smiled.

Jessica doesn't find this exciting at all. She doesn't want to be pregnant in the first place, but why everyone was so happy about it? Even Sophia was shameful to show how happy she was though she was the one to blame.

"Go ahead and sleep now, Jessica. I know how hard it is to be pregnant." Sophia smiled at Jessica for the first time in three months.

Jessica stood up and bowed, wanting to leave the room as fast as she could. After everything, she couldn't really stand to look at Sophia for a long time. She left the room with Chansung following closely behind.

Once the door closed, Sophia immediately threw her arms around her husband's waist and pressed her forehead on his chest. "Honey, she's pregnant. Oh God, she's pregnant." She sounded as if she couldn't believe it.

"She is, love. I'm glad." Ernest wrapped his arms around Sophia. He was always been the calm one.

Sophia turned quiet and Ernest felt his shirt getting wet, followed by Sophia's soft sobs. She was too overwhelmed to process everything in her head. So she has been right all along. Her plan did work.

She silently sent a sincere prayer up in the heaven. "Thank you for guiding us, Father."

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The next day Jessica took her time sleeping and woke up at around twelve noon with the space beside her empty. Nothing's new. Tiffany went to the company early in the morning again. She felt for her wrist watch on the night stand, eyes still closed, but opened them once she felt something unusual on her wrist watch.

There was a note stuck on top of her wrist watch. She flicked it off and held it high so she could read it.

The servants said you're still sleeping so I didn't bother waking you up. Just give me a call once you're ready to buy the baby's stuffs.

--Chansung

PS. I didn't sneak into your room while you're sleeping, just so you know. Don't want Tiffany to kill me.

Jessica slightly chuckled. Chansung really knew his place. He knew better than to mess up with Tiffany.

With the mention of the girl's name, Jessica felt something on the pit of her stomach. It was guilt, she knew it. She's guilty for arguing with Tiffany that somehow led to this—Chansung taking care of her, and Tiffany totally fading off into the background.

She felt bad for Chansung too. He has his own life. He shouldn't be involved with this, but everything became complicated that she needed to cling onto Chansung and not onto her own wife.

Everything's complicated and confusing and mind-boggling that Jessica doesn't know what to do anymore.

After taking a deep breath, Jessica stood up from the bed, silently thankful that it still smelled like Tiffany so she wouldn't miss the girl so much, and went straight to the bathroom to prepare.

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At around 1 pm Tiffany still hasn't had lunch and she was still stuck in front of her terminal. Work was doing its purpose to keep her mind away from anything else that mattered besides their company. 'Anything else' meant: Jessica, Jessica, and Jessica.

There were jewelry runway shows in different parts of the world that their company hosted and Tiffany could only monitor it through the internet. There were hundreds of jewelry designs she needed to see and approve so it could be released. And there was the mining company where Tiffany & co. import minerals from that Tiffany also had to handle.

Tiffany only realized then why her parents' hairs easily turned gray.

She rubbed the back of her neck as she groaned, feeling it stiff. There was still a lot to do and her stomach was already complaining from the lack of food.

Her fist-sized iPadXV beside her terminal vibrated and it cut through her concentration. She glared at the poor thing, wishing it to explode, but her eyes turned hateful when she saw who messaged her. She wished that person to die right at the moment.

She grabbed her iPad, and tapped the screen to open the message.

From: Chansung

Out w/ Jess ryt now. @Urban Mall. Baby's section.

Tiffany scoffed, not understanding the man's message. Was he trying to show off that he could bring Jessica out and she couldn't? That he's the father of the child and not her? Or to show off that he's excited for the birth of *his* child?

"Why is he telling me? As if like I care." She slammed the poor thing down on her desk, and right at the same time, the door hissed open.

"Hey, Couz, you looked stressed." Taeyeon came in with two brown paper bags.

"I am." Tiffany rested her back against her red swivel chair's back rest and tiredly turned it around and around like a kid.

Taeyeon smiled fondly at the girl though she's not sure if Tiffany saw it because she's busy spinning her chair around. She put the paper bags on Tiffany's table and leaned over it to stop the girl from spinning.

"As your adviser, I'm telling you that you should eat so you can focus."

"What is that?" Tiffany looked at the paper bags.

Taeyeon took two food containers out of the first paper bag. "Food and drinks."

"You didn't have to bring them. Everything's available here." Tiffany motioned for the refrigerator on the corner.

Taeyeon shook her head. "No. This food is home made. Cooked by Sunny's mother. It's the best in the world, I'm telling you. And the tea was also made by Mrs. Lee."

"You're saying that 'coz she's your mother-in-law," Tiffany joked.

"Correction: *future* mother-in-law, and no, I'm not bluffing! Wait till you have a taste of this." Taeyeon opened the containers, pulled out a fork from the same paper bag, and forked a shrimp from the seafood casserole for Tiffany. "Open your mouth."

Tiffany opened her mouth without second thoughts and Taeyeon fed her. The taste of the shrimp and its seasonings exploded in her mouth like something familiar she's tasted before. It was delicious. Full of love. It tasted like *home*.

Taeyeon watched intently as Tiffany slowly chewed the food, waiting for her reaction. Something caught her eyes. It was almost invisible, but it was glinting with the chandelier's glow. Was that a tear on the corner of Tiffany's right eye?

"How is it?" Taeyeon asked expectantly.

Tiffany swallowed everything first before answering, "It's great..."

Taeyeon sensed that though Tiffany has stopped talking, she still had something to add. Something was stopping her though, and she looked like she was about to cry.

"And?" she prompted.

"It..." Tiffany had to fight the lump in her throat for her to talk normally. "It tasted like what Jessica used to cook for me before."

Tiffany exploded in tears then. She cupped her mouth with both shaking hands to muffle her sobs as Taeyeon hurriedly went beside her to hug her. This was crazy. Why was she crying? Why was she hurting all of a sudden? Why did she only feel now how much she missed the taste of the food Jessica cooked for her before?

The food was incredibly delicious. She could taste the love in it. It was so strong to be missed out and it reminded her so much of Jessica that she couldn't help but cry in hopelessness, thinking that she would never be able to taste Jessica's cooking again.

It was just a simple thing. It was just Jessica's cooking that she missed, but why was she crying?

The answer was deep inside her heart, and Tiffany heeded it. She loved Jessica, that's why she's crying, and she missed her so badly, knowing the things Jessica used to do for her before wouldn't happen again.

"Shhh... Couz, what's wrong? Tell me what's wrong," Taeyeon soothed as she rubbed the crying girl's back.

Tiffany knew by Taeyeon's voice that the older girl knew something. Somehow she knew something was wrong with Tiffany but she couldn't figure out what. She badly wanted to let her feelings out, and she knew Taeyeon was the best listener she could ever have.

"Did you and Jessica fight?" Taeyeon caught the use of the word 'before' on Tiffany's sentence earlier.

Tiffany nodded, for she couldn't talk with her uncontrollable sobs.

“Calm down, Tiffany, and let’s talk about it. Y’know it’s not good for you to be bottling it all up.”

After a couple of minutes, Tiffany has finally stopped crying and she started telling Taeyeon about the whole story, starting from the very beginning. She told Taeyeon the truth about their marriage, that she doesn’t love Jessica then and only grew to love her now but couldn’t confess because of the stupid contract she made herself. She mentioned about their parents’ plan of making Chansung sleep with Jessica just so the first born would be a male. And lastly, still with her nose red and eyes puffy: “She’s three months pregnant now.”

Taeyeon’s eyes grew wide. “WHAT?!”

Tiffany simply nodded and wiped her nose for the last time before throwing the tissue on the trash bin under her table.

“That’s...” Taeyeon trailed, unable to find the right words to say. “I’m sorry, Couz. I really don’t know what to say to make you feel better.”

Tiffany shook her head. “No, Taeng, it’s alright. Just taking your time listening to me is enough help. At least I have someone to whom I can share my thoughts and feelings with now.”

“Yes. I’ll listen to you anytime.” Taeyeon hugged Tiffany again.

“Hey, Taeng, can you do me two little favors?”

Taeyeon pulled away and looked at her. “Anything.”

“First: don’t tell anyone—even Jessica—about everything I’ve told you.”

“You have my word on that.”

“And second: can you call Hyun Joong oppa and tell him to network the mall’s baby section’s CCTV on my terminal?”

“Why?”

“It’s just that Chansung messaged me earlier, telling that he’s there with Jessica, and I just wanna make sure if he’s buying the right thing.” Tiffany looked expectantly at her.

Taeyeon smiled. “Sure.” She stood straight and pulled the sleeve of her coat up to reveal her wristwatch. She pressed a couple of tiny little buttons before her brother’s voice answered the rings.

“Yes, dongsaeng?” Hyun Joong greeted sweetly, and his smooth voice reminded Tiffany of stuffs about him.

She hasn't seen Hyun Joong for a long time now, but when they were kids they were almost always together. Playing, most of the time, with Taeyeon. And Tiffany remembered having a crush on him. She's young, and she doesn't know that it's wrong to have a crush on a relative, and Hyun Joong was so sweet back then.

Being a couple of years older than Tiffany, he's like an older brother to Tiffany too, but then he started going to school, and Tiffany too, that's when they lost contact. Tiffany was utterly surprised to hear from Taeyeon that he took up Business Management on an all-male college and not Medicine. Though it was long time ago, Tiffany remembered Hyun Joong telling her that he wanted to be a doctor.

"Oppa, can you network the baby's section's CCTV on this IP address?" Taeyeon told him the address.

"I guess I know why." There was a hint of knowing in his voice and if only they were talking face to face, Tiffany's sure that he's smiling teasingly at her. "It's about Jessica and Chansung, am I right?"

"Of course you know. The whole mall's closed down only for them, so don't act so smart or intuitive, Oppa." Taeyeon burst his bubble. "Just network the CCTV!" she prompted.

Hyun Joong chuckled. The sound was a little crackled because of the static. "Alright. Alright. Just wait for a sec."

There was a short silence on the other line before Tiffany's terminal dinged. There was a pop-up confirmation message if she wanted to receive the thing that's being sent to her. Tiffany immediately clicked yes and the screen divided into four, each part has different views of the Urban Mall's baby's section. On the top-right corner, the two girls could clearly see Chansung and Jessica carefully picking some baby's stuffs.

"It's here now, Oppa. Thanks." Taeyeon was about to click the end call button but Hyun Joong stopped her.

"Wait!" Then his voice changed into a fond one, like the way he used to talk to Tiffany when they were young. "Tiffany, I know you're there. I don't know what's up with our cousin and your wife, but I just wanna tell you that I'm here to help you anytime."

Tiffany felt her old feelings grew back, like she had a crush on him again. That was the reason why she had a crush on him before. He's so sweet and nice and caring and gentle and understanding it was impossible for a girl to not like him. But she's grown up now, and already deeply in love to entertain her small crush on him. After all, a crush was just a crush.

Tiffany moved closer to Taeyeon just so he could hear her. "Thanks, Oppa. I'll hold onto that."

"Alright. Bye-bye." Then he cut the call.

"Hmmm... let's see what we have here." Taeyeon stood behind Tiffany, reached for the food that was left on her table, started eating, and looked over Tiffany's shoulder to watch Chansung and Jessica on the screen like she's watching a movie.

Tiffany watched too, tons of work pushed at the back of her head.

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Chansung doesn't know what to do. He hasn't studied anything about baby's stuffs yet and he doesn't know which were the right things to buy. There were thousands of stuffs around them. Different sizes, colors, designs and brands, and he felt lost. He just stood behind Jessica and watched the girl choose everything as he maneuvered the push cart.

And plus, he knew deep down inside him that Tiffany was watching. Somewhere, somehow. Maybe by the CCTV, but he couldn't be so sure. He still wanted to live so he would keep a distance away from Jessica that she wouldn't notice.

Jessica, on the other hand, was taking her time in reading the back labels, checking if it's good for her coming child. Currently, she has two baby bottles on both hands and examining every detail of it. On her right was colored pink and the other was blue.

A sales lady came over to them and bowed. "Hi, Ma'am and Sir, do you need any help?"

"Yes," Chansung answered before Jessica had the chance to. "This is the first time we're buying baby's stuffs and we don't have any idea which to buy."

The sales lady smiled before going on with her practiced sales talk. She talked about this and that. About dos and don'ts on the baby's things. Jessica listened intently, not because she wanted to but because she had to. She wanted what's best for her baby. And Chansung just looked around the place, not interested.

Finally, after a long time of talking, the sales lady asked. "It is a girl or a boy, Ma'am?"

Chansung's ears perked up, remembering something. He palmed his face. "Oh yeah! We haven't gone on obstetrics yet and had an ultra sound!"

But Jessica ignored him and answered straight away, "It's a boy."

Chansung's eyebrows knitted. "How did you know?"

Jessica looked incredulously at him. "It's a Hwang, of course it's a boy."

Chansung's expression didn't change for a long time. He was just staring at Jessica, trying to figure her out. The sales lady looked confusedly at them, not knowing what to do. Finally, he sighed and waved his hand dismissively. "Whatever. Just do whatever you think is right."

And then the longest five hours of Chansung's life begun as they shopped everything that's needed both for the baby and for the mommy and dived into a world both Jessica and him are not familiar with. They were just silently thankful that the sales lady was there.

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Seohyun slowly put down the novel book from her hand to the table and she breathed out as she removed her reading glasses. She couldn't focus on what she was reading. She was reading them, but couldn't understand. She has been like this for the past couple of months. Probably because she's bothered about Sooyoung that everyone knew as Summer.

She couldn't understand why Sooyoung was hiding behind Summer. Who was she? Really? What did she want? Who was she hiding from? Most likely Tiffany, because she wanted to put down Tiffany. But for what?

Ever since Seohyun overheard Hyoyeon and Sooyoung's conversation a couple of months ago, she contacted a private investigator to search for Choi Sooyoung's background. About everything the private investigator could find. Since then, the private investigator hasn't found anything yet.

Three tiny beeping sounds emitted from Seohyun's wristwatch and she pressed a button on it.

"Ms. Seo, this is private investigator Edward Calhound reporting."

"Have you found anything yet?" Seohyun asked.

There was a pause before he answered, "Still nothing, Miss. She didn't leave any trace behind. Everything's cleaned up. There were no records about Choi Sooyoung anywhere."

Seohyun sighed. She expected it. Hyoyeon was helping Sooyoung, she knew it, and so everything was probably already covered up.

"OK, but please don't stop there."

"Yes, Miss. I'll do my best though it might take some time."

"No matter how long just tell me immediately when you've found something. Thank you." Seohyun cut the call.

She sighed again before resting her back on the back rest of her chair. Her study room, that could pull her into a different world before, couldn't seem to pull her out of reality right now. She badly wanted to know what's up with Sooyoung but couldn't ask anyone. She knew she should ask Tiffany. But if Tiffany had something to do with her, shouldn't she have recognized Sooyoung the first time they've seen each other? Maybe, just maybe, something happened between them long time ago that Tiffany couldn't remember. And

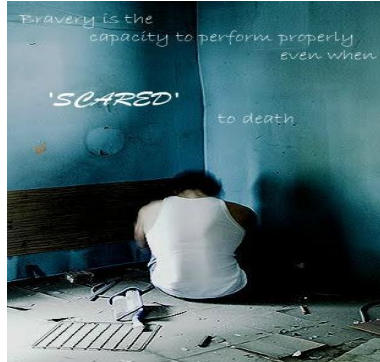
if it was long time ago, Seohyun thought that maybe it wasn't that important to Tiffany anymore. No need to bring it back and talk about it. Sooyoung seemed deeply affected by whatever that happened though, because she badly wanted to put Tiffany down.

Seohyun doesn't know what to do. Ask Tiffany and bring back something she probably doesn't want to remember? Or let it be and wait till Sooyoung do something stupid to Tiffany? If ever she would do something to Tiffany, that was. And she doesn't want to get in between the two of them, she just wanted to help.

Finally, Seohyun came up to a plan.

I'll wait for the next report, and if it's still nothing, I'll ask Tiffany myself.

CHAPTER 3: 'SCARED'



CHAPTER 3: 'SCARED'

Jessica's fourth month of pregnancy.

Jessica dried her hair with a white towel as she stepped out of the bathroom, at the same time with Tiffany stepping inside their room. Tiffany moved fast, not wanting to stay inside the room with Jessica alone. She walked into the walk-in closet, stepped out with a couple of clothes and hurriedly went inside the bathroom. Her right shoulder slightly brushed against Jessica's as she walked past her.

Jessica sighed once the bathroom's door closed. She didn't even see what Tiffany did because she moved so fast. She sat down on their bed and took a deep breath. She's been finding it hard to breathe lately, and she knew it was the effect of being pregnant. But this time, it wasn't because she's pregnant that's why she couldn't breathe. It was because of Tiffany.

Every time she's ignoring Jessica, Jessica couldn't breathe, like Tiffany took all the air with her. And, anywhere they were, once Tiffany ignored her, the place would suddenly feel packed and small, the air thick and heavy.

Jessica eventually grew tired of all of Tiffany's childish actions and so she made up her mind to talk to Tiffany. Right now.

She waited patiently for a long time until Tiffany finally came out of the bathroom.

"Tiffany, let's talk." Jessica stood up from the bed and held the girl's wrist before she darted out of the room again.

Tiffany sighed before facing Jessica, putting up an annoyed expression. "Let go."

Jessica hesitantly did.

“What’s there to talk about?”

“Why are you ignoring me?” Jessica asked.

Tiffany shrugged. “Isn’t that what you want? You told me to not treat you nicely, and to stop acting. That’s exactly what I’m doing.”

Jessica shook her head. “No. You’re not good at acting, y’know that? Tiffany, no matter how hard you try, I can see that you’re *still* acting.”

“What do you mean?” Tiffany’s eyebrows knitted.

Jessica’s eyes softened and Tiffany felt her heart twitched. “You’re acting like you don’t care about me though you do.”

Tiffany was taken aback by Jessica’s statement and she felt scared. Did Jessica know that she love her? Then that meant that they should divorce because that was what’s written on their divorce agreement.

No. She wouldn’t admit it just like that.

Tiffany laughed unbelievably. “Do not assume so easily, Jessi.”

Silence fell between them for a while.

Jessica paced back and forth. “Look, I’m sorry, OK? It was an impulse reaction. I didn’t mean to tell you to not care about me, honestly, I want you to.”

Jessica felt weird. She has never really told anyone about her real feelings before. This was the first time and she felt nervous, scared that Tiffany might misunderstand what she was saying. Given that this was her first time, she doesn’t really know what to say and what to not, so she would gamble. She would say everything.

“I know it’s my fault, but I can’t stand the feeling I feel every time you’re ignoring me. It feels like you’re blaming me for everything.” Jessica stopped talking then because she felt her throat tightened and tears filled her eyes.

“Why are you saying sorry when you didn’t even do anything wrong?” Tiffany whispered, but she doesn’t really have to talk loudly for Jessica to hear her. They were alone and secluded inside their quiet room.

“Then whose fault this is?”

Tiffany stopped Jessica from pacing and held her shoulders, willing the girl’s eyes to look at her. “Mine. It’s my fault, Jessi. The wrong is with me, not with you.”

Tiffany wanted to add something more, but she couldn't. She wanted to tell Jessica she couldn't stand seeing Chansung with her, that she's jealous, but she couldn't. She couldn't risk it.

"Then what's wrong with you? You're not talking to me, you're so childish, and everything you do was shouting 'this is your entire fault, Jessica, all yours!' " A tear rolled down Jessica's delicate cheek.

"Don't cry." Tiffany wiped Jessica's tears with her fingers as she sniffed and stopped herself from crying too. "The wrong is with me, and I'm grown up enough to understand that. It's just that it's hard to say it!" she cried hopelessly.

"I'm just asking what's wrong with you. Answer that. What's wrong with you? Tell me, please," Jessica begged with soft voice.

"Do you really wanna know?"

Jessica nodded, not trusting her voice.

A long silence passed as Tiffany debated with herself. Should she say it or should she not? She doesn't want to and she knew she should not, but she's so tired of all this.

"I'm jealous! Goddammit!"

That was it. Tiffany knew it even before Jessica removed her hands from her face and took a step backward. She has exposed herself. She felt naked in front of Jessica, like she's not hiding anything anymore. This was the end, she knew it.

Jessica looked confused. "Jealous? Why?"

Tiffany silently thanked God that Jessica was dense and didn't realize the only reason why she's jealous. "I dunno. You're spending so much time with that stupid Chansung—"

"Don't call him that!" Jessica snapped.

Tiffany looked incredulously at her. "What? Are you siding him now?"

"You don't know about the things he did for me when all the time you ignored me. He took what's supposed to be your work. You don't have the rights to call him stupid," Jessica defended, totally forgetting about Tiffany's jealousy.

Tiffany misunderstood it and nodded mockingly. "Alright. OK. Are you siding him because he's the father of that... that...?" She doesn't know what to say next as she pointed an offending finger to Jessica's stomach.

Jessica glared at her and hugged her stomach. "Don't you dare point a finger on him. He's innocent. He doesn't have anything to do with everything that's happening to us!"

But Tiffany didn't stop and still pointed at Jessica's stomach, jabbing her finger through the air. "You shouldn't have willingly slept with Chansung so that... that thing inside your stomach didn't happen!"

That pulled the last straw. Jessica could take Tiffany's insults on her. She could call Jessica a slut or the likes because she knew deep inside her that none of that was true. She could look down at Jessica like she's someone dirty. But she couldn't take the insults on her unborn child. She should not call the life inside her a *thing*.

"How... how dare you..." Jessica's tears flooded her face. She was deeply hurt by Tiffany's words. She couldn't take anymore insults and so she ran out of the room, out of the house, and never looked back.

"Go ahead! Run and don't come back!" Tiffany shouted to no one in particular.

Just when she thought they were fixing things, everything suddenly became worse.

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Fifteen minutes.

Twenty two minutes.

Thirty minutes.

Fifty eight minutes have passed since Jessica ran out of the house and Tiffany couldn't sleep. She kept on rolling over the bed. Fidgeting. Fighting with herself. She kept on glancing at the clock on her night stand. The neon red lights of the numbers seemed to be daring her to run after Jessica.

No, Tiffany, no. Don't run after her. She chose Chansung over you! she kept on repeating to herself.

But her conscience was eating her, and worry was building up inside her.

She glanced at the clock again and it was officially one hour since Jessica left. It was already 11:23pm.

"God. Where could she have gone?!" Tiffany hissed as she messed her hair up.

Where does someone pregnant go at this time of the night? It's probably cold outside. Dark. And dangerous. A pregnant woman shouldn't be wondering outside this late. She should be inside the house. Keeping herself warm and safe and also her unborn child.

But Tiffany was the one who pushed Jessica out of the house.

If she didn't argue. If she just let Jessica say anything she wanted and accepted it, none of this would have happened. Jessica should be here, in this room, sleeping beside Tiffany as Tiffany watched her sleep.

"No. She ran away. I'm not running after her," Tiffany stubbornly pushed herself to believe.

What if a man is watching her every move?

"No." Tiffany closed her eyes tightly and pushed away the thoughts.

What if she didn't see a car coming as she crossed the street and she was hit?

"Tiffany, no. You're being paranoid."

What if a drunkard pulled Jessica in a dark alley?

"NO!"

What if she's shivering from cold outside as she cries?

"Goddammit."

What if she unexpectedly had a miscarriage?

"SHIT!"

Tiffany finally lost her inner battle and she bolted up from the bed and pulled out a shoe box under her bed. She wore the sneakers from it and ran out of the house, ready to find Jessica and fight for whatever danger she's in. If she's in one, that was.

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Jessica furiously wiped her tears as she ran aimlessly. She ran without thinking. She just wanted to get away from that house as far as possible. Away from Tiffany. Away from everything. She doesn't know how long she's been running. She felt the cold breeze brushed against her and she hugged herself, still running blindly.

After a long time of running, she stopped, feeling her legs tired. She remembered only then that she was pregnant and she shouldn't be running, so she started walking. She went straight ahead though she doesn't know where she was and where she was going.

When everything turned still and quiet after a long walk, she stopped yet again and look around. The place was totally unfamiliar to her. There were massive houses and narrow streets. But the streets were empty, the

house's lights were all turned off, as if the whole place was deserted. She knew it wasn't, though. Because it's already late, they're all probably sleeping.

She suddenly felt an eye behind her. She was wrong. Not everyone was sleeping. She sharply turned around and found a shadow behind a tree that looked suspiciously like a man's shadow. It was totally creepy, and she felt scared all of a sudden.

Why does this feels oddly familiar?

The owner of the shadow moved. The man with wire-rimmed glasses stepped out of his hiding place and faced Jessica's direction. On his right hand, held on his side... was a gun.

She started running then, really, really scared, into a narrow street. She knew the man followed her.

Jessica raced forward blindly. Turning. Winding. Staying out of the straightaways. The footsteps behind her seemed relentless. Jessica's mind was blank. Blank to everything—where she was, who was chasing her—all that was left was instinct, self preservation, no pain, only fear, and raw energy. A shot exploded against the azulejo tile behind her. Shards of glass sprayed across the back of her neck. She stumbled left, into another alley. She heard herself call for help, but except for the sound of footsteps and strained breathing, the night air remained deathly still.

She searched everywhere for an open door, an open gate, any escape from the suffocating canyons. Nothing. The walkway narrowed.

"Help!" Jessica's voice was barely audible.

The walls grew closer on each side. The walkway curved. Jessica searched for an intersection, a tributary, any way out. The passageway narrowed. Locked doors. Narrowing. Locked gates. The footsteps were closing. She was in a straightaway, and suddenly the alley began to slope upward. Steeper. Jessica felt her legs straining. She was slowing.

And then she was there.

Like a freeway that had run out of funding, the alley just stopped. There was a high wall, a wooden bench, and nothing else. No escape. Jessica looked up three stories to the top of the building and then spun and started back down the long alley, but she had only taken a few steps before she stopped short.

At the foot of the inclined straightaway, a figure appeared. The man moved toward Jessica with a measured determination. In his hand, a gun glinted in the moon's light. Jessica felt a sudden lucidity as she backed up toward the wall. She looked up at the figure approaching. The shadow advanced up the inclined passageway. Jessica saw walls on all sides—a dead end behind her. A few gated entryways between them, but it was too late to call for help.

Jessica pressed her back against the dead end. Suddenly she could feel every piece of grit beneath the soles of her shoes, every bump in the stucco wall behind her. Her mind was reeling backward, her childhood, her parents . . . Tiffany.

Oh, God . . . Tiffany.

For the zillionth time since she was a kid, Jessica prayed. She did not pray for deliverance from death, instead, she prayed that the girl she left behind would find strength, that she would know without a doubt that she had been important to Jessica. She closed her eyes. The memories came like a torrent. They were not memories of Fencing competitions, academic awards, and the things that made up 90 percent of her life; they were memories of her. Simple memories: making breakfast for her, their fights when they were still newlyweds. It was as if every defense, every facade, every insecure exaggeration of her life had been stripped away. She was standing naked—flesh and bones before God.

She stood, eyes closed, as the man in a wire-rimmed glasses drew nearer. Somewhere nearby, a bell began to toll. Jessica waited in darkness, for the sound that would end her life.

“Hey!”

Jessica’s eyes shot open and she doesn’t know what to feel when she saw Tiffany pushed the man sideways. The man dropped on the floor, the gun slipped somewhere in the shadows.

“Tiffany!” Jessica ran forward to Tiffany, but stopped when Tiffany warned her.

“Don’t! Stay there. I’ll handle this.” She talked without looking at Jessica. She was still facing the man, who was still on the floor, as she slowly walked backwards until she was in between Jessica and the man.

He stood up and didn’t bother searching for his gun, instead, he pulled out a long knife from his back pocket. Though it was dark, Jessica could see that it was sharp, so was Tiffany.

Tiffany gulped, not knowing what to do. The man was big for her size, and she doesn’t know any self defense, but one thing she’s sure, she’s not going to use her last resort, especially if Jessica was around, and she would fight him no matter what.

She bended on the waist and pressed something on the sole of her sneakers. Jessica saw the blades protruded out of the sneakers’ sides. Tiffany didn’t actually arrive without a weapon.

The action began.

Jessica watched, horrified, not knowing what to do. The man attacked, but Tiffany easily dodged it. The following things happened so fast Jessica was not sure if she saw it. Attack after attack. Defense after defense. Blade versus blade. The man seemed to be winning, for he has the blade in his hand, and Tiffany has hers on her sneakers.

Then something shocking happened.

The man raised his hand, the blade glinting in the moon's light, and dragged downward, ready to slice anything that would pass by it. Possibly the defenseless Tiffany's head. Tiffany, not knowing how to defense the sudden attack, raised her left arm over her head and let it experience the knife's sharpness.

Blood didn't come out of Tiffany's injured left arm the moment the knife sliced *through* it. There were no blood, Jessica was surprised-- but short circuiting wires! Sparking live wires!

Shit. I was saving it as the last resort, Tiffany mentally cursed.

Jessica's eyes grew wide as realization hit her. Tiffany's left arm was robotic. So that's why it felt, and seemed, different than her right one.

Tiffany screamed as the electric shock vibrated through her body, but she wouldn't give up. Not now that she's so close to winning.

The man raised his free arm to cover his face when the wire's sparks almost hit his eyes. Tiffany took it as a chance to strike. She swiped her feet right about the man's abdomen and sliced his stomach. Blood spattered everywhere. She jerked her left hand and the man let go of his knife that was still stuck through Tiffany's arm and dropped on the cold pavement, screaming in pain.

Tiffany dropped on the floor at the same time as his, also screaming in pain that was vibrating through her whole body, mostly on her spine.

"Tiffany!" Jessica hurriedly ran to Tiffany's side, not caring about the man. He deserved it. He deserved to die a slow, and painful death.

"Tiffany." She kneeled beside Tiffany and was glad that her arm has stopped sparking, the knife still stuck through it. She held the knife's handle and tried to jerk it out of Tiffany's arm, but the wires sparked yet again, and Tiffany creamed in pain as she felt a sharp electricity hit the back of her right eye.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Jessica gave up on the knife and hugged Tiffany's head on her chest instead. "Tiffany."

Tiffany has her eyes closed, and was breathing heavily, as if each of them was her last.

"J-j-jess-i," she managed to stutter. She wanted to say "It doesn't matter if you choose him over me. It doesn't matter if he's the father. I want to keep you beside me, Jessi," but couldn't.

"Tiffany, I'm here." Jessica hugged her tightly.

"D-d-d-on't cry." Tiffany found it hard to talk for she felt her whole body went numb, even her tongue.

Jessica didn't even realize that she was crying until Tiffany said so.

She's scared. Really, really scared. She couldn't stand to see Tiffany like this, on the verge of death, and most importantly she doesn't want to be the reason. But it was too late now. It already happened and she's scared. She doesn't want Tiffany to die, to leave her. She doesn't want to.

Just the thought of being a widow and of waking up in the morning knowing she wouldn't see Tiffany anymore scared her. Divorcing was different than one of them dying. If they divorced there was still a chance they would meet, but if Tiffany died Jessica couldn't stand it. She couldn't even stand the thought of not seeing Tiffany again.

"Tiffany, don't sleep." Jessica slapped the girl cheek a couple of times to keep her awake. She could feel Tiffany was getting weaker by every passing second. She's slowly slipping.

"J-j-jessi."

Jessica knew it was the last even before she took her next breath.

Tiffany's body shuddered once before finally lying limply on Jessica's arms.

"Tiffany?" Jessica slapped her again. "Come on, baby, wake up!"

"Tiffany!"

CHAPTER 4: 'LOSE'



CHAPTER 4: 'LOSE'

Tiffany woke up to a couple of series beeps but she didn't open her eyes. She knew those were the sounds of the machines connected to different parts of her body. She could feel the needle on top of her right hand, and also something she couldn't place. There was a certain heat settled on top of her right hand, heat that reminded her of the sun's heat in the mornings.

Her left arm, as usual, does not feel anything. She could feel a stagnant pain on her spine and she knew that feeling well. She has felt that before when she was nine, fourteen, and nineteen years old-- after her left arm was changed to a new one because it has to be as normal-looking as her right arm.

Tiffany could feel the blanket around her waist, the hospital gown's rough cloth, and a gauze covering her right eye.

Finally, she opened her left eye (couldn't open the right one because it was covered with a gauze) and she was in a place where she expected she was—on a hospital room. She looked around. It was spacious and high-ceilinged and looked like a bedroom instead of a hospital room if not for the machines surrounding her. It just might be a presidential suit in the Scorchwood Medical Hospital.

She saw Jessica hunched on her right, sleeping, both hands cupping Tiffany's right hand. Behind Jessica's chair, pressed against the wall, was a machine Tiffany recognized as the one tracing her heart beat. On Jessica's left, just beside Tiffany's headboard, was another machine Tiffany knew to be the one monitoring her left arm if it has some defects or something only Tiffany's doctor knew.

Tiffany tried to move her left arm to touch the gauze on her eye but winced when a sharp pain struck her spine. She gave up then. She knew she couldn't move it yet because she would be the one suffering. She couldn't move her right hand though, because Jessica was holding it tight. If Tiffany would move it, she might wake up.

But it doesn't matter. Jessica was already stirring up.

Tiffany watched as Jessica straightened her back, oblivious of her stares, and rubbed her eyes. Jessica held her nape and moved her head left to right to flex it because it was tensed from sleeping on the uncomfortable position. Only then she saw Tiffany awoke.

Her eyes grew wide. "Tiffany! How are you feeling? Are you hurt anywhere? Tell me! If you're feeling something anywhere..." she bombarded Tiffany with questions.

"Stop."

It was almost a whisper but Jessica heard and she stopped. She studied Tiffany's expression. She doesn't look happy. Not at all. She more looked like annoyed.

"What did you do?" Tiffany hissed.

Jessica's face easily flooded with tears as she looked down on the tiled floor. She didn't expect Tiffany to be like this right after she woke up. Tiffany wasn't like this last night when she fainted. For as long as Jessica could remember, Tiffany even told her to stop crying.

"I'm sorry, Tiff."

Tiffany was already breathing heavily in anger. "Why did you ran away?!?!" She winced when her spine twitched.

Jessica just continued crying like a child being scolded.

Tiffany ignored the continues twitching of her spine and screamed, "DO YOU WANT ME TO GO CRAZY?!?!"

"I-I'm sorry," Jessica sobbed.

"Get out of my room for a while, will you? And don't run away again," Tiffany said. She knew she wouldn't be able to hold in what's about to come out of her for another minute.

Jessica nodded and walked away without a word, her sobs being the only noise she created.

"Don't come in until I told you so!" Tiffany said before the door closed.

She let her tears out then. Jessica doesn't understand why she's angry. Jessica thought Tiffany was blaming her for what happened to her. No. It's not that. It was far from that.

They didn't understand. Tiffany was scared that if she arrived late, Jessica could have died, and she couldn't stand that. She couldn't stand to witness yet another body, in front of her, draining out of life. Like what happened to Mr. Choi, like what almost happened to Sunny.

No one understood what Tiffany felt, and no one would. She treasured Mr. Choi so much before, like a father, and she was so devastated when he died because of her. She thought it would never happen again. But she was wrong.

History repeated itself.

And this time, Jessica, the girl she loved so much, almost died the same way Mr. Choi died and, yet again, because of Tiffany.

Tiffany whimpered hopelessly. She was about to go crazy. If she didn't arrive in time, if Jessica died, she would have gone crazy right now. Totally crazy. And she would just take her own life just to end her miseries.

Right then, Tiffany questioned her fate. Why was it like this? Why couldn't she just have her happiness? Why does everything have to be complicated?

She knew the answer deep inside her, and she wondered if Jessica has somehow influenced it into her. She knew that no matter how hard everything was right now, in the end, everything's going to be perfect.

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Jessica has stopped crying ten minutes ago, but her nose was still running, and she hasn't looked up since then. She was sitting on a sofa on the receiving area of Tiffany's room, fidgeting on her fingers as Sophia and Leo sat in front of her. None of them exchanged words ever since Jessica came out of the room.

She looked up and stared at the door that's separating her from Tiffany.

Sophia took it as a cue to talk. "Jessica."

Jessica looked at her, still uncomfortable. "Yes, Mom?"

"I know you don't understand why Tiffany is acting like this."

Jessica wiped her nose with the napkin that's in her hands. "I know. She's blaming me for what happened to her."

Sophia shook her head. "No. She's like that because she's scared."

Jessica's eyebrows furrowed. "Why will she be scared?"

"Fourteen years ago, the same thing happened," Leo butted in. Though he was still unborn then, he knew the whole story.

“What do you mean?” Jessica looked at him and Sophia.

“It was Christmas Eve then, Tiffany was nine years old,” Sophia started. “She was so young and knew nothing but to play and play. You know the effects of snow to kids. Tiffany loved playing in the snow, and so she ran out of the house, out of the front gate, and Mr. Choi, her personal butler, ran after her. Tiffany thought Mr. Choi was playing hide-and-seek with her, so she ran farther away from the house and went into a narrow street just to hide from Mr. Choi. Then a man found her in her hiding place and he tried to kidnap Tiffany. Mr. Choi found them and tried to save Tiffany but they ended up fighting. I don’t know what happened then. We asked Tiffany but she doesn’t want to talk. I guess she’s traumatized. Mr. Choi died that night with a stab on his chest and Tiffany has a horrible wound on her left arm.”

Jessica watched as Sophia’s eyes changed into a melancholic one.

“Mr. Choi is like a father to Tiffany, and a good friend to us. She was so devastated when he died, and that’s when she started to keep a distance from people. Even Mr. Baek had a hard time connecting with her, but he eventually succeeded.”

Jessica remembered Tiffany’s drowning incident.

“She’s scared, Jessica. She’s scared that if she didn’t arrive on time, you could have died the same way Mr. Choi died.”

So that’s why...

“I didn’t know.” Jessica looked down at her lap. “But... what about her arm?”

“Like I said, Tiffany has a terrible wound on left arm when we found her. The police said the kidnapper’s knife was rusty, and by the time they reached the hospital, her whole arm was already infected. The doctors said they have to totally remove it. If they wouldn’t, the tetanus would spread all over Tiffany’s little body. Tiffany doesn’t want to, so the doctors made her a robotic arm to compensate.”

Jessica remained silent. She doesn’t know what to say. She totally felt bad now. She has brought back the darkest part of Tiffany’s life without meaning it and now Tiffany was suffering.

“But there’s still one thing, Jessica,” Sophia said.

“What else?” Jessica looked up at her.

Leo’s ears perked up. Sophia has said everything, what else was left to say? He was intrigued.

“We conducted tests to Tiffany. Every single part of her body was tested just to be sure that she’s not damaged anywhere else. The results came after a week or so, and the doctors discovered something different, odd, about Tiffany.”

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“That was a very dangerous thing you did, Miss Tiffany.”

Tiffany closed her left eye, not wanting to pay attention to her personal doctor’s sermons. She already knew what he’s going to say. Taeyeon has said it to her earlier when the girl visited since Sunny’s room was just on the same floor. She went back to Sunny’s room after two hours. Chansung said the same thing though Tiffany couldn’t understand why he was also concerned. Shouldn’t he be happy?

“You know that your left arm’s controls are connected to your spinal cord. If you’re not lucky enough you could be dead right now.” Doctor Smirth sighed before taking a seat on the sofa at the foot of Tiffany’s bed.

“I know,” Tiffany said dryly.

“Because of the electric shock, the nerve on your right eye was damaged.”

“Am I gonna lose it too?” Tiffany felt like it was alright though she would lose her right eye.

Doctor Smirth chuckled. “You’re really lucky. It’s going to be alright in a few months’ time. You’re not going to lose it.”

Tiffany knew it was her cue to sigh in relief, but she didn’t. It felt like it wasn’t good news at all. She felt like it wouldn’t matter even if she lost it or not.

“Don’t do it again this time, Miss Tiffany.” There was a hint of a fatherly concern on his voice.

Tiffany finally opened her left eye and stared at the ceiling. “Alright.”

He shook his head before standing up. He knew Tiffany’s not in the mood for any talk. “I’ll go ahead now.”

Tiffany listened as the door hissed open and closed. She wasn’t really in the mood to talk, to listen or to even think. She just wanted to lie there, staring up at the ceiling, mind blank, and pretend that everything was alright.

The door hissed open again. She heard a lot of footsteps and she looked at the door. Sophia and Ernest were coming in with two tall and mountain-like men in black suits. The two men looked like twins.

“Tiffany, baby,” Ernest said as they came in.

“Who are they, Dad?” Tiffany asked as she eyed the two men.

The two men didn't have any facial expression. They have well-built body, at least six feet in height, broad shoulders, strong chin, tall nose, blue eyes, dark short hair, and slanted eyebrows that made them looked always angry. Tiffany couldn't see their rock-hard chests heaving like they weren't breathing.

"They're going to be your bodyguards."

Tiffany closed her eye and groaned. She really hated bodyguards.

"Tiffany, you have to have them. You've been endangered for a lot of times," Sophia explained.

"I used to have sixteen bodyguards before, and they did nothing. As if like this two can have any difference."

"They're different," Ernest said.

"How?"

