



Those Games We Play

readeroflots

Those Games We Play (Part I)

It is one of man's curious idiosyncrasies to create difficulties for the pleasure of resolving them.

~Joseph de Maistre

.....

“You can wait, but I won’t be there.”

A deafening silence overtook the rambunctious chattering of those who had been attempting to appear as if they were not blatantly eavesdropping. The lecture hall their class met in was one of the smallest on campus so it would have been hard not to overhear anyways, but it became a purposeful act when it concerned one of the most popular girls at Soshidae University, a renowned private institution for those studying the Arts. When the favored second ‘goddess’ of their school issued a proposal like she had, the thirst for gossip and the thrill of watching the impending spectacle unfold were the lures that they all were entranced by. When the girl known for charming her way into hearts from the moment she first set foot on campus asked out the girl best known for ranking first in the school for four consecutive years, their peers raptly observed their interactions.

Tiffany Hwang’s rejection at the hands of Kim Taeyeon was like a fascinating weekly drama, where the next episode was eagerly anticipated even when the ending had already been predetermined.

Head whipping around at the blunt reply, Tiffany’s short chestnut brown mane adopted a slightly mussed look as it resettled around her head. Her coffee brown eyes were wide in feigned surprise even as she unconsciously tightened her fists at her sides, manicured nails digging into her palms as her eyes began flitting from one classmate’s face to the next. Her enticing pink lips twisted into a scowl upon seeing familiar looks of disbelief, happiness, mirth, and the occasional one of pity on their faces. The expression on her beautiful face only grew darker as her eyes finally landed on the girl she had been actively pursuing for four months, who as always, did not seem the slightest bit fazed by the attention they were now receiving.

Really, it was not the first time thoughts of injuring and possibly murdering the girl crossed her mind, but she repressed them now with a calming reminder to herself that she liked said damnable girl. It would not be beneficial to her in any way if she were to break limbs that she preferred wound around

her in a fit of rage. Nor would it do her any good to throttle the slightly shorter girl and face charges for attempted murder. Asphyxiation, after all, would deprive her of certain things she rather enjoyed. However, she was almost to the point of not caring any more, her temper over constant refusals close to snapping as easily as a piece of graphite.

“I just told you I wasn’t taking no for an answer this time and yet you still want to argue? You will be there and that’s final,” Tiffany said through clenched teeth, her eyes narrowing as Kim Taeyeon slipped on the pressed crème colored blazer that was part of their uniform and picked up her messenger bag.

Why do you keep doing this to me? What is it that you keep telling me ‘no’ when all I want to hear from you is ‘yes’? After what happened between us then, after what I told you two months ago, why can’t I get any closer to you than you let me? Why can’t everyone know that we...

“Once more, I won’t be there and have no plans of listening to you any longer. As I’ve told you before, I think it would benefit you greatly if you went and bothered someone else. There are plenty of people who wish to date you, you know. You should ask one of them because my answer will continue to be no. Now, if that’s all you wanted to tell me—”

“No, that’s not all I want to tell you!”

In fact, I have many things I’d like to scream at you... but can’t.

“I don’t get you. I’m sincere each time and you shove it back in my face. What did I do to you that you don’t even seem to consider my sincerity?” Tiffany questioned, her irritation and aggressiveness over the entire situation between them getting the better of her as she crossed the space separating them.

Stopping in front of Taeyeon with the intention of saying more, Tiffany felt her words die on her lips the moment Taeyeon’s dark chocolate eyes flashed behind square lenses. With her glasses pushed up on her nose and her feathery brown bangs falling partially across her left lens, Taeyeon pinned her with a glare that came across more as sexy instead of stern as Tiffany knew the other girl intended it actually to be. The look almost made her want to fan herself, especially when her eyes trailed down to tantalizingly pursed lips and then to the decidedly stubborn set of a softened jaw line. How the baby-faced girl was able to make her want to cup her face in her hands and lay kiss upon kiss on it was not a mystery to her in a moment like this, but otherwise, Tiffany was often mystified about what exactly it was about Taeyeon that captivated her so much.

Taeyeon was not even her normal type. Her ideal was taller, darker, more mature looking, and looser in character. Never before had she had the compulsion to tie herself to someone who often looked younger than she did or someone who was as indifferent, conservative, and proper as Taeyeon *acted*. Quite honestly, even though she knew it was mostly pretense, she understood the attraction on a physical level more than she did on a personality one at times like this. Personality wise, she had always preferred the spontaneous, outgoing, and willing to have fun types. Taeyeon hardly appeared to hold any hint of those characteristics, but Tiffany knew better than anyone that appearances could be deceiving. What only she knew of was why she wanted Taeyeon to be hers in the worst way. If she did not have her own motivations, then why else would she continue making a fool of herself? Why else would she undergo months of rejections that the entire school knew about five minutes after they occurred?

And she did know, tuning into the increasing whispers of those around them, that news of this latest rejection would spread faster than gossip scratched into the walls of a bathroom stall. Perhaps it would be even faster since it pertained to her *and* to Taeyeon. It was an indisputable fact that her own status all but demanded a certain degree of interest in her life, but Taeyeon's situation was comparable because she was not the stereotypical nerd in glasses. As it was, while she may have been deemed a 'goddess' by her peers, Taeyeon was certainly not lacking in attractiveness and the only reason she was not titled similarly was because she had made it clear that she had no wish to be held to such standards. Taeyeon's popularity may not have been to the same extent as her own, but the other girl still had many admirers as her reputation extended more along the lines of words of awe and the label of 'Soshidae's resident genius'.

So to Tiffany, it truly was little wonder why such attention was generated when the 'goddess' was repeatedly denied by the 'genius'.

"I'm not denying your sincerity, but I'm not the one for you. Your sincerity would be put to better use on one of your many followers who would bask in it or someone who could truly appreciate it. And I've told you before that you didn't do anything to me. I'm just not interested in you, Tippani-sshi," Taeyeon finally responded after a long moment, swinging her bag onto her shoulder, her fingers tightening around the strap in a manner reminiscent of someone who was agitated.

It's somewhat funny that the most intelligent girl in school can't even pronounce my name right... It's cute. Especially when— Aish. Focus, Tiffany. Focus. You're mad at her remember? And by the way she's holding that strap, it looks like she's getting upset about something too...

“But I’m putting it towards you! I just want one freaking date and then if you really can’t see yourself with me, I’d at least be more understanding. You’re not giving me a chance at all! You’re just choosing on your own to disregard my feelings,” she countered in a strained voice, a small part of her anger diffused because of proximity alone. Never mind that it was also because she was mentally exhausted saying the only words she was permitted to say in consideration of their audience...

“Like you don’t choose on your own all the time. I said I see your sincerity, but you started making demands after the fifth time I turned you down. If I had ever had a thought of accepting, then it disappeared then. Who slams their hands down on someone’s desk and makes demands? And you expect me to go along with it? Not a chance. We’re not in primary school where that ploy might have worked. I don’t wish to date you and nothing you could do would change my mind.”

What you’re saying now, is that really all you can come up with? What does that even have to do with what I’m talking about? It sounds like you’re just making excuses... like it always sounds to me. I was childish and admit it, but I only did that to see if it would make you actually consider me. But you’re not even now, are you?

“But why can’t we go on just one date? I mean, I’m beautiful, kind, I may not be as smart as you but I’m ranked 5th in the school, I’m... I’m many things that people admire. Isn’t there anything about me that you like enough to explore?” Tiffany asked, humbleness now lost to her because she was past caring. A vague feeling of frustrated desperation was creeping over her as she had lost count of the number of times she and Taeyeon had had this very same argument in the last two months only to reach a stalemate...

Something flashed in Taeyeon’s eyes at her words, but it was gone as quickly as it appeared and followed by her saying, “No. There really isn’t, Tippani-sshi.”

...Which was obviously not going to be the case today.

Fuming internally at the reply coupled with the use of her mispronounced name, she was unable to think of what to say in return for the first time because she hadn’t expected that response at all. Tiffany huffed as she shot Taeyeon the dirtiest look she could muster, the words washing over her and stabbing at all her weak points. She was unable to completely conceal the hurt it made her feel and as she spun on her heel, she thought she caught a glimmer of remorse in Taeyeon’s eyes, but she brushed it off as she stalked back down the steps to where she had left her belongings. Shoving her books into her bag

with more force than necessary, she picked her backpack up before heading back up the steps. She heard the almost excited murmurs of her peers and promptly ignored them as she stomped up the remaining stairs to the exit, not bothering to glance Taeyeon's way as she passed her lest she do something stupid, like drag her off and give the gossipmongers something more to talk about.

The gaggle who usually trailed after her seemed to know to keep their distance because she went unmolested as she made her way to the nearest restroom. There were only two occupants inside and upon seeing her they immediately scuttled towards the doors, making her feel slightly guilty for running them out. Sighing heavily, Tiffany placed her book bag on one of the hooks installed in the bathroom for that purpose and stripped her blazer off to hang it up as well, the extra layer of her winter uniform making her feel stifled since she already was wearing it's matching vest over a white button up. Tugging at her pale pink tie next, the only part of the uniform that they were 'officially' permitted to personalize, she pulled it loose and left the ends dangling as she moved to the other side of the room to sit on the window ledge. She was thankful that the restroom was on the third floor where it meant she could open the window and let some cool air inside.

Staring out over the nearby grounds, she wished it could be spring already so there would be more than just scruffy patches of once verdant grass, branches void of unfurling buds or an incandescent rainbow of leaves, and brittle tree bark to look at. Maybe by the time it was spring she would be over her infatuation with Taeyeon and back to her confident self who had never truly had to ask anyone out or put as much energy into it. Maybe she would stop being this person so whipped by a girl who had kissed her after drinking at a party, and then continued to make out with her until they had been interrupted. Perhaps by the time the flora on the campus blossomed, she would no longer want to see the person behind that false stoic exterior who had made her wish to call Kim Taeyeon hers.

I swear that's the last time I'm asking her out. I'm not going to keep doing this. Jessi is going to be so mad that I did it again when I made such a fuss the last time, but this time is really it. I mean it... Anyways, how can she get irritated at me when it was at her damn party that the incident that got me hooked on Taeyeon happened? I mean, she could have ensured that none of the regular beverages were spiked if she weren't so busy molesting and being molested by Yuri. But then again, if she had, maybe Taeyeon and I would've never...

Tiffany raised a hand to her lips involuntarily, recalling the feel of slightly chapped ones brushing against them and pleasant pressure as she had been forced to open her mouth to a sudden intruder. Oh, she could've stopped it that time, but she had allowed her libido to control her actions and all she had

done was pull the shorter girl closer while leaning back against the counter in Jessica's kitchen at that party four months ago. Sometimes she thought it was the best decision she had ever made and other moments, like now, made her regret it.

At Jessica's yearly party, she had simply been in the kitchen to get another drink and had turned around to find Taeyeon when a hand on her shoulder urged her to do so. Surprised when Taeyeon had fallen against her and looped her arms around her neck, she had been entranced by the way her eyes had sparkled without glasses cutting their glow and the cascade of soft waves around her face. She still wasn't certain why she had allowed someone who was a virtual stranger to her to lift their face to hers in the next moment, but permit it she had. It definitely hadn't been loneliness or a desire for intimacy that compelled her to do so since she had come to the party with a date, whom she had forgotten the moment Taeyeon had rested against her. No, she rather thought she had consented to it because of the raspy whisper of her name before their lips met and the insistent kiss that had turned into something far more volatile than anything she had experienced before.

If her date hadn't come to find her and made her presence known through a series of coughs, Tiffany was certain her hands would have eventually found the mind to unfasten the clasp on the dress Taeyeon had been wearing that night. Strangely, she had fumbled with the damn thing for well over ten minutes of the nearly three quarters of an hour she had spent with Taeyeon in her arms; a detail that had shaken her because she was known for her nimbleness. Then again, Taeyeon's hands had found their way under her top and had been tracing patterns on her sides for a good portion of that time so maybe it wasn't so out of the ordinary.

Yet, that she couldn't even deny that her hands had been trembling abnormally when she had retracted them was a bizarre reaction for her. She wasn't going to call herself a player because she wasn't, she had had committed relationships, but she had never reacted to her previous partners or occasional fling as she had with Taeyeon. After the ferocity of the assault they had sustained and their subsequent counter-attack, her bruised and tender lips were also a testament to that, as her relatively high degree of self-control hadn't held up in the slightest. Frankly, because of it, she hadn't even been able to imagine just how much more affected she would have been if her date hadn't interrupted.

With her date's nagging voice filling her ears, she had gazed at the girl in her arms and been extremely tempted to lean back in, in spite of her original companion's presence. However, having tasted the mild flavor of liquor and mint on Taeyeon's tongue and seeing the faint glaze in her eyes that she had failed

to notice before, she had restrained herself even though she had wanted to find out if it had been an accident of drunken behavior or something more. Unfortunately, she had been unable to obtain an answer because her date—who had become like a giant gnat buzzing irrepressibly nearby in that moment—had angrily dragged her off after Taeyeon’s arms had fallen with seeming reluctance from around her. All she had been able to do was glance over her shoulder and she had still yet to figure out if what she had seen was Taeyeon frowning at herself, scowling after her or both.

She confuses me so much... but the way she kisses definitely trumps confusion any day Tiffany thought, sliding a finger across her bottom lip musingly and exhaling lightly at the touch.

Remembering that first encounter always provoked a storm of butterflies in her lower belly and now was no different. As her stomach fluttered, Tiffany laid a calming hand over it while lowering her other hand from her lips to tug at the collar of her button up, her fingers finding and releasing the top two buttons. The class she had left had been her last of the day and so she had no qualms about beginning the removal process of her uniform. Moreover, she still felt overheated thanks to her thoughts and she sighed again as she pushed the window open further, closing her eyes when the chilly breeze sweeping inside caressed her face.

The cold air was welcome against her flushed skin and she hated Taeyeon for being the cause of her condition. Okay, so maybe she didn’t hate her, but it did severely aggravate her that she flushed so easily over the incident that the other girl had initially acted as if she had no clue about when she had first confronted her. She had asked to speak with her three days after the party and the result of their conversation had been Taeyeon asking her if she had drunk too much. Knowing she hadn’t, Tiffany remembered how she had demanded for Taeyeon to stop acting and how the other girl had coolly informed her that she had not attended the party and to check with others if she liked.

As it had turned out, no one really remembered Taeyeon being there. Still, even with no proof, she had been certain of who she had been kissing because there was no one else who could pass themselves off as Taeyeon in their school. Taeyeon may have been a virtual stranger to her, but she had been one who Tiffany had seen around and remembered vaguely from a shared class. She could say it had been identifying and recalling the seemingly quiet girl that had made her decide to ask her out, but it had actually been because she had been unable to shake the memory of their meeting. She had wanted to know more about her and the word ‘rejection’ had become almost synonymous with her name in recent months because of it.