"They're the latest versions robot bodyguards. They have built-in weapons such as guns and knives. They can protect you," Ernest explained.

That explained why they looked like they aren't breathing.

"Your left arm was changed too. It's not like the usual ones you used to have. We asked the doctors to put in your left arm your bodyguards' controls. We can't explain it to you yet 'coz you can't move your arm yet," Sophia said.

Tiffany sighed and opened her eye. She looked at the two bodyguards and grimaced.

"Alright." She finally gave up. "Can you keep them outside the door? They're creepy."

Sophia smiled fondly at her daughter. "OK. Do you want us to leave too?"

"Sure."

And then they walked out of the door with the two bodyguards following closely behind with heavy footsteps.

It hasn't been five minutes since the door closed and it opened again. Tiffany groaned and glared at the door.

"What now?!?!"

Her eyes grew wide when she saw Seo Juhyun frozen on the door, looking scared.

"I-I'm sorry, Tiffany. I didn't know you don't want a visitor right now. I'll just go back some other time." Seohyun turned around and was about to leave but Tiffany stopped her.

"No. Come in. It's alright, Seohyun."

Seohyun came in and sat on the chair on the right side of Tiffany's bed. She concernedly held Tiffany's right hand with both of hers.

"I heard what happened. How are you feeling?"

Tiffany could clearly see in her eyes, and hear in her voice, how worried Seohyun was and she was glad that she could finally see a different face other than Ernest, Sophia, Leo and Jessica. It felt nice to have someone like Seohyun worry for her.

"I'm feeling better now." Tiffany smiled fondly at her.

Seohyun kindly smiled, reminding Tiffany of a cute kid. She has always liked Seohyun's appearance. She looked so innocent, gentle, soft and kid-like with her round and curious eyes.

"Tiffany, we've been friends for a long, long time, but I don't know about this accident of yours when you're nine years old."

"It's just that I don't wanna talk about it."

Tiffany knew what Seohyun felt. She felt left behind in the dark. But she couldn't really blame the girl. If her friend that she treated like a sister also has a secret this big, Tiffany would also feel sad that she doesn't know about it until her friend got involved in an accident and it was revealed, like what happened to her.

Seohyun squeezed her hand. "I understand. It's really awful."

"I know, right?" Tiffany chuckled and winced when something on her spine twitched. She could just easily shrug off that matter now.

"You're going to be alright, right?" Seohyun concernedly asked.

She was really surprised when she heard the news about Tiffany. It was all over the television and internet. The president of Tiffany & co. having a robotic arm. It wasn't really a big deal. There were some famous personalities everywhere that has worse condition than Tiffany. Seohyun knew it wouldn't affect their company.

Tiffany was her friend. She worried about Tiffany and not anything or anyone else. But since she's here now, she thought that she might as well use this chance to ask Tiffany about Sooyoung because the private investigator she hired couldn't really find anything about her.

And Seohyun suspected that Sooyoung somehow has something to do with what happened to Tiffany.

“Of course I’m gonna be alright,” Tiffany assured.

Seohyun smiled. “That’s nice to hear.”

Silence enveloped them for a while and Tiffany wondered what Seohyun was thinking. She looked exactly the same the last time she saw her, which was after their graduation, but there’s something about the girl that made Tiffany think that she’s bothered about something. It was all obvious through her eyes.

Seohyun knew it was obvious too. She couldn’t really hide her feelings. There were few people who told her that she was easy to read. Her round eyes were like mirrors of what she was feeling inside.

“Tiffany,” Seohyun started. “Do you somehow know someone with the name Sooyoung?”

Sooyoung. Tiffany doesn’t have to think. It was automatic. Every time she’s hearing that name, her brain would automatically show a picture of a little girl with tanned skin, black eyes, short brown hair, and her sweet smile.

Sooyoung and Tiffany have met before. A couple of years ago, they played together when Sooyoung’s father, Mr. Choi, brought her to Tiffany’s house one day. Leo was still unborn then, and Tiffany treated her like a sister though they were of the same age.

But when her father died, she disappeared. No one knew where she was. Hwangs hired investigators to search for her, but to no avail. They couldn’t find Sooyoung.

How did Seohyun know about her?

“Yes, I do,” Tiffany said a little too eagerly. She so much wanted to see her again. “Do you... know her?”

Seohyun doesn’t know what to say. She couldn’t decide whether to let Tiffany know that Summer was Sooyoung or not.

“How do you know her?” Seohyun asked instead.

“She’s... she’s my old butler’s daughter. We’ve been searching for her for a long time after Mr. Choi died. Mom and Dad wanted to adopt her then, but she suddenly disappeared and we couldn’t find her.”

“How did he die?”

“He died...” Tiffany paused, fighting her tears. “He died from saving me the night I was caught in an accident. He died the same night I lost my arm.”

That was it. Seohyun has put one and one together and she knew the reason why Sooyoung hated Tiffany so much. Sooyoung was blaming Tiffany for her father’s death.

“Do you know her?” Tiffany prompted.

“Uh...” Seohyun removed her hands from Tiffany’s and put it on her lap. “I’m... I’m not sure, Tiffany, if this is right, but I heard Hyoyeon called Summer by that name. I can be wrong, y’know? There’s a lot of Sooyoung in the world.”

“Summer?”

Tiffany remembered that one time after they’ve gone back to school after their honeymoon vacation in Zeigesar. She argued with Summer during lunch until their faces were close to each other. She realized then how familiar Summer looked.

“So that’s why she looked like someone I know,” Tiffany said to herself than to Seohyun. “How could I have not realized?!?!” She turned to look at Seohyun. “Seohyun, thanks for this. Thanks a lot! We’ve been searching for her for a long time!”

Seohyun smiled though she was still bothered. She still doesn’t know if Sooyoung has something to do with what happened to Tiffany. “I’m glad I helped. But, Tiffany, I don’t think it’s good for you to contact her right now.”

“Why?”

“I’ll handle her for you. You’re still recuperating, you can’t be stressed with this stuff.”

Seohyun knew Tiffany doesn’t want to agree. She could see it through her expression. But Seohyun wouldn’t want Tiffany to be endangered again. She’d rather face Sooyoung herself than to let Tiffany meet head-to-head with Sooyoung. That’s what friend does, right?

“Trust me, OK?” Seohyun raised her eyebrows up and wished that she looked convincing.

Tiffany sighed. “Alright. I trust you, Seohyun.” It was hard not to say yes to this kind friend who’s willing to help

Seohyun smiled again. “I won’t disappoint you. I’ll give you infos about her once I’ve found some, OK?”

“Yeah. Thank you so much.”

“And, Tiffany, can we keep this a secret between us?”

“What for?” Tiffany asked, confused.

“We’re still not sure if Summer really is Sooyoung. We might still be wrong, and it will disappoint some people if we’re wrong,” Seohyun lied.

“OK then.” Tiffany nodded and winced again when her spine ached.

Seohyun stood up. “I’ll go ahead now. I can see you still need some rest. Get well soon, OK?”

“Take care.”

Seohyun kissed Tiffany on the cheek. “You too.”

She smiled one last time before walking out of the room. She bowed to Sophia and Jessica who was on the waiting room just outside Tiffany’s door and bid her goodbye. The older woman wished her a good trip. She walked straight out of the building and into her car that was waiting for her outside, her butler behind the wheels.

Once inside, she pressed a couple of buttons on her wristwatch and Edward Calhoun answered.

“Forget about Choi Sooyoung, detective, and look out for Choi Summer instead.”

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Tiffany closed her left eye and took a deep breath. Finally, there was some clue to where Sooyoung has been. No one knew how much she wanted to see Sooyoung again and to tell her things Mr. Choi has said before dying. His last words. They were still etched very clearly in Tiffany’s memory, and she couldn’t wait to tell it to Sooyoung.

But Tiffany somehow felt bad. She has never liked Summer ever since the first time she saw her. She argued with Summer and she put the girl on her loathed list. If she was Sooyoung, Tiffany knew Mr. Choi would be disappointed of her. She just fought with his daughter whom he entrusted to Tiffany’s hands.

“Sooyoung, I can’t wait to see you again.”

It never occurred to her that Sooyoung felt the exact opposite.

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“Ugh!” Sooyoung slammed the remote control down right after she turned off the TV.

It was all over the news, Tiffany’s accident and the death of the man Sooyoung hired to kill her or Jessica. The man failed to kill neither of the girls and it pissed Sooyoung off. She never knew they were this lucky.

“Relax,” Hyoyeon, who was sitting coolly beside her, said. She was smiling.

Sooyoung glared at her. "Are you mocking me?"

Hyoyeon raised her hands up, as if in surrender. "No. I just found this very interesting."

Sooyoung sighed and sulked on the sofa. She was really unlucky. She knew that once she's gone back to the police station for her duty, her mates would be talking about it, and would be wondering who wanted to finish Tiffany off. They wouldn't have any idea it was someone from inside their very own precinct.

"Why did you hire that useless man? How can he not kill either Tiffany or Jessica? They're weak!"

Hyoyeon remained silent. She knew better than to get into one of Sooyoung's moods.

"Y'know what? I'm starting to think that you're sabotaging my revenge."

Hyoyeon looked disbelievingly at her. "Why would I do that?"

"Because you don't want what I'm doing."

"Sooyoung, it's still not too late to turn back. You can still forget about this," Hyoyeon softly said.

"I knew it." Sooyoung sighed as she stood up. "I knew you're sabotaging me." She turned and walked away.

"Where are you going?"

Sooyoung hastily turned back, long brown hair flipping over one shoulder. "I'm still on duty, if you can't remember. I'm going back to the police station," she said dryly.

Hyoyeon watched Sooyoung walked out of the huge front door. She heard Sooyoung's car started, flew, and then silence.

She sighed as she shook her head.

It would surely take some time for Sooyoung to forgive her again.

CHAPTER 5: 'IF'



CHAPTER 5: 'IF'

Jessica's fifth month of pregnancy.

Never once, ever since Tiffany was admitted to the hospital, Jessica left Tiffany's hospital room. She might not be beside Tiffany but she stayed on the lounge of her room, just outside the door of the main room. She followed Tiffany. She didn't come in until Tiffany said so, which she haven't done yet, and didn't run away either. She didn't come with Chansung when he wanted to take her out. She didn't even left the room in fear of missing the time when Tiffany would finally let her in.

But, after a month, it never came. Tiffany hasn't let her in yet.

Now, as Jessica sat tiredly on the lounge room, she was silent yet again, and alone. Leo, already in vacation from school, was taking fresh air outside the hospital. Sophia has gone back to the company to help her husband since Tiffany couldn't handle the company yet. Chansung was doing his usual business that Jessica never dared to ask what.

She could feel the tiredness in her body, and stress—both emotional and physical. She's been thinking a lot lately and she knew it wasn't good for her condition, but she couldn't really help it. Tiffany was occupying her mind all the time.

They have a lot of things to talk about. A lot.

The door hissed open and Jessica's head snapped to its direction.

"Noona, your friends are here," Leo said as he came in, two tall and slim girls following closely behind. "I'll just leave you girls alone." He bowed before leaving the room once again.

"Yuri, Yoona." Jessica stood up and pulled them to sit on the sofa opposite the one she was occupying.

Jessica was silently thankful that they haven't noticed, even once, her stomach. It was visible now, the baby bump, but she still tried to hide it by wearing oversized clothes. She knew time would come that she couldn't hide it anymore, and so she has to hide *herself* from everyone instead.

"Sorry we just had the chance to visit now," Yuri said. "I've been busy with Kwon's Construction and Yoona doesn't wanna go by herself."

Yoona looked sharply at her girlfriend. Yes, it was true that she doesn't want to visit alone, but there was no need for Yuri to blame her.

"How's Tiffany, by the way?" Yoona asked Jessica.

Jessica looked down at her lap. "Well... she's getting better."

"That's nice to hear, but I'm not asking about that," Yoona said and Jessica looked up to stare at her.

Jessica studied the two. Their eyes has the same emotion—curiosity. Curious about what, Jessica doesn't know.

Yuri read the girl's confused face and she rephrased the question, "How's Tiffany as a wife?"

Why suddenly ask? Jessica thought. They've been married for nine months, why only ask now?

She could see the two girls were up to something but she couldn't put a finger in it. She's not feeling good about this and she has a feeling that by the end of their conversation, she has already said things she would regret later.

"She's... she's all a wife should be."

"Do you mean that?" Yuri asked, eyes narrowed and studying Jessica.

Jessica eventually grew tired of their prying stares and sighed. She really couldn't run away from them.

"What do you know?" Jessica asked suspiciously.

"We know the truth. The whole truth," Yoona said without second thoughts.

"What are you talking about?"

"We know that you're married because of your companies, and that you don't love each other," Yuri said.

"Then why are you asking me about Tiffany?" Suddenly, Jessica realized what they were trying to do and she raised her palms up, shutting them. "Oh wait! I think I don't have to hear it."

Yoona's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "You know it, don't you?"

Jessica sighed and looked away. "I'm not sure."

"Say it," Yuri prompted. She has a feeling Jessica knew what they were going into, just that something was holding her back.

"You want to know what I feel about Tiffany... because..."

"Go on."

"Because she's in love with me."

Jessica felt like her chest somehow lightened after she said it. She knew Tiffany loved her. The things Tiffany did for her were beyond act, they were most likely to be natural, wholeheartedly done. At first she noticed Tiffany's actions were unconscious, and then it became planned. Jessica was not sure before if Tiffany loved her, but everything was confirmed the morning after they had sex.

She felt it, the meaning behind Tiffany's kisses that morning. Goodbye and I love you all put into those kisses. She doesn't know how, but she just knew it. She, herself, was overwhelmed by the kisses that she hadn't helped her tears.

And then there was this one time Tiffany said she's jealous.

Tiffany loved her but she couldn't just confront Tiffany about it, especially now that she's not sure of her own feelings and she's going through her pregnancy to think about it. They might end up divorcing, and Jessica doesn't want it to happen. She believed in the blessings of marriage, it was not to be broken.

"Do you..." Yuri brought Jessica back to reality and carefully asked, "Love her too?"

Jessica sighed and looked down, fidgeting with her fingers on her lap. "I haven't been in love before, I haven't been in a relationship, I'm not sure if I had crushes, I don't know what love is. I have no experience in this, Yuri. I don't know."

"Listen to your heart," Yoona softly said.

Her heart. Jessica's heart was not saying anything at the moment. Sure, there were times when she felt something strong for Tiffany, like that one time when she was so jealous of Siwon to the fact that she punished herself by punching the punching bag with her bare knuckles, but there were also times when she thought it was just merely over protectiveness. Tiffany was her wife, no one should touch her but Jessica.

Or was that it?

Jessica shook her head. "I don't know. Maybe not."

Maybe yes.

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Leo walked out of her sister's hospital room right after he sent Yuri and Yoona in. He stayed leaning against the wall beside the door for a long time, looking at the door just in front of it, the door to Sunny's room.

He hasn't gone there again after his last conversation with Taeyeon. He knew they've reconciled, Taeyeon and Tiffany. Taeyeon was constantly visiting Tiffany in her room. But Taeyeon and Leo haven't talked yet, and Leo found himself wishing for things to stay this way. He doesn't want to talk to Taeyeon for some reasons. Maybe it's because even if they would talk, his heart would remain broken.

After some time, the door of Sunny's room opened and Taeyeon came out. Leo immediately looked away.

"Leo, I've been finding a perfect time to talk to you," Taeyeon said as she stood in front of the younger boy. "I haven't asked for your forgiveness yet."

"Didn't I tell you that you're forgiven the moment you've forgiven my sister, noona?"

Taeyeon shook her head. "No. I never agreed to that. I want to ask for your forgiveness personally." She bowed. "Forgive me for disappointing you, Leo."

Leo held her shoulders and pushed her body straight, looking kindly into her eyes. "Noona, it's alright. You're forgiven, just don't let her get hurt this time."

Taeyeon beamed. "I won't."

Silence enveloped them and Taeyeon looked down.

"I know you care for Sunny so much, but I can't give her to you. I'm sorry."

Leo sadly smiled. "It's OK, noona. She's not the one for me and she's years older than me. There's no way we will be together."

Taeyeon just looked at him. "Sorry."

Leo tapped her shoulder twice before dropping his arms on his sides. "I'll move on eventually. Don't worry. I'm still young, there's still a lot of girls out there, I'm sure I will find someone like Sunny in no time."

Taeyeon chuckled. "I wish Tiffany is as rational as you. Anyway, thank you for trusting me again, Leo. I will not fail you this time."

“You should not, noona.” He smiled playfully.

He felt his chest lightened. Somehow, knowing the fact that Sunny would never be his wasn’t that bad suddenly. He knew Taeyeon and Sunny were meant for each other, they deserved each other, and he deserved someone too, just not Sunny.

The door beside them opened and Yuri and Yoona came out, probably done with talking to both Jessica and Tiffany. The two smiled when they saw Taeyeon and Leo. The three girls easily went into a conversation only they could relate to and Leo took it as a chance to leave the girls.

He walked away from them and stopped in front of the lift. He pressed the button and waited until it opened. When the door opened, he saw a lone girl inside, probably from the upper floor. She looked about his age, thirteen, with her cute flower patterned dress and braided hair.

The girl smiled shyly at him when he boarded the lift before looking down at her doll shoes. Leo pressed the ground floor button before putting his hands inside his pockets, staring at their reflection on the metal door of the lift.

The girl was cute, as he could see, and she looked really shy. She hasn’t once looked up since the door closed.

Leo looked up to the numbers on top of the door. 3F... 2F...G, and then something dinged, the door opened. Before stepping out of the elevator, he looked at the girl beside him and met her eyes. He smiled like a real gentleman before stepping out.

And then he stopped in mid-step.

He looked back at the girl that has just boarded off the elevator. She stopped, too, and looked up at Leo as he was taller than her.

“I think I know you.” Leo looked at her from head to toe. He tilted his head on the side, looking really boyish. “You’re from class B in Year Nine, right?”

The girl’s heart fluttered as her crush, Leo Hwang from class A in Year Nine, has just recognized her. She has been crushing on him for a long time, ever since she laid eyes on him, and knowing that he somehow knew her face made her happy.

“Yes,” the girl squeaked.

“I’m Leo Hwang, from class A.” He offered his hand for a handshake. “What’s your name?”

He couldn’t understand why he felt comfortable around the girl.

She just looked at his hand for quite some time before taking it. “Kate Harris.”

Kate looked up, smiling sweetly at him, and Leo felt his heart started beating once again.

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Jessica sighed after the door closed, alone once again. She's really tired of everything that's happening. Why was it so complicated? She almost wanted to die and just run away from everything.

After she sat on the sofa, the cramps immediately came, rippling across Jessica's middle. She hugged her stomach as she bent double on her knees. It came in waves. She couldn't even breathe except in short, tight bursts. Vaguely, she could hear voices outside the door. Probably Yuri and Yoona were still there.

She gasped in short breaths as she collected enough strength to shout for help. The pain was killing her, wrenching her out. The chance came and she gasped.

"Help!" she shrieked and the door immediately opened.

Yuri, Yoona and Taeyeon, looking panicked, came in and helped her.

Jessica passed out even before she was on her feet.

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"MISCARRIAGE?!" was Tiffany's first word after hearing from Taeyeon, Yuri and Yoona what happened to Jessica and Tiffany swore if only she wasn't bed ridden, she would have been on her way to Jessica's room right now.

"Couz, relax!" Taeyeon pushed the struggling girl's shoulder down her bed to stop her from standing.

Tiffany lay back on her bed with a groan of suffering. Her spine has just ached and it spread all over her body, her right eye twitching. She continued grunting because of the pain. If only rolling over the bed wouldn't hurt her even more, she would have done it.

"It's just an *almost* miscarriage. Not miscarriage, alright? She's safe now and the baby's safe. No worries," Taeyeon clarified but Tiffany wasn't convinced.

Silence enveloped the room for a long time. Tiffany simply laid there, left eye scrunched close, right eye twitching, lower lip bitten hard, and spine gradually loosing pain. Yuri and Yoona held each other while Taeyeon looked concernedly at Tiffany.

Taeyeon knew what Yuri and Yoona were thinking. They didn't know Jessica was pregnant and they're probably assuming things inside their head right now. Being the only one in the right mind at the moment, Taeyeon spoke up.

"You know you have to tell them, Tiffany."

Tiffany's mien didn't change. "Just do it for me, Taeng."

And so Taeyeon did. She told the two confused girls the whole deal but the two paid special attention to the latest ones—about Jessica and Chansung—than to the first ones since they already knew it.

"That's..." Yuri started with her eyes wide. She was so shocked of all the things that happened that she couldn't finish her sentence.

"I'm sorry. We don't know what to say," Yoona said for Yuri.

"That's exactly my reaction," Taeyeon said.

"What are you planning now, Tiffany?" Yuri asked.

The pain on her spine finally settled down and Tiffany slowly opened her left eye. "I dunno. Maybe I'll kill Chansung. He is the father of that child and he's not taking care of Jessi! Does he expect me to do it for him?!"

"We know how hard it is, Tiffany," Yoona said sympathetically.

"It's really hard. How can I take care of Jessi if I'm bed ridden?"

"That's not the only reason, right?" Yoona carefully asked.

Tiffany looked at her. "What do you mean?"

Yoona felt Yuri squeezed her hand once, urging her to go on. "We're sorry for keeping this to you, but we know that you love Jessica."

"And that it's really hard to take care of her knowing the child isn't yours but your cousin's," Yuri finished.

Tiffany felt like crying then. She was so gifted with loyal, thoughtful and understanding best friends that she was so overwhelmed. She wouldn't trade them for anything in the world.

"What really happened to Jessi?"

Taeyeon sat on the foot of Tiffany's bed. "The doctor said she almost had a miscarriage because of emotional stress. He said that we shouldn't let her think too much because it was stressing her out and it's really

dangerous for her sensitive condition. He said, too, that if it happened again..." She paused. "Jessica or the child can die."

Tiffany closed her left eye again and fisted her right hand. She was fuming. She would really kill Chansung if something bad happened to Jessica.

"Can you call Chansung over? I have to have a word with him."

Taeyeon nodded understandingly. "Sure."

"And please leave me for a while."

"OK. We'll be in the lounge room."

The three stood up and quietly left the room.

Tiffany hissed after the door closed. "I'll really kill you, Chansung."

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Chansung ran forward blindly, turning on every turns he guessed would lead him to Jessica's hospital room. He just received a call from Taeyeon and he immediately left his father on their company's office. He and his father were talking about important things concerning the company but he left him the moment he received the call, panicked.

Jessica just almost had a miscarriage and he knew it was somehow his fault. Jessica was his responsibility at the moment. If something bad happened to her, he knew he would be blamed. And Jessica was a friend, he's concerned whether he has something to do with it or not.

After minutes of running, he finally found Jessica's room. He paused in front of the door for a moment to gain his breath, hands on his knees, eyes staring at his shining black shoes. His dark pink striped necktie was loose on his neck, the first button of his baby pink long-sleeved polo was opened and it has untucked and hung out over his black slacks because of running.

He commanded the door open once he has regained his breath. The moment the door opened he immediately saw Jessica on her bed with a dextrose on her right hand. She was awake, back resting on a pillow against the headboard and staring out into zilch.

"Jessica, how are you?" He stood beside her bed.

Jessica snapped back to reality and stared at him. "I'm... OK?" she said, unsure.

“What happened?”

“Emotional stress.” Jessica shrugged as if it was normal.

“Don’t shrug it off just like that! Your condition’s complicated. You could have died, or the child,” Chansung snapped.

“I’d rather die than him.” Jessica hugged her stomach.

“Don’t talk like that. God, Jess, you’re scaring me.” He sat hopelessly on the chair next to Jessica’s bed.

“Didn’t I tell you to stop thinking? Look at what happened now.”

Jessica looked down and bit her lower lip. “I can’t help it.”

“Aish,” he hissed. “This is Tiffany’s fault.”

“It’s not hers! It’s my fault. Don’t blame her.”

“If only she took care of you, this will not happen.”

“It’s my fault she’s in the hospital right now. I can’t blame her. This is my fault.”

Jessica knew that by saying this was her fault she was not only referring to her almost miscarriage. She’s taking every fault starting from siding Chansung the night they fought that probably sent Tiffany in a frenzy knowing that she loved her. Having Tiffany almost killed because of running away was also her fault.

She has broken Tiffany’s heart not only once but a lot of times. She felt really bad.

Chansung stood up. “I’ll go out for a while. While I’m gone, just rest and stop thinking. Please.”

Jessica simply nodded but didn’t look up.

Chansung left the girl’s room and once the door closed, he started running again, to Tiffany’s room this time.

He doesn’t know if he’s protective of Jessica or he just wanted to make his cousin’s mind straight and knock some senses into her head. It should be the latter. Tiffany was the wife and she should be taking care of Jessica. But what was she doing? She was letting the days pass without doing anything.

He understood that Tiffany was also injured right now, but she could have just at least told Jessica some nice words to keep Jessica going. Does she not understand the things Jessica was going through? Not just her pregnancy but something more.

Jessica needed Tiffany’s support right now-- not Chansung’s or anyone else’s.

He commanded the door to Tiffany's lounge room open and he saw the three girls sitting on the sofa, looking tensed. He passed by them without a word and went straight to Tiffany's room.

Silence enveloped them as Chansung simply stood in front of the door and Tiffany stared at the ceiling.

"What are you doing?" Tiffany finally said, calm but obviously holding her anger back.

"I'm doing *your* job," he gave emphasis.

Tiffany scoffed and glared at him. "That's *your* job."

"Do you know why she almost had a miscarriage?" he snapped, walking closer to Tiffany's bed and stopping just beside her bed. "It's because of you. It's because you're so selfish and stubborn and stupid and careless! It's because you don't know how to appreciate her!"

"Don't judge me!" Tiffany snapped back. "You don't know how much I appreciate her and how much I care for her. You don't know how much I love her and how much it kills me to know that she's pregnant with your child!"

Tiffany doesn't care if she would say everything to everyone now. She doesn't want to keep secrets anymore. She doesn't care if Jessica would figure out that she's in love with her. She doesn't care about anything else in the world but Jessica and everything about her.

"Oh, just because it's my child you're not gonna take care of her?" Chansung scoffed. "Yet you claim you love her."

He knew what he was doing was wrong, but he has to do it to push Tiffany. He, too, was confused for he doesn't know the real story, but he wouldn't just let someone like Jessica, a very nice girl, to be downed because of things that were happening all at once.

Knowing Jessica, Chansung knew that she wouldn't defend herself. She's most likely to look down and take everything in though some of it was not true. If she's not going to do it, he would do it for her.

"You don't understand how hard this is for me, do you? Of course you don't, and you never will."

"If this is hard for you, think about how hard this is for Jessica. Do you think this is easy for her? She's a nice girl. She has given up herself for everyone that's important to her and most especially to you. It won't kill to show some care for her, will it?"

"I know it's not easy for her and this is your fault. If you hadn't slept with her, none of this would have happened. If you hadn't slept with her, I could have shown her how much I love her. If you hadn't slept with her, she's going to be fine with me!"

“So you’re blaming me now? Tiffany, if only you know, there are things that are kept from me too! You’re not the only one in the dark. If I hadn’t known what’s right from wrong, I could have left Jessica long time ago and let her suffer with you.”

Tiffany gasped. “You’ve thought of leaving her?”

He threw his hands in the air. “Truth be told. I did.”

“How could you?!” Tiffany gathered enough strength to raise her right hand and punch Chansung square in the cheek though she was still lying on her bed.

The moment Chansung dropped on the floor was the same moment Tiffany hissed from the pain that emitted from her spine. The force of her movement triggered it, but she didn’t care. He deserved that punch and if only Tiffany wasn’t injured she could have punched him harder—with her left fist.

“What the hell!” He cupped his left cheek and he swore he could feel his jaw almost dislocated. Though he didn’t see, he’s sure the corner of his lips has a cut and it was bleeding. “What was that for?!”

“For everything!” Tiffany snapped though she has her left eye tightly scrunched and her right hand gripping the sheets tightly in pain.

“You’re lucky you’re injured right now. If not, I don’t know what I have done to you.” Chansung stood up again and composed himself. “I guess you’ve already done what you called me here for. We’re fair now. I’m leaving.”

He hastily turned around and, even before Tiffany recovered from the pain, left the room.

The things Chansung told her had left her confused. What were the things hidden from him? Was it the reason why the elders had wanted him to sleep with Jessica? Didn’t he know the truth about Tiffany and Jessica’s marriage? That it was a fixed marriage? Tiffany doesn’t know.

Tiffany was mad at him for everything he’s said and done, but she’s more mad at herself for *not doing* everything. Her body was still recuperating, her heart was broken and still bleeding, and the only thing that’s working in her, her brain, was not functioning very well.

Her plans of not giving up were running far from her reach, and everything was jumbled up inside her head that she’s freaking pissed off at herself because she couldn’t get her mind straight.

CHAPTER 6: 'TRY'



CHAPTER 6: 'TRY'

Jessica's seventh month of pregnancy.

After three months, Tiffany was finally admitted out of the hospital. Jessica, Chansung, Taeyeon, Yoona, Yuri and Seohyun were there to support her, though Chansung and Jessica barely talked to her. Sophia, Ernest, Leo and her two new robotic bodyguards were also there to see her.

Her parents has explained to her how to control her bodyguards right away and even had Tiffany to try it. Tiffany wouldn't deny that she really felt uncomfortable with having two metal-made men watching her, but what else could she do? She needed them both for herself and for Jessica.

Now, after everyone except Jessica has left the Hwang's Taecsion (the latest version of McMansion), knowing Tiffany still has to rest, Tiffany was lying flat on her back on her and Jessica's shared bed, feeling slightly tired.

Two months ago Jessica almost had a miscarriage and she was admitted out of the hospital after a week, but Tiffany still felt worried about her. She's seven months and a couple of weeks pregnant now. It meant her condition was even more sensitive. She couldn't risk having another break down because of thinking so much again for it might endanger her or her child's life. And that meant Tiffany has to do something.

But what?

Tiffany raised her left arm up, as if it was her first time having a robotic arm. She almost felt normal now, her right eye was working perfectly like what her doctor have told her. She stared at her wedding ring, its thick gold band, the big single diamond in the middle, and the little diamonds around the big diamond lined to form a half of a heart. It was the female's ring, and Jessica has the male's ring which has a simple lining of diamonds forming the other half of the heart in Tiffany's ring. If they were to be put together, it would create a perfectly shaped heart.

It was ridiculous. Her parents have made sure that she wouldn't do anything about their marriage. She might divorce Jessica on papers, but there was no way she could forget about being married to Jessica once. The

ring would be a constant reminder to her. They put the ring permanently on her left ring finger, built in, and it wouldn't ever be removed. It's not that she minded it, though.

Tiffany dropped her hand back to her side and stared at the ceiling.

Unlike two months ago, when she couldn't get her mind straight, her mind was made up now. She took her time thinking and getting her mind straight for two months while her body was busy recuperating from the accident.

Tiffany realized that there were two ways she could show her strong side. One was be strong enough to continue even if it hurt, and another is be strong enough to give up and admit that it was not meant for her.

There was no way she would choose the latter; it has to be the former because true love never surrender. It might get tired, but a little rest was enough. True love would never complain, it always find a way to understand pain-- that was what she learned from Chansung, her annoying cousin, no matter how ridiculous that sounded.

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The whole massive house was exceptionally quiet this afternoon as Tiffany made her way to the nursery room. She just knew Jessica would be there.

The maids and butlers were moving like cats, not making a single rustle, and Tiffany wondered why. They seemed to be very careful. She suddenly remembered her two new bodyguards. Leaving her room wasn't easy, because they were guarding outside the door like dogs. She had to strictly order them not to follow her, and if they did, she might have discarded their power sources by now.

Tiffany stopped on one of the metal doors in the second floor. The nursery room was arranged while she was still in the hospital, and though it was on-going then, Jessica never left Tiffany's room to check on it.

"Door open," she commanded and it opened in between, like that of an elevator's.

She saw the sole of Jessica's feet first, sticking out of the blanket. A single bed was in front of the door, pressed against the wall, and Jessica was sitting there, back pressed against the headboard. There was an open cabinet on the right side of the bed, filled with baby bottles, diapers and such. On the left side of the bed was the baby's little crib, complete with bars and safety precautions as to keep the child safe.

The room was painted blue, and the baby's stuffs were mostly blue. The room was designed for a male too, with all the car designs and anything that boys liked.

"T-Tiffany," Jessica stuttered when she noticed Tiffany's presence.

“This room is nice,” Tiffany said as she came in and stopped at the foot of the bed.

“Chansung chose most of them.”

Tiffany felt like taking back her complement then.

Silence enveloped them and Jessica looked down, her hands splayed over her stomach. She pressed gently, very gently, with her fingertips, to see if she could feel him.

She’s confused of her own feelings and there’s still this life inside her. She thought of him like an insect, under her hands, seven months old, a healthy baby boy, like what her obstetrician said. She thought how easily she could crush him with her fingers. If she pressed hard enough she could kill him herself.

She didn’t of course; she couldn’t. She could feel him in there, breathing inside her.

She thought of Gin bottles and knitting needles and all those stories of how to kill a baby, and she cupped her hands protectively over where he must be, cradling him deep inside her.

This unwanted child of theirs.

She never thought her baby might have dark brown eyes, and dark brown hair, like hers, but she thought he must have Tiffany’s brown eyes that could turn into crescents, and his short hair as brown as Tiffany’s. His nose would probably be as tall as Tiffany’s and his lips would be as pink as Tiffany’s too.

Jessica wanted him to look like Tiffany. Their child, a constant reminder of Tiffany.

“Jessi, listen,” Tiffany started and Jessica looked at her. “I had a lot of time thinking, and I think this is the best decision I can ever come up with: sure, the child is Chansung’s, but I’m your wife. It’s my responsibility to take care of you. Just because he’s the father doesn’t mean you have to be with him. It might be a little late now, there’s just two months left before you give birth, but I’m taking over Chansung now.”

Even before she stopped talking, Tiffany felt like she was doing the right thing.

“Are you gonna trust me again this time?”

Jessica couldn’t stop her tears and they rolled down her subtle cheeks. Tiffany’s sincerity was audible in her every word and it was overwhelming for Jessica to hear.

Tiffany walked over and sat on the edge of the bed. She pulled Jessica inside her embrace, pressing the girl’s face on her chest.

“Sorry for taking a long time to grow up and realize this. I shouldn’t have made things hard for you,” Tiffany softly said as she ran her right hand up and down Jessica’s long dark brown hair. Tiffany felt her burdens lifted off her shoulders. Finally, she could breathe normally.

For Jessica, it was impossible, but Tiffany has just said it. She was choosing Jessica though it was hurting her. It was enough. It was assuring enough for Jessica to tell her the truth.

Jessica pulled away but kept her hands pressed against Tiffany's chest. "Tiffany, sorry for keeping this to you, but it's not Chansung's."

She watched in fear as Tiffany's expression changed from confused to angry, and even before she assumed things again, Jessica continued.

"It's yours."

For a moment Jessica thought Tiffany would scream angrily at her, but then she threw her head back and laughed.

"That's funny. That's a nice way to lift the mood up."

"Tiffany, I'm not kidding."

Tiffany looked at Jessica's expression. She was dead serious and Tiffany suddenly felt scared. She gradually stopped laughing and slowly frowned when Jessica's expression didn't change.

"You're kidding, right?"

Jessica shook her head.

Tiffany opened her mouth and closed it again for a couple of times, unable to find the words. Finally, she pointed her forefinger at herself.

"Mine? As in *mine*?"

"Yes."

"That's impossible!" Tiffany exclaimed, eyes all wide.

"It's not."

Tiffany messed her hair up, seeing Jessica still dead serious. "God! You're making me crazy!"

Jessica sighed. She knew it would take a long time for Tiffany to understand, but she couldn't really blame the innocent girl.

"Do you want me to prove it to you?"

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The next day, the doctor met with them and began a series of tests. Tiffany did not understand them then, and she did not understand them now, but she supposed it was because she was afraid to know. Both Tiffany and Jessica spent almost an hour with Dr. Smirth for he was the one who knew Tiffany's condition since she was nine years old, and they went back the next day. That day was the longest day they've ever spent. He called both the girls into his room and sat them down. Jessica held Tiffany's right hand confidently (she preferred holding it since it was normal), but Tiffany remembered clearly that her own hand was shaking.

"This might seem shocking to you, Miss Tiffany," Dr. Smirth began. "But you are slightly hermaphroditic."

Tiffany's mind went blank, and all she could think about was Jessica's hand in hers. The words echoed in her head. *You're slightly hermaphroditic ...*

Her world spun in circles, and she felt Jessica's grip tightened. She whispered, almost to herself. "Tiffany."

But Tiffany barely heard it as she passed out.

Now, Tiffany was back on a hospital bed once again, but there was not a thing attached to her right hand except Jessica's hand.

She just woke up and she somehow hoped that everything was just a dream. But no. It was real. The results of the tests were on the bedside table, next to a glass of water, and Jessica was there, silently seated on the side of her bed.

Tiffany stared at the ceiling, muttering to herself. "I'm... I'm..." She couldn't will herself to say the word. "God... this is crazy..."

"Do you believe me now?" Jessica carefully asked.

"But... I don't understand... How?"

The door suddenly opened and Sophia came in. Jessica has called the woman.

"Do you want me to explain it to you, dear?"

"Mom, you knew it?!" Tiffany gasped.

Sophia simply nodded as she took a seat on the edge of Tiffany's bed.

"OK. So this is the truth, Tiffany," Sophia began and Tiffany braced. She doesn't want to pass out again. "When you're nine, we conducted tests to you, and that's how we knew the truth. Doctor Smirth thinks that

maybe it was the effect of the conflict of Ernest and I's strong genes. Your case is really rare. There's only one hermaphrodite out of millions of people, and fate chose you to be that one."

So having a male first born wasn't really a big thing? Tiffany thought, Just to get Jessica pregnant was their real plan?

"I dunno how to make you understand this, honey, but this is the truth. Haven't you ever wondered why you never had a monthly period?"

Now that Sophia mentioned it, Tiffany remembered not having her monthly period ever. She shook her head to answer her mother's questions. She has never really wondered about it.

"That's the thing. You might have the female reproductive organ but you don't have uterus. You can't carry a child, but you can *make* a child."

"What do you mean?" Tiffany knitted her eyebrows.

Sophia paused for a while before continuing. "You don't have egg cells, but you have sperm cells."

Tiffany suddenly felt like vomiting and she cupped her mouth. It was all too much for her to bear. She was a mutant, in a way. She wasn't a full hermaphrodite, like having both reproductive organs, but she was just *slightly* hermaphroditic since she doesn't have all of a hermaphrodite's characteristics.

She already felt like throwing up, but Sophia was still not done.

"Now, on Jessica's case. You're really the father. How you transferred the cell, I have no idea, but it's a nice job." Sophia winked at Tiffany and Tiffany felt like throwing up again.

She stared at Jessica instead, and the girl stared back at her.

"It's not Chansung's?"

Jessica shook her head. "Absolutely no."

"Nothing happened between you two?"

"Nothing."

"Sorry for having to do this, Tiffany, but I just set it up. I knew you wouldn't make a move until I've gone to the extent. It worked, right?" Sophia said, but Tiffany's mind was far from her.

"But how come there was no blood?!" Tiffany hopelessly exclaimed.

Jessica blushed a deep pink and removed her hand from Tiffany's hand, lower lip bitten. She put them on her lap, and shyly ducked her head.

Sophia answered for the flushed girl. "Of course. She uses tampons."

A long silence passed between them as Tiffany let things sink into her head. Finally, Jessica spoke.

"Do you want to see the results of the ultrasound?"

Not waiting for Tiffany's answer, Jessica took a paper from the bedside table and unfolded it before handing it to Tiffany.

Tiffany read the informations.

BPD: 7.66cm

AOG by US: 30 weeks and 2 days

FL: 5.54

FHR: 146 beats/min

HC: 28.2 cm

EFW: 1447 gms

AC: 25.5 cm

AFI: 15.0 cm

Placenta Maturity: Grade I

There is a single, live, intrauterine male fetus in cephalic presentation.

Regular fetal heart activity and movement are appreciated.

Placenta is high lying and posterior in location.

Amniotic fluid volume is adequate.

No other significant findings.

She couldn't understand most of them, but it was enough to inform her about the important things concerning the baby, and most importantly its age.

"If something happened between Chansung and I, his age would probably be 30 weeks and 3 days, not 2 days," Jessica explained.

She could still remember clearly what happened that night.

--Flashback--

Chansung started leaning forward and Jessica just closed her eyes.

But then nothing happened.

Jessica peeled her eyes open and stared at Chansung. He simply stared back at her.

He could clearly see the fear in those dark brown eyes and he knew she doesn't want to do this. He's a nice guy, a gentleman. His mother didn't let him grow up in a bad way. She made sure that Chansung would grow up to be a nice guy and he couldn't risk disappointing his mother, no matter the cost was.

Chansung sighed and dropped his hand to his lap. Jessica watched confusedly as he stood up, walked over to the other side of the bed and lay on Tiffany's side of the bed, back facing Jessica. He seemed like a different person from when he came in a moment ago, as if he lost his confidence, but Jessica didn't mind. At least he didn't do anything bad to her.

"Just don't tell anyone we did nothing."

With that, Chansung fell asleep right away.

--End of flashback--

Three weeks later, when Jessica called him, he seemed happy when he answered the call, and just two months ago, she realized that his happiness then was a slip. He wasn't supposed to act that friendly to Jessica, even until now.

--Flashback--

After explaining to Jessica every single detail about Tiffany's oddity, Sophia paused to let everything sink in to Jessica. Little did she know, Jessica was relieved.

Jessica felt like going crazy when she discovered that she was pregnant. She hadn't slept with anyone but Tiffany and there was no way she would get pregnant. So the first person that came up to her head was Chansung. Before leaving the next morning Chansung left his number on Jessica's night stand with a note.

Just call me if anything.

Jessica assumed that *anything* included her pregnancy and so she called him. She hadn't told him the truth that she didn't sleep with anyone but Tiffany, but he still didn't leave her. He stood up for her like a man though he doesn't know the truth. He was really a nice guy.

And then here's the truth. Tiffany was really the father of her child, but she still couldn't tell Chansung about it. If she did, he might leave her, and Tiffany doesn't know the truth yet. Jessica was scared to be alone in this.

With all these now, Jessica was still left wondering why Chansung was so different that night than the following day that they've met. Sophia answered it for her.

"Chansung was just acting that night."

"What do you mean, Mom?"

"I know I wouldn't get you to lie to Tiffany. If he didn't act that way do you think you wouldn't tell Tiffany that nothing really happened?"

Jessica understood Sophia then. She purposely asked Chansung to act like he was there to have sex with her but then changed his mind so she would be scared to tell someone that nothing really happened. If she told someone that nothing happened, that someone might tell Sophia and then she would ask Chansung to have sex with her again, and Jessica wouldn't want that to happen.

Sophia purposely let Tiffany and Jessica's trust on her to be ruined for their sake.

Leo, who was silently listening, was also enlightened.

--End of flashback--

Knowing she wasn't needed anymore, Sophia said, "I believe you have a lot to talk about. I'll leave you two," before leaving.

"Do you want to see the results of the paternity test?" Jessica asked and was about to get another paper from the bedside table if Tiffany hadn't spoke.

"No need. Just give me some time."

Silence fell between the two girls and Jessica wondered how Tiffany was taking this. She, herself, was surprised when she first heard about this from Sophia, but she got used to it eventually. She wasn't wondering who's the father of her child anymore, and it felt relieving, though slightly shocking.

"Nothing really happened between the two of you?" Tiffany asked again.

"I told you already. Nothing."

"Then why you didn't tell me nothing happened?"

Jessica ducked her head again, scared of Tiffany's stares. "I didn't tell you then that I didn't sleep with Chansung because I thought you're one of 'em... maybe you'll tell your mom and she's gonna make me sleep with someone again. But I know now that it's not like that. They just set me up so I wouldn't tell you the truth."

"Since when you knew the truth?"

"Two months and a few weeks ago."

"And you still didn't tell me?" Tiffany snapped.

Jessica's head jerked up and she defended herself, "I can't tell you. You said you're gonna call me in if you wanted, but you never did. I never had the chance to talk to you until now."

Tiffany suddenly felt bad and looked away. Jessica has followed her orders without complains, and now she's scolding her. She shouldn't scold her for being too nice. Tiffany was now slowly understanding Chansung's heart and everything he said two months ago. She unexpectedly felt bad for punching him.

"You're not mad at me... for not doing anything that night?"

"At first I am, but I understood eventually."

Jessica wanted to scream at Tiffany for not stopping Sophia's plan before, but she understood Tiffany the morning after they made love. She realized that Tiffany already loved her then, and she couldn't do anything about Sophia's plan because she was so heartbroken. She understood Tiffany. It was really hard, the girl you love and your very own cousin locked inside a room doing God-knows-what.

"Didn't you expect that I'll come banging at the door to stop whatever I believe was happening?" Tiffany carefully asked.

"Honestly, I didn't." Jessica didn't try to lie.

"Sorry... for not doing something."

Jessica smiled humbly. "It's alright. I understand."

Tiffany suddenly remembered something. "Why did you tell me to not treat you nicely before?"

Jessica shrugged. "What do I know? I was angry then, and confused. I don't know how I got pregnant and have no idea whose child it is... and then you said you don't want anything to do with it when I know I never slept with anyone but you and you're most probably the father though I don't know how... so I said something stupid."

"So I'm really the father?" Tiffany asked yet again. She could ask the same thing over and over again for all Jessica would care. Jessica doesn't mind answering the same thing. She understood that it was really hard to believe.

"None other than."

Silence took over them again.

“You’ll get used to it, Tiff.”

Tiffany nodded. “I’m trying.”

CHAPTER 7: 'CONTENTMENT'



CHAPTER 7: 'CONTENTMENT'

"I never thought I'll be saying this, but I'm saying this now. I wanna thank you for knocking some senses into my head, and for taking care of Jessi and my child for me."

Chansung raised an eyebrow, confused. "Your child?"

Tiffany nodded. "Yes, my child."

She then explained to him every single little thing starting from the beginning.

They were in a high-class restaurant and Tiffany had to keep her voice low to not let anyone hear her. It would be a shame if someone did. The food was the best in the country, so was the place, but none of them were interested in the scrumptious food served on their table.

After explaining, Chansung was left agape.

"Are you serious?"

Tiffany simply nodded.

"I need to process this." Chansung suddenly laughed, amused. "Wow. Tiffany... that was... cool." He couldn't find the right word and settled on the lamest one.

Tiffany glared at him. A lot of things might have changed on her, but she couldn't really help being annoyed at Chansung. "It's not cool, just so y'know."

He turned serious. "Sorry. But, I guess this means I'm not needed anymore."

"Exactly."

“Ouch. You’re really harsh,” Chansung said in mock hurt.

“I’m not. Didn’t I just thank you?”

“You’re not gonna say sorry for punching me for no apparent reason?”

Tiffany looked away. “Yeah. Sorry about that.”

He chuckled and leaned forward to fondly pat her head. For the first time ever, Tiffany didn’t slap his hand away and just let him. “Do you know why I love teasing you?”

“No.”

He rested his back against the chair’s comfy backrest. “We’ve been rivals at almost about everything when we were young and until now. Do you know why I always do whatever you do? Why I follow you around?”

Tiffany’s eyebrows furrowed, wondering where Chansung was getting to. “No.”

“Tiffany, when I said you’re my favorite cousin I didn’t mean it sarcastically—I meant it.” He paused. “I followed you around before, do whatever you do, and even joined every drag racing competition you’ve joined just so we could bond.

“In every race we’ve joined I tried to talk to you. I tried to have you say ‘hey, Chansung, your car is nice’ or ‘that was a nice race!’ but nothing came. I wanted us to bond and talk about cars because I know that’s what you liked, but you always tell me ‘get out of my face, will you?’ or when I start talking you just say ‘who the hell cares?’. Every time you win I congratulate you, but you always smirk smugly at me and say ‘loser’.

“You never saw my efforts but I never stopped. I wanted you to call me ‘oppa’ like how you call Hyun Joong. I’m soooo jealous of him, by the way.” Chansung chuckled at his pathetic self.

Tiffany’s eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Tell me. All those times that I won, did I really win?”

He chuckled again. “No, I purposely made you win.”

Tiffany’s hands turned into tight fists on her lap and she looked down at them. She suddenly felt bad. He just wanted to be close to her but all she did was push him away and say harsh words to him. He purposely made her win all those times and took all the insults just so Tiffany wouldn’t be the one to be insulted.

She has always looked at him like a bad guy, but he’s actually really nice.

“I... I didn’t know.”

He shrugged as if it doesn’t matter. “Of course you wouldn’t know.”

“Thank you... for everything.”

Chansung patted her head again but didn’t say anything. Tiffany looked up and was greeted by his genuine smile.

“Are you seeing me at a new light now?”

Tiffany nodded like a kid.

“We’re in good terms now?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s nice to know.” He heaved a huge sigh of relief. “I guess my sacrifices of taking care of Jessica did it, huh?”

Tiffany slightly chuckled. “It helped.”

Silence enveloped them.

“Hey.”

“Yes, Tiffany?”

“Why did you claim my child before? When we argued you said it was yours.”

Chansung laughed. “You still remember that? Well, I did it to push you to do something. You’re so stubborn. You don’t want to do something until it’s too late. And, honestly, I don’t really know whose child it is. I just wanted to make you jealous and finally stand up for your wife.”

“You’ve done a lot for me.” Tiffany felt even worse.

“Yeah, I did, but it’s a part of being a good cousin to you. Everything’s alright now so I guess I’m not needed anymore.” He stood up from his chair. “My role in your current life is done.”

“Keep in touch.”

He nodded with a small smile. He definitely would.

“Thank you. Really,” Tiffany said something she never thought she would say to Chansung sincerely.

“I’m willing to do the same thing if it happened again. I’ll see you soon,” with that and a final smile, he left the restaurant, hands in his pockets and with an additional bounce to his steps.

Tiffany knew then that she would never be annoyed at Chansung again.

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It took six months for Sunny to fully heal. Those months passed by slowly and she's not sure if she would survive it without Taeyeon beside her. Taeyeon had been a great help to her. She stayed beside Sunny all the while, telling her to recuperate fast just so they could go out together.

They have talked about a lot of things. Sunny got to know Taeyeon more and Taeyeon got to know Sunny more. Taeyeon has prepared plans for both of them, including marriage. Sunny almost fell from the hospital bed when Taeyeon mentioned it. She was serious with their relationship and it surprised Sunny in a good way. She wouldn't mind getting married with Taeyeon, of course, but it was just too soon. Their relationship hasn't been that long and strong and the only challenge they've been through was Sunny's accident. They still have a lot to go through, like Jessica and Tiffany. Taeyeon understood it, of course. She said she could wait forever.

But Taeyeon hasn't given up and now Sunny was stuck in a condition Taeyeon came up with in replacement to marriage.

She asked Sunny to live with her on her condominium unit and Sunny couldn't say no when her own mother said yes.

Little did Sunny know, Taeyeon did it just so she could make sure Sunny would be safe. She wouldn't mind literally tying Sunny on her and carry her around. She wouldn't mind locking her inside a safe place, just so she would be safe. She couldn't risk Sunny's life again. Not only because of her promise to Leo, but also because she loved the girl.

"Sunny," Taeyeon stood uneasily on her bedroom's door and called the girl busy with unpacking her things.

"Hmm?"

"You don't mind sharing a room and a bed with me, right?"

Though Taeyeon was the daughter of the owner of the world's biggest mall that has thousands of branches all over the world, she only has the whole ninth floor of the condominium building as her unit. Though it was very big and spacious and luxurious, it only has one kitchen, one room, one bathroom and one living room. It was a bachelorette's pad, so it doesn't really have that many rooms.

Sunny sighed tiredly and faced Taeyeon. "I already told you that I don't mind, right?"

"Yeah." Taeyeon shrugged. "I'm just making sure."

Sunny went back to unpacking her things and Taeyeon bolted away from her place to stop the girl from doing anything.

“You just recovered. Can’t you stop working for... ever?” Taeyeon said as she held the girl’s hands.

“Have you forgotten that I was once a maid? I’m used to doing things and once I stopped my body would be looking for it,” Sunny explained.

Taeyeon sighed. “Just stop working, OK? You’re living here with me as my girlfriend, soon to be wife, not my maid.”

“Then who’s going to clean the house? Wash the clothes?”

“I’ll just call a maid-for-a-day from the agency to clean the house and wash the clothes, like what I’ve been doing for a couple of years I’m living alone.”

Taeyeon preferred living alone on her condo unit. She didn’t hire a maid to take care of her house because she’s mostly out of the house for always being at school before and now at the office. Not everything was being used. What’s being used was only the bathroom, bedroom, kitchen when she felt like cooking and living room when she felt like watching. So she just called a maid-for-a-day once a week to maintain the house and do the chores.

“Alright,” Sunny said almost sadly.

Taeyeon smiled encouragingly at her before pulling her out of the room. They took three minutes just to get out of the big bedroom, twice of how long Taeyeon used to take before. They had to walk slower because Sunny’s legs and waist needed precautions. It took them another four minutes to reach the living room since it was far from the bedroom.

Taeyeon sat Sunny down on her long white leather couch before searching for the remote control of her 82” flat screen TV that was nailed on the wall. She searched on the coffee table, on the couch, under the couch, and everywhere in the living room but couldn’t find it.

She scratched the back of her head, muttering to herself. “Where could it have been? I really should use my TV more often.”

“I think it’s there.” Sunny pointed to the small cabinet just below the massive TV. The DVD set was there, with its huge speakers scattered all over the living room. A black square thing was on top of the amplifier. That couldn’t have been anything other than a remote control.

Taeyeon went over and took it out of the cabinet. “Oh yeah. This is it.”

Suddenly, she felt weird. *Did this happen before?* And then she remembered that she met Sunny at the Hwang’s place in a situation like this before.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Sunny asked and Taeyeon jerked her head to look at her. The moment their eyes met they exploded in a fit of laughter.

When their laughter subsided, Taeyeon treaded over to the couch and sat beside Sunny. She turned serious and wrapped her right arm around Sunny’s shoulders. Sunny looked down at the bracelet on her wrist. It was Taeyeon’s gift last Christmas, and she treasured it so much.

“That was the luckiest day of my life,” Taeyeon softly said. She’s always been the sentimental one.

And being the one who always lifted the moods up, Sunny said, “Probably because you accidentally hit my chest and checked out my *assets*.”

“I didn’t!”

And Sunny, again, exploded in another fit of laughter.

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Tiffany watched silently as Jessica held a book on her lap while sitting on the bed in the middle of the nursery room. Though she was a couple of feet away from Jessica, with her back pressed against the wall beside the door, she could see that the book was a children’s book, fairytale, and Jessica probably wanted to read it to their child once he could already understand things.

“What are you thinking?” Tiffany softly asked.

She’s been gentle to Jessica ever since she came out of the hospital and even gentler when she finally learned to accept the unborn child as hers, which she just knew yesterday. It didn’t take a long time for her to accept that she’s a hermaphrodite. It wasn’t really that bad once she got used to it.

The day has been tiring but Tiffany felt her tiredness disappeared the moment she saw Jessica. Tiffany met with Chansung and reconciled with him, the Jungs arrived and Sophia, Ernest and Tiffany had to explain everything to them. They had no idea that Jessica was pregnant until they received a call from Sophia yesterday. They were only shed light today and they were now settled on their respective guest rooms after having a word with both Tiffany and Jessica which lasted for more than an hour. They were all really surprised.

Jessica didn’t look up from the book she was inspecting, wasn’t really reading. “I’m just wondering... if they have a children’s book about The Land of Stars.”

Tiffany raised an eyebrow. “You still remember that?”

“Hmm.” Jessica nodded. “I know you like that story so much.”

Tiffany chuckled as she ambled over to the bed and sat beside Jessica, their backs against the headboard.

“How did you know?”

Jessica shrugged. “I just know.”

Tiffany spun her right arm around Jessica’s shoulders and pulled the girl closer. Jessica let her do it, and just simply nuzzled her face on Tiffany’s chest. This was the least she could do to not break Tiffany’s heart, and their child seemed to like it. He slightly moved inside Jessica’s stomach.

“Tiffany?”

“Hmm?”

“Having a child isn’t on the contract.”

The statement didn’t do its expected effect on the atmosphere because of Jessica’s soft voice. It did nothing on their moods, and it surprised Tiffany. Wasn’t she supposed to be sad because of it? Maybe it was because her mind was made up now, and she knew what she would do about the contract.

“What should we do?” Jessica voiced out what has been bugging her for quite some time.

“Can you trust me again this time and let me handle it?”

“Of course.”

“Please just trust me with whatever I’ll do and believe that I’m doing it for the both of us.”

“I will.” Jessica couldn’t really understand why she trusted Tiffany so much even after all those times that she decided based on stubbornness and foolishness.

Tiffany slowly stroked Jessica’s arm up and down, almost mindlessly. Jessica almost fell asleep with Tiffany’s touch only if their child hadn’t kicked. She missed this, Tiffany hugging her, and she wanted to stay this way.

She knew Tiffany was showing her that she cared for her, that she loved her, but she couldn’t appreciate it like how she was supposed to because she’s confused of her own feelings.

Yes, she liked it that Tiffany cared for her, it was alright with her that Tiffany loved her and she was showing how much she does at the moment, and there were a lot of other things she liked about Tiffany too. There were also times that she felt like she almost loved Tiffany, but pushed it at the back of her head because of the contract.

But right now, she couldn't be so sure anymore. She doesn't want to assume that she loved Tiffany though she really doesn't.

Jessica remembered reading a short trivia before.

70% of pregnant women ignores its symptoms and denies that they're pregnant.

Was it the same thing when it came to love? Does people in love ignore it and deny it?

Jessica was really confused.

"Jessi," Tiffany pulled Jessica back to reality. "Are you excited?"

"Excited about what?" Jessica's mind wasn't fully back to the present just yet.

"Giving birth to our first child."

"I'm... I'm scared."

"Of course you'd be." Tiffany tightened her arm around Jessica, translating through her actions her words. "But I'm here. I'll be with you."

"I can't help but think like it's kind of a late birthday gift for me," Tiffany said after a couple of minutes' silence, chuckling.

"Speaking of. I'm sorry I haven't greeted you," Jessica said guiltily. She couldn't really greet Tiffany because the girl doesn't want to talk to her then.

"It's OK. I think we're fair. I haven't greeted you on your birthday either. I'm sorry about that."

Jessica didn't say anything about Tiffany's reply. She understood Tiffany. Tiffany was hurt then, and she even saw Chansung massaging her legs. It wasn't really a good scene.

"Are *you* excited?" Jessica asked instead.

"I'm scared too." Tiffany chuckled pitifully at herself.

"We'll be together."

Jessica's statement brought relief to Tiffany more than anything she's ever said. It was the perfect way to put it and the best way to look at it.

"Y'know what? Suddenly I don't feel so scared anymore."

“Why?”

“Because we’re together.”

Jessica laughed. “That’s plagiarism.”

Tiffany smiled sheepishly before shrugging. She couldn’t feel any more contented now. She has her own family-- wife and child. What else could she ask?

To make it all real and solid, probably. Without the stupid contract.

But for now, Tiffany has to make do of whatever she has and appreciate it.

Jessica watched in confusion as Tiffany removed her arm around her and kneeled on the bed, still beside her. Her expression changed to amusement when Tiffany leaned in to her baby bump and started yelling, hands cupping the sides of her mouth.

“Hey! Heeeeey! Can you hear me in there?!” Tiffany pressed her right ear on Jessica’s stomach but heard nothing. She yelled again, “I’m your father!”

Jessica laughed. “What are you doing?”

“I’m trying to make him recognize my voice so when he came out already, he would recognize me as his father.”

Jessica laughed again before she felt him moved. “Oh! Hurry!” She took Tiffany’s right hand and pressed her palm on her stomach.

Tiffany felt like she won a lottery when she first felt her son’s slow movement against her palm and she smiled until it reached her eyes—a sign that she’s genuinely happy.

“Oh my God! He’s answering me!” She leaned in close to Jessica’s stomach again. “I’m your father! You recognize me now?!”

Their child moved again and both girls felt it, and then nothing. Tiffany suddenly felt sad. Just when she was having fun, it abruptly stopped.

“He might be tired,” Jessica reasoned.

Tiffany looked at her. “Are you?” She knew mothers and their children were somehow connected.

Jessica sheepishly nodded.

“Let’s just sleep here then,” Tiffany proposed and Jessica just slid downwards to settle flat on her back on the bed after putting down the book on the bedside table. Tiffany neatly tucked Jessica under the blankets before settling down beside her.

Tiffany put her right arm under Jessica’s head and pressed it against her chest, like how she used to do before. She missed doing this too. Before, there were just the two of them, now there were three of them, one unborn.

She settled her left palm on Jessica’s stomach though she couldn’t really feel him in there, and five minutes later they were both already asleep with a similar feeling inside their chests—contentment.

The following day Tiffany woke up early to visit every bookstore in the vicinity, and when Jessica checked the sets of children’s book in the nursery room, she found an exceptionally beautiful book entitled ‘The Land of Stars’.

SPECIAL CHAPTER:



DEMANDS

This wasn't the first time she saw him, but Tiffany still had the same reaction. Staring at the screen where a black and white 4D image of their child was transmitted from the obstetrician's apparatus that was pressed against Jessica's stomach, she couldn't help but to smile in amusement.

He's so *little* to fit in there, and though it was still too early to say which features of the girls he inherited, Tiffany could say that his chin was so Jessica. He's healthy too, and the obstetrician said Jessica could give birth normally.

Tiffany was brought back to the present when she felt a hand cupped her right hand. She looked down at Jessica on the bed with a questioning look.

"What are you thinking? You keep on smiling."

"That's a normal reaction fathers get whenever they're seeing their first child," Dr. Dot Hepburn answered for Tiffany.

Tiffany made sure Jessica would get a female obstetrician, and Dr. Dot had been Sophia's good friend, for she was also Sophia's obstetrician before. They had a strict agreement to not let Tiffany's secret be publicized, and Dr. Dot was very trustable that until now the public still doesn't know that Jessica Jung-Hwang was pregnant and the father was Tiffany Hwang. It would ruin both the Jung's and Hwang's companies if it was divulged.

"Don't you feel the same?" Tiffany asked Jessica.

"I do, all the time." Then Tiffany realized that Jessica, too, was having the same expression she has.

"Anyway, Tiffany, are you doing what I've told you before? That you should not buy massage chairs for Jessica?" Dr. Dot casually asked.

“Yes, of course,” Tiffany answered.

“It’s better if you would be the one massaging her, and getting whatever food she wants. You shan’t ask your maids or anyone to get it for Jessica. It’ll help not only to ease Jessica, but also to develop strong relationship between the two of you, the parents.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I’m doing.”

That was actually the reason why Tiffany asked her parents to keep her robotic bodyguards away for now. She’s always going out to search for things Jessica wanted (luckily, it wasn’t too demanding yet), and they sometimes have check-ups with Dr. Dot. They couldn’t just always follow her around.

“Very good.”

Dr. Dot wiped Jessica’s stomach clean of the gel she put before pulling down Jessica’s dress to cover her stomach. Jessica sat on the edge of the bed and Tiffany helped her to stand up by standing behind her and cupping her shoulders. The three of them walked out of the room and into Dr. Dot’s office.

“Take a seat while you wait for the results.” Dr. Dot waved to the seats in front of her desk and the two girls sat. Dr. Dot retreated back to the previous room, leaving them alone.

“Jessi.”

“Hmm?”

“Nothing. I just wanna say your name.”

Jessica chuckled and looked down at her baby bump. “Next time you’ll call me I’m not gonna respond.”

Silence enveloped them for a long time and Jessica wondered what the future held for her and her family. What would happen to their child after they divorced? What was Tiffany’s plan now? She hoped it wouldn’t be so bad that it could turn everything worse.

If only they could cancel the contract...

“Hey.”

“Hm?” Jessica answered instinctively.

“You responded.”

“You’re awful!” Jessica slapped Tiffany’s arm and they laughed.

Jessica realized something as she watched Tiffany laugh. Maybe she should just enjoy the present and stop worrying for the future for now. It would certainly make things lighter.

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“Jessi, you’re OK with this?”

“With what?”

“This.” Tiffany motioned for their setup.

They have been lying down on the bed for the whole morning. Tiffany, as usual, has her right arm under Jessica’s head as her left arm was settled on top of Jessica’s stomach, their feet tangled. Jessica was lying contentedly on Tiffany’s arm and has no complains at all.

“You’re not getting bored? We’ve been at home for a couple of weeks.”

“I easily get tired, so I’d rather stay like this than to go out,” Jessica said as-a-matter-of-factly.

“OK.”

Tiffany really has no problem with their setup. She’d rather stay like this forever, if they could, and not once would she ever get bored. It felt nice having the chance to touch Jessica like this without negative thoughts in her head, without thinking that Jessica would suspect about her feelings. She could really use some moments like this once in a while, not thinking about problems and not doing anything. They should have been like this since the beginning.

Jessica, on the other hand, doesn’t have any problem with this, too. She knew Tiffany liked this, loved it even, and it’s alright with her to do this just to give Tiffany a short time happiness she deserved while she still tried to figure out her own feelings. But Jessica knew, too, that she doesn’t have to think so much about her feelings right now. She couldn’t risk having another break down from thinking too much. She doesn’t want to risk their child’s life again.

Silence enveloped them for a long time and Tiffany has almost fallen asleep if Jessica hadn’t broken the silence.

“Tiff, I’m craving for something.”

“What is it? I’ll get it for you.”

Tiffany untangled herself from Jessica and sat on the edge of the bed. Jessica sat up too.

“I want... peaches.”

“I’ll get it.”

Tiffany stood up and was about to go out of the door but Jessica held her wrist to stop her.

“Wait. There’s something specific about the peaches I want... a specific smell and texture.” Jessica grimaced, unable to explain herself.

“What smell and texture?”

“I’d just go with you. It’s really hard to explain.”

Tiffany kindly smiled and cupped Jessica’s cheek with her left hand. “It’s OK, I understand.” Her expression suddenly changed to worry. “But you said you easily get tired.”

“I could last for a long time, so don’t worry. Plus, there’s a certain place where I want to buy. They have a lot of varieties to choose from.”

Tiffany knew how complicated pregnant women could be, and she has prepared herself for Jessica’s demands. Judy said they could demand something almost impossible sometimes, something weird or unusual. They could be really picky too, and they could change mind and mood in a matter of seconds. Good thing Tiffany hadn’t experienced anything about it yet so far.

“OK, if that’s what you want. I’ll just go change my clothes.”

“Wait!” Jessica stopped her again. “You’re not planning of wearing high heels, are you?”

“What should I wear then?”

“Wear something casual. Flats, jeans and a shirt would do, and something to disguise your face. It’s a public market; you don’t want to be mauled up by a hundred reporters trying to capture THE Tiffany Hwang in a public market.” Jessica read the look on Tiffany’s face and added, “Of course I’ll be disguising myself too.”

“Ooookay,” Tiffany dragged before going into the walk-in closet while wondering why it felt like she was sneaking out from her parents to go on a secret date.

Jessica remained seated on the bed for a minute, trying to push everything at the back of her head so she could enjoy Tiffany’s company later.

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“Chansung once brought you here?” Tiffany disgustedly asked as she stared at the place in front of her.

It was indeed a public market for people with average and low status in life. There were a lot of people of different ages. Stalls after stalls were lined up so close to each other that no one could identify which stall started where and which stall stopped where. The ground was wet, (it wasn't even tiled!) probably because the vendors were throwing waters on their products to keep it fresh and clean. Though Tiffany and Jessica was a couple of yards far from the place, they could already hear the noise of the place and could smell the mixed scent of different kinds of fruits. All of it was crammed up in a single roof.

Tiffany never imagined Scorchwood has a place like this.

“We just accidentally discovered this place when we were taking a walk before.” Jessica jerked her head to its direction. “Let's go?”

Without waiting for an answer, she held Tiffany's right hand and started dragging her as if she wasn't pregnant. They passed by a lot of stalls that has different types of fruits, trying not to bump into other buyers. Tiffany pinched her nose with her free hand because she couldn't take the smell. It made her want to puke.

“What are you doing?”

“I don't like the smell.” Tiffany's voice sounded nasal.

Jessica removed her hand from her nose. “You'll get used to it.” Then she started dragging Tiffany again.

Tiffany didn't dare put her hand back to her nose when she realized Jessica wasn't doing the same. Jessica doesn't seem to be so bothered about the filthiness of the place, and she has a very sensitive sense of smell.

Jessica continued dragging Tiffany into the heart of the market, the middle, where all varieties of peaches were, and then they stopped for a moment. Jessica let go of Tiffany's hand and started surveying every stalls, asking questions to the vendors and examining the peaches, while Tiffany lurked behind her—exactly like what Chansung also did before.

“It has got to be here,” Jessica murmured to herself as she examined a peach from the sixth stall. She took a piece and sniffed it.

“Why are you sniffing it?” Tiffany asked as she looked incredulously at Jessica.

But Jessica didn't even turn to look at her. She continued to pick up another piece and sniffed it as she casually answered, “I told you I'm looking for a certain smell.”

She found it eventually, on the eleventh stall, and by that time Tiffany has gotten used to the smell of the place and Jessica wasn't even a tad tired. Jessica found that certain smell she was looking for, that stocked-in-

a-room-for-so-long-it-had-gathered-dust smell of its skin. Its texture was also the one she was looking for, that not-so-hairy-but-not-also-bald texture. It was just right.

Tiffany took it from Jessica's hand and smelled it. She retched. "God, is that the smell you're looking for? It must've been almost rotten if not already!"

"It might smell like this, it might look like this, but it's only the skin. Once you've tasted it, it's perfect," Jessica tried to convince Tiffany.

"Yeah, if that's what you want." Tiffany waved it away, still not convinced. "Just take all that you can."

Jessica talked to the vendor for a while until Tiffany saw the man packed two kilos of peaches in a box, like what Jessica instructed, and handed it to Jessica but Tiffany was fast enough to snatch it from the girl. She doesn't want Jessica to carry it.

"Do you accept debt card?" Tiffany asked the man as she held the box with her left hand and her right hand felt for her wallet on her jeans' pockets.

"Sorry, we don't, Miss."

Tiffany's head snapped up to look ridiculously at the man, her hand frozen inside her pocket. Everything, and she meant *everything*, in this world could be paid by cards now, even the buses. And then she remembered this was a public market for families with low and average status in life. They probably don't really accept any type of cards and Tiffany couldn't figure out why she hadn't thought of that. And she doesn't have any cash to save her life!

Good thing Tiffany heard Jessica chuckle or else she would have gone mad from embarrassment.

"Here, take this." Jessica kindly smiled at the man and handed him cash. "Keep the change."

As they walked away, Tiffany still hadn't recovered from embarrassment. She kept on thinking what the man would think of her. A rich girl buying in a place like this? Or would he have recognized her as Tiffany Hwang? Then that would be more embarrassing. But Tiffany was quite convinced of her disguise—a navy blue Lacoste polo shirt, jacket, denim jeans, cap and groundless spectacles—that she's sure no one would recognize her. No one, so far, had even glanced back at them to take a second look, so they were safe.

Suddenly, she felt Jessica's arm around her waist, calming her thoughts down. She turned her head towards her right and stared at Jessica's heartwarming smile.

"You're so uptight. Loosen up!"

Jessica didn't remove her arm from Tiffany's waist as they continued walking.

It wasn't so bad, Tiffany realized, to be embarrassed if this was the compensation for it.

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Jessica savored every cut of the peaches as she sat on Queen's LV patterned seat, the door open and her feet dangling off to the ground, while Tiffany rested her back against the car's window, just beside Jessica, arms crossed and eyes still on the public market in the distance.

Jessica has insisted on staying, saying she wanted to have fresh air. Good thing they parked the car far enough from the market that the smell didn't reach them.

"Y'know what? It isn't so bad."

Jessica swallowed before looking up at Tiffany. "What?"

Tiffany continued staring ahead as she put her left foot on top of the other. "Going here, and the experience."

Jessica chuckled. "That's nice to hear."

A couple of minutes passed and Tiffany stood straight. She removed her jacket and draped it over Jessica's shoulders before kneeling in front of Jessica. She settled her right hand over her stomach, feeling him inside.

"Is he this hard to feed? Is he giving you a hard time?" she concernedly asked, face concealed from Jessica because of her cap.

"Of course not. There might be time when he would move so much that it hurts, but it's nice to know that he's in there, alive and well. There were times when my back would hurt, or my legs, but it's because he's healthy and gaining weight. Most of the time I find it hard to breathe, but it's also because he's growing big. I'm willing to endure all of it just to give birth to him."

"It's near."

"Yeah, a couple of months left, but why do you sound scared? I thought you're not so scared anymore?"

Tiffany looked up and only then Jessica saw that she was actually smiling so delightfully that it reached her eyes. Jessica could clearly see it behind her groundless specs. Finally, Jessica's wish had come true—for Tiffany to look at her with those smiling eyes. It was the first time, and Jessica couldn't understand why she felt so happy as if it was a big achievement.

"What scared are you talking about? I'm excited! I can't wait to see him!"

Jessica's expression suddenly changed. "Here he goes again."

"What?" Tiffany concernedly asked.

"He's about to give *you* another hard time."

"What do you mean?"

"He's craving for an apple."

"Easy. I could just go back there." Tiffany juttred her thumb over her shoulder to the public market.

"But it's not just a common apple." Jessica smiled sheepishly. "A black apple."

Tiffany just stared at her for a moment, eyebrows knitted.

"I know it's kinda impossible, but can you please try?" Jessica pleaded.

Tiffany finally smiled. "Sure."

She kissed Jessica's stomach before standing up and towering over Jessica. She kissed the girl's forehead softly, Jessica's eyelids drooping close instinctively to enjoy it.

"I'll be back in just a short while."

Tiffany hugged her one last time before jogging back to the market.

Jessica sighed, opened her eyes and watched Tiffany's back until it grew smaller and disappeared by the distance. She felt her forehead-- that spot Tiffany kissed. It wasn't warm against her fingertips, but she could feel that certain spot on her forehead, where Tiffany's lips had been, hot. Or maybe it was her soul that Tiffany kissed and warmed?

"Aish," she grunted before dropping her hand to her lap.

This was getting confusing.

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"I looked like a crazy woman back there, asking for black apple."

Jessica caught herself a second before laughing at Tiffany's expression. She looked like she was so stressed, but in a funny way. Her eyes were half-lidded, her lips set in a deep frown, and the rest was blank. It just looked too funny for Jessica.

“Sorry.”

“Here.” Tiffany gently put a box on Jessica’s lap, her expression going back to normal. “It’s not black, but it’s the darkest shade of apple I found.”

Jessica opened the lid of the box and saw a couple of apples inside. They weren’t black, but it was too red that it almost looked like black. That was exactly what she asked for, maybe she just said the wrong color.

She smiled up at Tiffany. “Thank you.”

That simple smile washed off every embarrassment and tiredness she had back in the public market and Tiffany smiled back.

“Anything for you. Are you ready to head back home?”

“Yeah. Sure.”

Jessica put her feet inside the car and Tiffany shut the door for her before jogging back to the other side and climbing in. She started the engine and carefully maneuvered Queen back to their house.

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“Did I tire you out?”

“No. Of course not.”

It sounded assuring enough as an answer to Jessica’s guilty-sounded question but Tiffany opened her eyes to confirm it though she was actually about to fall asleep from exhaustion. She stared at the crown of Jessica’s head as the other girl buried her face against Tiffany’s chest. They were back to their usual position on their bed and the room was dark. They were actually about to sleep.

“What made you think that?”

“I don’t know... ever since we came back you just seem... so tired.”

Tiffany slightly pulled away so she could see Jessica’s face. She cupped Jessica’s cheek and willed the girl to look at her forced-to-look-lively eyes, while wishing Jessica wouldn’t notice that she’s really tired.

“You see? I’m not. You can even tell me to go back to that place right at this instant to buy red mangoes or flawless oranges.”

Jessica chuckled lightly before burying her face back to Tiffany's chest and Tiffany put her left arm around her waist. She trailed her hand up and down Jessica's back before deciding on something. She stopped at a certain part of Jessica's back, close to her waist, and carefully applied pressure.

"Hmmm," Jessica hummed.

"It hurts?"

Jessica nodded.

"Settle yourself comfortably. I'll massage your back until you fall asleep."

Jessica didn't move from her position and Tiffany assumed that she was comfortable inside her arms. She continued applying gentle pressures on certain parts of Jessica's back and once she felt Jessica's breathing evened, she finally let herself to give in to sleep.

Little did she know, she fell asleep faster than Jessica.

CHAPTER 8: 'MAGIC'



CHAPTER 8: 'MAGIC'

Jessica's eight month of pregnancy.

Tiffany knew Jessica could easily get tired, especially her legs and back. She actually learned a lot about pregnancy from listening to Judy talk about it whenever she could, and she learned that a woman's weight tends to double when she's pregnant, that's why their legs couldn't carry their weight, especially Jessica's case because she, herself, has gained weight. But that fact hadn't stopped her from bringing Jessica out.

Once again, Jessica found herself standing in an open area, eyes blindfolded, and hand intertwined with Tiffany's, like last Christmas Eve, but she didn't know what to expect this time.

"Jessi, I'm gonna remove the blindfold now," Tiffany said as she stepped behind Jessica and untied it.

Tiffany seemed excited. Her voice was a pitch higher than usual and her steps bounced. Jessica wondered what she was so excited about and waited patiently as Tiffany removed her blindfold.

Jessica had to blink a couple of times before her eyes cleared. She stared at the massive house in front of them, and then looked around.

The house was caged inside a tall automatic chromic gate. In front of the main door of the house was a tall fountain with a cupid in the middle, a long road that started from the front gate circled around it and ended at the back of the house. Jessica guessed the garage might be there. The space that was left unstained by concrete was filled with Bermuda grass, a couple of bushes that gains flowers based on their seasons, and a lot of flowers of different kinds.

The house itself was massive and painted all-white. There were two steps of stairs before the front portico and the huge tinted-glass door with golden frame. The windows on both sides of the main door were lightly tinted and it obscured what's inside the house. The roof was still white, and it was pointed, like that of a Versailles' palace.

It was beautiful, the place, like something out of a fairy tale book, but Jessica couldn't help but wonder.

She turned towards Tiffany. "What about the place?"

Tiffany smiled. "A gift for you." She took both of Jessica's hands and stared at her square in the eyes. "Happy anniversary."

Jessica didn't forget, of course. It was their first anniversary –September 6, 2028-- but she didn't expect Tiffany would get her a gift this big, this beautiful.

By the way Tiffany said 'a gift for you' seemed as if Jessica would live there alone, as if Tiffany wouldn't live together with her and it somehow bothered Jessica. What did Tiffany mean by that?

"Thank you, and happy anniversary." She hugged Tiffany. "I only got you this." Jessica rummaged inside her purse and handed a car key to Tiffany. "You got your cars from Im's Automobile, right? I had to ask Chansung about what you loved about cars, and Yoona to customize a car for you, since they already know what you like. It'll be delivered at home later at night."

Tiffany stared at the key on her palm. It wasn't like the usual ones. The key itself was made of gold, not silver or platinum, and on its handle engraved a word—Princess.

Seeing Tiffany's expressionless face, Jessica explained, "You already have Queen, so I thought maybe I should give you Princess. I know I'm not really good with names." Jessica chuckled sheepishly.

The name actually reminded Jessica of Tiffany. When they first saw each other, way back in Korea, fifteen days before their marriage, Jessica saw her outside her school and called her Princess in her head since she doesn't know her name yet. The first night after their wedding, she called Tiffany Princess too. Tiffany was as beautiful as those Princesses Jessica loved to read on books then, and Jessica couldn't help but call her that.

Tiffany, on the other hand, doesn't know what to feel. The word reminded her of the time Mr. Choi died, particularly Mr. Choi's last words. *Princess*. She felt as if the word was haunting her.

Thinking about him now made Tiffany wonder how was Seohyun's progress with the investigation. She hasn't called yet, and Tiffany couldn't reach her. But then Seohyun promised, and Tiffany trusted her.

She pushed the thought at the back of her head and forced a smile for Jessica. She hugged her. "Thank you. Thank you so much. I'll use it well."

"You're not saying you'll be running over people, right?" Jessica joked.

Tiffany pulled away and laughed. "Of course not. I've learned not to drive fast again after the incident with Sunny." She jerked her head to the direction of the front door. "Let's get in."

Tiffany led her in inside the house and what greeted Jessica was more than what was outside, though it was all white too. It was high-ceilinged and a glass chandelier was hanging in the ceiling. In front of the door was a white grand staircase with countless steps and it parted in between, one turned to left, and one turned to right, its railings gilded. The wall in between where the staircase parted has a huge picture of Tiffany and Jessica on their wedding outfits, smiling. Jessica remembered that picture. It was taken before their wedding, when they were shooting for the pre-nuptial video and photos.

Jessica doesn't know what to feel.

Those memories were bittersweet to remember now, and plus, they were really awkward back then. She couldn't believe a year has just passed. It felt as if five years have already passed because of a lot of things that happened.

"I'll take it that you don't want to explore the house right now because you'll just get tired," Tiffany said, taking Jessica's attention off the picture. "So I'll just give you a quick summary. The left stair would lead to the master's bedroom and our child's bedroom while the right one would lead to the guest rooms." Tiffany pointed to the hallway on their right. "This would lead to the maid's or butler's quarter, and the dining area." She slowly assisted Jessica to the left hallway. "And this is the living room."

Jessica stopped in the middle of the living room. It was as luxurious as every part of the house and was hard to describe. Decorated in lush, French-Victorian style, the room was closely packed with rare antiques, jaw-droppingly familiar museum-quality art, and sumptuous fabrics.