However, what their classmates knew was just half of the story that only Jessica and Yuri knew in its entirety.

I act like I'm so surprised by why I can't seem to look at anyone but her, but I know it's because she keeps me bound like a fly stuck in a spider's web. I know it's because I still get a thrill from what others don't know about us. But mostly, I know it's because I want to know why it is that she acts as if she doesn't wish to be associated with me—

“You’re going to catch a cold sitting at the window like that, Tippani.”

—when in private, she comes to me after each rejection and shows me that she does... It's what I wait for...

Tiffany opened her eyes and turned her head toward the entrance to the restroom, where Taeyeon was leaning back against the door with her arms crossed over her chest. She hadn't heard the other girl enter, but that wasn't unusual, as she had figured out that Taeyeon's ability to make herself unnoticeable was the reason no one could recall her presence at that party. She had drawn her own conclusions and decided that Taeyeon hadn't wanted to be recognized then, so she hadn't been. She had realized many more things about Taeyeon over the last four months and all of them had thus far only served to make her more interested in the girl who was anything but what Tiffany had originally thought her to be.

Turning her head back towards the window, she ignored Taeyeon because she still was pissed off and hurt by her last comment. She just did not understand why Taeyeon acted one way toward her and then another in the next second. Being shuffled back and forth across a game board where someone else was in control of her movements frustrated her to no end. It was as if she was a pawn dancing to the tune of whatever persona Taeyeon chose to show; whether it was the unaffected attitude Taeyeon paraded to the public... or the hidden one that always managed to catch Tiffany by surprise when they were alone. The one that somehow always made her rebel against her mind's orders because she knew, better than anyone suspected, that Kim Taeyeon was one hell of a girl.

Around others, Taeyeon was like a crude gem; beautiful but not as dazzling as she could be. When it was just her and Taeyeon alone, however, Taeyeon was a faceted gem ablaze with rich color and of peerless exquisiteness. She had seen the girl who was unsuspectingly cute, mischievously playful, endearingly considerate, naturally compassionate, and surprisingly risqué. She also had seen the girl who was annoyingly stubborn, dishonestly apathetic, unintentionally flawed, and generally

bewildering. Though she was at an advantage to have seen those facets of Taeyeon's true personality in the time she had known her, it was only a marginal one as she was only offered glimpses before they seemed to be carefully retracted behind what she had identified as a self-constructed exterior mask Taeyeon wore when acting.

Damn her luck for causing her to like someone who happened to also be a hell of an actress... because she often—and quite profusely—had to curse her fate that Taeyeon was one so skilled that she was unable to tell if what was between them was real or just a manifestation of her own desires clouding her perceptions.

“What do you care? I'm just the girl who bugs you for a date every week, right? So why don't you stop coming to find me afterwards as if you actually are sorry for saying no. I'm kind of tired of all this now and would prefer to be left alone,” Tiffany stated grumpily, refusing to fall prey to any form of mollification Taeyeon might offer.

“Well, I'm glad to know that you do know you bug me,” Taeyeon responded lightly and she heard the light tread of loafers over tile as the other girl came further into the bathroom, her back tensing with each step. The water turned on a moment later and then Taeyeon spoke again. “But you still don't seem to have figured out why that is...”

“Excuse me if I don't really give a damn about why any longer,” Tiffany responded testily before her voice softened and she tiredly continued. “You treat me one way in front of everyone and then another when we're alone. And I've let you do that, even though I told you two months ago that I was serious about you and wanted to see you openly. I let you convince me to act as though asking you out is the only manner in which I know you and have been keeping up with the act, but I don't want to be convinced anymore.”

I really don't want to do this anymore. It's not that I care about people knowing we're—well, whatever we are. It's just me wanting to be able to really call you mine. Taeyeon-ah, I'd just like to be able to see you whenever I want... to hold onto you whenever... to call your name and have you look at me differently than you do anyone else...

“You and I... all you want us to do is meet in secret, right? You don't want more of me than that. Well guess what? I won't bother you by asking you out anymore, so you don't have to follow me anymore. We don't have to see each other anywhere else either. So could you please leave? I don't particularly

want to see you right now. Leave.”

*That's right. This is how you do it, Tiffany Hwang. Just forget about her. I mean, there are plenty of smart midgets out there who would love to date you publicly, instead of always sneaking around. So what if their lips don't quite fit yours like hers do or they aren't as adorable looking when lazily answering a problem in class? So what if they aren't **her**? Once you get free of her, don't get yourself caught in her web again... Don't lose yourself in her charms like you always do...*

“Now why on earth would I do something like that?” Taeyeon questioned in an almost thoughtful tone as the sound of water hitting the basin abruptly ceased. Following it was the crumpling of a napkin, then the click of the trash receptacle opening and the ringing of it swinging shut.

“Why won't you?” Tiffany asked sharply in return, and then cursed her mouth for opening when she didn't ever intend to speak to Taeyeon again.

A soft chuckle came from right next to her, causing her to turn her head and find that Taeyeon had stealthily crept to her side. Taeyeon made a tutting noise and wagged a finger at her in admonishment, taking another step closer and making her realize the position she was in. Dryly swallowing, Tiffany wondered why it was that Taeyeon seemed to have a knack for finding her when it was easiest to trap her. Seated on the low window ledge with her back cattycornered between the window and narrow strip of wall intersecting it, her position was not one that afforded her the luxury of an escape unless she possibly wanted to kill herself by falling from the third floor. Attempting to move forward wouldn't do her any good either as getting past Taeyeon would require skill that seemed to desert her whenever the other girl was so close.

“Because I don't want to,” Taeyeon answered silkily, gazing down at her with glittering eyes as she reached out to trail the finger slowly down the line of her jaw.

Tiffany knew immediately she was in trouble at the tone of voice, one that Taeyeon used when she was feeling particularly aroused. Knowing that, she had to force herself not to gasp at the touch, her heartbeat quickening as Taeyeon's eyes fell to her lips and a smirk lifted a corner of her mouth. Taeyeon added another finger, sliding them beneath her chin and lifting her face up before leaning down. The cool breath that fanned against Tiffany's cheek as Taeyeon moved to place her mouth next to her ear caused her to shiver, which she knew the other girl noticed because of another soft chuckle. Frowning, she lifted her hands to Taeyeon's shoulders to push her away with the hopes that it would

stymie her reaction, but then Taeyeon beguilingly whispered her next words into her ear.

“You know you’re really cute when you’re frustrated with me and downright sexy when you try commanding me to do something? So how could I leave when I want to see you frustrated? How could I leave when I like going against your demands so much, Pani-ah?”

“Yah! Don’t you dare try and—”

...sweet talk me into—Oh, damn it Tiffany thought, her words cut off and thoughts diverted by supple lips lightly grazing her own.

Instead of pushing Taeyeon away as she knew she should, Tiffany found herself gripping Taeyeon’s neat blazer, wrinkling the material as she pulled her closer and their noses collided. The other girl uttered a short curse against her mouth as she overbalanced and Tiffany was unable to stop the feeling of triumph she felt when it meant that their lips pressed together more firmly. When Taeyeon was forced to lean down even more with a hand on her shoulder and the other on the wall to accommodate the change, Tiffany took the other girl’s lower lip between her teeth and nibbled on it until Taeyeon pulled back to mock glare at her. Pasting an entirely too innocent look on her face, she watched Taeyeon’s eyes darken before she was descended upon once more, eyes drifting shut as Taeyeon’s mouth hungrily assaulted her own.

Taeyeon alternated her attentions between her upper and lower lip, nipping and tugging in such an impatient manner that Tiffany knew what was being asked of her. Parting her lips further at the unspoken request, she almost broke away to giggle at how quickly Taeyeon’s tongue took advantage of the granted entry before she was lost to its strong, yet delicate strokes. Even though she was obviously eager, Taeyeon took her time to make sure no nook of her mouth went unknowing of her existence. Then their noses brushed again as Taeyeon tilted her head the other way and Tiffany wondered if her neck wouldn’t start hurting from having to lean down, but realized she needn’t worry a few minutes later when Taeyeon broke their connection once more.

Eyes fluttering open as she licked her lips, Tiffany met with the sight of Taeyeon pouting and felt her heart jump to her throat. Well, not literally, but it did thump hard enough for it to sound plausible. Lower lip jutting out and cheeks puffed with just a little bit of air, the image almost would have made her forget what they had just been doing, except Taeyeon obviously hadn’t. She already knew what Taeyeon had in mind when the other girl removed her hands from her shoulders and pulled her from the

window ledge. What she didn't know was why Taeyeon always threaded their fingers together as though she had every right to make her heart beat even faster with such a simple act.

And she didn't.

At least, that's what Tiffany had been trying to get herself to believe after the last couple of rejections. But she couldn't. She couldn't say that she did not enjoy every one of Taeyeon's attentions that she did receive, that they all meant nothing to her. She couldn't deny that just this bit of contact that so many 'real' couples took for granted was all she really longed for with Taeyeon. That she would rather have it than what they had just been doing, even if she did take pleasure in it. She would rather have this if it meant Taeyeon felt the same. Because if it was always and only hers to have, then she would not be one of those who did not appreciate its value.

Taeyeon led her across the bathroom to where she had hung her things and retrieved her blazer first, passing it to her one handedly before reaching for her book bag. As the other girl slipped a strap over her shoulder, Tiffany wondered where Taeyeon's own bag was, but the thought was fleeting as Taeyeon took the jacket back and then cracked open the door to peer into the hallway. There had been discord within her mind because of the warmth enveloping her hand and her earlier frustrations, but watching Taeyeon check to see if the coast was clear, the conflict dissipated and left behind only a feeling of disenchantment.

Why was I expecting anything more from her? I know what she wants. I know that well, but I want to give her another chance. I need to because I l...

Tiffany shook her head to clear it, for now ignoring the voice in her head telling her what she was hesitant and scared to admit. Focusing on Taeyeon, she stubbornly refused to acknowledge the voice changing tactics and telling her she shouldn't follow because Taeyeon was right now doing one of the very things that bothered her. She didn't want the reminder that it could end up hurting her like it always did. She just wanted Taeyeon to stop and so she squeezed her hand, saying nothing when the other girl turned back to her in confusion.

Taeyeon waited for her to speak, but when she didn't, she smiled at her and then turned to continue her check. Because she wasn't quite ready to demand the answers she wanted from Taeyeon, Tiffany let it happen, looking down as she allowed herself be pulled into the empty corridor a few moments later. She stared down at their joined hands longingly and didn't look back up until she was guided into a

vacant classroom. Only then did she glance up at Taeyeon curiously, standing by as Taeyeon released her hand to close the door and after it was retaken, following her to the back of the room.

“What are you doing?” she finally asked, breaking her silence as Taeyeon deposited her things in a chair and then turned another around so that its back was against the desk.

“What does it look like? I’m getting you settled somewhere that will be more comfortable for you and for me,” Taeyeon replied almost absently, pushing her to sit before shedding her blazer and throwing it into the other chair.

Empty classroom plus us two only equals exactly what I know she wants. Not to mention that she isn’t taking care with her uniform like she usually does. That is, when she’s not like this. I know I should resist, protest or something, but it’s been a long week and I want—no, I need to be with her even if it’s only on her terms. I can’t act like I do though... I can’t be that weak...

“Don’t you just mean comfortable for you? This is new though, I don’t think we’ve ever made it to a chair before.”

“Actually, I meant more comfortable for you. Call it my apology for bruising your back the last time.”

She knew? I didn’t tell her about that though... Does that mean she—

“I noticed you wincing when you were stretching in class a couple of days after. Plus, you kept making pained faces whenever someone patted you on the back,” Taeyeon said as if she were reading her mind.

“Sorry, Pani-ah. We’ll stay away from walls and I’ll be gentler this time.”

She was... looking at me. I...

“Who said there would be a this time? I’m not in the mood.”

You liar. Why are you even trying?

“Ah, really?”

“Really.”

She can probably see right through me. If only I could see through her too...

“Are you sure about that? Because I think you are.”

“Yah! Who are you to tell me what I’m in the mood for and what I’m no—”

“Aigoo. Just be quiet, Pani-ah, and think about what I’ll do to you if you make me fall.”

“Wait, what are you doing? Yah! K-kim T-tae... Kim Taeyeon!”

She did not just...Yah! Why am I getting so flustered? It's not as though it's the first time someone's sat on my lap, but then again they weren't her, were they?

“Just sit still and be a good girl, okay, Pani-ah? I’ll do everything.”

Taeyeon’s smile held a wicked edge as she leaned in to recapture her lips and Tiffany barely got a chance to get used to the idea of Taeyeon straddling her before her eyes were sliding closed once more. Moving her arms around Taeyeon’s torso as the other girl’s arms settled loosely around her neck, she kissed Taeyeon back with as much fervor as she possessed. Just the thought of Taeyeon’s skirt currently bunched up to allow their position and the idea that Taeyeon did not seem to care in the slightest made her feel dizzy with lust. Whoever the idiot had been who had first said that men were driven far more by their hormones than women had obviously never been in her place, receiving the almost single-minded focus of one Kim Taeyeon.

It was, on her part, a total surrender.

Some odd number of minutes later and Tiffany was finding it harder to draw in air the longer Taeyeon kept her mouth engaged. It was as if Taeyeon had no reservations about stilling her breath in her chest or preventing her from taking in any more. Taeyeon’s kisses had grown almost frantic and so far, she was meeting each with as much passion as was poured into them by the other girl. Taeyeon’s arms slid from around her neck and she would have felt alarmed if she did not feel her vest being pulled at in the next moment. Taeyeon’s hands slipped beneath it, inching it upwards and freeing her shirt from the waistband of her skirt in the process.

“Stupid vest is in my way. Lift your arms. Now,” Taeyeon muttered against her mouth before pulling back, breathing irregularly as she tugged demandingly on the semi-lifted material.

Doing as ordered, her eyes opening so she could see what was happening, Tiffany found herself divested willingly of a part of her uniform as Taeyeon pulled it over her head and unceremoniously

tossed it to the side. Taeyeon's hands dropped to her shoulders and then slid towards her neck, pulling her tie off and disposing of it in the same manner. Slender fingers then fell upon the buttons of her shirt and Taeyeon unfastened the third button before maneuvering it back into place, impishly repeating the act a few times as if to prolong the suspense. When Taeyeon tired of her own antics, or perhaps when the other girl noticed that she was beginning to grow antsy as she shifted beneath her, another wicked smile was directed her way as the button slipped free for the last time.

Following it was the fourth. Then the fifth. And so it continued until her shirt was unfastened completely. The hue of Taeyeon's chocolaty eyes became almost black in their dilation and Tiffany was sure her eyes were in a similar state as she felt her lids lower to half-mast. As her shirt was further parted, every bit of her focus was on the sensation produced by fingertips lightly grazing her skin. All she could see was the way Taeyeon's eyes seemed to grow unfocused as she took in what she had revealed.