She sat on the long feathered couch and Tiffany took a seat beside her, immediately sweeping Jessica's feet off the floor and putting it on her lap. She started carefully massaging them.

"Tired?"

Jessica nodded though she's actually not just so she doesn't have to explain why she suddenly felt down.

The truth was she doesn't know what to think. Every wall of the house has a picture of them nailed on it. They were all taken before and during their wedding, when everything wasn't as complicated as now. It reminded her of what they used to be, and what they *should* be.

And the fact that it was their first anniversary saddened her more for no apparent reason. It only meant that they only have one year left together, and Jessica was inexplicably not liking the thought. It made her want to cry.

Tiffany, however, seemed happy and Jessica wondered. Wasn't she supposed to be sadder than Jessica? But it seemed as though she's happy, with all the smiles she has and the good vibes around her.

"Did you like the house?" Tiffany pulled Jessica back to reality.

"Of course. It's beautiful."

Tiffany smiled. "That's nice to hear, because you'll be living here soon."

"You're not... gonna live here with me?" Jessica carefully asked.

"That's what I have to tell you about..." Tiffany hesitated and put Jessica's legs down. She took an envelope from the coffee table and handed it to Jessica. Jessica didn't even notice it was there.

Jessica doesn't know what to feel when she saw the headline, but she surely felt a tug at her heart.

Tiffany explained, "It's a new divorce contract. It says that our child's custody will be under you every day except Saturday when he'll be mine."

"Why are we talking about his custody?" Jessica braced for the answer she knew was coming.

"Because... we'll be automatically divorced three months after you gave birth." Jessica didn't answer and Tiffany continued, "I'll live with you after you gave birth and for the next three months, and then... I'll leave." She dragged the last part, as if unsure.

Jessica gulped. "What about... our latest contract?"

"That's gonna be canceled."

"Why did you suddenly decide this?"

"I can't wait for another year!" Tiffany said a little too enthusiastically.

Why did Jessica's heart twitch at that?

So that's why she was happy, Jessica mused disappointedly, She's gonna untie the knot with me before we reach our second year. I thought she loves me? Why is she doing this?

Tiffany knew Jessica was taking it in a bad way, but she wouldn't explain.

Her real plan was to divorce Jessica as early as she could so that she could finally move, or maybe even confess. If she would confess to Jessica now, they'll divorce, and it wasn't good since Jessica was pregnant and Tiffany still has to watch over her. So the only chance she could find to finally confess was after their divorce.

It doesn't matter if she has to divorce Jessica just so she could tell her how much she loved her. If she confessed now, and Jessica doesn't love her back, they'll have to divorce and part forever. But if she confessed out of marriage, after Jessica gave birth, and Jessica doesn't love her back, there's no threat. She could still always try to make Jessica fall in love with her.

There's still one possible scenario left but Tiffany doesn't want to give much thought about it. Maybe if she confessed now, and Jessica loved her back, they could cancel the first contract and everything would be fine. Hope in it was false though. Tiffany wasn't sure whether Jessica loved her or not. She doesn't want to risk.

It was complicated, but early divorce was the only remedy Tiffany could find.

"Sooo... can you sign it?" Tiffany picked the pen up from the coffee table and handed it to Jessica.

Jessica gripped the pen on her hand as she settled the paper down on the coffee table. Her left hand found its way to her tummy, where their child must be.

What would happen to him after she signed this contract? He would grow up without a father, and Jessica doesn't want that. She never thought being pregnant with *Tiffany's* child could actually shorten their time together. She thought Tiffany would just cancel the contract.

But then, what Tiffany told her before came back to her.

"Please just trust me with whatever I'll do and believe that I'm doing it for the both of us."

Was this what Tiffany meant then? Jessica wondered.

She finally came up with a decision —give it all up to Tiffany and trust her again— and she signed the contract with a heavy heart.

~.~

"JESSI!!" Tiffany excitedly stormed into their room and Jessica immediately sat up on the bed in alarm.

"What?"

"I just saw Princess today. She's gorgeous!" Tiffany sat beside her and started jumping up and down like a child. Jessica heaved a sigh of relief. She thought something bad happened by the way Tiffany shrieked her name earlier.

"The latest version of the fastest engine, the vertical doors, the massive speakers, the wheels, the... everything! Especially the Chanel patterned seats! She's gorgeous, Jessi!" Tiffany hugged Jessica. "Thank you so much."

"I'm glad you liked her." Jessica adopted Tiffany's habit of thinking of her cars as a living thing.

Princess was delivered to their garage yesterday night, but Tiffany only saw it today because she fell asleep right away. Jessica, too, was awed by the car when Yoona sent her the pictures of it. It was too beautiful to describe.

Tiffany pulled away. "I'm thinking of using her later."

"Later?"

"Yeah. Do you not know what today is?"

Jessica shook her head confusedly. "No."

"Do you not know the reason why I didn't take you out yesterday to celebrate our anniversary?"

"No." Jessica's eyebrows knitted.

"We'll gonna have dinner later to have a late celebration for our anniversary because today is a special date—*tonight* is special."

"Why is it special?"

"Because today is the seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar."*

~.~

She's eight months pregnant, Tiffany, remember that, Tiffany thought as she focused on driving. She was so tempted to drive Princess faster, given that its engine was the fastest in the world, but she couldn't because Jessica was on the passenger's seat. She instead focused on getting them to the place they were going to in time without hindrances and as smoothly as possible. It was almost six o'clock now and they couldn't be late.

They arrived in the pier in about twenty minutes. Tiffany hovered the car down before parking it flat on the ground and climbed down. She opened the door for Jessica before assisting her to the dock.

"What are we doing here?"

Tiffany pointed to a yacht close by. It was massive, two-storey, and painted all white. The windows were closed and inside Jessica could see all the lights were on, probably because it was starting to turn dark. The lights on the outer sides of the yacht were turned on too. The first floor was made to be a one big cabin, and the second floor doesn't have walls but plain roof and a couple of tight wires to keep it steady. The controls might have been there.

"We're going sailing."

Jessica didn't complain when Tiffany helped her to the jetty and carefully led her to the ramp that was connecting the jetty to the yacht. The yacht was slightly moving because of the waves and they had to hold each other tight so no one would fall. Once on the yacht, Tiffany led Jessica into the nearest door of the lone cabin and seated her on a red-leathered seat.

"Wait here."

Jessica watched through the circular window as Tiffany removed the yacht's ties to the dock.

The pier looked deserted, even the whole yacht, and Jessica wondered why. A lot of questions were swirling inside her head. Was this all Tiffany's plan? That's most likely a yes. Could Tiffany drive this thing alone? That's something Jessica doesn't know. But most importantly, why was she doing this? They're going to divorce in a couple of months anyway. Jessica doesn't have even a tiny little clue.

Tiffany finally came back. "Stay here for a while, OK? It's cold outside and you might get sick. I'll get back to you later." Then she went out again.

Jessica looked around the cabin as the yacht started moving. There was a double-king-sized bed in the middle, pressed against the wall opposite the door, complete with a thick comforter and a couple of pillows. There was a bedside table with a lamp on top of it, on the low ceiling were nine holes where the light bulbs were. The wall was covered with wallpaper with swirling patterns. It looked like a room in a house and not a cabin in a yacht.

Jessica thought back to what Tiffany said this morning. *The seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar? Was it really today?*

She doesn't know if it was really today, but she found herself excited to see the Bridge of Stars.

~.~

Tiffany was focused on maneuvering the yacht when she remembered she still has to make a call. She let go of the steering handle for a while to press some buttons on her wristwatch and returned a hand back to it once a ring sounded from her watch.

"Couz?"

"Hey, Taeng, I hope I didn't interrupt, but I have to ask you something."

"What is it?"

“Uhh...” Tiffany hesitated. “I know this is hard, but can you let Sunny work for me again? Don’t worry, I won’t treat her like a maid at all. I just really need her.”

There was a long silence.

Tiffany never thought talking about what happened could still brought up some feelings from the both of them. She never thought it would be this hard for Taeyeon to talk about it again. But she understood, of course. It was really hard that your very own cousin that almost killed your beloved girlfriend before was now needing the latter.

But Tiffany was determined to gain Taeyeon’s trust again.

“Taeng, trust me again, please? I know I’ve done something bad to her, but I’ve truly regretted it now. I just won’t trust my family to no one but her.”

“I’d have to ask Sunny about that,” Taeyeon finally spoke. “Why do you need her, by the way?”

“I bought a house for Jessi, and I haven’t recruited any maids or butlers yet. Jessi and our child are going to live there, and I trust only Sunny to take care of ‘em.”

“I’ll... just ask her. Wait for a sec.”

There were heavy footsteps, probably Taeyeon’s, and then it stopped. There was nothing but static for a while before Sunny’s voice was heard over the line.

“Miss Tiffany?”

“Sunny! Can you think about my offer?”

“I don’t have to think about it. I would be more than glad to work for you again, Miss.”

Tiffany stopped herself from shrieking in happiness. “Thank you, Sunny.”

“Anything for you, Miss Tiffany.” Sunny’s voice sounded as glad as Tiffany’s.

“Tiffany?” Taeyeon’s voice called and Tiffany assumed she must have taken the device back. She purposely called the girl by her name to say that she’s serious.

“Yes, Taeng?”

“I’m trusting you again.”

“I won’t fail you, Taeng.”

“I’m holding onto your word. I have to go now, Couz.”

“Thanks again, Taeng.”

Then Tiffany cut the call.

As she stared at the wide body of water around her, and the sun almost gone but left a small part of the sky orange, Tiffany recalled the previous talk. She felt so happy that Taeyeon and Sunny were trusting her again, and she would make sure not to break it again.

~.~

Jessica heard Tiffany’s heavy footsteps above, then on the side, and then Jessica sensed her near the door.

“We’re here.” Tiffany beamed as she came into the cabin with a jacket. She handed it over to Jessica. “Wear this.”

After wearing the jacket, they stepped out of the cabin. The sky was already dark. Tiffany led Jessica to a stair on the side that would lead them to the second floor. Jessica was right, the controls were there. Her eyes caught something else though. Behind the controls, close to the peak of the yacht, was a perfectly set table with a lit candle, two plates of dinner and a pitcher of water. The speakers scattered all over the yacht was playing an instrumental music. The only thing missing was a bottle of wine, but then Jessica was pregnant and Tiffany probably knew she couldn’t drink alcohol. Tiffany also made sure that the setup was under the roof so the night’s dews wouldn’t fall on Jessica.

Tiffany sat Jessica down on one of the two seats before taking the other so they were face to face.

“Sorry if it’s not much.”

“What are you saying it’s not much? This is too much!”

Jessica was so flattered. Tiffany was so sweet and thoughtful. This was the first time someone did this much for her. She now knew what it felt to have someone who loved her.

Tiffany smiled sheepishly as she rubbed the back of her neck. “I hope you like it.”

“I love it.”

But Jessica couldn’t really enjoy it because her mind was still stuck with the thought of the new contract. Tiffany seemed to notice that, that’s why she said, “I know what I’m gonna ask is kinda hard to do, but can we please just forget everything for now? Let’s just enjoy this.”

That seemed to work on Jessica. Tiffany's right, she should just forget about everything for now because this was surely the first and last time Tiffany would do this. She might as well just enjoy it while she still could.

Jessica nodded and Tiffany beamed.

"Let's eat."

As they ate, Jessica couldn't help but notice how romantic the atmosphere was if she doesn't have any negative thoughts in her head.

~.~

"Thank you, Tiffany."

"I can do this every day for you."

Tiffany gave a hint to Jessica before putting her arm around Jessica's shoulders and stared down at the dark water over the railing of the yacht. It was after dinner now, and the sky was dark with countless stars but Tiffany preferred looking down at the moon's reflection on the water. The ocean was calm, and there was nothing around them but dark, endless waters, not even a single island nearby.

Surprisingly, none of them were scared of the wide body of water even if Jessica almost died from it earlier this year. Its beauty and wonders took the girls' thoughts away from the harrowing ordeal.

Tiffany wondered what Jessica thought of all these things she was doing for her, all those times she searched for foods she craved, all those times she kissed her on the forehead, all those times she hugged her, every time she's showing sweetness towards Jessica, and all those thoughtful words she has said. What did Jessica think of them? Didn't she suspect that Tiffany already loved her? It must be so dense of her not to realize. It was just so obvious.

Or did she already know but she's not just saying anything about it?

No. She can't know it... can she?

If she did know and it was alright with her, then the second contract was... not needed. If Jessica wanted to stay married with her, they could have just cancelled the first contract and then continue being together. But Jessica signed the second contract. Then that meant it's alright with her to be divorced.

Tiffany felt a wave of emotion hit her. She *wanted* Jessica to sign it, she wanted to divorce Jessica, but why was she disappointed that Jessica actually signed it?

Because... it showed that Jessica doesn't love her?

"Tiffany."

"Hm?"

"What are you thinking?"

"Uhh..." Tiffany frantically started searching for something to say. She couldn't just say what she was actually thinking. "...I'm thinking... of a name for him!"

Jessica didn't notice the raise of Tiffany's voice and said, "I already have one."

"What is it?"

"Shinvi."**

"Shinvi." Tiffany ran the name over and over in her head. For someone who proclaimed herself as a person who was not good with names, it was impressive that Jessica actually came up with a cute one. "I think it's a nice name."

"You like it?"

Tiffany nodded. "Absolutely."

"I'm scared he won't like it."

Tiffany held Jessica's shoulders, made her face her and bent on the waist, close to Jessica's stomach.

"Is Shinvi okay with you?" She pressed her right palm over Jessica's stomach and waited for a reaction. "Shinvi-yah!" she called again before both girl felt his slightest movement. Tiffany laughed. "He likes it!"

But Jessica's attention wasn't on them anymore. Something caught her eyes, up there, in the night sky.

She gasped. "Tiffany."

"Hm?" Tiffany remained hunched.

"Look up."

Tiffany straightened her back and stared at where Jessica was staring. She, too, gasped at the view of billions of stars in the sky. It was normal, but what wasn't normal was they were perfectly [i]lined[/i] next to each other, creating what seemed like a thick bridge from South to North. The Bridge of Stars!

The two girls were awed for a moment. It was splendid. The stars looked like diamonds lined up next to each other in a black velvet cloth.

“Oh my God. I finally saw it,” Tiffany turned to look at Jessica who was still awed and continued inside her head, *with Jessi*.

Her wish finally came true-- she saw it not only with Jessica but also with their child. She couldn't be any happier than this.

But then she couldn't help but wonder why she hasn't seen it before. It was a rare phenomenon and very obvious, how come it was never featured on the television? But it wasn't the right time to wonder about that so Tiffany pushed it at the back of her head.

“Tiffany, it's beautiful. It's even more beautiful than in the book.”

“Of course it'll be.”

Tiffany put her right arm around Jessica's shoulders and pulled her closer as they continued gazing up at the beautiful image in the sky.

“Are you happy that you finally saw it?” Jessica knew how much Tiffany wanted to see it.

“Happy is an understatement to what I'm feeling right now. There's no word to describe it.”

Especially because I got the chance to see it with you and Shinvi.

~.~

Tiffany awoke in the middle of the night still pressed against Jessica, right arm around Jessica's head and the other on Jessica's middle, holding her so she was safe, holding her body into the warmth of hers, her legs curved at the back of Jessica's, hand on her abdomen feeling it go in, out, in, out, just holding her—exactly how they fell asleep. She had held Jessica all night long.

They were still anchored on the same part of the ocean, and Tiffany decided that they should just sleep there and just go back home tomorrow. They're more than equipped anyway, and the last time Tiffany checked, the weather was nice and would continue being nice for the rest of the coming day.

Tiffany glanced at her wristwatch. It read 01:39 am. Jessica would probably continue sleeping until nine or ten in the morning.

She looked out of the nearest window, into the dark sky. The Bridge of Stars was already gone, and Tiffany wondered why and how. Shouldn't it stay until the sun comes up? And shouldn't they have already seen it since the sky turned dark? But why they only saw it at around seven o'clock?

How mysterious.

Or maybe *magical* was the word for it.

Tiffany could never forget this night.

Tiffany moved her hand from Jessica's stomach, up her body, and pushed the hair back from her neck. Jessica didn't stir. Tiffany shifted a bit so she could lean over her and see her face. She put her lips against Jessica's cheek and kissed her; still she did not stir, so Tiffany said what she wanted to say to her, what she'd wanted to say for months, since she had first realized. For the first time using her full name, Tiffany whispered it against Jessica's cheek, so the words would stay, kissed into her skin,

"Jessica, I love you."

*I'm not sure whether September 7 is really the seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar or not. I just said so for the sake of the story =p

EDIT: "the 7th month, 7th day is correct dongsaeng its said to be a chinese valentine day"--KougraJetGel

**I got the name from Jessica's 100 Q&A from a website (At least I think it's from a website) and there was a question about what would Jessica name her child if she ever had one, her answer was 'Shinvi'. I'm not sure if it's a male's name though, maybe it's unisex? =p

CHAPTER 9: 'LOVE'



CHAPTER 9: 'LOVE'

Jessica's ninth month of pregnancy.

Krystal looked sad, Jessica realized as she stared at her younger sister watching the television. Krystal constantly flipped the channel and never found any good show she wanted to watch. She was sad probably because Sulli was left behind in Korea. Jessica wondered what was with Sulli and Krystal was always sad without her.

Are they together?

It could be. Jessica noticed the way Sulli looked at Krystal and vice versa. It reminded Jessica of the same way someone looked at her, and that someone was... Tiffany.

Jessica shook her head to get rid of the thought and looked at the screen.

That was when she felt her stomach lightly twitched.

She settled her hand on top of her tummy and tried to feel within her.

The enormous pain came at once that it shocked Jessica. It felt as if Shinvi suddenly gained strength and was kicking his way out. She hugged her stomach and screamed in pain.

"Unnie! Are you okay?!" Krystal asked in panic, immediately putting her hands on Jessica's shoulders.

Jessica couldn't answer with all the pain running through her body. She felt Shinvi inside her started turning slowly. It felt as though he was clawing her stomach open so he could get out. She knew this. She knew she's about to give birth.

She desperately clasped Krystal's arm and rasped, "Bring me... to the... hospital,"

Krystal gasped and her eyes grew wide when she saw water running down in between Jessica's legs, wetting the sofa and the floor.

"Unnie! Your water just broke!"

~.~

Everyone was nervous.

Judy was clasping Albert's arm as they sat together outside the operating room's door and Krystal was grasping her other hand. Ernest and Sophia, too, were holding each other. They couldn't hear Jessica's screams from inside the O.R. but Sophia and Judy knew very well that she's in pain. This was Jessica's first time giving birth and it's not going to be easy.

Along with the nervousness, the elders were also excited. A couple of minutes, or hours, from now their first grandchild would be out in the world. They couldn't wait to see him.

The huge green door suddenly opened and Dr. Dot strode out, looking pissed. She might be the most famous obstetrician in Scorchwood, but her temper was short. Sophia already knew Jessica might have done something to piss her off.

"Where's Tiffany?" she asked and only then that they realized Tiffany was nowhere to be found at the moment.

They shrugged.

"Then call her!" Dr. Dot cried.

"Is she really needed? Can't you focus on Jessica for now?" Judy asked.

"I can..." The doctor paused. "But the patient said she's not gonna give birth without Tiffany!"

So that's what pissed her off, Sophia mused.

"Hurry up and call her!"

Ernest took the initiative and nervously scampered with his wristwatch.

~.~

Aish, where is it? Tiffany exasperatedly thought as she looked around.

She was currently looking for the peaches Jessica requested in the public market. Unluckily, she totally forgot which stall they bought the first time. She has been there for almost an hour and she still couldn't find it.

Just when she thought she already found the stall, her wristwatch rang. She answered it.

"Dad?"

"Where are you?" Ernest sounded calm but Tiffany knew he's holding something in.

"I'm buying fruits."

"Forget about buying fruits! Jessica's giving birth!" he burst.

"What?! I'll be there!"

And then Tiffany started running out of the public market, not bothering to say sorry to the people she bumped into. She reached her car and hurriedly rode off.

As she focused on driving, she couldn't help but feel nervous. Jessica was giving birth, for pete's sake, how could she not feel nervous? And the fact that it was their first child made her even more nervous. She knew she said she's not scared anymore, but now that it's here, she couldn't help but be scared. What if Jessica had complications? What if something bad would happen to their child?

She shook her head.

No. Nothing would happen, she's sure of that. They didn't miss out on check-ups, Jessica drank vitamins and supplements, and Tiffany did her best to take care of her. Nothing bad would happen.

She just has to get to the hospital now.

Tiffany eventually reached the hospital. She immediately knew where to find everyone and she was proven right when she saw them outside the operating room. Something was off though.

Dr. Dot was with them.

Shouldn't she be helping Jessica now?

"How... is... she?" Tiffany panted, but instead of answering her, Dr. Dot handed her a green hospital gown and a hair net.

"Hurry up and wear it then follow me inside."

Tiffany immediately did what she was told and had to scamper behind the doctor when she already came inside the huge green door, leaving Tiffany behind.

Tiffany halted when she saw Jessica lying down on a bed, legs spread open apart, in the middle of the room, a green cloth covering her stomach and the rest down. There were three circular lights above her, three female nurses around, and Jessica kept on slowly breathing in and out through her mouth.

“Tiffany!” Jessica called when she saw the girl and Tiffany almost tripped on her own foot as she came over to her.

She stood above Jessica’s head and held both of her hands. She doesn’t really know what was happening, and why she was needed inside. Everything was happening so fast.

“Are you ready now, Jessica?”

Jessica nodded.

“Scream while you push!” Dr. Dot dutifully commanded.

Jessica screamed.

So was Tiffany.

For the rest of the hour, Jessica listened to the commands of the doctor (Push! Breathe in, breathe out! Push!) as she gripped Tiffany’s hands with hers. She listened, too, to Tiffany’s whispers on her right ear as she stooped over her head, *feeling* it more than anything.

“Jessi, I’m here...”

“We’re together...”

~.~

Jessica woke up two hours after she gave birth. She was just too tired that she fell asleep right away. She woke up in a deserted hospital room and saw Tiffany sitting on the side of her bed, hunched over her left hand and fast asleep.

She must be tired too, Jessica thought.

Her left hand slowly lifted up and pushed away the hair covering Tiffany's face and tucked it behind her ear, revealing her multiple ear piercings. Her face from that angle was cute, she looked younger. She lightly brushed her knuckles against Tiffany's soft cheeks and tilted her head sideways to admire Tiffany's beauty.

Y'know, you're sweet. It's not hard to learn to love you. I just don't really know if I already do or not yet. But I guess there's no sense in trying to figure out now, we're gonna divorce in three months anyway. It would just kill me...

Jessica's thoughts were interrupted when Tiffany stirred and finally opened her eyes. She sat up straight and rubbed her eyes.

"How long have you been awake?"

"Just a couple of minutes ago."

"How are you feeling?"

"Okay, except for the stitches."

Tiffany put Jessica's right hand in between both of hers. "Do you want anything?"

Jessica shook her head and smiled at the offer. "Nothing. Where's everyone, by the way?"

"Our parents were so excited to see Shinvi so they probably went to the nursery with Krystal. Leo's still in school."

As if that was a cue, the door opened and Krystal came in, beaming from ear to ear. "Unnie! He's so cute!" Jessica only saw her happy today ever since they went to Scorchwood without Sulli.

Krystal moved aside so Dr. Dot could pass through the door, Judy and Albert following closely behind. Dr. Dot has Shinvi in her arms wrapped around in a blue cloth. Jessica immediately struggled so sit up so she could carry him and Tiffany helped her to do so. The doctor carefully passed Shinvi over to Jessica.

"Ah, so cute," was the first thing Jessica said when she finally saw him face to face. She felt like her sufferings and pains when conceiving and giving birth was all paid off at the first sight of him.

He was small, but kinda heavy. His face was the only part of his body exposed because of he was wrapped around in a cloth like a cocoon. His cheeks were puffy, his eyes were closed, his nose was tall and though his hair was still very minimal, Jessica could already see that it has a brown color like Tiffany's.

"Oh, my God." Jessica realized only then that Tiffany was already sitting beside her on the bed and was also looking at Shinvi.

Tiffany felt a bubble of happiness inside her, but she wanted to cry. He looked like he came from heaven and not from Jessica. This little bundle of joy, she couldn't believe he was a product of her love for Jessica. She was just too overwhelmed to describe everything she was feeling.

"Aww, a happy family," Krystal commented as she looked at the new parents' big smiles, hands on her chest.

Tiffany looked at Dr. Dot and hesitantly asked, "He's normal, right? He's not... like me?"

The doctor smiled. "He's very normal, don't worry."

Tiffany heaved a huge sigh of relief.

"By the way, where are Mom and Dad? Have they seen him already?" Tiffany asked Judy and Albert.

"They already saw him before someone from your company called, saying that they're needed back there," Albert answered.

Tiffany nodded understandingly and gazed at their child again.

Being the professional and expert when it came to moments like this, Dr. Dot Hepburn said, "For now, I think we should leave the parents for a moment with their child." Then she ushered the others out of the room but she didn't leave and had let the door to close in front of her before she turned around and faced the two girls. She walked over to them.

"I know what you're feeling. That's exactly what I felt with my first child. But I'm warning you to not let that happiness be washed away by stress of taking care of your child that isn't gonna be easy. I recommend this to all of my patients-- I know it's hard to take of a child but do it yourself and don't hire someone to take care of 'em. Maybe hire someone to assist you if you do not have any idea how to take care of a child properly, but you *must* do it yourself."

"We will," Jessica answered.

"Acting as a parent isn't easy either. You two are still young, and probably didn't know how to be a parent, but this is the easiest way—love each other and love your child. Love is always the key to everything."

Tiffany slid her right hand from Shinvi's back to take Jessica's left. She doesn't know what, but the doctor's words hit something inside her, a soft spot, and she just felt like holding Jessica's hand for support. Jessica turned her wrist so she could grasp Tiffany's hand too.

"Love is the reason why Shinvi is in this world—your love for each other, and God's love for the both of you. Remember that." Dr. Dot smiled and patted Tiffany and Jessica's shoulders. Before leaving the room, she left a last message,

"Every single baby is a product of love, and a gift from God. None of them are an accident... or a mistake."

CHAPTER 10: 'STAY'



CHAPTER 10: 'STAY'

Jessica and Tiffany with their new born child immediately moved over to the new house with Sunny after letting Jessica rest at the hospital for a week, the Jungs went back to Korea because Albert and Judy had to handle their company and Krystal needed to get back to school. But the new parents hardly used their bedroom. Jessica stayed most of the time in the nursery room to watch over Shinvi while Sunny was doing the household chores and Tiffany was back to working in their company and once she went home she would sleep next to Jessica in the nursery room.

Sunny had been a great help. She, alone, was enough for the whole house. She actually has a younger sister and she was the one who took care of her mother when she was pregnant and helped with taking care of her little sister, that's how she knew what to do with babies. But she just instructed Jessica most of the time, because the latter insisted that she wanted to figure out how to take care of babies. It was a good thing that Sunny didn't have to work full-time on Shinvi because she was also doing the chores.

Everyone's places in the house were settled.

It wasn't easy to take care of Shinvi on his first month even though all he did was bathe, feed, sleep, poo and pee, and vomit, which was actually normal. Jessica had to stay up late and couldn't take deep sleep because she had to constantly check on him. Once in a while, after work, Tiffany still made sure to take rounds on watching over him so Jessica could somehow rest. Sometimes, Sunny was taking rounds too, but only when the two girls had let her, which was rare. Tiffany and Jessica were totally on hand with Shinvi.

Tonight, on Shinvi's exactly one month and three weeks' existence, Tiffany went home at around eight and found the house sans of lights except for the dim lights in the hallways. It was the usual time she always went home, and everyone would be asleep by then, except the two robotic bodyguards who were standing outside the main door. Her parents didn't know she never brought one of them to work when she's supposed to.

She made her way up the stairs, passed the door of their bedroom and into the nursery room. She had to be careful of commanding the door open because she might wake up either Shinvi or Jessica. She saw her tired wife napping on the queen-sized bed in the middle of the room, and lying next to her, wrapped around with a

cloth and surrounded by pillows, was their little bundle of joy, Shinvi. The room was lighted only by a lone tinted bulb in the ceiling, making the room colored yellow and the corners dark. Tiffany made her way next to the bed and stared at her family.

The scene never failed to get rid of Tiffany's stress from work, and she felt like all of the weights on her shoulders were suddenly lifted.

She wouldn't ask for anything other than this.

Tiffany carefully put her right knee on the bed and towered over Shinvi before softly kissing his forehead. She made her way to the other side and pulled the comforter up to Jessica's chin before gently kissing her forehead too.

"Hmm." Jessica stirred and slowly opened her eyes. She was really sleeping lightly.

Tiffany cupped her left cheek. "Just sleep. I'll watch over him tonight."

"But you're tired from working all day." Jessica's voice sounded hoarse as she held Tiffany's hand that was on her cheek, and even though the room was dimly lit, Tiffany could see worry in her sleepy eyes.

"And you're tired from taking care of him all day," Tiffany as-a-matter-of-factly retorted.

There they went again. This gentle argument was always brought up whenever Tiffany wanted to watch over Shinvi. Jessica would always say that Tiffany was already tired from work and she doesn't want to bother her anymore, but Tiffany was insistent.

"But—"

"No buts," Tiffany silenced her. "Just sleep, okay? I can handle this."

Jessica finally gave up and nodded.

Tiffany removed her jacket that has water spots because of melted snow of November and put it on the sofa pressed against the wall before removing her pencil skirt and blouse, leaving only a women's boxer shorts and a fitted tank top. The room's heater was actually turned on and she never bothered about the cold, she'd cuddle with Jessica anyways. And then she tucked under the comforter next to Jessica and the latter immediately found her usual space on Tiffany's chest. Tiffany softly stroked Jessica's long brown hair until she fell asleep.

She'd never get tired of this.

Having Jessica in her arms like this felt familiar to her more than anything. It felt like the longer they stayed together the deeper her love for Jessica had grown, and she couldn't help it-- even the apocalypse wouldn't be able to help it.

Shinvi really made a huge difference in their lives. It was nice to have a baby in the house, someone so innocent, someone so cute that no one could resist but kiss his cheek. And the fact that he was genuinely Jessica's and Tiffany's --not adopted or anything-- delighted Tiffany. She didn't mind having to work for the whole day and went home only to take care of Shinvi. She didn't mind staying up late though she was stressed from work and still had to go to work early in the morning. She wouldn't mind doing all this for her family just to give them what they wanted and deserved. Funny that she never thought of doing this before, when she was still selfish, but as the time went by so fast she had grown to be more like Jessica-- rational and selfless for the sake of others. She couldn't even remember how or what she was before she had this family.

Tonight, Tiffany would not only watch over Shinvi but also Jessica, or simply, her family.

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Tiffany woke up from her short nap in the middle of the night to Shinvi's little grunts and immediately entangled herself from Jessica, careful to not wake her up too. She picked him up and nuzzled him in her arms. She felt his diaper. He's pretty clean. She tried to give him Jessica's breast milk that's already transferred in a bottle but he was also not hungry and kept moving his head away from the feeding bottle. It left Tiffany to only one reason: his sleep was disturbed.

She started rocking him in her arms then and patted his back. But he didn't stop whimpering, and his little sounds turned into a louder cry. "Sssssh, you're gonna wake mommy up."

Tiffany grimaced when she glanced at Jessica. She actually stirred.

"Ssssh, baby, come on, just get back to sleep."

Tiffany's eyelids felt like sandpaper and they were heavy. Her body felt beaten up that she couldn't even stand properly, her back was hunched. She really felt sleepy but she couldn't just relax when her child was like this.

And then a thought occurred to her. Jessica liked it when she was humming a song to her before sleeping, maybe Shinvi would like that too? Tiffany started humming a soft random tune and fortunately, Shinvi gradually stopped crying.

He really took over Jessica.

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For a start, Tiffany went home early the next day, around 5pm, with Taeyeon who wanted to visit her girlfriend. She went straight to the nursery room and was delighted to find Shinvi awake.

“How’s my baby?” Tiffany ecstatically asked as she jumped on the bed where Sunny was sitting, cradling Shinvi in her arms. She lightly pinched his cheek before asking Sunny, “Where’s Jessi?”

“When you called earlier to say that you’re going home early, she asked me to watch over him so she could cook dinner for you.”

“Oh.” Tiffany nodded. “Taeng’s in the living room, though, waiting for you. Just give him to me.”

Sunny carefully passed him over to Tiffany, stood up and bowed before leaving the room. She never really stopped showing her respect for Tiffany and Jessica through actions though she verbally did by removing the formality in her sentence and she has actually stopped calling them ‘miss’ because the couple said so.

“Have you been a good boy, huh?” Tiffany cutely asked her child only to be answered by silence. He merely stared at her. What would she expect from a month and a couple of weeks old baby?

And then he started crying.

“What’s wrong? Are you hungry?” She put him in the middle of the bed for a while to grab the feeding bottle and put the silicon nipple in his mouth. He immediately started sucking. “Ahhh, so you’re hungry.”

Tiffany lay on her tummy next to him as she held the feeding bottle with her right hand. She just stared at him as he fed. The funny thing was, after twenty minutes, he eventually fell asleep, so she put the feeding bottle aside and stayed lying next to him. She felt the fatigue and she suddenly felt sleepy. She couldn’t miss dinner because Jessica cooked it for her, so she started thinking to keep herself from falling asleep.

How did babies know how to cry? To suck milk from their feeding bottles? How did they know how to poo or pee? How did they know...

Alas, no matter how hard she tried, Tiffany, too, eventually fell asleep.

Thirty minutes later, when the dinner was ready, Jessica came in the room to find her wife and child both fast asleep and she couldn’t help but chuckle at the cute moment. Good thing she was wearing slacks and not a skirt because Tiffany’s left foot was dangling off the bed, and one of her high-heeled Gucci shoes was on the floor, not on her right foot which was actually on top of the bed.

Jessica carefully made her way on the side of the bed where Tiffany was. Tiffany’s left cheek was pressed on the bed and her lips were lightly parted, the same way Shinvi looked, who was placed next to her head.

So cute... Jessica chuckled.

She then checked if Shinvi's blanket was wrapped carefully around his body so he wouldn't feel cold and moved next to Tiffany when she saw that he's fully clothed. She draped the comforter on top of Tiffany so she, too, wouldn't feel cold. She hovered over Tiffany and gently kissed her right temple and cheek. She lingered there for a moment, eyes closed, nose nestled against Tiffany's cheek so her mouth reached her right ear.

She then sincerely whispered,

"You make a great father, Tiff."

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"What's wrong?" Taeyeon asked from the dining table once Sunny returned, looking flushed. "I thought you just called Tiffany and Jessica for dinner? Where are they?"

Sunny took a seat beside her and kept her head low.

"Hey."

"Well..." Sunny hesitated. "I kinda... sorta... saw Jessica kissing Tiffany." She buried her face on her palms, blushing deeper. "Ugh, I should really knock next time. I can't believe I just ruined a moment."

"What?!" Taeyeon exclaimed a little too loudly. "Jessica... she--"

"Wait, before you start thinking anything else, I'll make it clear. When the door opened, Tiffany was sleeping on the bed, and I saw Jessica hovering over her. I'm not sure if she's really kissing Tiffany or not 'coz the moment the door opened she immediately stood straight. But I think she was," Sunny clarified.

But that didn't really change what Taeyeon was thinking. If Jessica was really kissing Tiffany while she's asleep, then somehow she had feelings for Tiffany, if not already. That's good news for Tiffany. But Taeyeon couldn't really assume and Sunny couldn't help her either, because Sunny knew nothing about their marriage being fixed.

Maybe she could help in some way?

"What did Jessica do then?" Taeyeon asked.

"She told me to just eat dinner with you and she'll wait for Tiffany to wake up and she'll just eat with her."

Taeyeon nodded as she contemplated. There really was a possibility that Jessica had feelings for her cousin, but she couldn't really assume.

“Hey, Sunny.”

The outcome might be unsure, but Taeyeon would somehow try and no one could help her but someone as clueless as Jessica-- Sunny.

“Yeah?” Sunny stared at her cute girlfriend, clueless.

“Do you think you can do this for me some time?”

And then Taeyeon explained to Sunny what she wanted her to do.

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“Jessica?”

“Hmm?” Jessica flipped the page of the Bible she was reading and answered Sunny without looking up. Shinvi was, as usual, asleep beside her on the bed.

It was already the middle of December but the sun was high up, its rays passing through the windows. It wasn't snowing this afternoon for a change.

Sunny carefully sat on the edge of the bed, hands straddled on both sides, and looked down at the floor. “Can I tell you something?”

“You know you can tell me anything, Sunny.”

“Well, I just noticed that Tiffany really changed. I was a new maid in their house before she got married with you and I can say that she's really different then than now. I think you're responsible of all this change in her.” Sunny slightly scooted so her left arm was closer to Jessica since her wristwatch was switched on.

She followed everything Taeyeon instructed— *“Be subtle and unsuspecting. Leave your wristwatch on and turn your speaker off so I could hear your conversation over the line and you couldn't hear any sounds coming from my side.”*

Sunny really had no idea why Taeyeon wanted her to do this, but it wasn't that bothersome so why not do it for her? It was just a small thing.

“Me?” Jessica finally tore her eyes off the book and stared at Sunny, surprised. She chuckled. “I'm not responsible for that. She changed herself for the better.”

“Y'know what? I really envy the two of you. Your relationship's perfect.”

Jessica looked down, closed the book and started fiddling with the corners of its cover. The girl's question had hit something in her chest. Their relationship was far from being perfect and it saddened her. She so much wanted it to be perfect but it's just impossible now.

Sunny swore she saw sadness in Jessica's eyes though her lips were smiling. Even her smile was rueful. She hoped Taeyeon could see Jessica's face. It was heartbreaking.

"Trust me, Sunny, our relationship's not as perfect as it seemed. I can even say that your relationship with Taeyeon is way much better than ours."

Sunny decided to keep quiet because Jessica's voice sounded totally sad. Was this what Taeyeon really wanted to do? And what was *this* really? What was this all about? She was starting to feel bad for making Jessica sad.

She was about to sneakily turn the wristwatch off but Jessica's small voice stopped her.

"Sunny." Jessica hesitated for a while. "How did you... know that you love Taeyeon?"

"Why do you wanna know?"

"Don't get me wrong! I'm just really curious." Jessica suddenly turned defensive and Sunny suspected.

Sunny took some time to think. "I think it started when my heart would always beat so fast whenever she touches me..."

Jessica remembered when Tiffany touched and kissed her. She felt exactly that.

"When I started realizing that she's really adorable..."

Tiffany was adorable, Jessica wouldn't deny that.

"When I started loving the things she only does for me..."

Jessica imagined herself tangled in the bed with Tiffany, her head on her chest, and the girl's arms around her. She loved that, especially when Tiffany was humming a soft melody.

"When I started being jealous though I don't want to believe that I am..."

Wasn't that what happened to Jessica before with Siwon and any other guys around Tiffany?

"And when I started *needing* her like I can't live without her."

Having the contract stuck in her head, Jessica couldn't help but feel sad about it. She's going to living without Tiffany starting next month and she couldn't bear the thought. Then did that mean she was needing Tiffany now?

Sunny pressed her palms against her chest. "Even now that I'm talking about this, I feel this feeling in my chest."

Exactly. There was constant nagging deep within Jessica. *You feel the same! You love Tiffany! You love her too!*

Sunny lightly chuckled. "It's hard to believe at first, but I eventually learned to accept it."

That's the only difference. Could Jessica accept it too?

"That's all I could think of right now." Sunny seemed to have snapped off her trance and stared at Jessica.

Jessica slowly nodded, still avoiding eye contact. "Thanks for answering my question."

Sunny stood up. "I'll leave you alone for now. I can see that you really need some time alone." And then she left before Jessica could say anything. She thought she did her best for Taeyeon, anyway. She felt that this was what Taeyeon wanted her to do, and she's happy that she has helped.

Jessica kept her head low and stared at Shinvi, sleeping peacefully without any problems as heavy as hers. He, who was, as Dr. Dot said, a product of their love for each other. He, who was a gift from God. He, who wasn't a mistake or an accident. They did him together, and Jessica wouldn't deny that she felt something for Tiffany then. She knew she has felt it long time ago, it was just pushed at the back of her head because of the contract.

The contract. There's barely a month left.

Jessica didn't know what to do.

Hoping for something that could give her hints on what to do, she opened the Bible on her lap to a random page and read.

"Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mark 10:9)

Jessica remembered that it was a topic of divorce. It was too much to bear, she was too guilty of the sin for her to have the courage to read on, so she flipped to another random page.

"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor to what is evil. Cling to what is good." (Romans 12:9)

She never knew the answer would come to her this fast.

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Once the door closed Sunny rested her back against the wall for a while and brought her left arm close to her mouth.

She enabled the little speaker. "That's all I can do for now, Taeng."

"That's great, Sunny. That'll do the trick. Sooner or later she, herself, would do something. Thank you so much."

"Anything for you, Taeng."