She gasped when Taeyeon's warm hands gently settled on her stomach a moment later, her abdominal muscles tightening at the contact. They leisurely slid to her sides and she watched Taeyeon follow their path with a now smoldering gaze, which when the other girl briefly made eye contact with her, only seemed to be magnified by her glasses. Then, Taeyeon lowered her head again and hot breath beat against her neck as the other girl hovered a moment before closing the gap. Angling her head back to make the area more accessible, Tiffany lifted her hands to Taeyeon's hair, twisting her fingers within the silken strands. With Taeyeon's mouth moving down her neck to her collarbone, a location she knew the other girl favored, she was perfectly content to let things carry on as they were.

She wasn't sure how long Taeyeon spent sucking on her collarbone and peppering kisses along it, extracting contented hums from her, but Tiffany was glad that the other girl was restricting the area she covered to what would be concealed by her uniform. The last thing she needed was someone asking about a line of hickies or the culprit. That had already happened more than a few times before when Taeyeon had decided to mark her visibly with the claim that it was her punishment. Punishment for what, she still didn't know and Taeyeon would only tell her it was part of the reason that she 'bugged' her.

If she'd just tell me what it is, then I can fix—

"Mmm. Lower," she heard herself order with something resembling a half moan, her thought utterly derailed as Taeyeon dragged her lips down to lacy constraints teasingly and then back up.

Taeyeon, of course, ignored her and continued doing as she pleased, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing in Tiffany's mind. Open-mouthed kisses back up her neck while hands skimmed up her sides was not a bad thing at all. It became even more enjoyable when Taeyeon's thumbs brushed the underside of her suddenly heaving chest and the other girl's mouth moved to nibble languidly on her ear. Her mind becoming blanketed by ardor when Taeyeon sucked the lobe into her mouth, she urged Taeyeon's head back in line with hers, seeking Taeyeon's lips and finding them after first brushing against her nose and then the corner of her mouth.

She could tell she surprised Taeyeon with her forcefulness as she pushed her tongue into the other girl's mouth, claiming it just as Taeyeon had done hers. She had already mapped the its interior before and so she knew just what areas to conquer first. Untwining her right hand from Taeyeon's hair, she lowered it to Taeyeon's stocking covered knee and idly walked her fingers upwards until her fingers found satiny skin. She flattened her palm against the firm musculature, sliding her hand upwards and teasing in a similar manner as Taeyeon had, using her fingers to push at the other girl's skirt before sliding her hand away. Then she repeated the act, smiling inwardly when it elicited a muffled groan from Taeyeon and the other girl rocked forward to try to force her hand higher.

Not so fast. This is payback since you had the nerve to tell me there was nothing about me you liked enough to explore. Even if it means denying myself too, I have every right to deny you what you want as punishment Tiffany thought as Taeyeon rocked forward again, their kissing becoming a bit more ravenous on Taeyeon's end because she kept her hand still.

Suddenly, as the thoughts of earlier events filtered through her mind, she realized just how far off track she had fallen from her original intentions not to succumb to Taeyeon.

Realizing it only now, she could see how thoroughly she had been ensnared in Taeyeon's web again. What she was allowing to happen between them was rising action headed towards an inevitable climax, one born of their mutual appetite for each other. She had let herself be swayed with ease by Taeyeon's daring and dominating behavior because she was the only one who the other girl acted that way with. With her lack of resistance to it, Taeyeon probably could've just crooked her finger back in the restroom and she would've been perfectly content to allow herself to be pushed into a wall or some other stabilizing surface. After all, that had happened more than once before.

Feeling Taeyeon boldly slide her hands up to her chest while she was distracted, she almost let herself sink back into the moment, but forced herself to exert some type of willpower to keep her sanity. No

matter how much she wanted to revel in the feel of splayed fingers and warm palms against her chest, she couldn't. Before she let things go any further, she first needed to clarify a few things with Taeyeon. Because Taeyeon was the first person who made her want to learn something new about her each day and the first she was scared to admit things to herself about, she couldn't go into this halfway anymore.

For a little while, she hadn't minded pretending they were nothing to each other except suitor and target, but that time had long since passed. Now she wanted more than these clandestine meetings between them. She wanted to stop feeling as though she were the cat chasing after the elusive mouse who taunted her with near captures. She wanted to be proprietary and claim every part of Taeyeon as hers, especially the license to hold her hand. Rather than being just two people who weren't even really friends but exchanged many benefits, she wanted a real relationship with Taeyeon that had all the strings attached.

Focusing on those things worked like a cold shower that dampened, but didn't extinguish, her desire.

Lifting one hand and untangling the other, she moved her hands to cup Taeyeon's face as she opened her eyes, lightly caressing the smooth cheeks before reluctantly pulling her mouth from Taeyeon's.

"What? Why'd you stop?" Taeyeon all but whined, a cross expression displaying her obvious displeasure. She didn't even lift her eyes from her lips, the stare making Tiffany feel a comfortable discomfort in knowing that Taeyeon desired her that much.

I don't think she'll like this, but I need to ask her. I've been holding it in, but I can't any longer. I need answers.

"Because we need to talk."

"Pani-ah, less talk and more kissing, okay?"

"Not until we talk," Tiffany said as firmly as she could, keeping the quaver from of her voice when Taeyeon temptingly moved her hands.

Concentrate, Tiffany. Concentrate. Don't you dare give in to her like you did earlier.

"Come on, I haven't kissed you all week. I don't want to talk," Taeyeon replied a bit petulantly, which almost would have been endearing if Tiffany weren't trying to hold a serious conversation with her.

“Well, we’re going to. You’re not the only one who gets to make decisions about what we do. Maybe I was all right with it before, but I can’t be anymore.”

“I’m sitting on you with my skirt way higher than school regulations allow, your glorious body just begging me to do something to it, and you’re asking me to talk? Seriously?”

Blushing lightly at Taeyeon’s bluntness, Tiffany nodded and received a frustrated growl in response.

“This had better be one hell of a talk, Pani-ah,” Taeyeon groaned before surging forward to plant a lingering kiss on her mouth. She knew it was the other girl’s way of showing her that they weren’t finished.

I suppose she’s really not going to like this, is she? Tiffany thought, as Taeyeon moved her arms back around her neck like they had been at the start and then leaned back away from her to meet her gaze squarely.

“Remember what I said about if you let me fall,” Taeyeon grumbled and Tiffany accordingly moved her hands from Taeyeon’s face, slipping her arms around Taeyeon’s back securely.

“You promise not to get mad at me and seriously consider what I’m saying?” she asked.

“What am I? A five year old who’s going to throw a tantrum when you tell me I can’t have candy?”

“No, but sometimes you act like one and I’ve seen you grow quiet enough to scare someone.”

“...”

“Promise me, Taeyeon-ah.”

“Fine. Let’s hear it.”

“What I said earlier... about wanting you to leave... well, I lied. I didn’t want you to and knew you weren’t going to. Or, at least, I really hoped you wouldn’t. However, I did mean it when I said I’m not going to bother to ask you out anymore. I wasn’t lying about that,” Tiffany began hesitantly, feeling unsure of what the potential outcome of this conversation could be.

“...Keep going,” Taeyeon replied slowly when she paused to gather her thoughts, her arms tightening in their position.

She's not going to strangle me, right? I mean, I've had plenty of thoughts of doing that to her, but she wouldn't to me, right?

“Honestly, I... I really can't do this with you anymore,” Tiffany admitted, watching Taeyeon's eyes for some hint of a telling reaction, but finding none. She almost slumped in disappointment, hoping to have at least seen some small bit of anxiousness. Fear or non-physical need seemed to be just too much for her to hope for though...

“Is this about me turning you down in front of our classmates?”

“That's only a small part of the bigger picture. I told you I'm tired of being treated one way and then another when we're alone. I dislike the feeling of being controlled just because I feel that if someone found out about us, you'd cut all ties. I don't like the thought that you might just be toying with me, taking what you want and not considering that you're the first person I've been this genuinely interested in.”

Because of that, wanting you as much as I do scares me, Taeyeon-ah. Transparent as I feel I am when in your arms, we're both so opaque otherwise when it come right down to it. I know I can't see through you, but do you ever truly see through me at all?

“What? No, Tippani. I—” Taeyeon tried to cut in, but Tiffany wasn't finished.

“Shut up and let me talk to you okay? Just listen for now,” she ordered and Taeyeon grudgingly complied, her mouth twisting into a frown and brow furrowing.

Here goes nothing...

“I don't like that you checked the hallway before leading me here or that you probably made sure no one was following you before you came to find me. It makes me feel like your hiding me away and there are so many possibilities as to why that it drives me insane. I'm not even going to go into the topic of you pretending you had never kissed me at Jessi's party and then suddenly changing your mind after I asked you out. I don't understand that, but it's not important now. I just want you to...” Tiffany trailed off, realizing that her words might come across as needy and that's the last thing she wanted Taeyeon to think of her as, even though she knew when it came to Taeyeon that she was becoming

progressively more so.

“You just want me to what, Tippani? Tell me.”

“I just want you to tell me why I can’t be your girlfriend or call you mine. I don’t want to hear that bull you say in front of others. Tell me why what we’re doing now is all that seems to be between us. I mean, you find me and this happens nearly every time. And sure, you’ve called me to meet up outside of school, but we always go to places out of the way. I’ve gotten to eat dinner with you, have gone to the movies and shopping with you, had you hold my hand a few times, and have even cuddled with you on your couch that one time you invited me to your apartment. I’ve gotten to do those things with you and seen the possibility of there being more, but those times hardly can be counted when I always feel as though you’re looking over your shoulder. What would seem like dates to anyone else just don’t feel like that with you,” Tiffany stated quietly, revealing to Taeyeon things she had not brought up before and which she had failed to keep her mind free of.

“I... I just want you to tell me what game you’re playing with me because tying my feelings up in you and giving me nothing in return except sneaking around isn’t fair. Giving me false hopes that you care and then in the next moment making it seem as if all we have is sex, it hurts, Taeyeon-ah. So tell me something so that maybe I can keep doing this with you. Tell me something that will let me know that it won’t always be this way. Because if you want me, then you have to give me more than just your body. If you want anything between us, then you have to give me something more than stolen moments.”

Please tell me anything. Tell me you want to keep me to yourself. Tell me that you’re still working out what you feel. Hell, tell me I’m a nice person to mess around with, but not someone you would introduce to your parents and that would be better than not knowing anything.

Expectantly waiting for Taeyeon to say something in return, Tiffany watched Taeyeon’s eyes shift rapidly behind her glasses. She couldn’t tell what was occurring within their depths and it worried her. She knew that people who said that the eyes were the windows to the soul were right, but when the eyes you were peering into were clouded, then all you were really looking at were dirty windows that hindered your ability to see inside. It did nothing to help her anxious mind that Taeyeon’s expression was now impassive and gave her nothing to analyze.

“I... I don’t know what to say, Pani-ah,” Taeyeon finally said and Tiffany loosened her hold on the other girl.

I just told you what I want to hear from you and you don't know? Are you really that dense? Are you really not going to answer me, Taeyeon?

“If I... If I want you to tell me that you feel something more for me and this isn't just you scratching an itch, can you tell me that? Can you at least do that? Or is it too much for you?”

“I... I enjoy being with you and I think we're compatible in many ways, but I'm not—”

“S-stop. I don't want to hear. I changed my mind. Don't tell me.”

This isn't funny. After telling you how I feel, you call us 'compatible'? What the hell kind of response is that?

“No, you don't understand, Pani-ah. I'm trying to tel—”

“Don't call me that,” Tiffany bit out, her voice sharp as her stomach clenched and she tried to control her emotions.

What more could you tell me? If it was really anything I should listen to, then why begin it with a line that has ended more relationships than it has started?

“But Pani-ah, I—”

“I said don't call me that!” Tiffany exclaimed and made to push Taeyeon off her lap.

I need to get out of here. I wanted you to tell me anything, but I'm not ready to hear it. I don't want to if it's not... Can't we just forget I asked?

“Yah! Wait a second, Tippani. Don't do that. Let me talk. I—”

Bucking her legs in an effort to dislodge the other girl, Tiffany almost let herself feel worried when she succeeded and Taeyeon yelped upon landing on the floor... but only for a moment. She hurriedly stood and began buttoning her shirt back up, not caring that she missed a few holes in the process. She turned to reach for her vest next and roughly pulled it down over her head, shoving her arms through the proper holes, but stretching the material out of place in her haste. Her hair was probably messier than she would ever normally allow it when she was done, but how she looked was the furthest thing from her mind as she grabbed her book bag and stuffed her blazer inside, unintentionally knocking Taeyeon's jacket to the floor. Turning back around while slipping her arms through the straps, she saw that

Taeyeon had gotten to her feet and was wincing as she moved a hand behind her to her rear, her skirt uneven and glasses low on her nose.

To think of my feelings for you... you just made me glad I didn't tell you. To think that I may be—no, to know that I'm in love with you... I'm really glad I didn't. Because what kind of fool would I have been then?

Glaring at Taeyeon and swallowing the misery she felt, Tiffany took a step away only to be stopped by a hand around her left wrist. She tried to jerk free, but Taeyeon held it in a vice-like grip and invaded her personal space as only she could. Turning her head away, she resisted when Taeyeon lifted her free hand to her jaw and tried to turn her face towards her. She might have been able to glare at Taeyeon a moment ago, but she didn't want to fall victim to whatever the other girl's expression might hold.

She didn't want to see Taeyeon's eyes apologizing to her as she rejected her this time. She didn't want to again not find the love she wanted behind them. But most of all, she didn't want its absence to cause her to appear any weaker than she had already made herself in front of Taeyeon.

"Let go."

"Tippani, why won't you listen to me? I—"

"Don't call my name. Let go, Taeyeon."

"I won't. I listened to you, didn't I? I'm trying to tell you that I know I'm not go—"

"I said let go!"

The wholly disquieting sound of flesh meeting flesh rent the air... and then there was silence.

She had her desire granted, but Tiffany was aware that it was only because of the shock of the impact. She followed her right hand's progress with her eyes as it dropped, looking at the stinging appendage as if it weren't her own. Only when it was back at her side did she lift her eyes towards Taeyeon, whose glasses were even more out of place than before, the thin frames pushed to the side and nearly hanging off her face. Taeyeon slowly raised a hand to her rapidly reddening cheek and Tiffany's eyes involuntarily watered as the other girl looked back to her with wide, stunned eyes. Something deeper in

their depths made her heart clench uneasily and not being able to identify it was just too much for her.

So she ran.

She ran and she didn't know it, but she was in her car and crying against the steering wheel, cursing Taeyeon with everything in her by the time Taeyeon moved to fix her glasses. She was flying out of the parking lot, merging into the afternoon traffic by the time Taeyeon bent down to pick up her fallen blazer. She was honking her horn at someone who cut her off by the time her forgotten pink tie was found and gingerly pocketed. And Tiffany was too far to hear it, was sitting at a light and pulling out her phone to tell her friends that she needed them by the time Taeyeon spoke, a broken whisper finishing what Tiffany hadn't allowed her to say.

Those Games We Play (Part II)

Two months later...

.....

“So?”

Taeyeon looked up from the notebook she was doodling aimlessly in and smiled as her best friend—and often absentee roommate—set a styrofoam cup down in front of her. Setting the notebook aside, she picked up the steaming beverage, wordlessly lifting it to her lips and taking a sip. The rich chocolaty concoction was missing the usual bitterness that came from cocoa, which she attributed to the semi-dissolved marshmallows floating on its surface. Licking her lips after taking another sip, Taeyeon set the cup back down on the kitchen table and looked up to find her friend staring searchingly at her.

“What? Do I have something on my face or did you just realize how beautiful I am?” Taeyeon asked, hoping her question would shock her friend enough to make the other girl stop looking at her as she was. She felt uncomfortable under the intense gaze, which was unusual for her.

“You have many people willing to tell you that lie recently and let you believe it. You don’t need me to feed your ego.”

“Yah! Why can’t you just go with it?”

“I don’t want to. Oh, and if you did happen to have something on your face, I—unfortunately—would have to tell because I don’t want people to think I associate with dirty people,” Sunny added with contrived haughtiness.

“Yah! Lee Soonkyu!” Taeyeon retaliated, causing Sunny to press her tongue against the inside of her cheek and narrow her eyes. She chuckled at Sunny’s action, as it was always a sign that her friend was feigning irritability at the use of her Korean name.

“Kim Taeyeon, I will set fire to all of your things if you ever call me that name again. We’ll have a lovely bonfire that no one will suspect me of, so don’t try me. Now stop trying to be cute and answer my earlier question,” Sunny threatened as she sat down across from her.

*Can't she leave me alone about this? Why does she need to know the reason why? Aish. I'm finally going to sing **that** song after her begging me for most of the past month, so why can't she accept it without a reason?*

"It's just a song, Sunny. I'll record it like your uncle and his producer friend requested, and then it will be released as an OST for an upcoming drama. Since it was chosen because the lyrics fit with drama's plot, that's why I'm willing to sing it now. That's it," Taeyeon explained, meeting Sunny's eyes and seeing the doubt within them.

"Kim Taeyeon, stop lying to me. That song isn't just any song to you. You wrote it because Tiffa—"

"She has nothing to do with it, Sunny. So drop it," Taeyeon interjected, a frown settling on her lips at the mention of the name that had become taboo around her two months ago.

"You do know that not saying her name and acting like she didn't mean anything to you isn't healthy don't you?"

"Who said she meant anything to me? She was just a... just a casual fling to relieve the stress of school," Taeyeon quickly countered, almost choking on the words... on the lie.

"That's the biggest damn lie I've ever heard you tell, Taengoo, and you've told some whoppers," Sunny retorted and Taeyeon scowled at the remark, even though it was true.

"I'm not lying."

Lightning's going to strike me isn't it?

"Uhuh."

"I'm not."

It'll strike the same place twice.

"You're protesting way too much for me to believe you. Not to mention that I'm way too accustomed to your lying in the past about anything to do with *Tiffany*. Let's examine some of your bigger lies, shall we? How about that time your skirt was torn 'accidentally' and you told your parents that you got it caught in your car door when you had to get it replaced? You and I both know very well that that

was *Tiffany*'s handiwork. Or how about the time Sooyoungie saw you feeling her up at the movie theater her friend works at and you claimed not to know her? Sooyoungie knew about you two already and thought it was hilarious seeing you try to hide your smile while you told her that *Tiffany* was a stranger who had tripped into your lap and you were just helping her up. And 'helping her' had a whole different connotation according to what Soo—"

"Shut it, Soonkyu, before I make you," Taeyeon demanded in a low growl, cutting the other girl off and glaring fiercely at her. She didn't realize that her hands had tightened around her cup or that Sunny had noticed as she worked to keep the relevant memories repressed.

"I'd like to see you try," Sunny remarked lightly before her expression shifted into one of concern. She reached across the table to pry her hands from the cup, then pulled it towards herself afterwards as she mumbled something under her breath.

"What did you say?"

"I said I need to save the cup from you because you're taking your agitation over Tiffany out on it."

"Why do you keep trying to force the point that she meant something to me when she didn't?" Taeyeon asked tiredly, bringing her hands together and lowering her gaze to the table. "Why can't you just take my word for it?"

Why do you have to be so persistent when I've been trying so hard to lie to myself? Let me act like I'm fine a little longer.

"Because I care about you and I hate knowing that it was a misunderstanding that broke you two apart. I don't like the fact that my best friend now masks her feelings under an even denser layer of indifference than before. Frankly, I'm sick of not saying anything and letting you deal with it all yourself."

"Sunny, I'm not maski—"

"Yes, you are. Taengoo, I hate seeing you in pain and trying to hide it from me. I hate seeing you looking so lost without her when I've never seen you this way before. You've always been sure of what you were doing and sure of yourself until her. The moment she captured your interest and things between you started, however, she wreaked havoc on your self-confidence in a way no one else has

ever been able to or probably ever could. You–Aish. It doesn't matter if I tell you this now, does it? Because you never cared about her, right?"

"Sunny, I—" Taeyeon started again, but was quieted she lifted her eyes back to her friend and saw the somber expression on her face.

"You're telling me I'm wrong, so I guess I have been. I guess it was just my imagining that you felt something for her. I must've imagined the nights for the past month and a half where I've come home and sat outside your room, worried because I thought I heard you trying to muffle the sounds of your pain and frustrations in your pillow. I thought that song was written in a moment where your heart was utterly broken. I assumed things and have been urging you to sing as a form of release, but I won't any longer since I know now that you only see that song in connection to the drama," Sunny said, pausing to shake her head before she went on.

"Not that it matters to you, but knowing now why you are willing to sing it just makes me want to rip the score to shreds, regardless of how furious my uncle would be. Because if you're going to sing it without any meaning behind it, I'd rather not have to hear it at all and be reminded of my silly assumptions concerning your feelings. Personally, I feel like you don't deserve to sing those lyrics if you've never experienced the condition of longing for someone that they describe."

Sunny... If I admit to you the true reason I'm willing to sing it now, can you tell me it will work? If I tell you I plan to put everything I am into it, can you assure me that it will ease my heartache? If I stop letting my lie protect me from what might be future hurt if nothing comes of it, can you promise me that it will at least get her notice?

Taeyeon lifted a hand to her hair and pushed an errant lock behind her ear, her fingertips brushing the metal of her glasses as she opened her mouth to speak. Then she closed it again, unsure of whether she could really divulge everything she had been feeling to her best friend, who she had been disclosing less and less to recently. Sunny was the friend she trusted the most with her secrets, which was why the other girl knew everything that had happened that day two months ago when Tiffany Hwang hadn't let her explain. The girl across from her, whose eyes beseeched her to open up to her like she used to, was the only person who knew the extent of her feelings for Tiffany. She was the only one who truly knew just how much her self-doubt had cost her.

So without further hesitation, she opened her mouth once more and let the words pour forth.

“I could care less about my song being used in that drama. I had no expectations for something like that to happen, especially since I had only submitted it to your uncle for a grade because I had forgotten about that composition assignment we had a month ago. When your uncle and his friend approached me about it, wanting me to sing it because they felt I’d give it more emotional depth, I refused at first because I didn’t want to sing it. I didn’t want to be reminded of the mistakes I made. Of words I wanted to say, but had lost the right to. But after another long day yesterday, I finally agreed to because... because it’s tiring to miss her when she’s only a few steps away,” she revealed, already feeling a bit lighter as she relied on her best friend once more.

“So your assumptions weren’t wrong. When I sing it, there will be meaning in it because my agreement was me choosing not to waste the chance it could give me. Even though she’s made it apparent that she doesn’t want anything to do with me anymore, I just want to have the opportunity to explain to her. Through my song, I just want to be able to tell her that she did mean more to me. That she still does, even if those words are worthless to her now. I owe her that and more.”

Even if I’m pretty sure she despises me, I just want to tell her. I just want to admit my stupidity to her and if it somehow granted me a new start with her, then I’d find ways every day to atone for the mistakes I made. ...If it convinced her come back to me, I’d never let her leave me again.

“So you admit it now, that she was more to you than just a ‘fling’?”

“Why are you asking a question you already know the answer to? You know she is because I told you. Oh, and by the way, you should know that your attempt at reverse psychology really needs work.”

Truthfully, the only thing you probably don’t know is why I acted fierce about you using her name. It’s because I knew you’d use it anyway and I needed you to say it because I couldn’t say it myself. She told me not to...

“So you caught that, huh?”

“Yes, I caught your failure to be subtle. It was pretty clear what you were doing when you started talking about how your assumptions were wrong concerning my feelings for Tippani.”

“Well, I wasn’t really aiming for subtly, so it served its purpose. And it’s not Tippani, it’s Tiffany. Seriously, Taengoo, how can you not even pronounce her name right? Say it with me: Tif-uh-nee.”

“Tip-pa-ni,” Taeyeon mimicked, her brow furrowing when Sunny rolled her eyes. It wasn’t the first time Sunny had tried to correct her pronunciation, but she had never tried very hard at it since Tiffany had seemed to like the way she said it.

“Tif-uh-nee.”

“Tip-pa-ni.”

“Okay. Whatever. I officially concede defeat over getting you to call her by her given name.”

“I do call her by her given name. It just... has a twist.”

“A twist? Well, she must’ve been okay with it if you kept calling her by it.”

“I think she was. I hope she was... And that she might be again,” Taeyeon responded, nostalgia and a hint of wistfulness encompassing her words.

“Taengoo...” Sunny trailed off, sighing lightly. “Even if she never is, even if things don’t work the way you want, at least you won’t regret not finding out if the last is a possibility. I know this sounds pessimistic, but if nothing else, you’ll be proud of yourself when you do get your chance to explain properly, as I’m sure you’ll be able to. Apologizing to her and letting her know the truth might not seem like enough now, but they will comfort you if things don’t go in your favor. They might not erase the pain you caused her or your knowledge of it, but they’ll help you forgive yourself. And I know that feeling regretful and trying to forgive yourself are part of the reason why you’ve been hurting.”

“How is it that you can see through me so well?”

How is it that you always say what I need to hear?

“I’m psychic. Little ghosts whisper in my ears and tell me all.”

“...”

“I’m just joking, so stop looking at me like I’m crazy.”

“Then be serious.”

“I was just trying to ease the atmosphere a little since I thought it’d be pretty obvious how I do. I mean, I’ve known you since we were in diapers and didn’t know we weren’t supposed to stick toys in our noses, Taengoo. So if I wasn’t able to do something as simple as that, then you should feel very worried. You know I’m more perceptive than most.”

“Hmm...”

“Hey, I am. It’s like how you’ve tried to tell me everything’s fine, that you’re okay, but I know it isn’t and that you aren’t. You’re words haven’t misled me because I have two perfectly good eyes and you seem to have forgotten that besides being your roommate, I attend the same school. So even though you haven’t been confiding in me, I’ve known.”

“I’m... I’m sorry for not talking to you and for lying to you. I’ve been doing a fair bit of that to myself too. It just hasn’t been working so well...” Taeyeon trailed off, the ghost of a wry smile finding its way to her mouth when Sunny nodded her head in understanding.

“I wouldn’t expect it to. Trying to lie to yourself when feelings are involved never does.”

“Sometimes I almost wish it would, but then I can’t let it because that means forgetting about her and I’m not yet ready to.”

I know I need to be ready, but I can’t until no other option remains. Until I’ve told her what I want to say and she turns me away knowing the truth, I can’t.

“I know you aren’t. It’s why I’ve been so worried about you as of late and a bit of why I pestered you about the song. So tell me honestly how you’ve been feeling, since I’ll no longer accept fine as an answer. Trust me with more of that weight you’ve been straining under because you know I’ll bother you until you do,” Sunny replied, cajoling her to do so with her persistent, yet easy manner.

“Tired. Wishful. Frustrated. With her still brushing me off when I try to talk to her and ignoring my calls, I can cycle through all three of those emotions whenever either event happens. That’s not to mention feeling thwarted when her two guards take turns glaring at me whenever I approach. Half the time I feel like I’m on the verge of losing my right to live because of the glares I get from Jessica-sshi

especially.”

“Well, what can you expect? Neither of them know anything so of course they feel protective of their friend. If the roles were reversed, I’d probably glare at Tiffany the same way.”

“I know. It’s why I don’t fault her for it. I just wish she would let me get a little closer to Tippani. But nevermind that. Even when Jessica-sshi and Yuri-sshi aren’t present, nothing much changes. Instead of being glared at by them, I’m just ignored completely while having to watch her being hung onto by her tram—I mean, girl of the week. Then, besides the other emotions, I’m also resentful and jealous. It upsets me to feel like she’s really moving on and forgetting me, even though I’m almost certain those girls mean nothing to her. Honestly, the worse thing about it all is her acting like I don’t exist... as if we were nothing to each other at all.”

“Within reach, but out of it. Just like how you probably seemed to be to her. It’s a painful feeling of déjà vu, isn’t it?”

Taeyeon shut her eyes and nodded, remembering how tormented and numb she had felt when Tiffany had told her how each of her actions made her feel. Recalling the anguish she had unintentionally been the cause of, she felt like a jerk of the highest order even now. She had to be for her not to have realized just how much she had been hurting Tiffany until it had quite literally struck her in the face. The knowledge of the damage she had wrought on the sincerity Tiffany had spoken of that day and that she hadn’t fully realized until then still struck her harder than any physical blow could.

That’s what I can’t forgive myself for. Realizing too late that she actually wanted a relationship with me and leading her to believe I didn’t want the same. Letting her even think that everything between us was about sex and meant nothing to me was my mistake. From the start, never telling her what that first kiss was without a doubt the first of many...

Inwardly sighing, Taeyeon allowed her mind to delve into thoughts of the first time she had kissed Tiffany Hwang.

It had been no accident on her part because even though she had been slightly inebriated, she hadn’t done anything she hadn’t thought of before. The alcohol had loosened her inhibitions, but she would not have acted if she hadn’t wanted to. She had merely taken the opportunity presented to her that night at the party six months ago when she had seen Tiffany wave off her date and go into the kitchen. She

had just wanted to know what it was like, even though she had not intended to pursue Tiffany further. It was just that at that point, she had been tired of watching everyone else fawn over the girl she had held a secret regard for since their first class together the year before.

They might have had the same major, but it hadn't been until that advanced musical theory class that she had actually ever seen Tiffany. Of course, she knew the names and gossip about the three 'goddesses' of their school: Jessica Jung, Tiffany Hwang, and Kwon Yuri, but she had been too focused on her classes to give them much notice. Sharing a class with Tiffany for a semester, however, had changed that. She had naturally found out more about all three of them, but it had been her covert observations during class that had fostered her growing interest in Tiffany specifically.