The conversation with Jessica might have been short, but Sunny, too, was affected. The things she said to Jessica about her feelings for Taeyeon reminded her how much she loved the older girl. It was delightful in a way to be able to sort out what she actually felt those times when Taeyeon was still pursuing her. She couldn't really remember them now, but she somehow managed to pull it out of her subconscious mind. It felt nice.

"I have to go, Sun. Y'know, work." Taeyeon sounded sheepish.

"Okay. I love you, Taeng."

"I love you more, Sunny."

It also felt nice to know that Sunny's love for Taeyeon was greatly appreciated and reciprocated.

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Three weeks before Christmas Tiffany went home sick. Jessica was talking to Shinvi when she came into the room. The two were surprisingly still awake.

"Tiffany, your nose is all red," Jessica said when Tiffany sat in front of the two. Shinvi mumbled something incomprehensible. "See, even Shinvi thinks so too."

"Yeah, I have cold." Tiffany stared longingly at their child. She so much wanted to carry him and kiss him but he might catch the cold too. It was not good for his age. "I can't take care of him tonight."

Jessica softly smiled at her. "It's okay." She pressed a couple of buttons on her wristwatch with her free hand and spoke, "Sunny, can you bring medicine for cold up here?"

Sunny arrived with a blister pack of medicine and a glass of water. “Who’s sick?” she casually asked as she put them on the bedside table.

“It’s Tiffany.” Jessica passed Shinvi to the smaller girl and took the medicine and water. “Can you watch over him tonight? I have to take care of Tiffany.”

“No!” Tiffany butted in. “I can take care of myself, Jessi, and it’s just a cold.”

“No, I can take care of you.”

Sunny chuckled. “You should just let your wife, Tiffany.”

Tiffany looked from Sunny to Jessica with suspicion. “Since when did the two of you have connivances?”

“We don’t secretly cooperate, and it’s not called connivance if it’s not a secret.” Jessica grabbed the sick girl’s wrist with her free hand and pulled her to her feet. “Now come with me.”

Tiffany stared confusingly at Jessica as the girl dragged her out of the room. *What’s wrong with her? Why is she suddenly concerned about me?* It’s not that she’s complaining though. She liked it, the feeling to have someone taking care of her.

They went into their room and Jessica ushered her into the bathroom. “Change your clothes first. You probably got sick because the snow just melts on your clothes and you don’t bother to change.”

Tiffany came out of the bathroom five minutes later. Jessica made her drink the medicine and tucked her in to the bed before slipping next to her.

“If Mom and Dad knew this they’ll probably think that I’m not a good wife to you.”

Tiffany looked at Jessica and though the room was dark, she could see the girl pouting. “Are you doing this because you’re scared of what they’d think?”

“No, of course not. If I won’t do this, then who will? I’m your wife, Tiff, it’s my responsibility.”

Tiffany sighed and turned her back on Jessica. The headache was starting to get its way to her head but what Jessica said somehow made her heart ache too. Yes, Jessica was her wife, but not anymore next month.

“But don’t you think it’s a good alibi for a divorce if they would see for themselves that you’re not a good wife for me?”

Silly, I’m trying to change your mind.

Jessica kept mum and closed her eyes. The conversation with Sunny earlier that month has been bothering her. Yes, it’s most likely that she loved Tiffany. There could never be any other reasons for what she felt and

what she's feeling. But they're going to divorce. She would just hurt herself if she accepted the fact. So she wanted to change Tiffany's mind about the divorce. She wanted to keep Tiffany. If they would remain together then she could finally let her feelings out.

"Cling to what is good." Jessica remembered the Bible verse.

Jessica hated it that she couldn't tell Tiffany directly that she doesn't agree with the divorce agreement. Tiffany clearly acted like she badly wanted it, for a reason Jessica doesn't have any idea what, and Jessica wouldn't try to change her mind by words. She wanted to do it by actions.

"Tiffany, is there anything you want to do right now? Anything."

"I... just hug me until I fall asleep."

"If I granted that would you grant a request from me too?"

"I don't see any reason why not." Tiffany turned again to face Jessica and buried her face on the girl's chest, Jessica's arms wrapping automatically around her. "What's your request?"

"Look at me first."

Tiffany did and Jessica just stared at her eyes for a moment. It was a good thing that the window above the bed was massive and the moon's light shone down on them so they could see each other. Jessica wanted to stay that way forever, if they could, but it was close to impossible. Her heart was aching and there was nothing she could do about it. She just wanted to rip it off her chest.

Tiffany could see that the other girl was deeply bothered, but she had no idea of what. *Could it be the divorce?* That was just Tiffany's wishful thinking.

"Can I kiss you?" Jessica used her last card.

Tiffany was taken aback but she tried to hide it. "Jessi, why are you acting so oddly? Why are you doing this?" The headache was pounding on her head and she doesn't want to think anymore.

"I dunno," Jessica lied. "Maybe... maybe I just wanna kiss you for the last time."

"But I'm sick," Tiffany reasoned.

"I don't care if you're sick."

"Jessi, you don't really have to—" Tiffany was unable to finish her sentence when Jessica kissed her long and hard.

Jessica swore it was supposed to be chaste, but the overwhelming feeling inside her chest pushed her to lean in further, her arms tightening around Tiffany, their eyes automatically closing.

A tear escaped the corner of her eye and it dropped on the pillow before Tiffany could see it.

Jessica never knew kissing Tiffany could be this painful.

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The worst Christmas and New Year with the Hwangs arrived soon after. The reason for it being worse was one: the Jungs were not with Jessica because of some reason they didn't elaborate, and two: Shinvi's third month was nearing, meaning: their parting was so close.

Jessica was noticeably gloomy and sluggish the whole holidays, even Shinvi couldn't cheer her up so she let Sophia and Ernest bond with their grandchild for a while. But Tiffany still couldn't get her hopes up. She thought it was because Jessica's parents and sister were not around.

Today they were back at their house after the holidays, January 19, 2029, exactly a year since they 'made' Shinvi, at five in the afternoon, Jessica listlessly watched Tiffany pack her things from the bed as Sunny watch over Shinvi in the nursery room. She tried to restore this last moment in her mind-- from the date and time, Tiffany's soft footsteps on the tiled floor of their room, the sound of opening and closing of the walk-in closet's door, Tiffany's heavy breathing, and to the smallest detail. Jessica tried to remember them all.

Finally, she heard the sounds of the clips closing Tiffany's LV patterned trunks and Tiffany announced without any hints of sadness, a little cheerful actually, "I'm ready to go."

"I'm not," Jessica wanted to say but said, "I'll send you out," instead.

She stood up from the bed and walked out of the room side by side with Tiffany as one of the robotic bodyguards carried the four huge trunks in both of his arms. His pointed movements were creepy and his heavy footsteps sounded eerie as they walked down the grand staircase.

Tiffany's cars, Princess and Queen, were waiting in front of the fountain with the other bodyguard when the front door opened and Jessica stopped at the front portico to watch as the two robotic bodyguards loaded Tiffany's belongings. She wished she was one of those.

Tiffany turned to Jessica. "I guess this is it."

It saddened her too that she had to leave, but she reminded herself that it was best for this to happen. She'd rather leave than to stay without certainty with Jessica. She swore to anyone who could hear her thoughts that she'd come back to this place. She'd come back to this house and would never leave again. She'd stay next to Jessica forever.

“Yeah.” Jessica smiled just to return Tiffany’s gesture, but she was well aware that the corners of her lips were trembling. “Take care.”

“You too.”

Behind them, two car doors had shut close but none of them turned. Tiffany was actually controlling her two bodyguards this whole time and now one of them was behind Queen’s wheels and the other on the passenger seat. She would drive Princess later.

There’s still time, Jessica. Tell her to stay. Don’t wait for everything to be too late! There was the constant nagging in her head again, but Jessica couldn’t quite grasp anything at the moment because of the grief that was overwhelming her senses.

“So...” Tiffany looked anywhere but Jessica as she hesitated. “We’re done.”

She hastily turned to leave. A part of her really wanted Jessica to stop her from leaving, but at the same time she knew she should leave.

It’s still not too late, Jessica. There’s still a little time. But no. Jessica did nothing as Tiffany went inside the car, closed the door and ever so slowly flew away with the other car close behind, as if giving Jessica time to do something.

Reality struck her then—she’s afraid to let Tiffany go.

Tears rimmed her eyes and they eventually rolled down Jessica’s pale cheeks when the tears flooded, like coming out of a broken dam, blurring her vision of the two cars in the orange sky flying away. She cupped her mouth with both her hands to stifle her sobs when biting her lips didn’t work. She knew tears could do nothing this time, but she couldn’t really help it. She felt hopeless, helpless.

Now it’s late, Jessica. You’ve just lost her forever.

Jessica didn’t know what to do but to cry. She realized, sadly, that Tiffany hadn’t looked back at all.

She knew, too, that she’s exaggerating. They only parted on the papers, she’d meet Tiffany every Saturday, when she would pick up Shinvi to spend a day with her. But it hadn’t really changed what she was feeling.

The cars’ figures were so small now, far, and they showed no signs of turning back. Jessica wished they would.

Only when the cars were no longer visible had she been able to say something in a strangled whisper.

“Stay.”

CHAPTER 11: 'LATE'



CHAPTER 11: 'LATE'

This was crazy.

Why did she have to realize that she loved Tiffany when it's all too late? She could have realized that long time ago, or *accepted* it. She could have said something before Tiffany left. She could have stopped her. And she shouldn't be acting so languid right now-- for her child, she should not.

In all honesty, Jessica still couldn't understand why Tiffany wanted to divorce her. There's no sense in trying to figure out now, though, because *they're done*, as what Tiffany said it.

On the other hand, it's funny. Their story was inverted. One year and four months ago they got married and now they're strangers. Shouldn't it have started at being strangers first before getting married?

Jessica knew she shouldn't have waited for things to become like this. But if Tiffany really loved her, she would come back, right? Or maybe Tiffany doesn't love her anymore?

Four days. Four days without Tiffany and Jessica felt like she wouldn't last for tomorrow. Tomorrow was Saturday, she'd meet Tiffany for a short time when she would finally pick Shinvi up. Would that be enough? To see Tiffany only every Saturday and for only a short time?

Jessica felt her eyes water as she stared at Shinvi, who was sleeping yet again. The grief was filling her heart. This always happened the past four days. Every time she's thinking of Tiffany her heart would always ache.

Have Tiffany already eaten? She would certainly want to eat anything Jessica had cooked.

What if she fell sick? Who would take care of her?

Was she tired from work? She'd surely want Jessica to massage her.

Who would cook for her when she went home late and hadn't eaten yet?

Who would make her her favorite caramel coffee every morning?

Those were the questions Jessica asked herself every day, but she couldn't bring herself to call Tiffany and check on her. What if Tiffany doesn't love her anymore? What if that was the reason why she wanted divorce? Jessica was too scared to hear it all, and so she would act indifferent.

Jessica hated it.

She was too miserable to even act like she's okay when in reality she's totally not and too far from being one.

Jessica hated it that she had to act strong, like nothing's wrong, when all she wanted to do was break down and cry and it's all because she lost someone that meant the world to her.

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Now what? Tiffany asked herself as she dropped on her bed she used to share with Jessica before, facing the ceiling. She just went home for office lunch break.

She bit her lower lip. The force of Jessica's last kiss was still lingering on her lips. The feeling of Jessica's soft lips against her was still freshly etched on her mind, even Jessica's reaction after that. When Jessica pulled away she pushed Tiffany's head against her chest and remained quiet for the rest of the night until Tiffany just fell asleep because of the effect of the medicine. Tiffany didn't want to pressure Jessica about it, knowing the girl didn't really want to talk about it.

When Tiffany went back home to her parents they bugged her about the divorce, but her short and bitter answers had silenced them. A 'we doesn't fit' and 'there's so many things we couldn't agree with' had stopped Ernest and Sophia from asking questions. None of those reasons were true, though. They asked about Shinvi's custody and Tiffany explained to them that Jessica have the whole week with him except Saturdays when he'll be with Tiffany.

Thinking of Saturdays, she remembered that she would meet Jessica tomorrow. It was her chance. She could confess right away without idle talks. But wouldn't that be so unromantic? Or should she be thinking of a romantic confession right now when she couldn't even last another day without confessing, knowing that it wasn't safe to keep this waiting?

"Ugh." Tiffany messed up her hair. "I should really confess soon, before it gets too late."

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Sooyoung pitied Seohyun. Seohyun was tied on a chair, hair disheveled, and skin bruised from trying to break free. Sooyoung had been kind to keep her mouth and eyes free of any cover, fed her, and let her bathe for the past couple of months. The bathroom was at the corner of the room and it didn't have any windows so Seohyun couldn't escape. Sooyoung hadn't hurt Seohyun in any way too; she couldn't bring herself to. Seohyun doesn't have anything to do with her problem, so she'd let her pass.

"Seriously, Sooyoung, what do you want from me?!" Seohyun barked.

"How long have you been asking that? But I'll answer you the same thing." Sooyoung calmly walked around Seohyun's chair and bent over her shoulder. "I don't need anything from you but I'm not gonna let you go either, not until I've already did what I've wanted to do for fifteen years now." She walked again and stopped in front of the younger girl. She bent on the waist to meet Seohyun's hateful glare with her smug looks.

Seohyun saw, for a moment, that there was still Summer behind those eyes, the kind Summer she knew. But it was only for a short time. It disappeared soon and was replaced by coldness.

"Ahh, Seohyun, do you really hate me that much? Shouldn't I be the one hating you 'coz you tried to catch me? Too bad I caught you first."

Seohyun remembered receiving a call from the private detective she hired to watch Sooyoung. He said the man who tried to kill Tiffany was hired by Sooyoung. Seohyun couldn't believe it. She had been right. Sooyoung had something to do with what happened to Tiffany! But as soon as Seohyun had received the call, something happened.

She was at a five-star restaurant then, having family dinner. She excused herself outside to answer the detective's call and the next thing she knew someone covered her mouth and nose with a handkerchief and the smell of it did something to her senses and she passed out. When she woke up she was already tied in a chair here in this bungalow that was totally secluded. The place was akin to an abandoned stock room. It only had three chairs and one table, and there were no other door except the entrance and the bathroom's door. It was just plain square with two windows.

"My men discovered your hired detective the moment he started looking for Choi Sooyoung which records are all erased now. I thought --*wished*-- you would stop there, Seohyun, but no. You made him follow Choi Summer instead. So I thought why not help him discover that I'm the one behind what happened to Tiffany? I let him deliver you the news, and then I had my men to capture you."

"You've been playing with me all along," Seohyun spat.

Sooyoung straightened and turned her back on the girl. "You've got that right. It's fun playing with you, honestly, and now the game's over for you, *Seohyunie*."

"What are you planning?" Seohyun never once thought that Sooyoung could be this sinister. She was far from the Summer Seohyun had meet in school, but she knew there was still a chance to change Sooyoung's mind. If only she knew how.

“Don’t worry; you’ll be around while it all happens. You’ll witness it all. You’ll witness how evil your precious friend, Tiffany, is!” Sooyoung walked to the direction of the door.

“Sooyoung!”

“What’s wrong? Afraid to be left alone?” Sooyoung mocked. “Soon, Seohyun... soon you wouldn’t be alone here.”

~.~

Jessica was playing with Shinvi on the bed when her fist-sized iPadXV vibrated. Thinking it was Tiffany, she immediately grabbed it from the bedside table and was disappointed that it wasn’t who she expected.

The message was from Summer.

She tapped the screen and read the message while keeping an eye on her child.

Hi, Jessica. Dinner at my place. Sounds great? (:

Jessica pondered for a while. No matter how much she hated to leave Shinvi behind, somehow it was good to talk to someone new. She’s been with Sunny for a long time; she’d surely need someone else to talk to other than the girl. It wouldn’t hurt, right?

“Sunny, come over here,” Jessica spoke to her wristwatch and three minutes later Sunny arrived.

“Yes?”

“Can you watch over Shinvi for a while? I’m going somewhere.”

~.~

It never occurred to Seohyun that the ‘soon’ Sooyoung was talking about would be later that night. She was surprised to see two men carrying a limp body into the room and tied into the chair next to her. It was Jessica.

“Sooyoung! What did you do to her?!” Seohyun demanded.

Sooyoung shrugged. “What? I did nothing. I just invited her over for dinner, and made her drink the drink I prepared for her. This is what she gets for trusting me so much.”

"I thought you want Tiffany? Why are you dragging Jessica into this?"

Sooyoung looked down at her. "I'm using her as a bait, idiot."

"You don't have to do this, Sooyoung. Take my life if you want, and let Jessica go --let Tiffany go. I'm going to pay for whatever Tiffany did to you!" Seohyun ducked her head and started sobbing.

This was her fault she's in this situation right now. She might not have anything to do with what happened to Sooyoung and Tiffany before but she involved herself in this. She wouldn't mind dying for Tiffany, anyway. No one would be affected if she died instead of Tiffany. Tiffany already has her own family, they would need her. But Seohyun doesn't. She could sacrifice.

Sooyoung was touched. Seohyun really loved Tiffany to sacrifice her life. She almost felt bad of involving Seohyun in this. No one was supposed to be involved but Tiffany. It was supposed to be between her and Tiffany only. Why had it come to this?

She shook her head. She should really stop listening to Seohyun, her kindness and soft heart was melting Sooyoung.

"Don't you think she's not worthy of your loyalty and your life? You don't know what she took from me. She's more evil than me." Her voice had gone soft.

"I don't know what she took from you, Sooyoung, but maybe you misinterpret it, maybe she didn't mean it."

"She took a life, Seohyun, and I'll take her life in exchange."

"Take mine!"

"Easy," Sooyoung cooed. "No one's gonna die... but Tiffany. I'm not gonna involve innocents in this."

"You've already got Jessica and I involved!" Seohyun cried.

Sooyoung watched as Seohyun's tears pelted her lap. The way Seohyun talked to her, looked at her, was *offensive*. That wasn't the way she talked to Sooyoung before. The two of them were the closest in their group, and Seohyun was always kind and soft to her. It struck Sooyoung in the chest to see Seohyun like this. She wasn't the bad guy here. Seohyun misunderstood it all.

This was too much, her conscience was telling her. She doesn't have any hatred towards Seohyun and Jessica. Tiffany was supposed to be the one in their position.

She wasn't really as evil as Seohyun thought she was. She only hated Tiffany, no one else. God knows how much she wanted to free Seohyun and Jessica, but she had to keep them to get Tiffany because she knew the girl didn't trust her.

"I wouldn't prolong this anymore, Seohyun. I'll prove to you that I'm not the bad guy here," with that, she stomped out of the room.

~.~

"What's up, Sunny?" Tiffany spoke to her wristwatch, a little groggy for her sleep was just disturbed. She just actually fell asleep because she found it hard to sleep without Jessica beside her.

"It's about Jessica." Tiffany could hear Shinvi crying over the line.

"What about Jessica?"

"She left before seven, and she hasn't gone back yet."

Tiffany rubbed her eyes and looked at the clock on her bedside table. "What? It's eleven already."

"Yeah, that's why I'm freaking out. Shinvi doesn't wanna stop crying."

"Where did she go?" Tiffany felt something bad at the pit of her stomach.

"She didn't tell me."

"Okay, I'll just go there."

"No, Tiffany, I think it's best for you to look for Jessica instead. I'm not really feeling good."

"Why?"

"I tried contacting her on her wristwatch and tablet but I couldn't reach her. I'm scared something bad happened to her." It was evident on her voice.

"Okay. Okay." Tiffany stood up from the bed, totally awake now, and walked into her walk-in closet. "I'll look for her. Do you think you can make Shinvi stop crying?"

"Yeah, I can take care of him."

"Thanks."

"Tiffany?"

"Yes?"

“Take care.”

“I will. Thank you.” Tiffany pressed the end call button and changed her clothes.

Only when she was already on her car had she started thinking. *Where should I look for her?* She tried contacting Jessica’s wristwatch and tablet but, same as with what Sunny said, nothing, she couldn’t reach her.

She bit her lower lip. *Where could she have gone?*

Tiffany maneuvered her car into the alleyways where she almost died twice. The place was creepy at night, but not so creepy when she was at the sky. She looked down and could easily see the alleyways. The streets were empty, not even a single soul could be seen.

She started feeling chills.

Please, please, please tell me she’s safe.

Her wristwatch suddenly beeped and it startled her. She was so focused on looking out of the car’s window and into the streets that a little sound easily startled her. She accepted the call.

“Looking for Jessica? Better get here fast before it’s too late. And remember: don’t bring anyone else.”

There could only be one girl who has that malicious voice.

A message then came in to her iPadVX.

Tiffany changed gears and dashed through the night, heading to only one destination.

~.~

Tiffany parked her car down on an empty grass field. To say that she’s fuming was an understatement. Summer might be Sooyoung but she didn’t really trust her right now. Somehow, at the pit of her stomach, she knew Summer has something against her. If she did something to Jessica, Tiffany wasn’t sure what she’d do to Summer, whether she’s Sooyoung or not.

She slammed the car’s door close and ran to house not far away. She slammed the door hard with her fist.

“Summer! Summer, come out!”

She was about to knock again when someone with muscled arms suddenly strangled her from behind and covered her mouth and nose with a white handkerchief. She tried to struggle free, but the moment she smelled the tingly, nauseating smell, she passed out.

~.~

1am. Two hours since she called Tiffany. One hour since she started being unable to contact Tiffany.

What really is happening?

Sunny continued rocking Shinvi in her arms. He finally stopped crying and was now sleeping. She couldn't help but think of the bad things that could happen to Tiffany and Jessica. What else could she think? Both of the girls were nowhere to be found. She couldn't reach Tiffany's wristwatch and no one was answering her tablet.

She dialed Taeyeon's number on her own wristwatch. "Taeng?"

"Yes, Sunny?" She sounded hoarse, probably because she just woke up.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your sleep but can you get over here? I'm really scared."

Taeyeon didn't need details and immediately answered, "I'll be there."

She eventually arrived fifteen minutes later, looking alarmed. She hugged Sunny longingly with Shinvi in between them. "What happened?"

"Both Jessica and Tiffany are missing and I'm not feeling good with it."

Taeyeon hugged her again. "Don't be scared. If they're in danger, Tiffany could get them out of it."

"I really hope so."

They sat on the bed for a long time, waiting for their gadgets to beep or ring or something. They were both anxious and were hoping that nothing bad happened to the two girls.

"Should we alarm the police or something?" Taeyeon asked.

"It hasn't been twenty four hours yet."

Taeyeon sighed and took Shinvi from Sunny. She knew the girl was already tired and she would gladly watch Shinvi for a while for the girl. Sunny rested her head on Taeyeon's shoulder.

“Take a rest. I’ll wake you up when someone calls or something happens,” Taeyeon softly said.

“How could you be so calm?”

“I’m not, but I have faith in Tiffany. She love Jessica so much and if they’re in danger, she’d do everything to get them out of it... or Jessica at least.”

CHAPTER 12: 'DONE'



CHAPTER 12: 'DONE'

Judy firmly clasped Albert's arm as they walked out of the hospital building, Krystal following behind. There was a reason why she needed to do this. It was because she was starting to find it hard to walk. Albert carefully sat her down on the passenger's seat of their car and jogged over to the driver's seat as Krystal sat at the backseat.

"Albert, I can't tell her," Judy softly said, talking about Jessica.

Albert put a hand on her lap as he focused on driving. "We *have* to tell her. Let's just wait for a perfect time."

Krystal looked away. She doesn't want to hear their conversation. It was breaking her heart because she knew very well what they were talking about. She wanted to cry. She felt so bad that they left Jessica behind in the dark. It was times like this when she needed Sulli the most. She needed Sulli's shoulders to cry on and her arms to hug her. She just wanted to break down and cry.

"It's hard. I want her to be happy." Judy started sobbing and Krystal felt her throat tightened.

"She'll figure out whether we tell her or not, so let's just tell her frankly." Albert rubbed his wife's thigh.

He was affected too. He was hurt and heartbroken as well. If there was someone who's more affected with what's happening it was him. But he's the pillar of this family. He has to be logical, strong and brave enough because if he'd crumble, his whole family would.

"Albert." Judy clutched her husband's arm as she continued crying. Albert wanted to nuzzle his nose on the crown of her head but he just focused on driving, trying hard not to cry.

Krystal turned her head farther so her parents wouldn't see her face. As fast as she could, she wiped a tear that rolled down her cheek even before anyone could see.

~.~

Tiffany woke up to a splash of cold water and she shivered as she gasped in deep breaths.

“Are you awake now?” It was Summer’s voice.

Tiffany tried to clear her eyes and saw two figures in front of her, Summer and Hyoyeon, and she immediately lunged but failed. She was tied to a chair. “Summer! Where’s Jessica?!”

Summer merely pointed to Tiffany’s left and Tiffany saw her wife, awake but with eyes blindfolded, mouth covered and tied to a chair, whimpering, as if trying to say something. She saw Seohyun too, next to Jessica, also tied to a chair.

“You involved Seohyun in this too? What did you do to them!?”

“Nothing.” Summer merely shrugged.

“What do you really want?!” Tiffany looked incredulously at Summer.

“Would you give it to me when I said it’s your life that I want?”

“Why are you doing this?”

Summer’s blood boiled. She was so tired of Tiffany acting all innocent. “You don’t know? You really don’t know, Tiffany?! You just took my father’s life years and years ago! Do you remember now?!”

Tiffany gasped. She didn’t know if she was shivering because she’s wet from head to toe or because the reality had slapped her right across her face.

“You... So you really are Sooyoung?”

“Yes, I am.” Sooyoung paced in front of the three girls, trying to calm herself down.

“...I’m sorry...”

Seohyun, who couldn’t do anything but listen, felt her heart broke at the pain in Tiffany’s voice.

“Your sorry wouldn’t do anything, Tiffany. After my father’s death, I have suffered so much. I had to endure my step-aunt’s cruelty. Do you know what she did to me? She took me in to her house and made me her slave!”

Sooyoung could still remember how cruel her step-aunt had been. Mr. Choi only had one sibling but he’s already dead so there’s no one who could take Sooyoung in but her uncle’s second wife. Her step-aunt had a

daughter, and she didn't really care much about Sooyoung. They treated her the worst way possible. At first, they made Sooyoung do the household chores alone, then, at the right age, they made her work so they could get Sooyoung's salary.

Sooyoung couldn't blame anyone for what's happening to her but Tiffany. If it wasn't for Tiffany, her father wouldn't have died and she wouldn't have suffered.

Sooyoung did everything to sneak a couple of cents from her salary until she had saved enough to support herself for her to run away. Once she came back to Scorchwood, the first thing she did was to find a job, and then find Tiffany.

"I bet you never suffered that much your whole life, Tiffany!"

"We've searched for you, Sooyoung! We've searched for you for a lot of years!"

"Well, you didn't search hard enough! If you did, you would have found me!"

"We did!" Tiffany started crying now. "Sooyoung, believe me... we've searched for you hard enough."

"Fine, you've searched for me, but that would never change my mind."

Hyoyeon remained seated at the edge of the table as two conversed, silently watching and observing. She never imagined this would come to this. This was half her fault. She was Sooyoung's fuel, she provided everything the younger girl needed. And now it's making her feel bad.

She failed in changing Sooyoung's mind, now someone might die tonight if she wouldn't do something about this.

"No one would find you if I kill you right here and now, 'coz y'know why? Odd's on my side, Tiffany. I'm the one assigned to search for Seohyun since she started missing months ago. It was so easy for me to manipulate my own men. I lead them anywhere but here."

This was it, Tiffany thought. If she would die this way, then she would die, just as long as the other two were safe. If the time for her to pay for the things she has done in the past was right now, she'd gladly accept it.

She couldn't stop the tears from coming. What about Shinvi? He would grow up without a father. She never imagined that for her family. She never imagined that her past would come haunting her up to this day and ruin everything again.

"Sooyoung, I'm sorry... I'm really sorry... If you want to kill me, do it, but forgive me first."

Seohyun and Jessica started protesting, but they couldn't really say anything but "mmmphm!" and couldn't do anything but struggle. Tiffany looked down at her lap and her tears pelted her jeans.

"I won't ever forgive you, Tiffany."

"If I told you it's an accident, would you forgive me?" It was the last card.

"That's not what they told me! My step-aunt told me you killed my father." Sooyoung's voice turned melancholic. "She told me you hid behind him when your kidnapper attacked!"

"That's absurd! I would never do that to him, you know that, Sooyoung! You know how important he is to me... he's like my second father."

Sooyoung knew that, but...

"I don't believe you."

Hyoyeon watched as Sooyoung's patience reached its end. She knew by the way the girl's shoulders and arms started shaking in rage. How her eyes were filled with fury. And how her steps became heavy.

"I wasn't even able to see him before he was buried. Do you know how hard it is to lose someone that meant the world to you? The only person who showed how precious you are? How agonizing it feels to not be able to see him before he was buried?" Sooyoung's tears flowed too as she remembered her late father. It crushed her heart every single time she remembered him. "It hurts like hell, Tiffany! I was ready to kill myself then and just follow him!"

Jessica, who was silently listening, somehow felt sympathy for Sooyoung. She knew what it meant to lose someone that meant the world to her. It had hurt like hell. But it was not a reason enough to this kind of thing. This was just so over the top.

"But then I realized I should make the person who killed him pay, and that's you, Tiffany."

"Your step-aunt lied to you! That's not what happened!"

"No! I won't believe you!" Sooyoung stood in front of Tiffany. She stooped low to meet her at eye level, showing Tiffany her burning eyes. "You're a liar."

Tiffany's eyes caught something glinting on her neck and she realized that it was a necklace with a pendant that read 'PS'.

"PS," she unconsciously mumbled. "I know..."

Sooyoung suddenly cupped the necklace and stood straight. "What do you know?" she asked, doubtful.

"PS. I know what it means."

Sooyoung scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous. How would you know?"

“Mr. Choi told me... before he died.”

“...What did he say?”

--Flashback—

The nine-year-old Tiffany crawled next to Mr. Choi, who was on the ground, gasping for breath and blood oozing out from his stabbed chest, as she clutched her injured left arm. Her young mind refused to process everything, all that she knew was the pain on her left arm was too much and that he was so close to dying.

“Mr. Choi.” Tiffany kneeled next to his head, crying.

“T-tiffan-ny,” he gasped.

“Mr. Choi!” Tiffany wailed.

“L-list-ten... S-sooyoung...”

Tiffany nodded encouragingly as she listened attentively.

“T-tell her... the k-knight I-loved her...” He suddenly gurgled and blood came out from his mouth but he continued talking. “PS. P-princess... S-sooyoung...”

“I’ll tell her that Mr. Choi.” Suddenly, the pain on her arm wasn’t that much painful and she hugged the old man’s head to her little chest, inside her little arms. “Mr. Choi...” she continued crying.

Mr. Choi smiled for the last time. Though with blood all over her wrinkled face, Tiffany saw the smile was genuine. He was happy.

And then his body became limp.

Tiffany didn’t stop crying until the police came. She didn’t let go as they put him inside the ambulance, and she didn’t leave his side even in the morgue.

--End of flashback—

“He said that?” For a moment there, Sooyoung wanted to believe her.

Tiffany simply nodded.

Sooyoung cried and pulled at her hair exasperatedly. That was definitely something her father would say. He knew him too well. She used to call her father knight and he used to call her princess. Since she was a kid she has always been with him. She loved reenacting fairy tales, aside from solving puzzles and riddles, with her father and that's how they came up with the nicknames. He used to say that he wanted to be a knight so he could protect the princess.

PS meant Princess Sooyoung. How come she never thought of that?

So Tiffany was saying the truth. But what if she only made half the story and the only truth were his last words? Tiffany wouldn't deceive her.

But what if... she was telling the truth?

Sooyoung whimpered hopelessly. Her mind was in a mess now. She didn't know what to believe. Should she believe Tiffany or her step-aunt? Who should she believe?! It was frustrating her. Tiffany was messing up with her head. She wanted to believe her but couldn't because her heart was aching for revenge. Her mind was telling her to believe Tiffany that she's innocent but her heart was telling her not to believe.

Sooyoung started pacing again and Hyoyeon could see her demeanor crumbling down, as if wanting to change her mind about this. That was a hope Hyoyeon saw. It was still not late to change her mind. But how? She had to act fast! But her brain wasn't working.

Jessica and Seohyun felt anxious at the sound of sobs. They're both wondering what was happening now.

"Sooyoung," Tiffany quietly called, getting rid of Seohyun and Jessica's anxiety.

"What?" Sooyoung snapped.

"Please listen to the whole story."

"No! I won't believe you!"

She was still stubborn. But Tiffany was, too.

"Listen to me! This was what happened!"

--Flashback--

Tiffany ran out of their house's massive gate at the view of the white snow that covered the whole city. It was like a white winter wonderland. Mr. Choi called for her and ran after her, but she continued running and smiling gleefully. It was Christmas Eve! Of course Tiffany would be very giddy.

"Miss Tiffany! It's dangerous to go out at night!" The old man continued running after the young heiress.

Tiffany chuckled loudly before running faster. Her young mind told her Mr. Choi was trying to play with her. They used to do this before, just running around in the backyard and once Mr. Choi caught her he would hug her and they would just laugh. Sometimes they would do this with Sooyoung.

“Miss Tiffany!”

Tiffany still ran while laughing, not noticing how tired the old man was becoming. She ran aimlessly, not really knowing where she was going because she knew that as long as she could hear Mr. Choi’s footsteps behind, she could still find her way back home.

She only stopped when she found herself in a very unfamiliar and eerie place. There were so many house but they were dark, as if abandoned. There were no sign of Christmas in the place. She couldn’t even remember how she got there. But she’s not worrying, she could still hear the footsteps. She turned around and was ready to give up with the game when the footsteps neared. But it wasn’t Mr. Choi.

“Who... who are you?” Her young mind told her the man was bad, like the villains she had watched in cartoons.

“Well, aren’t I lucky? Out of all people, the heiress of Tiffany & co.” He walked closer and Tiffany, scared of the towering man, only shrunk in her spot. “I have a lot of candies at home. Do you want some?”

Tiffany remained on her spot, shivering not because of cold but because of fear.

“I’m not gonna harm you.” His voice sounded malicious.

He then lunged at Tiffany and hugged her before lifting her off her feet, hanging her over his wide shoulder.

“Waaah!” Tiffany started screaming and struggling. “Let go of me!” She then punched the man’s back repeatedly.

He only started walking, but then he suddenly stopped.

“Let go of her!”

“Mr. Choi!” Tiffany struggled harder and the man finally let her down, only to produce a rusty knife and point it to her neck.

“What are you going to do?”

Mr. Choi saw how his hands shook and how his eyes showed fear and nervousness though he tried to hide. He was clearly new in this.

“Let go of her or I will call the police.”

Tiffany started wailing and the man's arm around her neck tightened. Though at a young age, she knew both her and her butler's life was in danger now.

"Stop crying!" The man pointed the knife threateningly at her, but she didn't stop. Instead, she bit his arm as strong as she could and ran to Mr. Choi's side. But as she removed herself from the man's grasp, the knife accidentally sliced her left arm.

"Miss Tiffany!"

Tiffany wailed louder and fell inside Mr. Choi's arms. The pain was too much, and the wound was too big for her tiny, little arm. Mr. Choi carried her and he started running. He didn't bring any weapons with him, and he wouldn't be able to defend Tiffany at this rate. He was already too old to fight, he couldn't even run fast. But he still tried.

"Miss Tiffany, I'll keep you safe."

The man followed them. He ran as fast as his legs could and grabbed Mr. Choi's shoulder before turning him around. Mr. Choi didn't see what happened. Suddenly there was a strong pain on her right jaw and cheek, sending him on the ground, Tiffany also falling beside him.

Then the man stabbed, but Mr. Choi rolled over so it wouldn't hit him. The man grew paranoid. If they would escape him, then he would be jailed and this was just his first time doing something this evil. He just needed to do this because of poverty. Paranoid, he started furiously and blindly stabbing multiple times.

He slumped on the ground when Tiffany kicked him on the crotch from behind. It wasn't even that hard, but the part was sensitive.

"Why you little--!" He angrily stood up and attacked Tiffany.

"Miss Tiffany!"

It was just a millisecond. He was aiming for Tiffany. Then Mr. Choi was suddenly in front of her. Materializing, it seemed, from thin air. One moment nowhere, the next lurching in front of Tiffany.

And his knife struck Mr. Choi on the chest.

He audibly gasped and his eyes grew wide, as if he just realized then what he was doing. He didn't intend to do that. This was supposed to be a clean job. He left the knife on Mr. Choi's chest, staggered backwards and scampered away.

"Mr. Choi!"

Tiffany's shrill scream echoed all around the abandoned neighborhood.

--End of flashback--

"Shut up! I won't believe you!" Sooyoung spun around and pulled out a gun from the holster on her right leg before pointing it to Tiffany's forehead, arm shaking.

Hyoyeon instinctively flinched but she couldn't do anything. *Do something... do something!* She frantically looked around and saw Sooyoung's tablet on the table. She stealthily picked it up and punched a message without anyone seeing her. *Please... please arrive fast before everything gets out of hand.*

"Stop messing up with my mind, Tiffany! You're lying!" Sooyoung was still crying.

"I'm not," Tiffany whispered, staring straight at the barrel of the gun, showing Sooyoung that she meant it.

That enraged Sooyoung more. "Goddamnit, I said shut up!" She shot at the wall behind Tiffany and the room's occupant flinched all together. Jessica and Seohyun started struggling on their chairs, voices muffled by the packaging tape.

"Sooyoung!" Hyoyeon warned.

"Stay away, Hyo!"

"I'm fine," Tiffany breathlessly assured the other two captives and they hesitantly stopped struggling.

"Sooyoung, please calm down," Hyoyeon coaxed as she cautiously neared the girl. Sooyoung did nothing when Hyoyeon took her right arm, which was holding the gun, and lowered it down. "Calm down."

Sooyoung tentatively did under Hyoyeon's touch.

"...please believe me, Sooyoung," Tiffany begged, still crying.

Sooyoung seemed to have come back to herself then. Tiffany's voice broke her heart, something she never imagined she would feel with Tiffany. What have she done? Of course Tiffany wasn't lying! Why have she believed her step-aunt in the first place after all the cruel thing the woman did to her? They used to be playmates before, almost sisters. She knew Tiffany ever since they're young. How could she doubt her? Tiffany had been a very good person way back then, especially to Mr. Choi.

Sooyoung witnessed how Tiffany hugged Mr. Choi with her eyes turning into little crescents.

How she treated him like a second father.

How Tiffany treated Sooyoung like a sister.

...How much the three of them seemed to be a family before.

What have I done?

Hyoyeon saw it happen right before her eyes. Sooyoung's legs gave up and she slumped on the floor, crying hopelessly, muttering hundreds of apologies under her breath. She knew then. She knew Sooyoung has came back to her senses. And Hyoyeon was glad. She might not have changed the girl's mind, but Sooyoung herself realized how wrong she was. That was much better.

After witnessing Sooyoung came back to herself, Tiffany didn't stop crying, but her tears meant something different now. She might have been crying because of fear and pain earlier, but now she's not. She's crying because she was relieved. Finally. It was over.

That's what they thought.

And then there were sirens. Loud and ear-piercing. Sooyoung, Hyoyeon and Tiffany simultaneously stared out the window and saw flying police cars heading the direction of the place.

Shit. The police, Hyoyeon remembered.

Everything that happened next was blurred.

Hyoyeon stole the gun from Sooyoung's grasp and pushed her next to the other three captives. Sooyoung attempted to stand back up but it seemed that she was afraid of her own gun when Hyoyeon pointed it at her.

"Hyo... what..." Sooyoung couldn't finish her sentence in confusion. She thought they were partners? Why was Hyoyeon pointing the gun at her?

"Stay right there, Sooyoung." Hyoyeon slowly walked to the window and waited for the police to board down their cars. She made sure they would see her holding the gun and pointing it at the other girls.

The police using a megaphone said something about negotiating the hostages out of there, said maybe they could talk about it.

"No need for a talk!" Hyoyeon shouted so they would hear her. "I will turn myself over!"

"Hyo! Don't do this!" Sooyoung attempted to stand up but Hyoyeon pointed the gun at her again.

"I'm doing this for you, Sooyoung," was the last thing Hyoyeon said before throwing the gun out the window and the door barged open with three polices pointing their gun at her.

Sooyoung was too shocked to speak, so was Tiffany. Sooyoung only watched as the police put handcuffs on Hyoyeon's hands. She only looked at her eyes all the while. There was a message prominent on the girl's eyes—*I'm doing this for you. I love you, Sooyoung.*

It all happened too fast. Hyoyeon was suddenly out of the room with the three men and another four men came in to remove Jessica, Seohyun and Tiffany's ties. They congratulated Sooyoung as they helped her out of the place but the girl was just staring into zilch, still trying to process everything in her head. Why were they congratulating her? This was all her plan! She was supposed to be the one who's wearing the handcuffs... not Hyoyeon...

Hyoyeon... why?

"Tiffany!"