From the beginning, she had been looking at Tiffany as a girl who captured her attention and hadn't been only seeing the title bestowed upon the other girl by their peers. That Tiffany had been blessed with an ethereal sort of beauty had been mostly irrelevant to her because while she appreciated it as much as the next person, she wasn't shallow enough only to look at external appearances. To her, outer appearances were just a distraction, one that sometimes entangled all of one's focus and made them forget that there was more to a person than what they looked like. So for her, it had been Tiffany's unassuming intelligence, faultless compassion, endless charm, amusing stubbornness, sporadic naiveté, ever-present confidence, and a plethora of other traits that she had admired. Any defects in the other girl's character had simply been deemed insignificant because what else could she do but accept them when she was flawed as well.

Tiffany had been—and still was—everything that she was certain she wanted in a significant other. The other girl had become her ideal without her ever having spoken with her and while that may have seemed odd to some, it hadn't been to her. Tiffany had been so genuine to those around her that she had known instinctively that she wasn't wrong in her opinion of her. It was probably because of that mindset that when innate bossiness and fiery temper had to be added to the list of Tiffany's characteristics, she had easily accepted them and liked the other girl a little more for them.

Not that she had needed anything to add to what she had felt for Tiffany before anything had ever happened between them. *Like* probably wasn't an ample enough term to describe how she had felt because it had not been what had made her heart still when Tiffany had cornered her a few days after that party. It might have been part of the reason, but it wasn't enough to explain how her heart restarted when Tiffany had spoken to her for the first time. Nor could it fully explain the sheer elation she had

felt over Tiffany seeking her out when she hadn't thought she would. She had thought that maybe Tiffany would just mark her down as a casual encounter, but instead the other girl had found her to question her and she couldn't have been happier, even when she knew she shouldn't have been. Hindsight in her case was definitely twenty/twenty because she knew now that she should have told Tiffany everything then. She should have told her the reason why she kissed her. She should have told Tiffany how she felt about her. She should have told Tiffany all her ridiculous insecurities and fears. She should have revealed everything, but she hadn't. Instead, from that moment on, she held back when she shouldn't have.

Her reason for at first denying the kiss was not an uncomplicated one. Simple on the surface but teeming with complexities beneath, it had been because she had been alarmed at her audacity. Permitting herself a taste had been too much when she knew everything had a rightful place and hers was not at Tiffany's side. Tiffany was one of the 'goddesses' of their school and Taeyeon could not deny that she had slowly built a pedestal for her to rival the one their peers had already elevated her to. She had raised Tiffany above all others and in her mind, she had no right to aspire for Tiffany to be hers. Tiffany deserved someone far better, someone on the same level as her, and she had convinced herself with that argument before she had ever had the nerve to kiss her.

However, the first time Tiffany asked her out, her conviction had been discarded like yesterday's junk mail.

Foolishly she had thought, as cliché as it was, that she could have her cake and eat it too. She had needed to keep her distance, but she had *wanted* Tiffany. She had been afraid that if she let the unforeseen chance to be with Tiffany go, then it would not come again. It was selfishness on her part, but she had been unwilling to risk Tiffany's interest moving on to anyone else even if it would be better for her. Girls like Tiffany could have anyone they wanted, so she was sure Tiffany would have no problem finding someone else and never looking back. At least, that's what she told herself as extra incentive to go through with her brilliant plan to be with Tiffany while keeping herself detached so she didn't get hurt when the 'right' person for Tiffany did come along.

The commencement of her grand scheme had involved publicly rebuffing Tiffany's advances. Turning Tiffany down had been the only way to ensure that no one associated her with the other girl beyond the context they bore witness to. While she could say it had been about protecting Tiffany's reputation and not wanting anyone's esteem for the other girl to decrease, neither of those things were the main reason. Those motivations were in consideration of Tiffany, but it had been an overwhelming desire to

spare herself that had been impetus behind her admittedly poor decision.

She had been selfish, having felt incapable of otherwise combating the fear that plagued her. Of all the things she could dread, it was the thought of anyone telling her to her face that she was inadequate, that she didn't match with Tiffany, that had troubled her. Those were the words she had least wanted to hear because she was aware that if she couldn't fulfill her own expectations of what Tiffany deserved, then she would never be able to satisfy anyone else's. Therefore, it had been important not to show any outward indication of her true interest in Tiffany.

Veiled by the image of aloofness she had gained over the years, lack of confidence in her own worth and cowardice had both been considerable factors involved in her plan to be with Tiffany for as long as she could.

Reasons behind her rejections aside, she could only imagine where she would be now if she had been unable to persuade Tiffany to go along with her proposed act back then. Until the actual moment she had to, she had only had a faint idea of how she could convince the other girl to pretend they weren't acquainted with each other. After all, convincing someone to make a fool of herself was not a simple task. So it had been with trepidation that she had gone after Tiffany the first time she rejected her, when the other girl had stormed off in what had been—in her biased opinion—an utterly adorable rage.

She wasn't sure what had made her do it considering the wrathful glare Tiffany had sent her way upon noticing that she had followed her into the library, but she had goaded her until it had seemed likely that she would either walk away or attack her in a fit of aggravation. Only then had she made her move, knowing that there was nothing and no one on Tiffany's mind but her. Slamming Tiffany against a bookshelf, she had roughly fastened her mouth to hers, determined to make a lasting impression if she hadn't before. She had taken thorough advantage of Tiffany's surprise with knowledge gained from bumbling experiences of the past and it hadn't been long until the quietest corner of the library had lost a bit of its silence.

Afterwards, as she helped pick up the books knocked off the shelves because of her bit of violence, she had been extremely proud of the disorientated expression on Tiffany's face. Her ego had been satisfied by it, especially since they had gone no further than kissing—well, maybe there had been a fair amount of groping on her part, but it had mostly been kissing. Murmuring lest they be overheard any more than they no doubt had been before, she had been flirtatious as she used their recent physicality to get

Tiffany to agree that it would be more fun if no one knew about them. With some extra ‘persuasion’ to keep the other girl off kilter, she had convinced Tiffany and had continued to do much of the same to ensure their trysts remained a secret.

Then, two months into the farce she couldn’t even call a relationship, Tiffany had hugged her from behind while she was zipping her skirt back up and told her that she didn’t want them to be a secret anymore.

Even though that admission of wanting to openly and seriously date her had been made, however, she hadn’t let herself believe in it. It had stunned her because through her own actions, all she could believe in was the fact that Tiffany physically desired her. To think the other girl wanted more had been incomprehensible. Moreover, she had still believed only the best was worthy of Tiffany and it certainly wasn’t her. So she hadn’t let herself think too much of it, mistakenly attributing the words to spontaneity born in the afterglow and not to anything of meaning. However, despite her beliefs, she had been unable to purge her mind of it completely because the time spent satisfying each other’s desires had no longer been enough for her by that point in time.

Waiting for Tiffany to approach her and then meeting her after a rejection had no longer held as much appeal as it had before. She had no longer been satisfied with furtively eyeing Tiffany during the one class they had together, wanting her to turn the smile she seemed to have for everybody towards her. Wandering near places where Tiffany could be like one of the other girl’s many admirers—or in her opinion, stalkers—and seeing her face to face only three times a week at most had not been enough. She had just wanted more interactions than the ones they had, even though she had been doing her damndest not to have any wishes. So, she had planned and arranged outings where she could just spend time with Tiffany, telling herself that it was all right to want at least that much.

Honestly, for her, the times she had gotten to spend with Tiffany out in public had been better than any of their encounters on Soshidae’s campus. She had taken pleasure in what she alone had deemed dates, but knowing now what Tiffany had felt about them, she knew they had been unfair to the other girl because she truly had always had half a mind on the lookout to make sure they weren’t spotted together. She had taken her to places they wouldn’t run into their schoolmates, all the while never realizing that she was hurting her. When she should’ve been focusing only on Tiffany, she had instead been considering how detrimental it would be if they were seen together and it prevented Tiffany from being with that better person she had been so certain the other girl deserved.

Now, thinking for the nth time about all the ways in which she had not taken into consideration Tiffany's feelings, Taeyeon could easily count all her regrets.

She could have done so many things differently, like kiss Tiffany in front of the whole damn school and not care what anybody had to say about it. She could have made sure that there was nothing unspoken between them, such as telling Tiffany that the reason she had sometimes visibly marked her was because she was jealous as hell of the smirking baboons casting amorous glances her way and getting smiles in return. Every moment she had been in Tiffany's presence, she could have completely lost the mask she wore to protect herself, showing her everything that she was and all that she felt for her. She could have listened to every word Tiffany said to her, taking them at face value instead of ignoring them or letting her insecurities overwhelm their import. She could—and should—have made Tiffany's emotional well-being her priority... because Tiffany had become someone she *needed*, while wanting to distance herself had never seemed more insignificant by the time they parted.

If she had done any of those things, then maybe Tiffany would've given her a chance to explain herself when she had clumsily began a reply she had still been formulating. If she had not immersed herself so deeply into the mindset of Tiffany being on a level far beyond her, then maybe she would have realized sooner that only Tiffany could determine the person she wanted at her side. If she had just allowed her heart to overrule her mind's erroneous choices, then perhaps her existence would still mean something to the girl she was still very much in love with.

For someone so smart, you sure are an imbecile, Kim Taeyeon. She had you pinned when she told you that you were making decisions on your own and choosing to disregard her feelings. And you knew it, but still tried to tell yourself she deserved better when she had already made it a point to basically tell you she wanted you... You moron.

"You okay, Taengoo?" she heard Sunny ask and she lifted her head once more, noting that Sunny was worriedly watching her. She knew it was because she had been silent too long, lost in her reflections as she had been.

"Yeah."

"You sure? You went quiet on me and your expression wasn't exactly the brightest."

"I'm sure. I was just thinking about what an idiot I wa—that I am."

“...”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“What is it, Sunny?”

“Nothing. I was agreeing with you.”

“...”

“Don’t frown. It makes you look ugly.”

“You know, you should be very glad right now that you took my hot chocolate or else it’d be in your face right now,” Taeyeon responded flatly, causing Sunny to pull said beverage even closer to her.

“If you’re going to make threats, then remind me not to be nice enough to make you any again.”

“Oh please,” she scoffed before allowing herself to smile slightly. “You know you only made it because you wanted to soften me up. Now hand it over so that I can have more than two sips of it. You’re holding my drink hostage and I need the chocolate. Take pity on the depressed will you?”

Sunny’s mouth twitched before she pushed the cup back across the table, being careful not to cause any to slosh out over the rim. Gratefully picking it up, she took a long sip, having been serious about needing the chocolate. She could benefit from a sugar rush right about now and the sweetness of the drink was just enough to pep her up a little. She needed the boost because she was sure her discussion with Sunny wasn’t over yet.

“It’s good you can make a joke about that, but—”

Taeyeon looked on interested as Sunny suddenly stopped speaking at a beeping noise. The other girl held up a finger to her and reached under the table, lifting her phone into sight a moment later. Sunny seemed to take her time reading the message she received and Taeyeon watched with growing

amusement as the other girl's face steadily suffused with color. When Sunny finally looked back up after speedily typing a reply, Taeyeon's smile was broad and more than a bit mischievous as she set her cup down once more. She kept it between her hands, however, because it was dangerous to leave it sitting where Sunny could possibly reach it. She didn't want her own threat to be used against her.

"I take it that was from Sooyoung-ah. Is she telling her 'Sunny bunny' to hurry home?" Taeyeon teased, enjoying the way Sunny couldn't quite meet her gaze.

"What are you talking about home? I live here with you."

"If you call coming to check on me and sleeping here only about twice a week living here, then I wonder what would you call actually being here all the time?"

"I pay rent."

"Doesn't mean you live here."

"Yah!"

"Sunny, Sunny, Sunny. Why not just admit that you and Sooyoung are more like roommates than you and I are? Basically all your stuff is at her place anyway."

"I pay rent here."

"You said that already and it still doesn't change anything."

"Yeah, well, not everybody can be a homebody like you."

"You used to be a bum with me before you met Sooyoung. Now you're not here enough to even warrant you being on the lease. Just admit you and Sooyoung are living together."

"You... Aish. I have to go, but we're not finished talking about this yet," Sunny said a tad irritably as she rose from her chair, sticking her phone back in her pocket.

“Give Sooyoung some kisses from her favorite unnie for me. That is, if you can stop yourself from giving her too many non-platonic ones, Soonkyu,” Taeyeon said, puckering her lips and making kissing noises.

“Yah! Kim Taeyeon, you’re dead when I come home! Prepare for it,” Sunny declared ominously, predictably eyeing her drink before glaring at her, which only caused her to laugh.

“I’ll look forward to it... when I see you next week. Or should I say next month?”

“Why I ought to...”

Sunny did not look as amused as she felt, although Taeyeon spotted glimmers of relief and amusement in her eyes. Waving her hand in a shooing motion to forestall any further reply, Taeyeon wordlessly issued her goodbye before pulling her notebook back towards her. She picked up her pencil and was lazily drawing squiggles when she heard Sunny huff, the other girl muttering something inaudible about her as she left the kitchen. The sound of the front door slamming as Sunny left reached Taeyeon a few minutes later and she looked back up, releasing the pencil and watching it roll across the lined paper until it fell over the edge of the notebook.

Saved by Sooyoung wanting her for I don't want to know what. I might need to go and buy that giant a present for getting her girlfriend to give me a breather. Although, what I now have planned for the rest of the afternoon isn't much better...

Sighing as she pushed her chair back to stand, Taeyeon lifted a hand to massage the bridge of her nose, nudging her glasses upwards a fraction as she did so. Hand dropping back to her side, she strode from the kitchen and across the living room to her room, flipping on the lights as she entered. She headed for her closet and sighed again upon pulling open one of its doors, bending down to grab a battered shoebox from the lowest shelf. It had every right to look a bit beat up considering how many times she had thrown it across the room, only to retrieve it and the items that lay scattered around it a few moments later.

Taeyeon didn't bother closing the closet door as she turned and made her way to her bed. After she settled in its center, sitting cross-legged with the box in front of her, she reached for the top. Her fingers stilled as they found the edges of the lid, but a second later, she lifted it with her eyes fixing themselves on its revealed contents. Gently she removed each item and laid them around her in a semicircle, her

present care with the items belying how often they had been subjected to her abuse in the past two months.

She doesn't even know I have any of these things... she thought with a familiar pang of contrition as she laid the last item on her bed. *I really should prepare myself soon for the idea that she might never...*

Looking at the objects spread out around her, Taeyeon picked up two movie stubs first. She held them in front of her eyes for a moment, the memories they were linked to encouraging a small smile to her lips. She recalled how the first time she had taken Tiffany to the movies, she had mimicked one of the character's voices and basked in the sound of Tiffany's giggles until the other girl had shushed her, pointing out the glare some kid in the row in front of them was directing their way. She had childishly stuck her tongue out at him in return and they had gone back and forth making faces at each other until Tiffany had kissed her cheek to recapture her attention. The unexpected gesture had left her feeling ridiculously pleased with herself when her only goal that day had been to make Tiffany smile for her alone and it was apparent that her juvenile antics had helped her fulfill her mission.

As for the second time they had gone to the movies, her not so innocent ploy to be the person Tiffany turned to for comfort had resulted in a situation that was not even close to being innocent. She would've have been happy if Tiffany had just clung to her arm for the entirety of the horror film she had purposefully chosen, but halfway through, Tiffany had burrowed her face against her neck and started brushing her lips lightly against the skin there. Incapable of resisting the allure of Tiffany seeking a different avenue of comfort, she had pulled Tiffany into her lap and gotten closer to her in the way most familiar to her, swallowing every breathy gasp while she indulged in the lingering sweet and salty taste of consumed concessions. They hadn't even realized the movie had ended until Sooyoung had snickered and cleared her throat, having followed her friend in while they did their regular inspection and clean up.

Even now, she swore she could feel the same tension in her facial muscles from trying not to smile as she had then under Sooyoung's amused regard.

She replaced the tickets after a moment's more contemplation and then her fingers found the soft corner of the next item. Her smile transformed into a full-fledged grin as she examined the skewed tic-tac-toe game hastily drawn on a napkin she had pocketed the first time she had asked Tiffany to have a meal with her. She had seen that Tiffany was bored while waiting for their food and not knowing quite what to say, she had started a round that ended in a sulking Tiffany, whose pouting had been nothing short of

charming. In a bid to lighten the mood though, she had decided to act as if Tiffany had really won, marking in extra O's on the grid and scribbling out her own X's. Then, she had slid the edited game across the table, earning herself an unforgettable smile that had been beyond lovely under the soft golden glow of the restaurant's muted lighting.

Shaking her head free of that image, Taeyeon moved on to the other souvenirs that she had collected during their *dates*. Besides the tickets and napkin, she had a scrap of paper hosting a bug-eyed fish she had drawn to tease Tiffany with after finding out about her aversion to fish eyes. There was also a folded up flyer on near fluorescent pink paper, which she been 'handed' while they wandered the mall once. A more apt description would probably be to say it had been shoved into her hands before Tiffany had dragged her off to the boutique it had advertised. That time had been an exciting outing if only because Tiffany had modeled everything for her and then lured her into the dressing room afterwards, baiting her only to coax her into modeling a few outfits for her as well.

Persuasion was a gratifying diversion that they both excelled at, one that she had not fully realized until that particular occasion.

The five by thirteen centimeter rectangle she turned to next stirred her emotions up even more strongly than the other items had, the set of negatives it had been developed from remaining on the bed as she plucked it up. It was the only photo of the two of them together, which she had sneakily taken using a camera she had planted between the couch cushions the one time she had invited Tiffany over. It wasn't the greatest picture because she had had to disable the flash and hadn't been looking at the camera, but luckily, it was good enough to capture the moment. To show Tiffany's slumbering visage, the tranquility on her face something Taeyeon wanted to credit herself with since it had appeared after Tiffany had drifted off. To preserve the second when she had pressed her lips against Tiffany's hair, breathing in the faint fragrance of shampoo as she marveled at how fortunate she was that it was her arms Tiffany chose to rest in.

What I wouldn't give to have one more moment like that with you... Or a hundred. Or as many as you were willing to let give me... Taeyeon thought, gazing down at her 'Pani-ah' with unveiled adoration and bestowing the printed image of the girl she loved with the look she knew she should have always shown her.

Really, when she thought about it, the picture had been her cleverest idea in their entire acquaintance. Everything else had just been ill fated from the beginning and were key factors in the current lack of relations between them. So while she liked the items that were tangible reminders, she was glad she had taken the picture because visual evidence of their time together was far better at reassuring her that

they had been something to each other. She had needed that reassurance, especially in recent months.

It really pains me to see you with those other girls, Pani-ah, but I have no one but myself to blame. I hurt you and maybe they're offering you solace or something you don't want from me. I know you're using them, but I wish you'd come to me instead. I wish I'd let you see that you could...

Placing the photo back down, Taeyeon picked up the next to last item on her bed, her fingers lightly tracing the edges of the small square box. Unlike the things before, what it contained wasn't a souvenir, but more an item found and unreturned. She didn't even need to open it to picture the tie folded inside neatly, an almost pastel pink length of carefully pressed fabric. She had meant to return it to Tiffany the first chance she had, but the opportunity had never presented itself with Tiffany ignoring her. As a result, she had kept and cursed it when all it did was remind her of how much she had screwed up things. When it caused her to remember the circumstances in which she had removed it and why it had been forgotten, she truly wished she had just blurted out how she felt first before trying to say anything else.

If I could've just made you listen to me, you would've learned my feelings. "I know I'm not good enough for you, but I love you" were the words I wanted to tell you. It was there, just on the tip of my tongue, but I didn't get the chance to finish. The moment you slapped me, the words died before they could pass my lips and my heart broke knowing how much I must have hurt you for you to do that. You, who had just cradled my face so gently, had no longer wanted to hear me... but I need you to now.

Taeyeon bit down on her bottom lip, her expression unreadable as she stared at the tie box.

No matter what, she had to finish what she had started the moment she had agreed to sing her song for the OST. She had to stop dwelling on the memories derived from her collected tokens. She had to stop letting frustration and jealousy at seeing Tiffany with someone else erupt whenever she came home and migrated towards the box hosting what remained of their 'relationship'. She had to return Tiffany's damn tie to her because pink was not a color she liked unless it was on the other girl. She had to apologize and tell Tiffany what she had known a little too late that the other girl had wanted to hear that day. Even if it was too late for it to change anything, she had to do those things to fulfill the desires she had told Sunny of.

But first, she had to convince Tiffany to listen... First, she had to sing for her.

Quickly repacking everything into the shoebox except for the last two items, she closed it and then

crawled off her bed, taking with her the tie box and the last item. Hurrying out of her room, she made her way to the couch, where she had left her messenger bag the day before after returning home from class. After depositing the tie box into one of its side pockets, she maneuvered her phone out of the tight pocket of her shorts before plopping down on the couch. Then, situating the small device between her shoulder and ear, she kept her hands busy by removing several sheets of paper from their protective sheath while waiting for the person on the other end of the line to pick up.

The somewhat stiff plastic that had been holding her original composition was tossed aside as her eyes scanned the scribbled notations of tempo changes and measure alterations that she had wanted to review. The lyrics penned beneath the bars of music were fine as they were, but there were a few areas she now felt could be smoothed out if she altered the bridge of the song to fit a change in a few notes. All she needed to do was make sure that it wasn't too late to do so, as well as check on the potentiality of an idea taking root in her mind.

“Hello?”

“Professor Lee? Hello, this is Kim Taeyeon. You told me to call you if I had any questions concerning the OST and I was wondering if it would be possible to...”

Those Games We Play (Part III)

.....

“Real classy, Tiffany. I see that yet again, you’ve made the hallway the place to make a spectacle of yourself. As much as I love watching you do so, I need to talk to you. And since I highly doubt you want everyone to know about what was really happening between you and a certain genius, you have until the count of one before I begin airing all your business. On—”

Tiffany immediately lifted her mouth from the neck of the girl she currently had pressed against the wall, her hands sliding out from under the girl’s partially lifted shirt. Glancing down briefly at the blushing girl who was hastily fixing her uniform, she straightened and backed away, knowing that it was all she could do if she didn’t want her best friend to follow through on her threat. She plastered a fake smile on her face for the embarrassed-looking girl before turning around, her hands moving to tuck her own shirt back into her skirt under Jessica’s reproachful gaze. When she was done, she furtively scanned their murmuring audience, searching the multitude of faces for one in particular.

That of the bespectacled ‘idiot’ who had broken her heart.

Where is she? She usually gets to class around this time and I made sure to drag— uh... damn it. What’s her name? Minhee? No, that was three weeks ago. Jieun? No, that was last week. Um... I think it starts with a Y. Hmm...

Jessica stepped towards her and reached for her arm, pulling her further away from the girl whose name she couldn’t quite recall at the moment. She had only met the girl a few hours ago after spotting her hanging around outside her first class, so being ignorant of her name wasn’t entirely unexpected or of poor taste. Of course, her best friend probably would disagree seeing as how she had been doggedly trying to get her to stop messing with girls she cared nothing for. Jessica was especially adamant about it after the first two, after realizing that finding a rebound was the last thing on her mind and that her motivation for being with them was far from seeking comfort.

As contemptible as it might be, it had all initially began because of a desire to show Kim Taeyeon that she was doing perfectly fine without her... or at least, that was a simplification of the reason...

After she had ended things between them, two weeks later had been the start of her current charade, of

the game she played only when she knew Taeyeon would be around to be spectator to it. Honestly, if not for some girl ambushing her between classes, then the present situation perhaps would be very different. Since she had been waylaid, however, her aggrieved feelings had led to her allowing the girl to kiss her. Because she had permitted it, the kiss had set the course for how things now were.

Just for a second, when lips crashed roughly against hers and she was pushed against the wall, she had allowed herself to imagine it was Taeyeon. For one infinitesimal moment, she had let herself believe that Taeyeon was the one kissing her, but the lack of finesse and the unfamiliar, irregular fit of their lips had quickly broken the illusion. Suddenly overcome with the frustration and distress that had been plaguing her, she had started to shove the girl away, but then Taeyeon had appeared before them. Unexpectedly, she had caught sight of what she had thought was a distraught expression on Taeyeon's face and it had fueled her next action.

Emboldened by a surge of anger and by the various grievances she held Taeyeon accountable for, she had pulled the girl she had intended to push away back into her arms. With the stranger for whom she could have nothing but a lackluster response, she had reinitiated the kiss with forced enthusiasm. Then, with only the slightest hint of a pause, she had guided her ambusher a little ways down the hall and into an empty classroom. Rational thought lost to her at that point, she purposefully had left behind the one whom she had still desired nothing more than to permanently attach herself to.

For the possibility of withheld feelings, for never saying a word to her, and for her own fear of hearing she had gotten everything wrong, she had chosen to penalize Taeyeon for it all.

Never would she have thought it of herself, but after seeing Taeyeon's expression, she had wanted the other girl to suffer. A before unknown, but suddenly recognizable, vengeful part of her heart had wanted Taeyeon to experience some modicum of the pain she felt. Therefore, after showing the girl—whose name she hadn't even bothered to learn—the way out the door, she had determined that she would exact her own brand of punishment on Taeyeon for everything she had suffered at her hands. Letting resentment and hurt feelings blot out her conscience, she had decided to show Taeyeon that she wasn't lonely and that there were plenty of others willing to be seen with her openly.

So as misguided as it surely was, thus had started her parade of girls before Taeyeon's eyes; a parade where she found a new girl each week who never came close to getting what Taeyeon had of her.

Consequently, for her brazen behavior of the last month and a half, she had invited the constant censure of her friends. For deliberately placing herself and her ‘companions’ in public places, she had gotten more than a dozen lectures from Jessica alone. Her best friend made it abundantly clear that she thought that she was ‘fucking retarded’, an epithet that Jessica had been applying liberally on almost a daily basis. On the other hand, opposite her quite vocal girlfriend, Yuri was quieter and gentler in her disapproval. That is, if wallpapering her bedroom door with sticky notes could be considered that. Favorite phrases of the girl who fit what she used to believe was her type until she had fallen for Taeyeon included, but was not limited to: ‘Talk to **her**’, ‘Do I look like a human shield?’, ‘Stop making my gag reflex want to kick in’, and ‘Thank me. I kept Sica from killing you for your stupidity another day’.

Despite their finding her actions to be ridiculous and having no problems telling her they did, however, both had been her steadfast supporters whenever she did have run-ins with Taeyeon. When she acted as if Taeyeon was just a girl she had once had interest in, an act that was similar to and yet different from how things had been while they were ‘together’, Jessica and Yuri said nothing until it was the three of them alone. In case she needed them to interfere, they lingered nearby whenever she pretended that she felt something, but actually felt nothing as relative strangers kissed her and unskillfully fumbled with her shirt buttons. After she had ensured that Taeyeon saw what she was doing, they told her later about the other girl’s shifting expressions and about how she eventually turned away from the sight. Moreover, for all their disapproval they were the ones who quite gladly would have led Taeyeon to the gallows for making her act the way she was, even though rightfully only she could answer for her own behavior.

In the past two months, she had gained an even greater appreciation of them than she had already had because those things showed her how much she was cared for. Therefore, even though she could have done without the lectures and constant paper waste, she allowed them to hassle her about it. The appreciation that she felt was the only reason she did not shake off Jessica’s hand now. Well, that and the fact that Jessica’s tone had reflected how serious she was about her threat and her carrying through on it was something Tiffany could not allow... especially when she still did not see Taeyeon amongst their peers.

Aish. This Kim Taeyeon. Where is she? Is she not here today? It was pointless to do this if she didn’t even see it. Aish. Where is she? Is she sick? She isn’t allowed to be sick. Who would take care of her? Didn’t she tell me once that her parents live in Jeonju? Should I get someone to call her? Did something happen to her on the way to school? What if–

“I-I’ll see you after your class, Tiffany-sshi,” a voice broke into her thoughts and Tiffany turned her head back to the girl she had just been making out with, feeling slightly guilty that she had let herself get distracted from remembering the girl’s name.

Come on, Tiffany. You can at least say bye to her using her name. It’s Y... It’s Y–

“You won’t see her after class. You should know she’s just using you and shouldn’t expect anything from her from this point on. She won’t fuck you or make you her girlfriend, if that’s what you’re thinking will happen. So you should just go fix yourself up and scurry along to class. By tomorrow your popularity should be where you want it,” Jessica responded in her stead and Tiffany turned back to her friend, surprised and aghast at her bluntness. Jessica had never before confronted the girls she was with.

“Jessi! That was rude!”

“Rude my ass. You and I both know that’s the only reason she came on to you. This one was probably waiting for you outside of your class, right?”

She’s right, but I can’t tell her that. She’s insufferable when she’s right...

“Who says? How do you know I didn’t come on to Yong Jee first?” she asked with a frown, even though the girl’s name jumping to her mind when she needed it almost made her smile at her sudden recall.

“Actually it’s Yong Joo, but I prefer Nicole,” the girl timidly corrected, but it was drowned out by Jessica’s agitated reply.

“Because you never do! They just happen to be there when you need them. Even the first girl came after you and you only messed with her around because you were pissed at Ta–”

“And your point is?” Tiffany cut in, her voice strained as she scowled at Jessica. “It’s my business, Jessi. What I do doesn’t concern you.”

Don’t make this hard for me. I’m already trying hard to keep up appearances...