Sooyoung was too busy arranging her thoughts to see Jessica lunged herself inside Tiffany's arms, glad that the drama was finally over. They hugged each other for a long time before inviting Seohyun over. Sooyoung was left behind, feeling guilty.

All those times that she hated Tiffany were all just a waste. Tiffany was innocent. Her father was brave to have saved her. He's a hero. He's a real knight. What have she done? She was blinded by the lies for a very long time. In the strong desire to blame someone for her father's death, she has believed the lies and hated the innocent. There's no one to blame for his death after all, because he's a hero. He gave up his life to save Tiffany. Her father was a real knight.

And Hyoyeon too. She was Sooyoung's hero and knight in the present time. But, just like Mr. Choi, she was also in danger.

What have I done?

CHAPTER 13: 'FAITH'



CHAPTER 13: 'FAITH'

The three victims, including Sooyoung, were ushered into a room in the police station. The walls were all black and there were a one way mirror and no one could see what or who was watching them from behind. The three sat next to each other and Sooyoung was lead to sit in front of them, next to her senior.

“Can you tell us what exactly happened?” Sooyoung’s senior started. He was a huge man with muscular body, his blue uniform almost bulging. On his nameplate Montgomery was written.

Everyone in the police station knew it was Sooyoung who messaged them. They all believed that it was Sooyoung who rescued the three girls and it pissed off Sooyoung. She didn’t deserve all the congratulations, the handshakes, the smiles, the pat on her shoulders, the pride. Instead of making her proud with what she did, all those gestures actually had the opposite effect on her. It was like a slap in the face.

Tiffany looked at the two girls sitting beside her, asking through her eyes their permission, and they nodded, Jessica even held Tiffany’s hand under the table to tell her it was alright. They only have one feeling in their hearts right now—understanding. Sooyoung misunderstood everything and she deserved a second chance no matter how sinister what she’d done was.

“There’s no need for an investigation, Sir. There’s no harm done. We’re not going to file any case.”

Sooyoung, who was drowned in her thoughts, suddenly snapped her head up to look incredulously at the three girls in front of her in hopes that they were just kidding. What were they doing? Were they not going to tell Montgomery she was the one who planned everything? Instead, she received kind smiles from the three. She felt like crying then but she thought she didn’t have any tears left.

“But, Ms. Hwang, we can’t be so sure. This can happen again if the hostage taker would not be jailed.”

“This won’t happen again, trust me.”

Montgomery seemed to want to say something but when he saw the determined look from Seohyun, Jessica, and Tiffany, he had second thoughts.

“Are you sure about this, Ms. Hwang? It could be really dangerous.” He was still doubtful. He studied the three girl’s faces but he only received a smile.

“I know this woman, investigator. She’s just confused, and blinded by the lies. She knows now that what she did is wrong, thus she turned herself over. I’m sure she won’t do this again.” Tiffany was looking at Sooyoung while saying this.

Sooyoung ducked her head in shame, avoiding everyone’s eyes. She didn’t deserve their kindness either. Were they trying to make her feel bad? Because it was working. After all she had done to them, they still had the guts to actually forgive her.

Montgomery was still doubtful but he finally stood up and picked his tablet up with a sigh. “Okay. I guess I can’t do anything to change your mind.” He bowed before leaving the four girls alone in the room.

“What are you doing? Why don’t you tell him the truth?” Sooyoung whispered over the table once the door closed.

Jessica smiled. “There’s no need. You did nothing harmful to us.”

“I could have! If Tiffany didn’t tell me the truth, I could have!” Sooyoung hissed, near tears.

“But you didn’t. It’s all in the pass now, Sooyoung. We know you’re not gonna do it again,” Seohyun said.

“How could you forgive me just like this?”

“Because you’re like a sister to me. I might not like you when you’re still Summer, but it’s because you’re giving off this different aura around me. And now that I know you’re Sooyoung, I can finally trust you again,” Tiffany said.

“The kindness you’ve shown me before might be with an underlying purpose, but I know that’s the real you. I always have trusted you, Sooyoung,” Jessica continued.

“Have you forgotten that you’re the closest to me in our group of friends?” Seohyun finished.

“Y’all forgive me just because of that? And I haven’t even said sorry yet!” Sooyoung finally let her tears fall as she grabbed the first hand she saw, which was Seohyun’s. She gripped it, pressed her forehead on the table, and continued crying. Tiffany and Jessica also held her hands with their unoccupied ones.

“I’m sorry... I’m sorry...” Sooyoung chanted.

“You’re already forgiven, Sooyoung,” Jessica said.

They let Sooyoung cry all she wanted. Sometimes, people needed a good cry. No one could really act all tough and strong all of the time. Sometimes, even the most despicable person, out of conscience, could cry for something bad they've done.

"Stop crying, Sooyoung," Tiffany said after a while and Sooyoung looked up to see her smile. "You need to go and find Hyoyeon."

At the mention of the girl's name, Sooyoung has bolted out of the door before she even knew it. She ran straight to the cells and found Hyoyeon was just being let out of the cell. She ran straight into her arms, ignoring the people's stares, even if it could raise suspicions out of her coworkers.

She cried and cried in Hyoyeon's arms until her tears dried out.

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When Jessica, Tiffany and Seohyun went out of the investigation room, they were met by Yoona and Yuri, who just knew what happened, and Sunny, Taeyeon and Shinvi, who came the moment they were called over to the police station. They looked worried as they ran to hug the three girls.

"What happened?" Yuri asked. "We were so worried."

Tiffany smiled mysteriously. "It's best if you don't know."

Yoona was about to say something but stopped short. This was nothing to shrug off. This was a big thing and a serious matter. But when she saw the three's expression she wanted to just trust them. The three girls were beaming and even looked happy. There was this certain feeling they radiated that told Yoona she should listen to them. Yuri, Sunny and Taeyeon seemed to have noticed it too so they didn't say anything anymore.

Jessica let go of Tiffany's hand so she could take Shinvi from Sunny. She suddenly missed him.

"How's my Shinvi?" she asked fondly before kissing his puffy cheeks. He just continued nibbling on his right hand.

"Aww, so cute," Tiffany said from over Jessica's shoulder.

Suddenly, all of the fatigue and all of the things that happened recently lost its effect. The two parents only felt nothing but happiness to have reunited with their child. He really has this effect to his parents, though all he did since he was born was so eat and sleep and nibble on his hands.

It wasn't really easy to accept when Yoona, Seohyun and Yuri heard about Shinvi before. Who could really believe Tiffany had gotten Jessica pregnant? It wasn't easy, but they eventually got used to it. How could they deny this little, cute and lovable bundle of joy that obviously acted as a strong bond between Jessica and Tiffany? Besides, they were his godmothers.

"I-is he... your child?"

Everyone looked behind Tiffany and Jessica to see Hyoyeon and Sooyoung standing there. Sooyoung knew about Tiffany's health conditions because of the men she has hired, but she never really saw Shinvi until now.

Tiffany and Jessica simply nodded.

"I... I'm sorry."

Sooyoung looked down as she felt bad. She almost turned Shinvi like her. She almost killed one of his parents for the wrong reason. How could she even think of killing Tiffany? It was just so nasty.

"Sooyoung." Tiffany put a hand on her shoulder. "Stop feeling bad for what you've done. Actually, I'm thinking of making you his godmother, if you would let me, and Hyoyeon too."

Sooyoung looked up to see Tiffany and Jessica's identical smiles. She, too, unconsciously smiled and hugged Tiffany. "Of course. Thank you."

Suddenly, Sooyoung remembered something and she pulled away.

"The man... who killed my father..."

"Don't worry. He's already paying for what he's done. He's pledged guilty and punished to spend the rest of his life in jail."

Sunny felt her fist-sized iPadXV from her pocket vibrated and she fished it out, drowning the next of the conversation out. The call was from Albert. She informed him about what happened and he probably wanted updates. She moved away from the other girls to answer the call.

"Yes, Sir?"

"How are things now?"

"They're okay now, Sir."

"Can I talk to Jessica?" His voice sounded so worried.

"Yes, Sir." Sunny walked over to Jessica and whispered to her about her father wanting to talk to her. Jessica passed Shinvi to Tiffany and moved away to talk to her father.

“Dad?”

“Jessica, how are you? What happened?”

“I’m good, Dad. Nothing serious.”

“Jessica...” He hesitated for a while. “... go back home.”

Jessica silently gasped and looked over her shoulder if anyone was watching her. She caught a glimpse on Sooyoung and Hyoyeon playing with Shinvi while the other girls remained watching them. Her eyes lingered to Tiffany, who was smiling so big it reached her eyes and occasionally laughing, with Shinvi in her arms. Go back home? How about Tiffany and Shinvi?

“B-But... Dad, why?”

There was a long pause and only the static was all Jessica could hear.

“Your mother... she’s sick.” His sentence was followed by a sniff.

“Dad, are you crying?”

“Please, Jessica.” His voice sounded tight. “Go back home. She needs you here.”

This was serious. Definitely serious. Her father wouldn’t cry for a small reason. He was the strongest man Jessica has ever known and he never cried in front of anyone.

“W-what’s her disease?”

“...She has ALS.”

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Just when Jessica thought all the drama was over, it turned out not yet. She has to go back to Korea as soon as possible because her mother was sick.

Tiffany, Jessica, Shinvi, Sunny and Taeyeon left the police station at around six in the morning. Tiffany went back to Jessica’s house mainly because Jessica asked her to. “Even just for today,” Jessica has said. Once Sunny and Taeyeon have gone into the nursery room with Shinvi, Jessica took Tiffany by the arm and said, “I need to talk to you.”

“About what?”

Jessica led her to the living room to talk to her. But, even before she had the chance to start, the doorbell rang.

“Wait, I’ll just get this.” Tiffany went over and opened the door to find her parents outside.

“Oh, Tiffany!” Sophia hugged her. “We’re from the police station but we didn’t find you there. What happened?” she asked. They looked worried too.

“It’s nothing serious, Mom, really.”

“What happened to your bodyguards? We gave them to you for reasons like this!” Sse nagged.

“Mom, I don’t like them so I turned their power sources off and threw them on the basement.” Tiffany rolled her eyes.

“And, why you didn’t tell us that you’ve already found Sooyoung?!” Sophia looked incredulously at her daughter.

“Oh, so you finally saw her?”

“Yes, we saw her at the police station. They said she’s the one who rescued you, Jessica and Seohyun. I’m so thankful for her. Ernest and I were so happy to find her.” Sophia beamed delightedly as she talked excitedly. “We said sorry for her father’s death and we asked her to just live with us, but she refused. Do you know why?”

Yes, Tiffany knew. But she’s not going to tell her parent that. They might have known Hyoyeon as the suspect and it wouldn’t be good if Tiffany would tell them Sooyoung was living with her.

Tiffany shook her head and lied, “I dunno. But I think it’s good the way it is. At least we could still communicate to her.” Then she remembered they were still standing by the door. “Oh, do you wanna come in?”

Ernest and Sophia followed Tiffany into the living room and they sat down in front of Tiffany and Jessica. Jessica eyes them first and thought if this was a nice timing. Sophia looked glad, and Ernest was as neutral as ever. This was just a nice timing. Jessica could tell them now.

“Uh, Mom, Dad, Tiffany, I... have to tell you something.”

The three looked at her expectantly.

“I... I have to go back to Korea tonight.”

“What!?” Tiffany was the first one to react. “Why?”

Jessica looked down at her lap and felt tears rimmed her eyes at the thought of her sick mother. "My mother's sick."

Sophia and Ernest didn't ask what kind of sickness because it seemed to be a sensitive topic for Jessica. They just knew it was serious. And then they realized why Judy was rushing them to have a grandchild. This was probably the reason.

Sophia took Jessica's hands in hers. "I'm sure she needs you, Jessica. If a mother is sick, there's no better relief than having her children around her," she said sympathetically.

"I-I'm bringing Shinvi with me."

"We respect your decisions, Jessica," Ernest said.

Jessica nodded and the first few tears fell. When Tiffany hugged her, Ernest and Sophia exchanged looks. They knew it was their cue to leave. Maybe they could reconcile and get married again. They wanted no other daughter-in-law but Jessica. They were still hoping maybe the divorce was kind of impulsive and the two would realize how much they needed each other right now more than ever.

"We're leaving."

Tiffany kept Jessica in her arms until the house turned quiet, save for Jessica's sobs. She could feel Jessica's grip on the sleeves of her shirt, her chest heaving up and down in deep breaths.

It broke Tiffany's heart seeing Jessica like this, and it also broke her heart knowing that she's leaving without a clear purpose of going back. How could she confess now? How could she confess if Jessica's mind was occupied by her mother? She didn't want to burden Jessica anymore, or pressure her, so maybe she would just wait until things calmed down.

"Jessica, stop crying now," Tiffany said, for the first time calling Jessica by her whole name, unaware of the effect it had on Jessica. Jessica was glad that Tiffany doesn't call her Jessi anymore. It reminded her of the stupid contract she stupidly signed.

"Come on. You should take a rest."

Tiffany pulled Jessica to her feet and assisted her up the stairs and into their room. She tucked Jessica into the bed and when she was about to leave, Jessica grasped her wrist.

"C-can you stay?" Her pleading eyes were red and puffy and Tiffany suddenly forgot how to say no. Jessica felt stupid, she could have said this a couple of days ago. Why had she had enough courage to say this only now? But the effect of this request now was only for a short time, unlike if she said them before they parted. Right now, Tiffany might stay, but she'd leave soon.

Tiffany tucked herself under the blanket next to Jessica and hugged the older girl close to her chest. Jessica automatically wrapped her arms around Tiffany and looked up at Tiffany's face as the latter looked down at her, seeing fear in her eyes.

Tiffany sighed. "Go on, take a deep sleep."

But Jessica kept looking at her.

Tiffany cupped her right cheek with her left hand. "Don't worry, I'll still be here when you wake up."

When Jessica finally closed her eyes and tried to sleep, she kept hoping Tiffany would still be next to her not only when she woke up, but also for the rest of her life.

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Once Jessica stepped a foot inside the airport, she knew her hope earlier was worthless. Tiffany might choose to stay longer, but she would be the one leaving this time. Why did every event in their lives seem to push them farther away from each other? Was being forever apart their destiny?

"Jessica."

Jessica turned around to find Tiffany anxiously standing in front of Sunny and Taeyeon, who were both quiet and were just sympathizing with what's happening between the two. They were on the flight line itself. Hwangs have let Jessica use their private airtrain for her convenience and it was standing proudly in the middle of the runway, just a couple of yards ahead of them.

"Hm?" Jessica pulled at the strap of her shoulder bag that contained Shinvi's feeding bottles, milks and diapers as she balanced Shinvi with one arm.

Tiffany walked over to them and kissed both of Shinvi's cheeks and his forehead. It was hard that her whole family was leaving, but she could make the distance seem nothing. If Jessica wouldn't want to come back, she would settle everything in their company and just follow her there. She would do everything just to get Jessica back and their child.

"You're... coming back, right?" Tiffany found herself dreading the answer for this though she already made plans.

Jessica looked down and slowly shook her head. "I... I dunno."

Tiffany wished she could kiss Jessica too, for the last time before she would leave. And also for another reason that their kisses seemed to have a magic. Whenever they would kiss for the last time, it would turn

out that it wasn't really the last. Maybe if she kissed Jessica now, she could still have chances of kissing her in the future.

But that was a juvenile thought.

This was more realistic: if she would kiss Jessica now, Jessica would think she loved her. Of course, Tiffany wanted that, even though she's not sure whether Jessica loved her back or not. If Jessica's leaving and not coming back, Tiffany would run after her. She had nowhere to go. Tiffany would follow her everywhere she would go. She wouldn't let her love escape so easily like sand in her hands. But she respected Jessica, that's why she doesn't want to do it. Kissing Jessica on her lips was not the only way to convey her feelings.

Tiffany looked down, and her eyes landed on Jessica's left ring finger. There was the source of her confidence. Jessica was still wearing their wedding ring. Tiffany could see she has a chance to have Jessica again, so she wouldn't give up. As long as they could see the same sky, step on the same planet, breathe the same air, then her and Jessica were not impossible.

Tiffany took Jessica's left hand and kissed it instead of Jessica's lips. But, after that, she cupped Jessica's cheek and kissed her on the forehead tenderly.

There was no doubt Jessica felt it, Tiffany's kept emotions, through that simple kiss. Tiffany still loved her and she was sure of that now. But she couldn't stay, not when the last moments to spend with her mother were at stake.

Sunny and Taeyeon couldn't help but to sigh. Tiffany and Jessica loved each other so much but life's sequences were pulling them farther from each other, like constant hooks pierced through their back's skin and once they took a step closer, it would pull them two steps backward.

Jessica willed herself to move away. The plane was waiting for them. Judy was waiting for them. That kiss would be enough anyway. She hoped it would last a lifetime for whatever may happen now. She didn't know if she would still come back or not, but that last kiss would be etched in her heart forever, as well as the first ones-- all of their shared kisses, touches, moments and words. Everything.

Jessica turned around even before Tiffany could say anything. She climbed up the detachable stairs and went into the airtrain. Tiffany soulfully watched as the door automatically closed, concealing her family from her sight. She wanted to run to Jessica and ask her to stay, but she knew Jessica's decision wouldn't change now. It was her mother that was waiting for her arrival. She had nothing against that.

One of the windows of the plane flickered open and there was a man ushering Tiffany, Sunny and Taeyeon away from the plane so it could already fly and leave. Tiffany refused to follow. She saw Jessica through the window, looking down at her. She couldn't quite see her facial expression because of the distance. She started struggling out of the man's arms that insisted on pushing her away from the plane.

"Miss Tiffany, you have to move away! It's dangerous!" the man shouted over the loud engine of the plane.

No... it's my family who's inside that plane! I'm not leaving until they go down that monster and stay here with me!

Tiffany's tears started flowing now, endless and streaming.

From inside the plane, Jessica watched as Tiffany struggled from the man's hold. She saw Tiffany shouted something but she couldn't hear it because of the plane's engine. Tiffany had let it known, though. Tiffany pulled out that look that only said one thing, and her lips moved very slowly for Jessica to decipher.

Don't go.

Jessica had let herself shed tears only then. She thought she could act strong through this but she couldn't. She's weak, after all. She raised a hand and ran her fingertips over the window, as if she could touch Tiffany if she did. Her head slowly shook and she soundlessly mouthed two simple words that acted as a tranquilizer for Tiffany.

I'm sorry.

Tiffany had finally stopped struggling and let the man drag her somewhere far from the plane. She slumped on the hard ground when the man let go of her and Taeyeon immediately went over to hug her.

"Couz."

"T-Taeyeon-ah..." Tiffany desperately grasped Taeyeon's sleeves. *"Why is she leaving me?"*

Taeyeon looked seriously at her.

"Sometimes, two people need to fall apart... to realize how much they need to fall back together."

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Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, doesn't have any known cure until now. At some random point in the nervous system the cells began to die, inexplicably, incurably, spreading through the whole network of ganglia, until the motors of life, large and small, were all besieged, overwhelmed. It could start with the most innocuous symptom, an odd patch of numbness on the skin, and from there the disease marched outward, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, leading inevitable to loss of the ability to move the limbs, to swallow, to speak, to breathe on one's own. Often it took away the ability to see or hear. With all the advanced technology on the society now, you might think scientists might have already found a cure for it, but they still haven't.

When Jessica arrived at their house in Korea Judy was already on a wheelchair. She refused to drink any medicine to slow down the progress of the disease. She refused any machine to connect to her body. And

Jessica felt devastated seeing her like this, so far from her strong mother she last saw just a couple of months ago. She remembered Judy as a very strong woman. Judy loved to talk about shoes with Jessica, but now she couldn't even wear one except for cushioned shoes to keep her limp feet warm, a blanket draped over her lap.

This wasn't the image of home welcoming Jessica had pictured in her mind.

"Mom." Jessica passed Shinvi over to Krystal so she could hug her mother. She instantly cried. It was the most heart-wrenching image of her mother she'd seen.

"Jessica... welcome ho-ome."

Jessica cried even harder. Judy used to love to talk so much, but she found it hard to do now. Her speech was almost gibberish and she couldn't finish a sentence without taking a deep breath.

"Mom, what hap-pened to y-you?" Jessica's voice cracked.

Judy lifted her arms with efforts and was unable to hug Jessica back so she just settled on grasping Jessica's sleeves weakly. There was nothing comforting in the world than a mother's hug, and it made Jessica cry harder that her mother couldn't do that anymore.

"I'm al... right," she said, but she, too, was crying. She couldn't help it. She knew the risks of crying. She might suffocate from crying too much but it was just hard to contain, next to impossible.

The disease was spreading obviously fast. A year into this disease, she couldn't walk anymore, arms were hard to move and it was getting hard to breathe. But she doesn't want to suffer anymore longer, that's why she refused to take the medicines and the machines.

"Mom, don't leave me yet," Jessica sobbed.

Krystal took her cue to leave then, with her little niece in her arms. She couldn't take the scene. It was just too sorrowful. She has begged her mother the same thing, but Judy stubbornly rejected to take the medicines to at least slow the progress of the sickness down. She said she didn't want to be a burden anymore.

"The doc-tor said... I have two y-years... to live... without the med-dicines... and m-machines... but I know... I have less."

Hearing that straight from her sick mother hurt more than anything. Jessica wished she could take the disease instead. She'd rather suffer than her mother. Her mother was half of her world. What should she do if Judy left soon and without notice? It'd surely kill half of herself.

Jessica regretted a few things now. If only she didn't moved to live with Tiffany in Scorchwood, she could have spent a lot more time with her mother. She could have made her happy and, if the disease was really

inevitable, she could have at least prepared for it because of the symptoms that had occurred. She felt so bad for leaving her mother only to go home when she's so close to dying.

Judy's death was inevitable now. If only she could do something... but she couldn't and it frustrated her. Why was life this hard on her? Why was she being punished like this? Did she deserve this after all the good things she has done for the others that she already forgot about herself?

Why was this happening?

"Jessica... don't b-blame... anyone f-for this... especial-ly Him. T-this is... just a... test of our... f-faith."

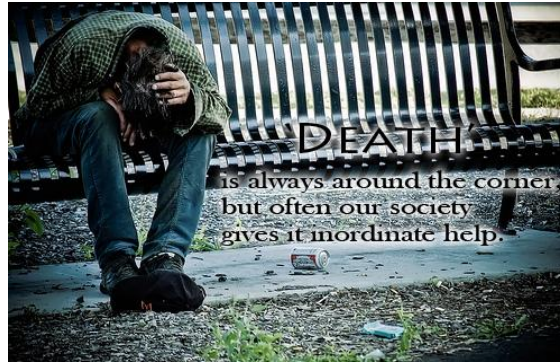
Of course she would never blame Him. She never had the rights to blame Him. Her life was merely borrowed, He could do whatever He wanted with it, though mostly it was all tests of her faith. She was never been the one to blame God for the bad things because He had given her far more greater things. She blamed herself for her decisions in her life. She blamed no one but herself.

Drowned with the guilt that had flooded her being, Jessica whispered assurance to her mother.

"Mom, I won't leave you again."

It was probably the best decision she had ever made in her life.

CHAPTER 14: 'DEATH'



CHAPTER 14: 'DEATH'

Six more months into the disease and Judy was totally immobile. Six months into watching her mother's body slowly wilt away into nothing Jessica was almost emotionally tired. She hadn't stopped crying and grieving though her mother's still alive. It was just too much to bear witnessing her mother slowly dying—her mother who did everything she could to raise Jessica to become a great woman, her mother who was always there with Jessica during her best and worst times, her mother who was half of her life.

Krystal had witnessed how Jessica become as weak as their mother looked, except that her reason was different. Krystal felt exactly the same, so was Albert. A part of their family was leaving, how could they not grieve?

But Judy was peculiarly acting all tough. And she was the one who was suffering with the disease. She kept saying positive things when she could still talk, until she couldn't produce any sound anymore other than a soft moan or a grunt. It seemed to work, somehow. Krystal, Jessica and Albert were slightly starting to take the inevitable in. Judy made it clear that if she would pass away anytime, she's happy because her family was around her, with an addition of her grandson, who had been her source of bliss lately though all he did was laugh and crawl on the floor of her room, next to her bed, not having any idea that his grandmother was a thread apart from the brink of death.

Like right now, Shinvi was busy crawling around the rubber mat on Judy's room, next to her bed, where she could see him play by himself as Jessica sat on the edge of her mother's bed, keeping an eye on both Shinvi and Judy. Jessica had never let her mother out of her sight, especially now that it's been a year and six months she's bearing the disease. She couldn't take her eyes off her mother in fear of Judy leaving when she's not watching. She always watched, so her mother wouldn't leave. Plus, Albert was working and Krystal was schooling, so no one could watch over Judy. They hadn't let the servants do it.

Judy murmured something.

"What is it, Mom?" Jessica held her mother's right hand in between both of hers.

It's getting harder and harder to understand Judy as the time passed by. She couldn't move her hands for signs. She couldn't talk clearly either.

Judy smiled and looked down at Jessica's left hand, specifically on the gold band on it. She seemed unusually bright today, and Jessica took that as a good sign. Maybe she's feeling better now than the past months.

"Oh, this..." Jessica looked at her hand too and touched her wedding ring. She couldn't remove it, or rather, she didn't want to remove it. Never. It was one of the reasons why she kept standing up all this time, except from Shinvi, because she knew Tiffany was with her, somehow. She could feel Tiffany through that ring.

Tiffany visited a couple of times before. In fact, she just visited last week. But she only stayed for a day before leaving and going back to Scorchwood. She checked on Shinvi and Jessica, but mostly on her mother-in-law, Judy.

Judy slightly squeezed Jessica's hand. Not *squeeze*, really. The word was too heavy of a word to describe the gesture. It was almost unnoticed because of its weakness, it was all that Judy could muster. But Jessica felt it, so she looked up immediately and met a pair of brown eyes very identical to hers.

Jessica's mind immediately blacked out and all of a sudden all that she could see was Judy's face. That face she had loved so much. Judy was saying something, through her eyes. Strangers wouldn't understand what the look on her face was saying. But to Jessica it was very clear. As clear as the blue sky outside the window of Judy's room. It might be the wonders of a mother and her child's invisible connection.

"You love her."

Jessica could have sworn she heard the voice in her head like her mother has some super powers to talk to her without moving her lips.

Jessica smiled sadly. "Very much."

Judy was aware that she was the one who's keeping Jessica from going back to Tiffany. She wouldn't let that go on anymore longer now.

"Go back to her and be happy."

"Mom..." Jessica's eyes instantly misted.

Somehow, it felt like a last message for her. Somehow, it seemed like Judy was ready to let go. Somehow, it appeared that Judy was trying to tell Jessica what she should do when she's finally off. Somehow, Jessica knew those weren't just a 'somehow' but a certainty. And that was the reason for her tears.

"Co-old," Judy croaked before taking in a deep breath, but was only able to inhale so little because, in her condition, it was hard to breathe. She still managed a smile, though.

“Y-you’re cold? Wait, I’ll just...” Jessica stood up and furiously wiped her tears that refused to stop. “I’ll just get another b-blanket.”

She ran out of the room and into the next room, a guest room. She grabbed the blanket on the vacant bed as fast as she could before dashing back to her mother’s room. And stopped right in front of the door. And dropped the blanket on the floor.

She was too late.

In a mere ten seconds, she’s already *too* late.

She lethargically dragged her feet closer to her mother’s bed and stared at her mother’s peaceful face. She’s gone, Jessica knew, but she refused to believe it. It was just a couple of seconds! How could she slip away in such a short time?! It was impossible! She must have passed away the moment Jessica had let go of her hand. She asked Jessica to get a blanket so Jessica wouldn’t see it. She acted bright today so Jessica wouldn’t suspect.

“Mom!” Jessica kneeled on the side of the bed and hugged her mother’s lifeless body. “MOM!”

Behind her, Shinvi stopped playing with his rattle and sat on his rear. He watched as his mother cried and wailed and shouted for his grandmother to come back. A second later, he started crying as if he understood what just happened.

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Krystal’s hold on her ice-cream cone loosened and it dropped on their cafeteria’s tiled floor in a soft ‘splat!’. She remained stoic in front of the entrance and Sulli looked at her confusedly.

“What’s wrong, Krys?”

Krystal’s eyes teared up. “Mom...” She knew. Her innards were telling her something. And it has something to do with her mother. “Something happened to Mom!” Her legs gave up and she fell on the floor, crying hopelessly, garnering every people’s attention.

“Krys!” Sulli kneeled next to her and hugged her weeping friend.

Krystal gripped Sulli’s sleeves, looking at her with her pain-filled and tear-filled eyes. “Bring me home, Ssul... bring me home! Something happened to Mom!”

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The grass was dry and the air was tight. The sky was pinkish and spiders seemed to have heaved the thin clouds. The one-hundred-forty-five-year-old Dogwood tree was standing proudly on its usual position two yards away from Grandpa Jung's tomb, leaves falling like confetti. Everything in the place screamed familiarity to Jessica, but it did nothing to her broken heart. The beautiful image of nature couldn't take her mind off of things for the first time.

Jessica, Krystal and Albert watched sorrowfully as Judy's coffin was laid atop the six-foot deep hollow on the ground next to Grandpa Jung's tomb, ready to be laid down. But not yet. It was still open.

"MOM!" Jessica lunged forward and hugged her mother's cold body without second thoughts. She had never gotten tired of crying during her mother's funeral, until now. How could she? How could she stop crying when every time she did, thoughts of not seeing her mother again haunted her? Thoughts of not being able to feel her arms around her. Thoughts of not being able to feel her motherly love. Thoughts of not being able to tell her much she meant to Jessica. And thoughts of the days she could have spent with Judy but hadn't had the chance because she was in Scorchwood. A lot of thoughts haunted Jessica.

Somehow, Jessica felt bad that her mother passed away without spending the last years of her life with her first born. If Jessica didn't choose to live in Scorchwood, she could have spent a lot more time with Judy. Jessica blamed even that thing to herself. Who else could she blame, anyway?

"Unnie!" Krystal tried to pry her sister away from their mother, but Jessica refused to. Krystal had been crying, too. Even Albert, who has only shed tears once, was crying right now.

Sulli, Yoona, Yuri, Taeyeon, Sunny (with Shinvi in her cradled arms), Seohyun, Hyoyeon and Sooyoung witnessed it everything from behind. Most of them could not sympathize. They didn't know what to do or say to Jessica because they had never lost a parent. Sooyoung, Hyoyeon, and Tiffany could sympathize, though. Tiffany and Sooyoung lost Mr. Choi, and Judy was Tiffany's mother-in-law so it was more or less her loss too. Hyoyeon lost both her parents at such young age. They knew what it felt. It felt devastating. Even that word was an understatement. There were not enough words to describe it.

They were all there for emotional support, along with her parents' colleagues, partners and friends, and Jessica was thankful for that. She wouldn't still be standing right now if not for them.

Tiffany took the initiative to take a step forward and the moment she settled a hand on Jessica's shoulder, the latter detached herself from the coffin and hugged Tiffany instead. Tiffany hugged her tight.

"Stop crying now, Jessica."

But that seemed to make Jessica cry even harder.

Sulli realized that Krystal had been crying so hard that her breathings were already ragged. It seemed like Krystal was almost suffocating from so much crying. So Sulli hugged her, too. Krystal slightly eased inside her arms.

Albert took this as an opportunity to command the two men to close the coffin and lay it down. When the coffin started slowly going down the hollow Jessica started struggling but Tiffany tightened her arms even more.

“No! Don’t!” Jessica screamed.

“Jessica... let her go,” Tiffany softly said and it seemed to work. Jessica gradually stopped struggling and just watched with wrecked heart as her mother’s white coffin slowly disappeared under the earth.

The men started throwing dirt on top of it, sealing the hollow. The dirt was thick and it made soft ‘plucks’ as it hit the coffin, but it was nothing compared to Krystal and Jessica’s wails. Shinvi seemed to have sensed the anguish around the place and he started crying too, shrill and keen.

Some of the people in the funeral shed a tear or two, unlike the two daughters of the deceased who shed buckets. The breeze was cold but there was nothing colder than the feeling of the empty space in their hearts that was recently vacated by their mother.

There was nothing hurtful than watching your parent being buried six feet under the ground. Every pile of dirt seemed to add to their buckets of pain. Every tear seemed to be a lead of another one, making them endless.

Ironically, the moment the hollow was fully sealed was the same moment Jessica, Krystal and Albert knew that an empty space in their hearts would remain unfilled.

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The air at the back of the Jung’s massive house was different than in the cemetery. The apple trees filtered the air clean before it could reach Jessica, who was sitting on her hammock, and Tiffany, who was resting her back against one of the apple trees where the hammock was tied. For the first time, the serenity of the place didn’t calm Jessica down. She wished she could go back to being a child, when she still had her mother.

Jessica was deep in thought while Tiffany was merely watching her. The stress and fatigue was visible from Jessica’s face and slouched, thin body. Seeing Jessica like this hurt Tiffany more than their parting. She could have been there while she was suffering, but she chose to stay in Scorchwood and take care of their company. She was one disappointing lover. It suddenly occurred to her that she didn’t deserve Jessica for all that she was.

The first time Tiffany saw Jessica in this place she had looked so peaceful, and as beautiful as the place. She even called her Snow White. But today she’s not. The sun was setting and the breeze was warm. The trees’ leaves were starting to fall off from their branches as it was the beginning of autumn. This usually excited Jessica. Autumn was the most beautiful season for her. But not today.

"Tiffany..." Jessica quietly called and Tiffany attentively listened. "Can you still remember what I told you the last time we were here?"

Tiffany thought for a while but Jessica didn't wait for her reply.

"I said I had a promise to myself that I'll bring the person I love here in this place and the person that I would marry."

Tiffany remembered it now.

--Flashback--

Jessica heaved a deep sigh. "You know, I promised myself before that I would bring the person I love here in this place..."

"So, you love me?" Tiffany asked with a smirk.

"Of course not! I'm not yet done talking! At least let me finish."

"Continue." Then Tiffany continued eating the apple.

"...And the person that I would marry. I knew ever since from the start that that would be two different persons. But I never stopped wishing that the person I would marry would be the person that I love, but still.... it didn't come true. Though I don't love you... you're the one that I was supposed to be married with so I brought you here to tell myself that at least I fulfilled half of my promise."

--End of flashback--

"Tiffany, my wish eventually came true." Jessica paused. "They're one person now, the person I married and the person I love... and that's you."

It took a good five seconds before Tiffany realized what Jessica just said and once she did, her eyes grew wide. *She loves me!* But she didn't have time to react when Jessica continued.

"Yes, Tiffany, I love you." Jessica ducked her head and Tiffany only watched from behind as Jessica's shoulders started shaking with her sobs. "But I can't be with you now... I'm guilty of some things. I'm guilty of being selfish... I've never thought that the only time I became selfish --when I chose to live with you in Scorchwood-- is the worst decision I've ever made. If I hadn't left, my mother could have spent the last years of her life with me. I could have been there for her to make her happy for the last time, but I wasn't. I came late."

Tiffany never knew that a confession such as this existed. This was the most heartbreaking confession she has ever seen, and it was a confession to her. Her tears rolled down her cheeks even before she knew it. Why was life so cruel to them? Why was Jessica choosing to punish herself? But she's still wearing their wedding ring... there's still hope... but somehow Tiffany already felt tired...

"I'm guilty of taking my mother's happiness with me when I left... and I deserve to be unhappy for the rest of my life."

Then what did Tiffany do to deserve this? Jessica was guilty, so she deserved this. But what did Tiffany do to deserve to be unhappy for the rest of her life? Jessica was her happiness, her everything. How could she be happy now that she knew she'd never have Jessica?

Tiffany's legs gave up and she kneeled on the dirt, tears pelting the ground. If Jessica was not sitting on the hammock, she could have fallen on the ground too.

Jessica said she loved her, but she still refused to be with Tiffany. That only meant that her mind wouldn't change. If her love for Tiffany wasn't enough to change her mind, then what was? It was times like this when Tiffany felt discouraged. There were no more hopes left. She's tired of fighting, no matter how much she loved Jessica. Even the strongest warrior gets tired sometimes. It was pretty normal.

It was just so hopeless.

Maybe it was really time to quit and just give up fighting.

CHAPTER 15: 'FAMILY'



CHAPTER 15: 'FAMILY'

It was the last week of September. Winter was coming and the air was starting to feel cold. Days had gone shorter. But Jessica noticed none of it.

It has only been three months since Judy died and since Jessica pushed her happiness away, but Jessica felt like it was already three years. Days passed by so slow inside her room. She never went out. She simply laid on her bed lethargically and let the servants take care of Shinvi. She felt like she lost half of her strength and she already lost the will to live. What was left there to live for? Shinvi. She knew she had to live for Shinvi, but every time she's seeing him she was reminded of Tiffany. His facial features had taken over Tiffany mostly. He has some likes too that was the same as Tiffany's, like his fondness of cars. He especially liked this rattle with the shape of a car than the usual circle ones. It was his favorite. Or maybe he got it from his uncle Chansung? Either way, it still came down to one conclusion—one unforgettable woman with the name Tiffany Hwang.

Jessica sighed as she stared at the ceiling of her room. Her mind was filled with Tiffany again. The pale color of her ceiling couldn't clear her mind. It never did.

She was so deep in thought that she was startled when the door suddenly opened. Albert came in.

"Jessica." Albert sat on the edge of her bed and Jessica remained lying down. "Why don't you go out for a while? Take Shinvi out or something."

Jessica sighed again. "I'm not in the mood to go out, Dad."

With one look, Albert already knew what was wrong with Jessica. He was his daughter, of course he knew. Not only mothers had invisible connections with their children.

He fondly ruffled her hair and softly said, "Jessica, there's no point in punishing yourself. Didn't your mother tell you to go back to Tiffany? It was her last message for you, you should follow it."

“But, Dad... I can’t. I can’t leave you. What happened to Mom might happen to you too and I wouldn’t be able to take it anymore if it did.” Jessica’s eyes instantly teared up. “Losing a parent once is already unbearable, but losing twice...” She trailed.

“Jessica, I’m still young. I’m just forty-eight. I’m pretty healthy, you don’t have to worry.”

“But, Dad...”

“Jessica, listen to me.” He cupped her cheek this time and looked at Jessica’s eyes seriously. “Seeing you like this hurts me twice than your actual pain. All I want for you is to be happy, and that’s what Judy wants too. If she’s here, she wouldn’t want you to do this.”

Albert has a point, Jessica realized. But she never wanted to be selfish again and leave her father. She didn’t want to risk it again. She wanted to stay so she could make her father happy, but, like what he said, he was hurting more than Jessica when she’s like this. Then there was her mother’s wish...

Albert took her shoulder and pulled her to sit up before enveloping her in his arms. Jessica never appreciated a man’s arms before more than how she appreciated her father’s. His chest was hard and his arms were firm. Jessica felt safe inside and she wished she could just stay there forever, safe from all the pain and heartbreaks. But her father’s embrace was ephemeral, unlike Tiffany’s embrace Jessica was sure that could last for eternity. She had her parent’s arms before Tiffany became her other half when she took her from her parents the moment they got married. She was hers now for the remaining days of her life. She’s supposed to stay inside Tiffany’s arms.

Jessica missed being a child, when nothing mattered as long as she had her parents, no conflicts and complications. She wanted to sit on her father’s lap and enjoy the feeling of his fatherly love as he wrapped his arms around her tiny waist. She missed those days so much...

But she’s all grown-up now. Her happiness does not lie on her parents anymore, but on someone she loved, someone who loved her back, someone who could make things better with just a simple hug and a chaste kiss.

Her happiness was with Tiffany now.

For the first time after a long time, Jessica felt like she’s finally starting to think maturely.

Albert finally detached himself from Jessica and stood up. Before walking out of the door, he said, “Go ahead, Jessica. Go ahead and reach your happiness while it’s still within your grasp.”

Right after the door closed, it opened again and Krystal came in. She waited for Albert to go out first before coming in because she knew he’s talking some senses into her sister’s stubborn head. And she was actually there to do the same.

She, too, sat at the edge of the bed where Albert was sitting earlier.

“Unnie, I’m gonna go straight to the point here, okay? So you have to listen carefully.” Krystal waited for a response but she received an amused chuckle instead. Jessica’s eyes were still red and her nose was still running and she looked totally crazy in Krystal’s eyes. But she pushed it aside. “Dad, is right—”

“I can’t believe you’re eavesdropping.”

“I’m not, okay?! I just... accidentally heard,” Krystal lied and Jessica laughed. She knew her younger sister very well. Though Krystal might be a little harsh, Jessica was actually fond of her. Krystal was the only one who could make her laugh in the middle of all the tears. Krystal was just so adorable. “Anyway, as I was saying before you disrespectfully interrupted me, Dad is right.”

Jessica turned serious when Krystal paused, so was Krystal. Her voice became soft when she talked again.

“Unnie, you’re not the only one who lost Mom. I did. Dad did. But were not acting like what you’re doing. Unnie, if you’re thinking about Dad, don’t worry, I can take care of him. If you’re thinking of the company, I can take care of it too. I’ll do my best to be fit for it.”