“Oh really? Because I think it sure as hell does. Especially when you decide that messing around with people who don’t give a damn about you is better than facing the person you care about. Don’t tell me

it doesn't concern me, Tiffany, when I'm the one who had to watch you break down because you lost your temper and didn't wait for her explanation. You can't say that to me when I'm one of the people who's kept her away because you were too scared to face that you were wrong."

"I'm not sca—" Tiffany started to deny but was cut off by Jessica raising a hand to quiet her.

Only then did she realize their audience had grown larger, some people craning their heads to catch sight of them and others pushing closer to hear what was being said. Realizing what gossips could possibly construe Jessica's hold as when paired with their discussion, Tiffany touched the other girl's hand lightly to make her release her grip. Once free, she watched silently as Jessica glared at their peers, making several look away in an attack of self-consciousness and others in recognizing that she was not pleased with their lack of manners. The blonde beauty that was her best friend and the school's number one idol crossed her arms, the heated atmosphere that had erupted between them cooling rapidly and extending its icy fingers towards those who hadn't received the first hint.

Where's Yuri? Jessi's not going to listen to me when I'm the cause of her frustration. Unless she stops herself, only Yuri can make the ice recede...

"I believe you all are smart enough to realize that our discussion is not fodder for your gossip ridden minds, so I suggest you move along before I decide to make your life miserable. An anonymous phone call to the Dean, a report to the honor court, or some hacking and framing by a few friends of mine could be arranged in under an hour. But since I have four years of graduate school here ahead of me, don't think I won't find an opportunity when you least expect it," Jessica declared, her voice falsely pleasant as she delivered her threat.

"But are you and Tiffany-sshi fighting about Kim T—"

"There's always one person lacking intelligence, isn't there? Name and year?" Jessica demanded of the speaker, an otherwise angelic expression on her face if not for the hard set of her eyes.

Aish. Why did they say anything? For someone so petite, how the hell can she be so intimidating? Okay, distraction time...

"Didn't you say you had something to talk to me about, Jessi? Now would be the perfect time since I still have about ten minutes before class begins. It's a benefit to arriving early and—"

“Shut up, Tiffany. You’ll only make me angrier and I don’t think you want me to release my temper on this idiot” Jessica interrupted without taking her eyes from her target. “Now, what’s your name and year? Don’t make me repeat myself again.”

“Jessi~ Come on. Let’s go talk,” Tiffany tried again, smiling for their audience as she latched onto Jessica’s arm and started pulling her away from the now quivering student.

Jessica growled low in her throat and allowed herself to be dragged down the hall, but not before shooting a thoroughly annoyed look over her shoulder at the still assembled crowd. Tiffany rolled her eyes at her friend’s behavior as she guided Jessica to the closest stairwell, which she hoped would be empty. Thankfully, it seemed to be and she released Jessica only after the door closed behind them. After moving away from her glowering friend, Tiffany leaned against the wall, her own expression revealing nothing. She was almost positive that she was about to receive yet another lecture and that this one would last a while since the other girl was in a foul mood.

“What is with you today? Were you finally initiated into the mafia or something?” she asked after a moment, not expecting an answer and not receiving one. “Are you going to talk to me or can I go, Jessi? I really don’t have that much time before class begins, so—”

“Oh please. You could care less about being on time. The *only* reason that you want to get to class, the only damn reason you’re early actually, is so that you can sit in Taeyeon’s general vicinity. So don’t try to give me that bull,” Jessica spat, the quick retort causing Tiffany to frown.

“Okay, what crawled up your butt this morning? Did Yuri give you your morning kiss with cucumber breath or allow someone to flirt with her in front of you?”

Jessica’s eyes narrowed even further in annoyance before she shook her head. Then, she cast her gaze upwards, as if praying for patience that she didn’t really have. There was a moment of silence as Tiffany contemplated her friend, wondering what couldn’t be said when they were home later, and Jessica contemplated where to start. After releasing a long sigh, Jessica’s now neutral gaze moved back to hers and her friend shook her head again before speaking.

“When are you going to stop doing this, Tiffany? When are you going to stop being pissed at her and listen to what she has to say?”

Tiffany shrugged and lowered her eyes, unable to answer the questions that always came up in some form during Jessica's lectures. "I've told you. When I feel like it."

"And when will that be? Tomorrow? A month? A year? Never? When am I going to be able to stop associating you with hallways, classrooms, and even the freaking dining hall? I mean, seriously. The dining hall, Tiffany? I want to be able to enjoy my food in peace you know."

"Why does it matter so much to you? It's not like it's hurting anything but your appetite."

I know that's not why you care so much, but I have to do this. Sorry, Jessi...

"Cut the crap, Tiffany. You're my best friend and I love you, but I'm tired now and I have no qualms about hurting you. Hell, maybe being close to death would scare some sense into you," Jessica remarked, her voice laden with underlying exasperation. "I'm trying to tell you that you really need to figure out how far you're going to take this, Tiffany. You need to figure out before it's too late and you regret not doing so earlier. I mean, have you even thought of what you're going to do if she decides to give up on you? What are you going to do if she gets sick of watching you bitch around, huh? Tired of being ignored by you?"

Did she just say...?

Head snapping up and eyes wide in surprise, Tiffany stared at Jessica, who was watching her with an utterly blank expression. There were no outward indications of what she was thinking at all. Tiffany repeated Jessica's question in her head and then frowned, shocked that her friend had used that term to describe what she was doing. Jessica knew she didn't sleep with any of the girls, so she couldn't quite comprehend what the other girl's intention in describing it that way was.

What is she thinking?

"I'm not 'whoring around', as you put it. You know that."

"Sure, I know that. But tell me, Tiffany... does Taeyeon? What you were just doing with that girl, that's all she sees. She's never seen you push them away because she always turns her back on it. She can't watch it because it's supposed to be her in their place and how could she stand to see someone else there. She probably wonders what else you're doing with them, if you're doing the same things you did with her, but can't stand to know. And do you want to know why?"

Tiffany remained silent, unwilling to commit to an answer.

“Because she loves you. She wants to be with you, but you won’t let her close again. God, do you even realize that you have the poor girl whipped stupid? If you didn’t, why else would she have sought your forgiveness so determinedly all this time? Considering half the crap you’ve been doing, I know I sure as hell wouldn’t be.”

“You’re wrong, Jessi. She doesn’t love me. If she did, then she had plenty of time to say that when we were... when we were messing around with each other. Anything she says now would just be a lie. It’d only be because she feels guilty,” Tiffany forced herself to say, ignoring the pang she felt at not being able to define what they had as anything else.

Thanks for reminding me of how she called us ‘compatible’, Jessi. Thanks a lot...

“Damn it, Tiffany. You’re really a fucking retard, and Yuri and I have been ones for enabling your stupidity,” Jessica groaned, running a hand roughly through her hair.

“I’m not a retard.”

“Oh yeah? Then why is it that you’re trying to pretend that this game you’re playing is still about punishing her?”

“Wh-what are you talking about?” Tiffany stumbled slightly over her words, looking away from Jessica lest the other girl see how stunned she was.

Damn. How’d she figure it out? I’ve been careful to keep up the act, so where did I slip up? How is it that she kno— Wait, is this why she confronted me today? Because she figured it out?

“You do know that looking away two seconds too late did absolutely nothing to hide your reaction, don’t you? Plus, it was pretty pointless since you already confirmed my suspicions when you stuttered... Dimwit.”

“Yah! Stop calling me names!” Tiffany protested, scowling as she looked back to the smirking Jessica. She was getting tired of having her intelligence insulted, especially by someone who ranked two spots below her academically.

“Stop doing stupid things first and I might.”

“Yah!”

“Shh! Shut up and listen, dumb one.”

“Jess—”

“Look, you want to get to class to see your precious Taeyeon, don’t you? Then be quiet and listen.”

“Fine,” Tiffany huffed before grumpily crossing her arms, not even denying that seeing Taeyeon was exactly what she wanted.

Since she already knows, it’s pointless to pretend...

“Stop acting like you don’t want to hear what I have to say.”

“Just hurry up and say whatever it is. I haven’t got all—”

“Give up the game you’re playing... or be prepared to lose Taeyeon.”

Tiffany froze, the last word of her impatience dying before it even formed. Whatever she had been expecting Jessica to say, that definitely had not been it. The unexpectedness of hearing the other girl bringing up the possibility of losing Taeyeon forced her spine straight and her arms to her sides. Stepping away from the wall and back towards her friend, she searched Jessica’s eyes, looking for the reason behind her statement. Jessica sighed heavily and then rubbed her temple for a moment before speaking again.

“Look, you and I both know that you’re no longer playing because you’re angry with her or because you’re afraid of hearing that you were wrong. Your motivation hasn’t been either of those things for a while, but it took me until the other day to realize it. Now maybe you felt you couldn’t tell me that because of my threat to bury her for hurting you not even a month ago. Or maybe you just didn’t because you didn’t want me to lecture you even more about the stupidity of your actions. Whatever the reason though, I don’t really care. What I care about is that you might lose the person you love over your stubbornness.”

“I’m not stubborn,” Tiffany murmured, paying close attention to Jessica’s words but still wondering over her earlier ones.

“First sign of stubbornness is not recognizing that you are. Second sign, in your case, is doing things the hard way because you’re unwilling to be the first to give in.”

“What do you mean?”

“Tiff... You know what I mean. Every time you’ve flaunted yourself in front of her, you’ve been silently pleading for her to step up and claim you. You want her to drag you away from those girls and make people wonder. You want her to show everyone that the only one who can have you and the only one you want is her. You’ve been wearing this façade of a player that you’ve never been because you want her to seek, take hold of, and love only you. You’ve been waiting for her to do that, even though at first you told yourself that what you were doing was to show her you didn’t need her and that you were punishing her. Because you refuse to be the weak one again, you won’t go to her until she comes to you with everything she has.”

How did she... How does she know all that? She’s right, but how can she explain it better than I can? How does she know my feelings better than I know them?

“I’ve put a lot of thought into this for the past two weeks and that’s the conclusion I came to the other day. I thought about all your actions and her reactions. Then, I thought about the disappointment I always sense from you whenever you hear that she walked away or whenever she doesn’t try harder to approach you. I considered how you’d mope for hours afterwards and then the next day seem to step up your act... and that’s when I figured you out. Because you want so badly for her to take a definitive step towards you, you’re stuck in a cycle of one upping every previous thing you do because you won’t let yourself step back towards her first.”

Looking down, Tiffany let her eyes trace the contours of her loafers. She wasn’t sure what to say. There was not a single thing Jessica had said that wasn’t true of the situation. At first, it had been under the guise of vengeance, but her charade hadn’t been able to conceal the fact that she still wanted Taeyeon more than anything... that she still loved her. Sure, she had been angry and hurt, but those feelings hadn’t held their ground long. If she were to be honest, they had diminished not even two weeks into her ‘game’. Her change in motivation had come when she had realized that despite telling herself that she was fine without her, she wasn’t fine without Taeyeon at all.

Because if she had been fine, then when Yuri had unknowingly rented the first movie Taeyeon had taken her to see, she wouldn't have only been able to think of the way Taeyeon had adorably imitated a character named Margo while watching it nor roamed around her room like an insomniac later that night because of it. She wouldn't have purposefully chosen to sit near Taeyeon in their two classes together, wanting to be able to see the other girl if she wouldn't let herself be next to her. She would have deleted messages asking her to please answer her phone instead of replaying them on the days she didn't hear Taeyeon's voice. If she had truly been okay with the way things were now, then she wouldn't have jealously glowered at three girls in the restroom when she had caught them speaking about getting closer to Taeyeon, causing them to bow in apology to her before they hurried out.

Out of everything else, she had learned very quickly that jealousy was the surest kryptonite for all her pretense. After all, it was exceedingly difficult to feign indifference while fighting the desire to snatch Taeyeon out of the crosshairs of the loiterers and wannabe hangers-on who should've known they were aiming out of their league. In her mind, they were playing T-ball and even if they managed to elevate themselves to the Korean Series and beat out all other contenders, they still wouldn't be worthy. Therefore, she had started to find herself drawing attention to herself in class just to keep it from Taeyeon and keep those showing interest from getting nonsensical ideas.

Of course, none of the incidents had been moments deserving of the title 'can't live without her', but all of them did fall under the category of 'don't want to live without her'. Recognizing the contrariness of her actions and dwelling on all the reminders of the other girl she came across, she had released her ill feelings and changed the aim of the game. What she had wanted of Taeyeon during their time together, she had made it her mission to obtain. And since she wanted everything, she chose not to settle for anything less.

I really want it all. That's why I can't go to her first. Even if I didn't directly say it, I already offered her all of me and let her see how weak she's made me, so now it's her turn. I need her to show me, to tell me, that I'm what she wants... or tell me that I'm not. I can't forget that I could've gotten it wrong and misinterpreted her expression that time. I can't ignore that that's what I dread finding out the most.

"How can I? How can I step back to her when she hurt me and could hurt me again? Wouldn't that just be me proving how weak I am? Isn't that just proving that I need her more than... more than she needs me?" Tiffany questioned, keeping her eyes downcast as she shuffled her feet. "I can't do that. So if I have to be stubborn longer... if I have to hold out longer... then I will."

“Why are you so reluctant to be seen as weak? What’s so bad about it?”

“I—”

“I see no wrong in it except you’re using it as an excuse. You know, something I’ve learned from being with Yuri is that love lets us be both weak and strong, Tiff. It permits us to stand on our own, but also lets us fall because there is always someone to catch us. It allows us to be our faulted selves—rough edges and all—but it also lets us find someone who doesn’t mind that much and simply accepts us the way we are. And yes, love makes us susceptible to hurt, but it also always finds a way to soothe, heal, and make us better than before. It shouldn’t matter if there’s a chance of getting hurt. It’s not weak to take that kind of risk because you’ll emerge stronger in the end, especially when love is mutual. So stop being worried about it being ‘weak’ and just take the step back to her.”

“I— I don’t think I can.”

Even though I understand what you’re saying, I don’t think I can put myself out there again. Not like before...

“Then you really might lose her,” Jessica pronounced softly, a pensive look that Tiffany didn’t see overtaking her features for a moment before she continued. “I wasn’t going to tell you this until later... I wasn’t even going to have this conversation with you until later, but I changed my mind earlier when I saw her outside your class. I’m sure you noticed when I interrupted that she wasn’t there and that’s because she walked right past you. She barely glanced your way as she went into the class.”

Wait... So she was there? Taeyeon saw? She saw and didn’t care?

“Are you saying she... that she saw and didn’t stop?” Tiffany looked back up seeking verification, which Jessica delivered with a sharp nod. “I see,” she mumbled, crossing her arms once more.

Has it been too much? Is Jessi right? Should I just give this up and go to her? But if I do then—

“Tiff...” Jessica called, recapturing her attention. “There’s more.”

“... ”

“Tiff?”

“Define more.”