“Krystal...” Jessica felt her tears welled up again.

“Unnie... I want you to be happy. My happiness is here, so I’ll stay. But yours is not here, it’s somewhere in a country named Scorchwood, with someone specifically named Tiffany Hwang,” Krystal still tried to joke, but her eyes were already tearing up too. “Unnie, you don’t have to worry about anything anymore. I can take over everything here from now.”

Jessica couldn’t believe she was hearing this from her seventeen-year-old sister. It was just not so Krystal. But she was thankful. Her family was the best supportive ones to her every decisions. When they knew her decision was stupid, they would stand all together to tell her she’s wrong and tell her to change her mind. She could never thank God enough for giving them to her. She was so blessed.

“And you have your own family now, what with my nephew and all... maybe you can add another member to your family.”

They shared a short, hearty laugh in the middle of the tears.

“Krystal, thank you.” Jessica said seriously.

“Yah!” Krystal slapped her arm. “I don’t have time for being sentimental. When I cry my eyes swells up and everything, it’s so unattractive, Sulli said. You should just get your butt out of here, and run straight into Tiffany-unnie’s arms, OK?!” She raised a fist and smiled at her older sister.

She was taken aback when Jessica hugged her but returned the hug nevertheless.

Jessica could never be thankful enough. She really had one great family.

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“Where have you been?” Hyoyeon asked the moment she sensed the front door of her house opened without tearing her eyes away from the television.

Sooyoung stood straight. She was caught. For a police that needed to always be stealthy, she could never really escape from Hyoyeon’s radar. She walked over to the living room and sat next to Hyoyeon.

“Where have you been?” Hyoyeon repeated.

Sooyoung studied her and realized that she’s probably dismayed. The tables have long turned. She wasn’t the one who’s constantly displeased at Hyoyeon anymore, but the other way around. She couldn’t remember when it started being like this.

“Uh...” Sooyoung hesitated. “Well... I visited a shrink and a life coach.”

Hyoyeon finally removed her eyes from the television and looked amusedly at Sooyoung with a small smile. “You are?” She sounded like she couldn’t believe it but was happy about it.

Sooyoung looked down at her lap and nodded.

“So that’s where you’ve been going the past couple of months?” That explained the huge change in Sooyoung’s behavior, Hyoyeon realized.

Sooyoung nodded.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Well... I don’t want you to think I’m crazy or something. I’m actually trying to get my head fixed. After all I’ve done to Seohyun, Jessica and Tiffany, I’m starting to doubt myself. I’m still living with the guilt from what I did to them.”

Hyoyeon took her shoulders and willed her to face her. “Are you kidding me? I’m glad you’re visiting them! Just because you’re visiting a shrink doesn’t mean you’re a psycho or something. It’s a good thing.”

Sooyoung finally looked up, hopeful. “You think?”

Hyoyeon chuckled. She’s liking this new Sooyoung more and more. It was way more cuter. “Of course.”

They just stared at each other for a while, the sound of the television drowned out of their trance. Sooyoung took the chance and hugged the older girl. "Thank you for everything, Hyo. For always being here for me. For loving me."

"It sounds like you're leaving me." Hyoyeon suddenly felt scared.

Sooyoung leaned away and stared at her. "I'm not going anywhere. I'm here to stay and yours to keep."

"What—" Hyoyeon didn't have the chance to finish her sentence when Sooyoung kissed her.

It was brief. A chaste peck. But Hyoyeon felt like everything stopped and she remained in a shocked state when Sooyoung hugged her again, an excuse to hide her reddening cheeks.

"I wanted to do that for a long, long time now."

Hyoyeon finally broke out of her shock and hugged Sooyoung back, blinking multiple times. She lightly chuckled then silence enveloped them. They stayed that way for a moment. Hyoyeon couldn't believe it. It was a silent 'I love you' and her heart was still fluttering. She couldn't believe her long wait has finally paid off.

"Say, Hyo," Sooyoung suddenly said.

"Hm?"

"Maybe we should adopt?"

Hyoyeon couldn't help but laugh. "Already? We haven't been together for an hour yet."

"I'm serious." Sooyoung paused so it could sink in to Hyoyeon. "I want to know what it feels to have a child. I'll love him or her, like how my father loved me."

"Is this what those shrink and life coach teaches you?" Hyoyeon joked.

Sooyoung slapped her arm. "Yah! I'm serious!"

Hyoyeon laughed. "Sorry. Okay, I'll be serious now." She pulled away and looked seriously at Sooyoung. "Does this mean you're planning to spend the rest of your life with me?"

Sooyoung smiled and nodded. "I don't want to be with anyone else."

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The month of October was busy. Christmas was coming yet again and Tiffany had to focus on a lot of things in their company. Jewelries were in demand during this season. It was helpful, somehow, because Tiffany got the chance to push Jessica out of her head. But whenever she takes a break, she would think of Jessica again. It was making her crazy. And the fact that Shinvi's birthday was coming was bothering her. She would see Jessica again then. She couldn't just miss Shinvi's birthday. She was his father after all, and she hasn't seen him for more than three months now. She missed him as much as she missed Jessica.

Today, Tiffany decided to visit their ancestor's room for a short visit before going to work. There might be a lot of things to do, but she could squeeze in a visit to her grandparents in her schedule.

The room was renovated. It was at the far back part of the house and the three side of the walls were changed into floor-to-ceiling windows so the person inside could see the backyard. The backyard was filled with trees now, and grass, and bushes. But autumn just passed and winter was coming so they're all leafless. It's still soothing, though. Tiffany understood now why Jungs loved nature. In the middle of the room was the huge mahogany table where the pictures of the late presidents of Tiffany & Co. sat.

Tiffany put her own picture next to her father's. She was the only female out of the hundred of males, but as she stood a yard away from the table, she realized one distinct facial feature they all had in common—the crescent eyes. And they were all staring at her. It didn't seem creepy, for the first time, but they looked sympathetic, as if they knew what Tiffany was going through and they all wanted to make her feel better.

Tiffany locked eyes with Daniel Hwang, her grandfather.

"Grandpa, I'm a fail lover, aren't I?" she said. "How could I give up so easily? One second I'm all confident that I could get Jessica, then the next I'm already giving up. But you understand me, right, Grandpa? She doesn't want me, and I don't want to push myself to her anymore. If she's with me, she would still hurt herself because she keeps telling herself she doesn't deserve to be happy. If she's not with me, I know she's hurting too. Either way, she's hurting, and I don't know what to do."

She paused, but she's not really waiting for an answer.

"Why did you even have to choose her for me?" she blamed him. "Do you know it would all come down to this? Did you plan all this? Grandpa... did you want me to be unhappy for the rest of my life?"

It was senseless. She knew talking to a dead person's picture was worthless. She wouldn't get any answer. So she turned around and was about to leave the room when her iPadXV vibrated. She fished it out of her pocket and tapped the screen before pressing it to her ear.

"Hello?"

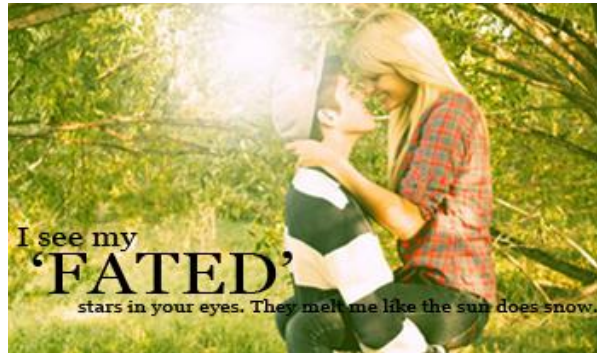
"Tiffany, do you think you can fetch me at the trainport right now?"

That sweet voice... Tiffany's eyes grew wide and she checked the name on her tablet. *Jessica*.

“I-I’ll be there in a minute!” She hurriedly cut the call and turned to look at her grandfather’s picture. She chuckled unbelievably. “Grandpa... thank you so much.” She bowed in front of all the pictures and dashed out of the room.

For the first time after three months, she finally saw how close her happiness was.

CHAPTER 16: 'FATED'



CHAPTER 16: 'FATED'

Tiffany found Jessica and Shinvi in the trainport without breaking a sweat. She found them waiting for her at the arrival area, but she was behind them, so they couldn't see her. Shinvi was standing next to Jessica and they were holding hands so Shinvi couldn't run away. Tiffany felt a deep longing inside her seeing them together, her family. She missed them so much.

She quietly crept behind them and suddenly jumped in front of Shinvi, shouting, "Boo!"

Shinvi shrieked in surprise and was about to run but Tiffany caught him just in time. She tickled him mercilessly until he started laughing loudly. Jessica merely stared at them, chuckling. She loved seeing Tiffany like this—acting like a father to Shinvi and playing with him.

Tiffany finally stopped tickling him and carried him in her arms. She stood straight and faced him.

"How's my baby, hm?" She showered him with loud kisses all over his face and neck.

Shinvi simply giggled for he couldn't talk yet, or understand anything.

Tiffany stared at Jessica only then. To be honest, they both still felt awkward. After Jessica's confession, both actually thought they wouldn't get back together again, but destiny has a different plan. Jessica had tried to act casual through the phone, but she felt really awkward now while seeing Tiffany face to face

Tiffany smiled awkwardly but her eyes were twinkling. "Hi."

"I missed you." Jessica, herself, was surprised with what she said, and more surprised when she lunged and hugged Tiffany sideways, since she has Shinvi on her left arm.

Tiffany's smile widened and tightened her arm around her. "I missed you more, Jess."

She realized then that people were staring at them. Of course, they all knew they've already divorced, and this was a rare sight to see. Tiffany could already hear the questions in their head.

Wanting some privacy, she said, "Come on. I'll send you home."

Jessica hesitantly removed herself from Tiffany's embrace and they walked side by side. As they walked, she clung onto Tiffany's right arm and Tiffany stopped. Tiffany looked at her, and Jessica looked back questioningly. When Tiffany softly removed her arm Jessica couldn't help but feel disappointed.

"Why?"

Tiffany took Jessica's left hand and kissed the back of it. "If you hold my arm you might let go, but if I hold on your hand I'm not gonna let go." Then she intertwined their fingers.

Jessica couldn't help but chuckle. Tiffany really has tendencies of copying someone else's words. Jessica remembered saying that before, when they visited Grandpa Jung's tomb for the first time.

As they continued walking, Jessica glanced at their connected hands. She used to think that their hands didn't really fit, and she still thought so until now. But she's positive about it.

Love wasn't always about finding someone with a hand that perfectly fit yours. It's about finding someone who would keep on holding on no matter how unfit they may be.

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Tiffany couldn't help but curse fate under her breath as she drove back to the office. At the last minute, it seemed to be still playing with her. Right after fetching Jessica and Shinvi from the trainport and sending them back to their house, Taeyeon called, saying that the World President was in their company, looking for her. Of all the times he could choose to visit, he chose this time. Tiffany didn't even had the chance to kiss Jessica or something... it's not that she's eager for it anyway... So, she excused herself from Jessica and the latter simply nodded and smiled, a smile that said 'I'll be waiting for your return.'

Tiffany hissed as she slammed a fist on the steering wheel.

She couldn't wait to finish the deal with the President and go back to Jessica's side.

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Tiffany found President Ok Taecyeon Jr. leisurely sitting on the couch on the receiving area of her office. His feet were crossed, like a lady's, and his left elbow was resting on the arm rest, fist supporting his chin and with a neutral expression on his face.

"Mr. President." Tiffany bowed and didn't straighten until Taecyeon commanded her. She hated being commanded. She loved doing things her way, and she's not really in the mood to talk to him now, not when he just ruined a possible happy ending. She could have just ignored him, but he's the *world's president*, how could she? And he came all the way from Mars. Even though he didn't make any appointment, it was okay for him to appear all of a sudden and demand for the attention of anyone he wanted.

"Take a seat, Tiffany." His voice was deep and his accent was hard to place.

Tiffany did as told.

"I'm sorry if I interrupted anything, but I really have to ask this personally to you."

"Anything, Sir."

Taecyeon entangled his feet and sat with his legs apart, his elbows on his knees, looking over the coffee table and directly to Tiffany.

"Christmas is coming, and what better gift is worth giving to a beautiful lady than something from Tiffany's? I want a unique and one of a kind jewelry for my girlfriend."

"What exactly, Sir?"

His smile grew wider and softer as the thoughts of his beloved filled his mind. "I don't want a ring. It's very cliché. I want something different, and it's all up to you."

"What do you mean up to me, Sir?" Tiffany raised an eyebrow.

"I want you to design it and craft it personally. My girlfriend is a very big fan of this company. She'd love it if the president of the company herself made the jewelry especially for her."

"What kind of a woman is she, Sir?"

Taecyeon rested his back against the couch's soft backrest and his eyes suddenly had distant looks in them, like he's looking back at the past, reminiscing. He turned from the most powerful man in the two planets to a man simply in love. Then he started describing his beloved and Tiffany couldn't help but admire this man. Too little men were like him these days. He's so in love and loyal to his girlfriend. Just looking at him and hearing his soft voice proudly telling about his girlfriend was heartwarming. His choice of words was beautiful and straight to the point. Tiffany didn't have to try so hard to imagine what his girlfriend was like. His girlfriend was lucky to have such fine man.

“... Please make it special, Tiffany.”

Tiffany thought she heard it wrong. Did the President just say ‘please’ to her? She didn’t expect him to be like this at all. All of a sudden, the burden of having to design a jewelry and craft it wasn’t that much bothersome. If it could make someone happy, then Tiffany would love to do it.

“When do you need it, Sir?”

He sighed and put up an apologetic face. “I know this is very sudden. But can you finish it in two weeks’ time?”

That was going to be hard, but Tiffany smiled and said, “Surely.”

Taeyeon stood up and shook Tiffany’s hand as she, too, stood up. “Thank you so very much, Tiffany.”

And Tiffany was taken aback when he hugged her. The World President just hugged her. It felt so surreal. She never imagined to ever be touched by the President, much more a hug. Was this man real? He was very far from the man Tiffany had anticipated.

“I shall go ahead. Love’s waiting for me back home,” with that, he left with his tons of bodyguards waiting outside the door.

Tiffany sat on her swivel chair and sighed. She pulled out a paper and pen from the drawer and started drawing the draft of the jewelry she had in mind and, like being possessed, spent the rest of the afternoon working on it. No one used papers and pens now, but she wanted to use it anyway. She found drawing on a paper more comfortable than in a tablet, because sometimes it was really much better if some things were simple.

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The next two weeks passed by in a blur. Tiffany was always stuck in the office to finish the jewelry—a bangle—and only managed to text and call Jessica. She kept on saying sorry for delaying ‘this’. What’s ‘this’? None of them really spoke of it. They often referred to calling it ‘this’. Tiffany hadn’t stopped saying sorry through the calls until Jessica good-naturedly laughed and said, “It’s okay. I’m not going anywhere.”

Jessica, too, was actually busy setting up Shinvi’s first birthday party, which landed exactly on the same day when Tiffany would present the jewelry to Taeyeon.

None of them said the three sacred words yet. They didn’t want to blurt it out in any way that sometimes meant nothing. They wanted it to be special. They seemed to mutually decide that confessing shouldn’t be rushed, though their feelings for each other were very obvious and no words were actually needed.

The best things shouldn't really be said-- it was to be felt.

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"Sir, I present to you... The Bridge of Stars."

Taeyeon eyed the jewelry in front of him. It was a thick bangle and the base was made of a black mineral he didn't know what was called. All over it were little diamonds scattered. The way they were placed looked calculated, but only after a long time staring at it. At first it didn't seem like it. Then there was a huge blue stone in the middle of the scattered diamonds, gleaming. The whole thing looked so fragile, just like how love was.

"Sir, the blue topaz in the middle represents the moon and the stone meant beauty, joy and splendor. The diamonds are the stars. The stone means true love, passion and commitment. The base was a mineral especially colored black so it would represent as the sky. The diamonds and the topaz are like the two of you combined, Sir."

Taeyeon was speechless for a while, and when he finally found the words to say, he was stuttering.

"T-this is... this is beautiful. I'm sure she'll love it."

"It's the thought that counts, Sir."

He tore his eyes away from the beautiful piece and looked at Tiffany. "Why the name?"

"It's inspired by the folktale The Land of Stars."

"You do know that?"

"I do, Sir."

He laughed, totally delighted. "I do too! In fact, I am a big fan of the story. It's so passionate."

Tiffany smiled. "I'm a big fan, too, Sir."

Suddenly, he toned down and looked seriously at her. "Tiffany."

"Yes, Mr. President?"

"I heard the news of your wedding a couple of years ago and the divorce just recently."

Tiffany's smile didn't fade but she looked down at her lap.

“Have you thought of her when you made this?”

“She’s the greatest part of me, Sir. I don’t think I’ll be able to do anything if it’s not for her.”

He knew he’s stepping over the boundaries. He might be the President, but he knew he shouldn’t be getting too personal with Tiffany.

“Have you seen The Bridge of Stars, Tiffany? The real one.”

“Actually, I did... with Jessica.”

He smiled. “I’ll tell you a little secret.”

Tiffany looked questioningly at him.

He settled a hand on her shoulder and scooted closer to whisper to her ears, “Those who can see it are the couples made from Heaven. Only them and no one else. Ordinary couples don’t see it.”

Tiffany’s eyes grew wide as he settled to rest his back on the backrest of the couch. Only the couples made from Heaven? Then that meant Mr. Choi and his wife... Jessica and Tiffany...

“Is that true, Sir?”

Taeyeon merely smiled and nodded. “I saw it with my girlfriend once, and that’s how I knew she’s the one for me. We wait for it every year now.”

Tiffany just kept looking at him with wide eyes, still unable to process the information.

“How else could such a beautiful phenomenon not be broadcasted on the television and publicized? It’s because not everyone can see it. Only the destined ones. I have not known of a single person who saw it. It was always a couple.”

Tiffany understood it now. He wasn’t lying. So whatever happened to her and Jessica wasn’t their grandfathers’ doings? It was long written in the stars. Their destinies were already tied even before they were born.

Jessica... was her fated one.

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“Jessica!” Tiffany ran out of her car, into the front door and was about to sprint up the stairs had Jessica not called her from the living room. She turned around and ran into the living room in her high heels. She found Jessica on the sofa, watching TV, while Shinvi was on a crib close to her.

Jessica stood up and stared questioningly at Tiffany, who looked really excited, and the next thing she knew she was being strangled by Tiffany’s tight embrace.

“God... I missed you,” Tiffany breathed as she panted.

Jessica slowly lifted her arms and hugged Tiffany back as tight. “I missed you more.”

They stayed that way for a long time, the sound of the TV and the sounds Shinvi made with his rattle drowned somewhere far and all they could hear were their heartbeats and breathings. Tiffany wouldn’t mind spending the rest of her life like this, just cuddling with Jessica. She missed the feeling of Jessica’s soft body against her more than anything. She missed the feeling of Jessica’s silky hair in between her fingers. She missed the way it tickled her neck and chin. She missed the way Jessica’s breath hit her neck. She just basically missed everything about Jessica.

Right at that moment, she knew she hadn’t fallen in love with Jessica; rather, she *grew* in love. Everything that fall gets broken, but everything that grows couldn’t shrink smaller.

Tiffany pulled away and cupped Jessica’s cheeks as the latter wrapped her arms around Tiffany’s waist. They would never get tired of looking at each other’s beautiful faces. Everything was pushed at the back of their minds then. Nothing mattered as long as they have each other.

“Do you know what the World’s President told me?” Tiffany whispered.

Jessica shook her head carefully, afraid to break the spell.

“He told me we’re fated.”

Jessica chuckled. “I thought everything that happened to us are fixed?”

Tiffany chuckled too and closed her eyes, resting her forehead against Jessica’s, still not letting go of her face. Jessica closed her eyes, too. She bit her lower lip as she breathed in Tiffany’s scent. They could stay that way for all they would care. They loved it that way and whoever would take them away from that moment would be sent straight to hell.

They slowly rubbed noses, brushed cheeks, grazed necks. They did everything with their faces just to enjoy the proximity, but didn’t kiss. Not yet. That would have to wait. They just wanted to enjoy the moment though they were just practically brushing against each other, effectively emitting heat.

Until Jessica pulled her face away from Tiffany and cupped her face too, so they were cupping each other’s faces.

“Jessica, you mean a lot to me... I can’t imagine a future without you. D’you know I almost died when you chose to stay away from me? It was like living hell on earth.”

It wasn’t a direct confession, but Jessica sure liked it better than the cliché ones.

“It was the worst decision I ever made.”

Tiffany wrapped her arms around Jessica’s waist as the latter touched her face with her soft palms. She closed her eyes to enjoy the sweet sensation.

“Mom once told me that fate brings people together, but it’s still up to us to make it happen...”

Tiffany felt Jessica’s breath hit her face, and instantly knew she was leaning in, maybe for a kiss. Jessica also brushed her hair backward so it wasn’t covering her face as her other arm wrapped around Tiffany’s neck.

“We may meet someone by chance, but staying with that someone is still a choice...”

Jessica tilted her head and her eyes fluttered close.

“And I choose to stay with you.”

At the last second, Tiffany peeked. Jessica, indeed, was leaning in for a kiss. A mere centimeter left. Tiffany closed her eyes again and also tilted her head so nothing would get in the way. Her arms unconsciously tightened around Jessica’s waist in anticipation.

Their lips barely even grazed when someone spoke from the entrance of the living room.

“Hey, lovebirds!”

Startled, they immediately entangled themselves and looked the opposite way. Tiffany started breathing heavily in irritation and her hands turned into tight fists. She would surely kill the owner of that annoying voice.

Jessica faced the intruder and smiled. Her teeth were tightly closed, though, and her jaws tensed. Her smile was obviously forced.

“Yuri, how nice of you to come here *exactly* at this moment,” she said between gritted teeth.

Yuri was obviously suppressing a laugh because there was a stupid grin on her face. “Well, isn’t it Shinvi’s birthday? Where’s everyone?”

“Where’s Yoona?” Tiffany asked so she could do something other than punch Yuri square in the face with her left fist.

“She’s just parking the car. She’ll be he—”

“Hello!” Yoona barged into the front door with her loud yell, carrying two boxes of presents, one from her and one from Yuri.

“Geez! No need to shout!” Tiffany complained.

Yoona copied the grin on her girlfriend’s face and put an arm around her waist, expertly handling the two boxes with the other. “Why do you look so pissed, Tiffany?”

“Because your pea-brained of a girlfriend—”

“Hello, everyone!” Taeyeon came into the house with a present in hand, too. Seohyun came in next and merely waved with a smile, also with a gift.

Soon, the living room was filled with Tiffany, Jessica, Sunny, Taeyeon, Yoona, Yuri, Hyoyeon, Sooyoung, Seohyun, Ernest, Sophia, Leo, Albert and Krystal, who flew all the way from Korea for Shinvi’s birthday. The whole house was filled with chatters as they ate the food Sunny and her mother had cooked. They even baked the three-layered cake. Everyone talked about almost anything and fooled around.

It was a simple birthday party, but since the family was almost complete, it was the best.

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The party ended late, around nine at night. Albert and Krystal were the first ones to leave because they have to take a flight back home. Leo, Ernest and Sophia were next, saying “We’re getting old. We need to rest early, and Leo’s too young to stay up late” before kissing the birthday boy goodnight. The rest of the girls, except Sunny and her mother, took off soon after because it was really getting late, they still had works the next day.

The house was empty now, save for Jessica, Tiffany and the sleeping Shinvi, as if he was tired too after playing with his guests. Mrs. Lee was staying at Sunny’s room. They were the ones who took care of the house when Jessica went back to Korea.

Tiffany took Shinvi from the crib and carried him carefully, afraid to wake him. She walked to the direction of the grand staircase and stooped when Jessica held her arm, stopping her.

“I’ll just carry him up. It’s getting late. The earlier you leave, the safer it is.”

“Are you sure?” Tiffany asked.

Jessica smiled and nodded.

Tiffany faced her and carefully passed Shinvi to her. Jessica put her arms under him and was about to take him had Tiffany's forehead not bumped into hers.

"Ow."

"Sorry."

Their eyes met and they blushed, but no one made an effort to move. Jessica felt her heart tripped over itself and landed face first, hitching her breath. Tiffany's eyes were glowing, and they were staring back at her meaningfully. She felt her whole body tingled at the intensity of the stare.

Everyone had gone home now. No one's going to interrupt them anymore. But just to make sure, Tiffany moved fast. She pecked Jessica on the lips and pulled away immediately, as if experimenting, testing the waters. Receiving no objection from Jessica, she slowly leaned in and captured her lips again.

It felt different at first, almost foreign. When was the last time they kissed? But it eventually felt familiar as they continued. The chaste kiss turned into a heated one as they lifted up their chins, closed their eyes and opened their mouths for each other, but no tongues involved. Their lips just locked, as if one was half of the other, and it felt really, really great.

Shinvi continued sleeping peacefully though already squashed in between his parents, not having any idea that they were so feeling like making him a sibling right now.

Jessica wished her arms weren't trapped under Shinvi's weight so she could wrap them around Tiffany and pull her in closer until they'd mold in one body. In her desire to be closer to Tiffany, she had already taken a step forward and pushed her head forward. Tiffany's body was already leaning backwards with the force.

Tiffany tasted dark and sweet to even ignore. Whenever they were kissing, there was this thing inside Jessica that was always screaming for more. Once wasn't enough, especially now that she could totally feel how much Tiffany loved her. She never wanted something this much before.

But, alas, it was Tiffany who decided to pull away first, slightly panting.

Jessica wanted more, so she leaned in again and just settled on a last peck. Their foreheads remained in contact.

"Or I might just stay," Tiffany breathed.

Jessica kept her eyes closed, and bit her lower lip, embarrassed of her aggressiveness. It took a while before she replied in a shy whisper, "Can you?"

Suddenly, Tiffany remembered her plans for tomorrow. She spent the rest of the day planning for it. She secretly talked to their friends for help and she still had to get some things done tonight. Obviously, no matter how much her mind, heart and body wanted, she couldn't stay. They could still do this next time anyway. They have all the time in the world.

"Actually... I can't."

Jessica nodded, but noticeably disappointed, still with her eyes closed. "Okay."

"I'll go ahead." Tiffany removed her arms under Shinvi so Jessica was carrying him now. "I'll see you tomorrow." She kissed Shinvi on his cheek and Jessica on her forehead before leaving with an additional bounce to her steps.

Jessica stayed rooted there, eyes closed. She could still taste Tiffany on her tongue. Her face was still flushed from Tiffany's kisses, her cheeks and lips a rosy deep red.

She wished Tiffany just stayed.

CHAPTER 17: 'HAPPINESS'



CHAPTER 17: 'HAPPINESS'

Weird, was the first word Jessica thought after reading Tiffany's message.

Ride your car and press destination number two on your GPS. Go alone.

-Tiffany

What was that about? How was Tiffany able to touch her car's GPS? Why did she have to go alone?

Despite the questions, Jessica put the tablet PC down on her bed and got herself ready.

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"Geez, Taeng! I'm nervous!" Tiffany shifted her weight from her right foot to the other as she spoke to Taeyeon through her wristwatch.

"Relax! It's not even your wedding! Why are you nervous?"

"How can I not?"

"You don't have to worry. The whole world already knows what she'd say."

Tiffany messed up her hair. "Ugh! Whatever. Anyway, are you sure she would find the way here?"

"Yes, of course," Taeyeon answered smugly. "I know every inch of that place like the back of my hand, and Sooyoung did a great job with the riddles."

Tiffany sighed. "Okay. I have to go. I have to calm myself down."

“Alright. Last thing, Couz—breathe in, breathe out.”

Taeyeon cut the call and Tiffany started pacing back and forth, breathing in and breathing out. She couldn’t really understand why she was nervous. Taeyeon was right, the whole world already knew what Jessica would say, but Tiffany still felt nervous nevertheless.

“Relax, Tiffany. She’s coming. You have to look cool.”

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Jessica was surprised when she found herself standing in front of the entrance of a labyrinth of tall bushes after letting the car bring her to destination number two on her GPS. She couldn’t see anything but tall, trimmed bushes, acting like walls, guarding whatever was in the middle, and a yellow bicycle right in front of her.

She walked closer to the bike and flicked off a note posted on its seat. She read it at least twice before realizing that it was a riddle. It was just a simple riddle, which answer was pointing her to the next destination, and there was a P.S.

Use the bicycle. It’s going to be a loooong travel if you’ll walk.

There was no name or anything, but the ‘PS’ said it all. Who else loved riddles and often used ‘PS’ on her notes? Jessica chuckled at Sooyoung’s thoughtfulness.

She climbed up the bicycle and started going to the direction of the answer to the riddle. When she reached it, she found another note posted on a tall street lamp, another riddle. She answered almost fifteen riddles and answered them easily, following its directions, turning and winding inside the labyrinth. After the sixteenth riddle, she found herself at the end point. She climbed down the bicycle and walked out of the tall bushes.

And halted with what she saw.

From where she came from, the bushes seemed dull and merely green and tall. But seeing it from the middle of the labyrinth, Jessica realized they were actually blossoming with colorful little flowers. The ground was tiled with old bricks. In the middle of the labyrinth was a white gazebo, its paint almost peeling off because of its age, but it just gave more romantic feeling in the air. The gazebo itself was decorated with wreaths of flowers and in the middle of it... was Tiffany.

Tiffany has her head low, and when she lifted it up, a bright smile was painted on her lips.

Jessica couldn’t help but smile too and ran a couple of yards to stand two feet in front of Tiffany, under the roof of the gazebo.

Tiffany turned sheepish. "I'm sorry if this isn't much."

"You know I love anything that associates with nature."

"I was hoping you'd say that." Tiffany chuckled. "Anyway..." She looked down at the small, red velvet box in her hands and Jessica looked down at it too.

Tears instantly filled her eyes. She understood now what Sunny meant earlier before she left. Sunny said, "I'm happy for you." And thinking about it, she knew now how destination number two was programmed to her GPS. It was probably Sunny who did that.

A slow song suddenly emitted from the small speakers on the gazebo's ceiling and Jessica knew it was Hyoyeon's doing. Who else was associated with music?

"Yoona and Yuri actually gave me a speech to memorize..."

Jessica chuckled amidst the tears. Of course. Yoona and Yuri helped too. *Did they all planned about this right in front of me yesterday?*

"What?"

"Nothing." Jessica waved it off. "Continue."

"Well, as I was saying... they gave me something to memorize, and I memorized it overnight... but when I saw you three minutes ago... I forgot it all." Tiffany scratched the back of her head. "So I'll just say whatever I have in mind."

She took a deep breath to compose herself so she'd stop stuttering. She looked straight at Jessica's eyes and the words just came out of her mouth.

"Jessica, you're the only one who succeeded in changing me. I was so selfish back then but now I'm selfless because of you. I can't even remember what I was before I married you, and what I was before we had a family. All I can remember are the times I've spent with you. Those times were the happiest times of my life, Jessica, and I'm hoping I'd still get the chance to spend the rest of it with you."

"I know I've failed you a lot of times already. I know I've hurt you, intentionally or unintentionally. And I'm sorry for all of that. I won't do them again. Just say yes and I'll make you happy for the rest of your life."

Tiffany took a step forward and kneeled, offering Jessica the ring inside the box.

"Jessica Jung, will you marry me? Again?"

Jessica's throat was tight and tears were streaming down her face. She couldn't talk anymore, so she just nodded and Tiffany removed their old wedding ring she still refused to remove.

"Throw this away. This ring reminds me of those times I was being stupid. I just had mine removed." She threw it over her shoulder and showed her empty ring finger. "I'll give you a better one on our wedding." She then put the engagement ring on Jessica's left ring finger. Tiffany stood up and Jessica immediately enveloped her in a tight hug. Tiffany smiled brightly as she stroked Jessica's hair, just letting her cry.

"No more contracts?" Jessica asked.

Tiffany lightly laughed. "Definitely no more contracts."

They hugged for a moment before Jessica spoke again.

"How are we gonna get out of this place? I can't even remember where I came from."

"That's the second phase of the plan." Tiffany pulled away and mischievously smiled. "Do you want to see the place aerial?"

Not waiting for an answer, Tiffany clicked her fingers. A minute later, a helicopter started hovering down on the left side of the gazebo and they walked over to it. The air was too strong and they were thankful that they were both wearing pants. Before climbing up, Jessica caught a logo on the tail of the helicopter. *Seo Airlines*.

"Did you guys plan for this yesterday?" Jessica asked once they were inside the back compartment and seated comfortably.

The plane started hovering up and Tiffany answered sheepishly, "Well... kinda."

They wore the earphones as instructed by the pilot. The helicopter was high up in the air now and Tiffany and Jessica's hands intertwined as they looked down at the beauty of the labyrinth. It was so wide and big. The tall bushes created intricate designs and in the heart of it was the gazebo. Jessica thought it was beautiful when she was down there, but it was more beautiful from up in the sky.

Jessica couldn't help but find this really romantic. Looking down at the beautiful view, holding Tiffany's hand and knowing she wouldn't go anywhere—there was nothing more blissful than this. And the fact that all of their friends had helped for this to become successful gladdened her more.

She always believed that friends were angels who lift us up when our wings had trouble remembering how to fly. She could never be thankful enough for having them.

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Sunny was resting her head on Taeyeon's right arm as they lay on the bed in Shinvi's room, the little boy sleeping peacefully in his crib. Taeyeon was absentmindedly stroking Sunny's hair while the latter played with Taeyeon's left ear. Taeyeon suddenly chuckled.

"Tiffany was so freaking out earlier. I wonder how they're doing now."

"Probably having the best of their lives," Sunny answered.

"Probably," Taeyeon agreed. She suddenly turned serious as she played with Sunny's hair. "Sunny, are you still not ready?"

Sunny nuzzled closer as she shook her head. "I'm sorry."

Taeyeon had been asking for her hand. She already even asked Mrs. Lee. But Sunny wasn't ready just yet. She's the breadwinner in the family for she was the first born. She wanted to settle her mother and her siblings first before getting married. Their sake was her priority.

Yes, Taeyeon was filthy rich, but Sunny doesn't want to burden her with the problem of her family. She doesn't want it to look like she's with Taeyeon because of her money. And she hasn't even met Taeyeon's family yet. Maybe they were like those evil people in the TV dramas or book novels.

"It's alright. I don't wanna push you. I can wait till you're ready. Just knowing you're mine gives me the contentment."

Sunny lay on her left side and put her arm across Taeyeon's collar bones. She softly kissed her right ear before pressing her nose on the latter's cheek and whispering, "I'm yours... and you're mine."

Later that afternoon, they had to entangle themselves because Jessica and Tiffany finally came home. Tiffany started moving her things back in their house to live with her fiancé.

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Dad... I'm sorry I only had the chance to visit now. You know what I've been through. I had to make sure my mind isn't messed up anymore before I can face you.

Dad, I'm sorry for what I did to Tiffany, Jessica and Seohyun. I was blinded then. I'm really sorry. I thought that was what you wanted me to do, but it just turned out that I, your own daughter, don't know you. You've always been a great man, of course you wanted me to just forgive Tiffany. You just fulfilled your duty. You're a hero, Dad, and I don't deserve to be your child because I'm a villain. Before. Not anymore now. And that's because of Hyoyeon.

Actually, Dad, I just helped Tiffany to propose a wedding to Jessica. I know they're happy together, like how happy I am with Hyoyeon. Dad, this woman sitting beside me, she's Hyoyeon. You brought her to me on that fateful night, didn't you? I know you gave her to me because she needs me, and I need her too. She saved me on my darkest moment, Dad. She's always been there for me. Thank you for introducing her to me, Dad...

Hyoyeon watched silently as Sooyoung talked to her father through her thoughts. Sooyoung had her hands clasped together as she kneeled in front of Mr. Choi's grave, tears rolling down her cheeks, and Hyoyeon was kneeling next to her.

Hyoyeon couldn't help but realize how different Sooyoung was right now than she was before. She became more rational and more confident. The changes in Sooyoung were fast and it was easy to spot. At least for Hyoyeon, because she knew Sooyoung from inside and out.

This was the first time Sooyoung visited her father's grave, and she did it with Hyoyeon next to her. It was so sweet of her.

Sooyoung was finally done talking to her father and she stood up, wiping her tears, Hyoyeon following suit. Sooyoung bowed and Hyoyeon, too, before walking away. Sooyoung took her hand and smiled at her.

Hyoyeon immediately knew Sooyoung introduced her to Mr. Choi and she said good things about her.

She smiled back and they remained comfortably silent as they continued to walk back to where they parked their car.

Hyoyeon looked at Sooyoung. She was focused straight ahead. There was a strength in her grasp—that of an independent and determined woman. Her fingers wrapped around Hyoyeon's with the comfort of innate acceptance. No hesitation.

Right then, they knew none of them would ever let go.

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"Y'know, Yuri, we've been together since forever but Jessica and Tiffany are not, yet they're about to get married for the second time now... How about us?"

Yuri blinked thrice, fast. She was taken aback with Yoona's question. They were just silently watching the movie in Yoona's house's home theatre like what they always do and Yoona suddenly asked the question.

"Yoona... you know I want to save money sufficient to support us when we get married before I'll ask you to marry me. I don't want to be a burden to my parents. I don't want you to work. When we're finally married, after a whole day's work, I'll find you waiting for me at home and you'll welcome me in your arms. Then you'll kiss my stresses away. That's my dream."

"But?"

“But if I can’t save enough, than you’ll have to work. When I got home, there are tendencies that you’re already asleep or not home yet because you’re working too. I don’t want that. I want you to focus only on me, and maybe our child too, if we’ll adopt.”

“D’you know what my dream is?” Yoona rested her head on Yuri’s right shoulder and pulled her feet up beside her on the seat.

“What?”

“Wait for the time you get home and I’ll massage your tired body from the whole day’s work. I’ll massage your temples when you’re having headaches and I’ll rub your feet when they ached from wearing high-heeled shoes every day. I’ll cook for you. I’ll wait for you to get home even though you’re having an overtime. I’ll be there when you sleep and when you wake up. I’ll kiss all your stresses away... That’s my dream, Yul.”

Yuri put an arm around her. “One more year and Kwon’s Construction is going to be mine, then we’ll get married. Wait for me.”

Yoona nodded. “I will, of course.” And they continued watching the movie.

The truth was, she could wait till forever.

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This, at last, was happiness. To wake every day being glad of where you were, what you would do, whom you would meet, the way each day would begin and end. To move through the world feeling protected and cherished by one person in particular, someone who seemed kinder and braver and sweeter than anyone else you’d ever known. To be truly loved and truly love in return.

Once it had seemed so unattainable, this sense of well-being. But once you found it, it was easy being happy.

Seohyun could hardly remember why her friends had once felt so hopeless. But she didn’t have to remember it now. Her friends were happy together, and she was happy, too, for them. She never felt envy because she was single. She knew hers would come soon. She just has to be patient because the longer the wait, the sweeter it was.

WARNING: CAUTION-- WOMEN AT WORK. CHOKING HAZARD. KEEP OUT OF READ OF CHILDREN. THE FOLLOWING SCENES ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR KIDS UP TO 15 Y/O. STRONG PARENTAL GUIDANCE. AND WHATEVER WARNINGS YOU COULD EVER THINK OF.

SPECIAL CHAPTER:



I REALLY DO

After a year of preparation, Jessica and Tiffany's most awaited wedding day has finally arrived. They both agreed to get married on the same date they got married before. Tiffany couldn't understand why preparations took so long when the wedding would be done only in a day. They were able to finish it in fifteen days before, why did it take so long this time?

Before, the wedding was at the beach, but this time it was more traditional—at church, because that's how Jessica wanted it to be. The place was decorated with carpets, columns and mostly flowers in white color. The family relatives, business associates, and friends dressed in suits and yellow gowns filled the wooden pews. They made it as exclusive as possible, because too many media men and camera crews would shatter the holiness of the event.

Tiffany couldn't stop pacing at the end of the aisle, where she was waiting for her bride. She agreed to wear the pants this time, since she was the one who proposed. Also, she's Shinvi's father so it was obvious that she was the man in the relationship. She muttered, "Oh my gosh... oh my gosh..." repeatedly as she paced to and fro.

"For the nth time, Tiff, stop pacing!" Chansung complained. He was the Best Man.

"How can I stop pacing? I'm nervous!" Tiffany retorted.

He held her shoulders to stop her from walking. "Breathe in, breathe out. Relax."

Tiffany did as told to no avail. "It's not working!"

Just then, the door of the church opened and one by one, the Ring, Bible and Coin Bearer, Groom's Men, Bride's Maid and the other attendants came in.

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Albert noticed Jessica's grip on his arm tightened when the door of the church opened. They were outside as the other personnel came in one by one and they were at the end of the line. He looked at his left but couldn't really see Jessica's face under the white veil.

"I know your Mom's happy up there, Jess, watching over us."

Jessica breathed in deeply and her hold loosened.

She was sad that her mother wasn't around to witness her real wedding, but she knew Albert was right. Judy was happy, that's for sure. Jessica could already see Judy's smiling face as she walk down the aisle later. She knew Judy was glad to see from up there her child getting her happiness. Jessica knew she's proud.

Shinvi, the Ring, Bible and Coin Bearer all in one, had already taken his seat in front of the altar, and the other attendants had already came in, Jessica and Albert were the only ones left. Jessica had her right arm hooked on Albert's left arm and she held her bouquet with her right hand. She slightly lifted up her long and heavy skirt with her left hand as they took a step forward. She felt the red carpet under her high-heeled shoes and refused to look up, only focusing on the floor. She couldn't look at Tiffany at the end of the aisle. She closed her eyes and trusted Albert to guide her.

Behind her lids, she saw her past replayed. Starting from when she met Tiffany, married her, lived with her, learned to love her, but then divorced her. She remembered all the things that had happened to them and eventually lead them to this—they getting married again.

Those were the most meaningful parts of her life. Too much things have already changed in the past years. Too many dramas already happened. But this time, right now, was the best. This marriage was for real, not anymore fixed. *This is real.*

She hadn't noticed they already reached the end of the aisle until Albert stopped walking. He let go of her and went to hug Tiffany and exchange words with her.

"I trust my precious daughter to you again for the second time, Tiffany," he said as he pulled away from the hug and Tiffany realized that there were tears in his eyes. "Don't ever hurt her again."

It was ridiculous, but Tiffany felt her eyes teared up as well. "I won't, Dad."

Meanwhile, Ernest had gone over to Jessica and hugged her too. “I know my daughter could be really stupid and stubborn most of the time, but please try to understand her.”

“You don’t have to remind me of that, Dad.”

Ernest let go of Jessica and hooked Tiffany’s arm through her arm. Tiffany smiled brightly at her and Jessica smiled back, but she knew Tiffany couldn’t see it through the veil.

“I love you so much, Jess.” Tiffany was focused ahead, but her voice and the squeeze on Jessica’s hand on her arm showed her sincerity. “I really do.”

Jessica didn’t say anything as they kneeled in front of the altar and the wedding proceeded. She only said how much she loved Tiffany when she said, “I do,” the most sincere way possible.

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“You may now kiss the bride.”

Tiffany and Jessica faced each other. The whole church had gone very silent, anticipating as Tiffany removed the veil with her trembling hands. Jessica looked so serene. Her make-up was light, almost natural, and she couldn’t stop smiling, making Tiffany smile too. Tiffany merely stared at her for quite some time, memorizing her features.

This woman was the greatest gift she received from above. She didn’t even ask, but He gave Jessica to her, and she would give herself to Jessica. She vowed in front of Him to love her and be her partner for the rest of her life, and she would surely fulfill that. She wouldn’t let anything get in between them. She wouldn’t let the coming trials to break them apart again. Till death do their parts. She would be brave, all for Jessica and Shinvi.

Instead of cupping Jessica’s cheeks, Tiffany wrapped her left arm around her waist to support her as she dipped her, reliving their position when they first kissed, though it wouldn’t be accidental this time. She brushed Jessica’s cheek with her right hand as the latter put her arms around her neck.

“Kiss me now.”

So Tiffany more than gladly did, passionately, with a promise to forever take care of Jessica conveyed in it. The guests cheered and applauded. But the newlyweds noticed and heard nothing.

~.~

At the reception hall, all of the girls had gathered in front of the stage. Jessica climbed up and held her bouquet up.

“Get ready,” she said as she faced her back to them.

Yoona elbowed Yuri and whispered, “I’m going to get this.” She didn’t have any idea that all of the girls there were also thinking the same, except Seohyun. She didn’t really want to catch it, but she participated anyway.

Jessica threw the bouquet over her head. The girls squealed as they fought over for the flower before the sounds suddenly died like it was sucked out of the room. Jessica turned around and was surprised to see the one who caught it. Seohyun.

“Yah! Seohyun-ah!” Yoona complained.

“I-I...” Seohyun stammered, flushed with all the eyes staring at her. “It just... landed on my hands.” It was the truth.

Yuri pulled her fuming girlfriend out of the scene before she could claw out Seohyun’s eyes. The flower didn’t mean that much, anyway, she reasoned.

“Now, for the garter! Groom!” the master of the ceremonies called. It was Sophia.

The girls cleared out the space and the men filled it as Tiffany climbed up the stage. She led Jessica to a chair and sat her down.

“I’m going to get the garter now, okay?”

Jessica nodded and Tiffany put her hand under Jessica’s skirt. Her right hand stroked Jessica’s left leg up to her thigh and Jessica couldn’t help but to emit girlish giggles as she slightly squirmed. Everyone chanted and some whistled. Tiffany suddenly stopped there, and she leaned in to whisper to Jessica’s left ear, hand not leaving Jessica’s thigh.

“How about we tease them for a while?”

Jessica was sitting sideways, her right side facing the audience. From the view of the audience, they couldn’t really see Tiffany’s face because she was hiding behind Jessica’s head, but Jessica was well aware that she has a naughty grin on her face.

Tiffany pushed her hand forward, past the garter she was supposed to remove, and Jessica involuntarily squirmed. She blushed as she bit her lower lip.

“What are you doing?” she said, wanting to be angry but feeling a rushing, queasy excitement instead.

Tiffany was unable to answer when Taeyeon shouted from her table, “Hey, Couz! What’s taking your hand so long in there?!”

Everyone laughed, even Tiffany, and Jessica blushed deeper. In one swift motion, Tiffany finally yanked the garter off Jessica’s leg and waved it in the air.

“Got it!”

The men positioned in front of the stage, Tiffany faced her back to them and threw the garter over her head. She turned around immediately and eyed the one who caught it.

He was a fine young man, almost as tall as HyunJoong, who was standing next to him. His frame was thin but still manly. His man bangs were too long it almost covered his slit-like eyes, his skin was pale, eyes sleepy-looking, lips thin and he’s wearing black man earrings. Tiffany had a hard time remembering who he was, but she’s sure she knew him.

“Yonghwa!” Jessica suddenly shouted, delighted.

The man named Yonghwa shrugged and smiled crookedly, the garter in his right hand. “I didn’t mean to get this. Really, Jess.”

He was Jessica’s cousin. His father was Albert’s brother. Jessica had been close to him when she was a kid. They were almost of the same age, he was just older by months. He was always present in the previous family gatherings and he was really important to Jessica. He’s one of the important parts of her childhood. So she invited him to her wedding.

Jessica waved it off. “That’s alright. Now, come up here!”

Yonghwa came up and Seohyun too. It was really awkward. They didn’t really know each other and Seohyun couldn’t help but blush. The funny thing was, even Yonghwa was blushing as they stood a foot apart from each other.

Jessica elbowed Tiffany. “Don’t they look cute together?”

Tiffany chuckled. “You think this is fate?”

“Why d’you keep talking about fate?”

Sophia ushered Yonghwa to get ready before sitting Seohyun on a chair. Seohyun couldn’t help blush deeper and deeper when Yonghwa knelt in front of her and passed the garter through her right foot. But he stopped after passing by her knee. He settled the garter there, right on top of her kneecap.

He stood up and brushed off the dirt on his knee before smiling warmly at Seohyun. He offered his right hand to her and helped her up.

“You deserve to be respected,” he whispered as he raised their connected hands.

Everyone cheered, but Seohyun was too busy blushing to notice anything. But she had to admit something—she had been eyeing him way back in the church earlier and he’s really cute, and gentleman.

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The slow, melodious song played and it soothed Jessica as she danced minuet with Tiffany. The smile on her face never left. She was too happy she couldn’t even explain it. Tiffany has both her arms wrapped around Jessica’s waist and the latter has hers on Tiffany’s neck. Their cheeks were brushing and their breaths hit each other’s ear.

“I’m so happy right now,” Tiffany whispered seriously.

Having Jessica in her arms like this felt really great. Knowing that this girl was all hers to keep for the rest of her life really pleased her, and she couldn’t be thankful enough.

Jessica softly kissed her right ear and Tiffany shuddered. “I love you, Tiffany.”

Tiffany felt her heart fluttered. Jessica’s voice blended with the beautiful song. It was just so beautiful Tiffany felt like it caressed her soul.

Jessica looked over Tiffany’s shoulder and saw Sunny and Taeyeon dancing. They were whispering sweet nothings to each other, and were actually giggling. Hyoyeon and Sooyoung too, though the latter was way taller than the former. Yoona has stopped fuming now and was enjoying slow dancing with Yuri. Sophia and Ernest were dancing too, even Leo, with a girl Jessica didn’t know. Albert and Krystal were somewhere at the tables, taking care of Shinvi.

Tiffany and Jessica took two slow steps and Jessica’s view changed. Jessica saw Seohyun and Yonghwa then, and she silently chuckled. They really looked cute together. Though the lights were dimmed, it was obvious that they were still blushing.

Everyone looked so happy.

Tiffany and Jessica continued dancing for a long time. They gave themselves over to the moment. They could stay that way forever and never once would they get tired. Having each other in their arms was what they had lived for. They felt like they belong here, in each other’s arms, and they wouldn’t mind dying there.

There was nothing left but happiness.

They might have been met because of their grandfathers' dying wish even before they were born, they might have hated the two old men before, but they were glad about it now. They never knew their grandfathers' dying wish would be the best thing that had happened in their lives. Who knew something they loathed before could be such a great thing now?

They refused to let go of each other as the night deepened. It was the most special day of their lives. How could they ever let go of each other?

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Yonghwa smelled really good, Seohyun realized. His strong hands were firmly rested on the small of her back and she felt really safe. She never really danced with a boy before, and she had to admit that this was nothing like she expected. This was better.

Yonghwa cleared his throat and Seohyun looked down, shy.

"Seohyun, right?"

Seohyun nodded.

"I'm Yonghwa, and I wanna thank you for accepting the dance with me." He sounded shy, too.

"It's nothing."

"But, sadly, I have to go now." He watched as Seohyun lifted up her face and saw disappointment in her eyes. "Don't worry! I'm not leaving the place, I just have to come up stage."

"Oh... okay," she said hesitantly. Just when she was starting to enjoy it.

Yonghwa twirled her one last time before leading her to the table her and her friends shared. "I'll get back to you later."

He jogged past the dance floor and came up the stage. He took the microphone and cleared his throat before speaking, "Excuse me." Everyone stopped what they were doing and eyed him. "I just want to say that I'm going to sing a song. Most of you might not understand it 'coz it's Korean, but the song is about a parted couple. It expresses regrets of the writer of the song being parted from her or his loved one." He pointed at Jessica and Tiffany. "I'm not singing this to remind you that you once divorced, but to make you realize how hard it is to part from the one you dearly love. So, Jessica and Tiffany, don't ever part again, okay?"

The lights dimmed again, leaving only a spotlight on Yonghwa and the newlyweds, and the orchestra changed keys. The melody started soft and slow, and the couples moved in slow in sync waves. Seohyun couldn't take her eyes off him as he started singing.

*Neul ttokgateun haneure neul gateun haru
Geudaega eomneun geot malgoneun dallajinge eomneunde
Nan bonaenjul aratjyo da namgimeobsi
Anijyo anijyo nan ajik geudaereul mot bonaetjyo*

He looked so immersed in the song by the way he closed his eyes to feel the music coursing through his veins. Seohyun's heart shuddered. His voice was so smooth and flawless and heavenly. She felt like she's starting to like him now. She's not even exaggerating.

*Geuriwo geuriwoseo geudaega geuriwoseo
Maeilnan honjaseo mangeudaereulbureu gobulleobwayo
Bogopa bogopaseo geudaega bogopaseo
Ijenan seupgwancheoreom geudaeireumman bureuneyo
Oneuldo*

The distance of the stage from the tables was at least six yards, with the packed dance floor in the middle, but Seohyun could see him clearly. The spotlight fell down on him like something from the heaven, casting shadows on his gentle face. He lifted up his chin and faced Seohyun's direction. Seohyun couldn't really tell because of the shadows in his face, but she thought he was staring at her as he sang.

Haru haru gajugeul geotmangateun de eotteokehaeyahaeyo

*Saranghae saranghaeyo geudaereul saranghaeyo
Maljo chamotagoseo geudaereul geureoke bonaenneyo
Mianhae mianhaeyo naemari deullinayo
Dwineuseun naegobaegul geudaendeureul suisseulkkayo
Saranghaeyo*

Just when Seohyun decided she could stay there forever and listen to his voice, the song ended. The orchestra played another soft melody and the dancing couples didn't even notice it. He boarded down the stage then, heading towards Seohyun's direction.

He smiled at her bashfully.

She was at a loss for words for a while. "Y-you have a beautiful voice."

"Thank you." He rubbed his nape and looked anywhere but her before he shyly offered his hand. "How about we dance again?"

Seohyun gladly took it and they went back to the dance floor. As they danced, Seohyun saw Ernest, Leo, a foreign girl, and Sophia approached the newlyweds, but she couldn't really hear them because of the distance, so she just focused on Yonghwa.

“Dear, I have something to tell you,” Sophia started and the newlyweds stopped dancing.

Tiffany was about to say something but stopped when she saw Leo’s company. “Who is she?”

Leo flushed. “She’s... she’s a friend.”

“Hi!” the girl said shyly. “I-I’m Kate. Nice to meet you.”

To her surprise, Tiffany took her hand and shook it. “It’s nice to finally meet you too. Now I know why Leo’s always missing.”

Kate and Leo blushed and Tiffany smirked. So she was right.

“Stop teasing them, Tiffany,” Sophia warned. “Anyway, I have something to tell you.”

“What? About the tradition again?” Tiffany hadn’t even heard her yet, but she was already complaining.

“Yes, about it.”

“Not again, Mom!” Tiffany whined.

“Let me finish, alright? That’s why you keep on getting things wrong, you don’t let me finish,” Sophia scolded.

Tiffany rolled her eyes. “Okay, fine. Continue.”

“We just wanna tell you that you can forget about the tradition. You can go home right at this instant and make love.” She smiled mischievously and winked. “Sunny said she’s going home to Taeyeon’s later, since her mother was back at their house and she doesn’t want to bother you. So you’ll be alone at home. I prepared the Jacuzzi. Use it well.”

“Mom!” Tiffany blushed madly. “I-I can’t believe you...”

Sophia’s smile softened and she patted Tiffany’s shoulder. “You’re welcome. Now go up stage and announce your departure.”

Hesitantly, Tiffany and Jessica came up stage and the lights brightened. Everyone’s attentions focused on them.

“I wanna thank all of you for coming. I really appreciate it. My friends, thank you for all your help,” Tiffany stated as she pointed at her gang. Yoona and Yuri raised their eyebrows suggestively, knowing the reason why they had to leave now. Hyoyeon and Sooyoung merely smiled fondly at them. Sunny and Taeyeon looked proud and happy for them. Seohyun was... well... still blushing as Yonghwa held her hand. It looked like she found herself a partner.

“We wish we could stay,” Jessica said. “But we have to go now... because... well...”

The crowd laughed and shouted something like, “Have fun!” “Go ahead! Don’t mind us!” “Best wishes!” and the likes.

They climbed down the stage, walked outside the hall and found Mr. Baek waiting beside the white limousine car. They hopped in and they were off to head home.

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Jessica tried to relax and enjoy the Jacuzzi after the whole day’s physically tiring events, but how could she if she was sharing it with Tiffany? When Tiffany held her hand under the water she felt really uneasy. Tiffany scooted closer and her left shoulder brushed against Jessica’s right. The skin contact burned Jessica’s skin and insides. Her mind was telling her she wasn’t ready, but her body was badly screaming for it.

“Jessica...”

Tiffany turned sideways and settled her right hand on Jessica’s bended left knee. She looked at Jessica’s eyes and Jessica couldn’t see lust in it... she could see love in the depths of Tiffany’s dark-brown eyes. Tiffany trailed her right hand up Jessica’s thigh, stomach, chest, shoulder, trailed it down her left arm and cupped Jessica’s hand. The motion felt so smooth because of the water’s fluidity. Jessica felt naked under the touch though they were still in their undergarments. She couldn’t understand why but she found it such a turn on.

Her heart started beating erratically fast, and the fact that her chest down was underwater didn’t really help at all. It was getting harder to breathe.

Jessica bit her lower lip, closed her eyes and dipped her chin down just as Tiffany finally moved in front of her, legs on both of Jessica’s sides. But when Tiffany kissed her right cheek, her hold on herself loosened. When Tiffany kissed the corner of her lips, it totally let go that she was the one who moved her head to taste Tiffany’s full lips.

She could never understand how Tiffany could make her do things she refused to do.

Jessica’s palms left the floor of the Jacuzzi and held on to Tiffany’s body instead. Tiffany’s body was slippery because of the water. When Tiffany deepened the kiss Jessica felt herself bury under the water. She wasn’t holding on to anything but Tiffany’s slippery body and she accidentally slipped under the surface of the water.

“Oh, my gosh! I’m so sorry!”

Jessica came out from under the water and coughed out water. She was really, really relieved that it broke Tiffany's concentration.

"No, it's okay. Don't you think we should dry up first? We don't want to wet the bed, do we?"

Just talking about 'wet' and 'bed' made their hearts jump.

Tiffany was hesitant but she nodded anyway. "Okay." She walked out of the Jacuzzi and wore a bathrobe before walking out of the spacious bathroom.

Jessica heaved a huge sigh of relief and stayed under the water until her heart calmed down.

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They started slow with Tiffany on top. She didn't want to rush things. The later the sweeter-- she had learned that. She trailed wet kisses on Jessica right shoulder as Jessica's eyes fluttered close, her right hand settled comfortably beside Jessica's left chest, close to her armpit, the left one straddled so her whole weight wouldn't fall on Jessica. They were both sans of clothes now, and their body pressed against each other perfectly. Jessica could already see the curves of Tiffany's body as she traveled her hands up and down on it, though her eyes were closed.

They could stay like that for a long time, just heating up and preparing themselves for the climax.

Tiffany was too smooth... her movements were too gentle... Jessica trusted her... she really did. She wanted to give herself over to her, all of her, like what she did the first time. She wanted to give in to the tingling sensations in every part of her body that Tiffany's kisses made. But something was holding her back.

They were both panting as their sweat acted as lubricant to their grinding bodies. Jessica nibbled on Tiffany right earlobe and Tiffany really wanted to take her then. Jessica *felt* so beautiful under her palms... so soft... she had never appreciated Jessica's body than what she did when they're making love.

"Hm," Jessica hummed when Tiffany kissed a spot on her neck, just behind her ear, next to her jaw. She had the urge to suddenly cower and hide somewhere. She felt so vulnerable under Tiffany, like she could eat her right then. But she liked it... she liked it that Tiffany felt superior to her... she liked to be Tiffany's slave.

The sound heated up every inch of Tiffany's body. She couldn't hold on anymore longer. She really wanted to take Jessica. So she stroked the left side of Jessica's body downward and settled her hand on Jessica's left thigh. She kissed Jessica's lips, pleading Jessica to let her.

"Please, let me. I promise I won't hurt you," she whispered against Jessica's lips, eyebrows knitted, eyes closed, forehead beaded with sweat.

Jessica kissed her and Tiffany thought she had finally let her, but when she moved her right hand Jessica held her wrist.

That made it. It was the third time Jessica rejected her that night.

Giving up, Tiffany breathed in deeply, kissed Jessica for the last time and collapsed down next to her, facing the ceiling. She panted as she kept her eyes closed. Jessica shifted to lie on her left side to face Tiffany. She ran her palm over Tiffany's collar bones and settled it on her left shoulder before scooting closer so her chest was brushing Tiffany's right arm.

"I'm sorry," she hoarsely whispered against Tiffany's ear, her eyes were closed too but her face looked pained. "I just... I just don't wanna get pregnant yet."

Tiffany sighed before facing Jessica, the latter's hand settling on the nook of her neck. She mustered up a small smile as she finally opened her eyes. "It's alright. Don't worry, I understand."

Jessica refused to open her eyes and kissed her deeply. "I really want to..."

"You don't have to push yourself." Tiffany respected her, but she couldn't really understand how Jessica could still delay this. They were almost at it. How could she still hold it at bay?

Jessica's legs had been tightly closed the whole night, and she finally parted them when she slid her right leg in between Tiffany's. "But I really want to." Her voice almost sounded pleading and pained. Tiffany didn't know if it was just her or her voice really sounded arousing. Or maybe it was the action.

Tiffany groaned in suffering before pressing her forehead against Jessica's. "Don't do this to me, Jess."

Jessica cupped her cheeks with both hands and kissed her again. "I want to make love to you, Tiff... I really do."

An idea suddenly popped up in Tiffany's head and she swiftly moved Jessica on top of her by the waist. Jessica finally opened her eyes then, only to see Tiffany's charming smile. Tiffany kissed her right cheek before whispering in her ear, "Then you'll lead tonight."

"I don't see how that helps."

Tiffany shrugged. "Well... I was the one who did things before, so maybe if you'll lead tonight you won't get pregnant."

Jessica still looked doubtful.

"Then how about..." Tiffany leaned to her ear again and whispered hotly, "You make tonight unique, different than the last time. *More special...*"

A smile slowly made its way to Jessica's lips as it finally dawned on her. "I'd love that."

At the head of the bed, where the headboard was supposed to be, was a huge window, almost taking all of the space where a wall should be. From the bed, if one would look up, they would see the night sky filled with billions of stars and a moon. From up at the sky, the moonlight shone down on Jessica and Tiffany's perfectly fitted body through that massive window.

That night, the stars and the moon became a witness to how much Jessica and Tiffany loved each other.

WARNING: CAUTION-- WOMEN AT WORK. CHOKING HAZARD. KEEP OUT OF READ OF CHILDREN. THE FOLLOWING SCENES ARE NOT SUITABLE FOR KIDS UP TO 15 Y/O. STRONG PARENTAL GUIDANCE. AND WHATEVER WARNINGS YOU COULD EVER THINK OF.

EPILOGUE:



SURPRISE, SURPRISE

“Go Uncle Chansung!”

“Go Oppa!”

Tiffany and the five-year-old Shinvi shouted at the top of their lungs as they cheered for Chansung. They were at the bleachers with only a thin barricade separating them from the track where there were at least ten racing cars, one was Chansung’s. Jessica, who was sitting next to her hyper child, merely chuckled at their cuteness.

Shinvi has developed fondness to his uncle. They loved to specifically talk about cars and racing. Shinvi really took over Tiffany on that. His toys and the wallpaper of his room, his blankets and his clothes—they were all printed with cars, like what he’s wearing at the moment. Tiffany gave him everything he wanted.

This was the nth time they came to the track to support Chansung in his race. He asked if Tiffany could compete, but Tiffany had long stopped drag racing since she married Jessica. Shinvi was disappointed. He wanted to watch his ‘father’ and his uncle to race, but of course he wouldn’t win against Tiffany.

“Dad, why is Uncle on the second?” Shinvi sulked in between Tiffany and Jessica.

Jessica chuckled at the name he used. She still wasn’t used to it after three years. It was funny, really. When Shinvi was two years old, he started murmuring undecipherable words, so Tiffany thought him how to speak. She started with teaching him how to say “Mama” slowly, but later, he blurted out “Papa” in Tiffany’s face, as if he actually knew she was his father. The “Papa” was soon turned into “Dad” as Shinvi finally learned how to talk since it was shorter. He called Jessica “Mom.”

“Don’t lose hope, baby!” Tiffany tried to cheer him up, and just then Chansung’s white car had overtaken the yellow car ahead of his and he was the first now. “Look! He’s first!”

Shinvi squealed his boyish high-pitched squeal and Jessica felt like it shattered her eardrums. It was still loud though everyone in the bleachers was screaming.

“Go Uncle Chansung!” He then raised his small hands and started waving frantically as Chansung’s car passed by their bleacher.

Tiffany chuckled and stared fondly at Shinvi. *He’s so cute.* She then traveled her eyes up and met Jessica’s. They exchanged smiles and, as if it was automatic, they leaned in for a kiss. But Shinvi was in between and he suddenly put his palms on their chest and pushed them apart. That was something he learned from his Aunt Yuri. Out of all the things he could learn from her, he chose that.

Yuri finally inherited Kwon’s Construction a year after Jessica and Tiffany’s marriage. She and Yoona were married for two years now yet they were still in their honeymoon stage. Im’s Automobile was inherited by Yoona’s brother, Im Siwan. They visit Shinvi once in a while, like Hyoyeon and Sooyoung. The two weren’t married just yet but already engaged. Sunny was still working at Tiffany and Jessica’s house and Taeyeon was still working as Tiffany’s adviser at Tiffany & Co. Sunny and Taeyeon weren’t married, weren’t engaged either. Sunny said she’d let Taeyeon wait for two more years, which Taeyeon gladly accepted. Seohyun was helping her father with their company, Seo Airlines, and she was with Yonghwa for two years now, still dating.

A lot of things have already happened in the past years, yet their friendship remained intact.

“Mom, Dad! Look! Uncle’s winning!” Shinvi whined, and the two laughed it off and focused on the race.

After two more laps, Chansung reached the finish line first. He ran out of his car and did some victory dance. Jessica, Tiffany and Shinvi could only see him at the huge screen, because he was way too far. Shinvi’s eyes shifted to the second placer and saw a man approached the second placer.

“Mom, why do they look alike?” He pointed at the huge screen where the second placer was, with a man beside him.

“They’re probably brothers,” Jessica answered.

He looked at Jessica with big, innocent eyes. “Mom, why don’t I have a sibling?”

“A sibling?!” Tiffany suddenly blurted out and Shinvi turned to her, making her nervous. “Uh... well... we’re... we’re family planning! Yes, that’s right! We’re family planning!”

“What’s family planning?”

Tiffany smiled nervously at him and resorted to what she always say to him when she couldn't say the truth, "I'll explain it to you when you grow up."

Shinvi pouted and sulked in his seat.

The truth was, Jessica still wasn't ready. Tiffany was ready anytime, but she wanted to wait for Jessica. They make love whenever in the mood. They do morning kisses, night kisses... they even kiss anytime, that would eventually lead to making love. But Tiffany has to be extremely careful. She couldn't get Jessica pregnant when she doesn't want to, yet.

"Aww, that's okay, baby." Jessica patted his back and realized his sweat gathered on his shirt. She took out a towel from her handbag and put it on Shinvi's back. He refused to even look at her or say thank you, like what he usually do.

Jessica felt bad now. As his mother, she only wanted Shinvi's happiness and she's ridding him it with what she's doing. It's just that she wasn't ready yet... but if Shinvi's like this...

"I'm really sorry, baby," Jessica tried to coo as she hugged him.

He whined. "But, Mom! I want a baby sister!" He jumped to his feet and made a pose. "I'll be her knight! I'll protect her from anything, even the germs!" That was something he learned from Sooyoung.

Tiffany watched as Jessica chuckled half-heartedly. Jessica pulled him to sit on her lap and hugged him from the back before stooping low to whisper in his right ear.

He sulked for the rest of the day.

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Tiffany carefully laid Shinvi down on his bed before tucking him under the blankets. He fell asleep in the car after cheering for Chansung for the whole afternoon and sulking. Tiffany stroked his cheek absentmindedly. She felt really bad that she couldn't give him the sister he badly wanted. For the whole five years of his life she gave him everything he wanted, but she couldn't give him a sister. If only she could just buy a sister for him, she could have. But it wasn't that easy. Especially when her wife wasn't ready.

Suddenly, a hand as warm as the sun's rays in the mornings held her hand. She looked up and saw Jessica.

"Come on." Jessica jerked her head to the door.

Tiffany nodded and let Jessica to lead her out of Shinvi's bedroom. They went into their bedroom and when the door finally closed, Tiffany faced Jessica. She held her by the shoulders.

“What did you tell him?” Tiffany didn’t have to speak much above whisper for Jessica to hear her.

Jessica shrugged. “I just promised him one thing under one condition.”

“What?”

Jessica leaned in to whisper hotly in Tiffany’s left ear. “A sister, if he’ll act like he doesn’t know it yet so I can surprise you.” She chuckled. “He’s a good boy and a good actor too.”

Tiffany gasped. “Really? You’re ready?”

“Yes. I just... wanna make him happy.” Jessica’s voice had gone into a motherly tone. “And I know that’s what will make you happy too.”

Tiffany smirked. “Finally. It took you three years.”

Jessica pulled away to look at Tiffany, a look so intense it made Tiffany’s toes curl, and the atmosphere changed, like the snap of electricity in a lightning storm. She then kissed Tiffany’s ear before moving to her jaw. Tiffany lifted up her chin for more access as Jessica moved to her neck. Her eyes fluttered close to the sensation Jessica’s kisses made. It tingled every inch of her body and tickled her.

Tiffany wrapped her arms around Jessica’s waist as their lips met. Jessica’s mouth was warm and she tasted dark and delicious. Tiffany’s lips trembled. Her heart pounded. The least she could do was to kiss her back, a kiss that would result to... who knew?

Tiffany cinched Jessica up so she could wrap her legs around her waist. She effortlessly carried Jessica to the bed, lips not parting. She kneeled on the bed first, before gently settling Jessica’s back down the mattress, as if she’s so fragile she could break with even just a little pressure. Jessica removed her legs around Tiffany’s waist and put it on the bed, Tiffany in between.

Tiffany felt lips glide up to her ear. She went stiff from the suffocating emotion starting to fuse inside her. Something in her stomach lurched, knotted as Jessica’s hands trailed up her arm and locked around her neck, guiding her down, willing their chest to contact. She lifted her chin at every kiss Jessica gave her waiting lips. Tiffany’s senses went haywire. She was already at the brink of insanity. She felt wild for Jessica even more than she already did. Her heart was beating so fast she might have a heart attack anytime soon.

She always felt like that when making love with Jessica. It was the greatest feeling ever.

Tiffany brushed Jessica’s hair back with her left hand and whispered against Jessica’s neck, “I want you.”

Jessica’s lips harshly grazed her ear when she answered, “Then take me... take all of me.”

Tiffany started on the buttons of Jessica’s dress shirt before stopping. “You know I’m not patient with buttons.”

Jessica chuckled before sitting up, Tiffany still in between her legs. She slid all of her top off effortlessly before bringing Tiffany down with her. She felt so beautiful... so loved... by the way Tiffany's hands roamed her naked body. She had never felt so beautiful in her entire life.

Their lips collided again, though roughly this time, Jessica's fingers raking Tiffany's silky hair backward. She could feel elation. She felt like she's on the top of the world when Tiffany's hand caressed her left thigh. She rolled her hips and arched her back. She wanted Tiffany in as soon as possible. She felt so alive. She couldn't wait anymore.

But Tiffany stopped for the second time, and they realized they were still in their pants and Tiffany still in her top that they were sweating like crazy because the bedroom felt so hot.

Tiffany straddled on top of her as they both panted, her forehead pressed against the pillow next to Jessica's head. "I love you."

Jessica blushed even more and shyly put her forehead on Tiffany's right shoulder. Tiffany still has that effect on her. "Say that again," she requested with a small voice.

"I love you, Jessica." Tiffany felt the words insufficient to the feelings she wanted to say.

Jessica's heart fluttered. "Say it again."

"I love you..." She was breathless.

Jessica started unbuttoning Tiffany's top.

"I love you..."

Jessica unbuttoned the second one.

"I love you so much..."

Jessica unbuttoned the next.

"I love you so much, Jess." Tiffany's teeth grazed against Jessica's right cheek.

After three more, Jessica finally got the buttons done and over with. She stroked her fingertips across Tiffany's toned stomach, her chest, and up to her shoulders, appreciating it. She slipped her hands on Tiffany's sleeves before bringing them down, removing it before tossing it aside.

"I love you, Jessica... I really do."

Jessica wrapped her arms around Tiffany's neck and pulled her down. "Then show me... I want to feel it..."

When they finally got the rest of their clothes off, Jessica gave all of herself to Tiffany. She trusted her. She knew she wouldn't hurt her. She utterly felt so loved, so precious. She felt like the most important thing in the world by the way Tiffany handled her.

Jessica watched in fascination as the muscles on Tiffany's back flexed as she grinded down before she couldn't keep her eyes open anymore and they fluttered close with all the love Tiffany made her feel.

And then she knew she was ready to be a mother again.

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Jessica slowly opened her eyes and inhaled Tiffany's scent. She was hugging Tiffany from the back. The latter was still naked, and Jessica had managed to wear her knickers and Tiffany's pajama top from the dresser last night before going to sleep.

She tenderly kissed Tiffany's right shoulder and it tickled the latter. "Good morning." Her voice slightly cracked.

Tiffany hummed before clearing her throat. "Good morning."

Jessica slightly moved so she could see Tiffany's back. She remembered what she did last night. Along with all the love Tiffany made her feel and the constant calling of her wife's name for more, she knew what else she did. She raked her nails on Tiffany's back and she's sure Tiffany would have a lot of welts right now. And she was right. There were red, slim, but long scratches all over Tiffany's back, made by Jessica's blunt nails. She touched a particularly red one and Tiffany flinched.

"I'm sorry."

"No. It's okay." It was the truth. The welts meant a lot to Tiffany. It was nice to feel it burning her skin and it was warm, like how Jessica made her feel last night. It was a visual proof of their love.

Jessica started kissing the welts one by one, softly, and Tiffany felt the scratches' pain decreased slowly. Jessica's kisses were like magic, even better than pain relievers. But it wasn't all that good. It was warming up Tiffany's body as well, and it wasn't good. It was too early in the morning for a round two.

Tiffany held Jessica's arm on her waist and Jessica stopped. Tiffany stood up and started dressing up herself before going back to bed. She lay on her back and Jessica immediately suited herself on her right arm, half of her body draped across Tiffany's, right leg over Tiffany's lap. Tiffany played with her hair as she realized how good Jessica looked in her pajama top. She could see she's naked underneath it, but she's in her laced knickers. Tiffany rested her left palm on Jessica's rear; it was slightly sticking out, making the curves of her waist obvious.

"I love you so much, Jessica. Words aren't even enough." Tiffany wouldn't get tired of saying it. "I hope I can tell you how much, but I can't really find the words."

Jessica cupped her left cheek and kissed her right jaw. "You don't have to say it. I felt it last night... and I can still feel it right now."

The door suddenly hissed open, but none of them made an effort to move. They knew who commanded the door open, anyway, and he wouldn't mind finding them like that. He had found them worse before.

"Mom, Dad!" Shinvi squealed and launched to their bed, jumping up and down.

Tiffany groaned. "Stop that. It's making me dizzy."

He stopped and kneeled next to Jessica. He shook his mother wildly. "Mom! Mom! Did you make me a sister already?"

Jessica laughed. "Yes, Sir. But you'd have to wait for a couple of weeks to make sure, then a couple of months for her to arrive."

Shinvi pouted. "That long?"

"Yes, that long," Tiffany said.

Shinvi moved in between them and squirmed until Tiffany and Jessica parted, giving him a space in between. He didn't even care that Jessica was sans of any pajama pants and didn't ask.

Tiffany's eyes narrowed. "Why are you up so early, young man?"

His expression turned guilty. He knew when his father called him 'young man' it meant he's in trouble. "I-I'm excited for my baby sister... but, Dad, now that I know she's coming, I can go back to sleep." He smiled sheepishly.

Tiffany kept her expression though she felt like pinching his cute cheeks. "Then go back to sleep."

Shinvi nodded vigorously, pulled the blanket up to his chest and closed his eyes. Tiffany thought he was already sleeping, but then he took her right hand with his left, and took Jessica's left one with his right. She felt her heart fluttered and she unconsciously smiled. Her child was really sweet.

"Tiff?"

Tiffany moved her eyes to Jessica and found her staring at her, and smiling. "Hm?"

"I love you. So much."

Tiffany smiled so bright until it reached her eyes, offered her left hand and Jessica took it with her free one. They intertwined their fingers before settling it down on Shinvi's stomach. Then they leaned in over Shinvi's head for a chaste kiss.

They slept again with their foreheads in contact, hands firmly holding, smiles on their lips and Shinvi in between.

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Three weeks and four days later, Tiffany was running after Shinvi in their private yacht. The sun was starting to go down and they had to leave soon, to watch the Bridge of Stars, but Shinvi chose this time to be naughty.

"Yah, Shinvi! Stop running! You might fall off the yacht and to the water!" Tiffany called after him, to no avail. He continued giggling and running around until Tiffany caught the back of his shirt and yanked him backward. She started tickling him mercilessly.

Jessica chuckled from the side of the yacht. "Hey, Tiff, he can't breathe."

Tiffany stopped tickling him. "Are you gonna be a good boy now?"

He nodded vigorously. "Yes! Yes, Dad!"

"Good." Tiffany carried him and walked over to Jessica before giving him to her. "There. Go and tell your Mom I tickled you to death. You two always confides against me. I hate you."

"Tiff," Jessica warned, but too late. Shinvi was already sulking in her arms. She glared at Tiffany and the latter innocently shrugged.

"I was just kidding!"

"Aish." Jessica turned her back on Tiffany and patted Shinvi's back. "It's okay, baby. Dad's just joking, okay? She doesn't mean it."

Shinvi pouted and Tiffany thought she saw his lips lightly quivered, so close to crying. She felt guilty though she didn't mean to offend him.

"Hey."

Shinvi refused to look at her.

“Hey, I’m sorry, okay?”

He still didn’t look at her.

Aish... he reminds me so much of Jessica when I teased her before.

“How about...” Tiffany hid her left hand behind her back and when she pulled it out, she was magically holding a bar of ice-cream she wasn’t holding earlier. “Ice-cream?”

Shinvi squealed and snatched the ice-cream from Tiffany’s hand before happily licking it. “Thank you, Mom!” He kissed Jessica’s cheek loudly.

“Hey! I was the one who gave that to you! Don’t I get a kiss too?” Tiffany complained childishly.

Really. This two has the same attitude, so good at teasing others, Jessica thought and sighed. She beckoned Tiffany closer. “Come here.”

Tiffany did as told and Jessica kissed her deeply to stop her from whining.

“Well... I wasn’t asking for a kiss from you... but I think this is better.”

Jessica slapped her arm. “I only did that to stop your annoying whines.” She faced her back on her and started walking into the cabin. “Come on, baby, I’ll tell you a secret,” she said to Shinvi and he stuck his tongue out over Jessica’s shoulder and to Tiffany, waving his bar of ice-cream.

“Why... that little--!” Tiffany stopped herself because the door of the cabin just closed on her face. She wanted to get mad at him, but he was a part of her. He was her child, how could she ever? Instead, she found him slightly adorable—just ‘slightly’ because he stole Jessica from her.

She sulked for the rest of the day.

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“Tiff...” Jessica snaked her arms around Tiffany’s waist from the back only to have Tiffany remove it.

“That won’t work on me, Jessica.”

“Why are you like this? I’m sorry, okay?”

Tiffany looked away, at the place where the dark sky and the dark waters met. They’ve finished eating dinner and Shinvi was fast asleep in the cabin now, so Jessica took the chance to reconcile with Tiffany. They were at the peak of the yacht, waiting for the legendary Bridge of Stars.

"I'm really sorry." Jessica's voice went soft and pleading as she wrapped her arms around Tiffany's waist again, her forehead pressed against her back. Tiffany didn't remove them anymore and secretly smiled, since Jessica couldn't see her face. "I missed you."

"What secret did you tell him?" It took too much self control for Tiffany not to turn around and hug her back.

"A secret I'm about to tell you now."

"Why d'you always have to tell him first?" Tiffany complained.

"Why—" Jessica caught herself and changed her sentence. "What? Are you jealous over your own son?"

Tiffany dramatically huffed and crossed her arms.

"Are you going to be jealous over your daughter, too?" Jessica murmured.

"What!?" Tiffany turned around to face her. She held Jessica's shoulders anxiously. "Did you just say *my daughter*? Did I hear you right?"

Jessica smiled and took Tiffany's right hand before putting her palm against her stomach.

"A-are... are you...?"

Jessica grinned and nodded vigorously. "Positive, and Dr. Dot said there's ninety-nine percent possibility it's a girl."

"OH. MY. GOD!"

Jessica thought Tiffany's scream might have woken Shinvi up, so she immediately cupped her mouth only to have it removed again. Tiffany faced the sea and shouted at the top of her lungs to nothingness.

"She's pregnant, did you hear?! She's pregnant with *my daughter*!" She faced Jessica again and showered every inch of her face with kisses, eliciting giggles. "I love you, Jessica. I love you so much!" Then she hugged her, slowly calming down. "Oh, my God... Oh, my God... I-I'm so happy, Jess." She was so happy when she closed her eyes she felt tears rolled down her cheeks.

Jessica hugged her back just as tight. "So do I."

Tiffany's excitement died down when she opened her eyes and saw the group of stars up in the sky. The view of The Bridge of Stars never did fail to leave her breathless and fascinated by its beauty. She entangled herself from Jessica and they faced the vast ocean, the stars reflecting on them. Jessica wrapped an arm around her waist and she did, too, as they stared and wondered the stars' mystery for a while.

“What’s next?”

“Who knows?” Tiffany gave a broad, slow smile. “Fixed or fated. Destiny or coincidence. Magic or luck. Whatever. That story will have to wait for another day. For now, let’s just enjoy the moment while it still lasts.”

So, together, Jessica and Tiffany watched the wonders of The Bridge of Stars on that year’s most magical night and the next years that followed.

The End