“Well, not only did she not look at you like she normally does, but she was busy talking to some girl when she went in. They were walking with their arms linked and Taeyeon was smiling really brightly at her. I haven’t even seen her smile since all this started, so I found it odd that she was smiling so much. And that’s why I’m saying you should stop. It’s why I brought up what she sees earlier. I mean, if she thinks that she can never be with you again, then what’s to stop her from moving on? What if she already is beginning to or has?”

“She wouldn’t,” Tiffany replied after a moment, shoulders hunching slightly as she uncrossed her arms slightly to grip her biceps. She didn’t realize that it made her look like she was using her crossed arms as a protective shield– as though she were bracing herself against what Jessica’s news could mean.

She’s like a freaking magnet now that I don’t talk to her. People are always trying to hang onto her, but she never seems interested, so she can’t have replaced me right? It can’t be what Jessi is thinking...

“How can you be sure of that, Tiff? If you won’t even believe that she loves you, then how can you be certain that she won’t?”

“I–”

The sound of the stairwell door opening cut Tiffany off before she could respond.

“Yah! Sica, why did you scare that first year? He looked like he was about to wet his pants when I asked him if he’d seen you. Then I thought he might be having a seizure because his finger was shaking so badly when he pointed me this way,” Yuri said, chuckling to herself as she entered the stairwell.

Watching her go to Jessica’s side and wrap an arm around her, Tiffany smiled faintly as the two exchanged their usual greeting. A light peck was followed by whispered words from Yuri and a nod from Jessica before Yuri turned her attention to her. The grin the taller girl directed her way was charming as always and Tiffany could not help but to let her own smile grow a bit. However, she couldn’t bring herself to verbally greet her friend, her mind still lost to the discussion Jessica and she had been having. Yuri’s smile seemed to dim a bit when she realized that and Tiffany could tell that she had caught onto the serious atmosphere because she started to look concernedly between her and Jessica before she spoke again.

“So what did I miss?”

“Nothing much, Seobang. Just what you and I discussed this morning.”

Yuri’s mouth parted slightly and she started nodding in understanding, her expression shifting to one of concern a moment later when neither Tiffany nor Jessica said anything more. Tiffany turned her gaze from her friends then, the weight of Yuri’s eyes on her causing some discomfort. It’s not that she wasn’t grateful that Yuri was worried for her or that Jessica had confronted her, but she suddenly felt as exceedingly unobservant. Her mind already running rampant with second-guessing caused by Jessica’s lecture and reflection on the last two months, she was ashamed to find that she was only now understanding and acknowledging how much her actions had affected others.

First with the random girls involved in her scheme, even though they had wanted something from her in return, she had acted selfishly and thoughtlessly. Without regard to anything else but her own intentions, she had made them disposable tools and in that manner dehumanized them. Then, in the case of her friends, she had caused undue concern for them by continuing with a senseless charade. Thankful for their support, but set on her path, she hadn’t truly taken into consideration how they must have been feeling watching her antics while being ignorant of the true motive behind them. And finally, towards the girl whom she was supposed to love, she had committed the greatest offenses. Locked in feelings of insecurity and determined for things to happen the way she wanted, she undoubtedly had to have hurt the person who had only been asking for her to listen.

Suddenly groaning and uncrossing her arms to lift a hand to her face, Tiffany thought she really must be ‘fucking retarded’, as Jessica so eloquently put it.

The anger, bruised feelings, and disappointment she had experienced now seemed so insignificant and pointless. She shouldn’t have ever tried to pressure Taeyeon to act by doing the very things she would never want to see the other girl doing with someone else. What was more, never should she have tried to hurt Taeyeon for hurting her. After all, hadn’t it been proven time and time again that ‘an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind’? Didn’t revenge or any other cruel intention always result in situations becoming far worse than they had been in the beginning?

This has all gotten so much more complicated than it had to be because of me. I’m guilty of far more than she is... Aish. I’d really deserve it if she did decide to forget about me...

“Fany-ah? Are you all right?”

“Hmm? Yeah. Yeah, I am, Yuri,” Tiffany replied a bit absently, hand sliding from her face as she looked back to the other two.

“Really?”

“Yeah.” Tiffany forced a smile. “Don’t worry anymore, okay? I’ll see you two later. I’ve got to get to class.”

I need to think about this some more. Maybe I’ll just go home for the day. I don’t think I can see Taeyeon right now after what I’ve done...

Without waiting for a response, she moved around them and exited the stairwell, not catching sight of a rather smug expression on Jessica’s face. Yuri did see it, however, and as soon as she was sure Tiffany was gone, she pulled away from her girlfriend and crossed her arms. Jessica’s expression quickly shifted to one that was entirely too innocent and Yuri raised a brow. Jessica just smiled at her and Yuri rolled her eyes before sighing in resignation.

“Okay, out with it. What did you do, Sica?”

“What are you talking about, Yul? I didn’t do anything.”

“Look at who you’re talking to, Sica. I know your expressions better than you do and I can tell when you’re pleased about something or hiding something from me. And right now, you’re doing both. So tell me what you did to Tiffany.”

“I didn’t do anything to her,” Jessica said seriously, but then seemed unable to stop a smirk from forming.

“...”

“Do you not trust me, Kwon Yuri? ”

“About as far as I can throw you.”

“Yah!” Jessica yelled, slapping her arm and glaring at her.

“No need to hit me. I’m just kidding,” Yuri whined, pouting a little as she moved to rub her stinging forearm. Jessica was more than kind of heavy-handed, but she figured should consider herself lucky that her girlfriend hadn’t instead decided to kick her since she was ‘heavy-footed’ too.

“Did I hit too hard?” Jessica suddenly asked, moving to examine the spot she hit.

A somewhat giddy smile making its way to her face at Jessica’s sudden concern, Yuri flushed lightly as Jessica knocked her hands away and began to gently caress the red tinged skin. She had always loved how quickly her girlfriend’s attitude could change. Seeing Jessica go from stoic to cheerful, from scarily moody to cutely grumpy, or from peeved to concerned, she sometimes felt like she was loving more than one person. It wasn’t tiring in the least though because she wouldn’t have her ‘multiple personality’ girlfriend any other way.

“You didn’t. It’s fine, Sica. Don’t worry about it. Just tell me what happened with Fany.”

“Like I said, I didn’t do anything to her—”

“Yah, Sic—”

“—but I did twist the truth concerning something I told her,” Jessica continued over her interruption, not lifting her gaze or stopping what she was doing.

“And that was?”

“Well,” Jessica looked up, a mischievous gleam in her eyes. “I might have told her that Taeyeon was doing something she wasn’t.”

“Elaborate please. I mean, I need to know why I’ll need to protect you when she finds out you lied to her.”

Jessica scoffed and released her arm. “She couldn’t do anything to me. Plus, she’ll thank me for it later. It didn’t seem like what I was saying was getting through to her, so she needed to hear that it’s possible

for Taeyeon to move on. I couldn't think of a better way to make her think about it then to give her an example."

"Aigoo, Sica. Tell me you didn't," Yuri groaned. "You know how she feels about Taeyeon."

"I know, but I was looking at it from Taeyeon's side too. It was too pitiful, Yul. I actually felt bad for Taeyeon because she was actually smiling while talking to some girl she was with, but as soon as she saw that Tiffany had someone pinned against the wall, it was like she no longer had the will to. I was actually glad that the girl dragged her into the class because she looked more heartbroken than Tiffany did two months ago. Her eyes held so much frustration that I can't help but think that she's probably ready to give up. Even though our friend is stupid, I don't want them to not be together because of that. So, I told Tiffany that Taeyeon looked happy and didn't pay what she was doing any mind."

"Hmm... Well as much as I don't condone you lying, I guess it should be alright this time since it seems like it wor—"

The stairwell door opened and they both turned instinctively at the sound, thinking it might be Tiffany, but saw two girls enter instead. Yuri flinched when Jessica suddenly hit her arm in the exact same spot as before and grimaced when her girlfriend quite rudely pointed at the shorter of the two, who was holding a rather beaten up shoebox under her arm. The taller of the duo seemed to be happily enjoying a pastry, but smiled at Yuri when she raised a quizzical brow. Turning her attention back to the girl Jessica was still pointing at, she saw that she was staring at Jessica's extended finger with amusement.

"Am I being fingered for something?" the girl asked, ignoring it when the girl standing behind her choked on her midday snack.

"You're the girl I saw with Taeyeon earlier," Jessica said, making Yuri focus a bit more intently on the strangers.

"And you're the girl she's scared of."

"What?"

"Nevermind. Anyways, I'm Lee Sunny and she's Choi Sooyoung," Sunny introduced. "We're

Taeyeon's friends."

"We're—"

"Tiffany's friends. Kwon Yuri and Jessica Jung," Sunny interrupted Yuri. "We know."

"Oh. Umm... Did you need something?" Yuri asked, seeing that Jessica was now busy analyzing Taeyeon's friends.

"Just wanted to give you this and tell you to pass it on to Tiffany," Sunny replied and held out the shoebox. "Don't do it today though. If you can, give it to her or leave it for her to find tomorrow after tomorrow's special concert. It's important that she gets it *after* the concert."

"What concert? And what's in the box?" Jessica asked, narrowing her eyes and looking suspiciously at it as Yuri accepted it.

"There's a concert tomorrow night because Taeyeon's going to si—" Sooyoung's response was cut off by Sunny elbowing her in the gut and causing her to drop her snack. Yuri had to bite her lip to keep from chuckling at how upset she looked after retrieving it from the floor.

"Like Sooyoungie said, there's a concert tomorrow. It's been organized by the music department and will feature several student performances. It's mandatory for all music majors to attend, but it'll be open to the public. As for what's in the box... Well, let's just say it's a surprise for Tiffany."

"Yah! You have to tell us more than that if you expect us to do what you asked," Jessica shouted, displaying aggravation at Sunny's closed-mouthed responses.

"It's for Tiffany-sshi's eyes alone. It's to show her what Taeyeon's feelings for her have been since the beginning," Sooyoung answered morosely in Sunny's stead, busy staring longingly at the pastry she could no longer eat.

"I see. Um... But if you can, could you please tell us why we need to make sure to give it to her after the concert?" Yuri asked politely, placing her hand on Jessica's shoulder when it looked like she was going to demand an explanation. She felt like she had an idea what this was all about and she didn't want her girlfriend to get angry for no reason. Sunny and Sooyoung probably had their reasons for not

telling them more, so they had to respect that.

“I think it’s impact will be greater afterwards. Just... just please give it to her. Taeyeon doesn’t even know I’m doing this and might kill me later for it, but I really think Tiffany needs to see what’s in that box. I know my idiot best friend hurt her, but she really needs to know it wasn’t intentional. Taeyeon’s just... really an idiot.”

“Okay then. I’ll make sure that my equally idiotic friend gets it,” Yuri said with a smile, willing to do as requested because there were obviously no ill intentions attached to it.

“Thanks,” Sunny returned gratefully before turning and hooking arms with Sooyoung. “Come on, Sooyoungie. I’ll buy you another one on the way to class, so don’t sulk.”

“I’m not sulking. It’s just such a waste. I mean, I’d only eaten like a fourth and I’m so hungry. You know I haven’t eaten breakfast yet since you made me go all the way to your old apartment to get that box. Aigoo. It’s such a waste, Sunny bunny. Just think of all the hungry children in the world who don’t even get to—”

Yuri watched bemused as Sunny pulled the slightly babbling Sooyoung behind her out the stairwell and turned back to Jessica when she felt the shoebox being taken from her hands. She thought Jessica might try to look in it, but her girlfriend just lifted it so that it was near her ear and then shook it gently. When she didn’t seem to hear anything, Jessica shook it again with more force before lowering it with a frown.

“Yul... What were their names again?”

“Sunny and Sooyoung. Why?”

“Because I’m going to kill them for wanting us to give Tiffany an empty box.”

Those Games We Play (Part IV)

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Circling first one way and then the other around the cramped dressing room filled with racks of worn stage costumes and boxes of discarded props, Taeyeon paced restlessly, her steps short and jerky. Her uneasy gaze, which had been flickering towards the door with increasing frequency in the past hour, found its way there once more and lingered on its brushed nickel handle for a moment when voices reached her from beyond the closed portal. Seeing the handle remain as still as it had been when she had glanced at it only moments ago, she experienced what was now a familiar swell of disappointment and internally grumbled about how long Sunny was taking with the errand she had sent her off on. Then, after lowering her gaze to the tiled floor of the room that seemed to be the drama club's depository for its castoffs, she sighed and resumed her trek within its confines.

Still anxious. Still impatient. And still very much in need of relief.

Normally, she would have at least been able to deal with the anxiety, but her present level was outside her scope of experience. She could've set herself at ease long ago if what she was afflicted with was just anxiousness born of simple stage fright, but that wasn't the case. Instead, after having been left alone more than an hour ago with nothing more to do than further internalize lyrics that couldn't be any closer to her heart than they already were, she was being harassed by a very different sort of nervousness. What hadn't overly concerned her a few days ago when she had made her choice was now suddenly overwhelming for her, as the enormity of what she was preparing to do had caused all rational thought to flee.

Because in just a little while, she would be stepping onto a stage that only her friends and a select few others knew she was going to perform on. In less time than she had spent rehearsing since contacting Professor Lee, she would be awaiting the rise of the curtain and clearing her head of any thoughts except why she was standing there. In a quarter of the time it had taken her to dress and retrieve a *lost* item, she would be dredging up every bit of courage that she possessed to deliver an unscripted introduction before she cued the music. And in around twenty-seven more minutes than the duration of her composition, in front of hundreds of people, she would be surrendering her last safeguard and fully unmasking herself for the first time...

All for what was truly an audience of one. All for Tiffany Hwang.

So suffice it to say, at the mere thought of opening herself up so completely to potential acceptance or rejection, she had grown more and more apprehensive the closer that moment became. Caught in the midst of an internal battle in which her hopes played tug o' war with her fears, where dreams of a promising future clashed with dread over possible failure, she was finding that the latter held significantly more sway than desired. In a conflict where she needed her hopes to be the victors, the negative was much easier for her to believe in than the positive. Thus, the pessimism that besieged her kept her chained to thoughts of how bleak her future could be without Tiffany in it and no matter how hard she tried to free herself, it wouldn't seem to let loose of its constricting hold on her.

Glancing towards the door once more as she made her nth circuit around the room and finally seeing the handle begin to twist, Taeyeon reversed her path and moved to intercept Sunny, hopeful that the other girl could bring her the relief from her torturous thoughts with the news she had been waiting for. Needing to know at least that Tiffany was somewhere in the audience in order to have something to combat her insecurities, she had been impatiently awaiting this moment. However, to a far greater degree of disappointment than she had experienced moments ago, it was not Sunny at the door. Instead, it was her best friend's girlfriend who entered the room.

Curiously, the younger girl entered while walking backwards and once inside, closed the door partially before moving her face close to the slit that remained. Wondering why the other girl was there and what exactly she was doing, Taeyeon backed up until she could lean against the dressing room's counter and crossed her arms. She then proceeded to watch silently as Sooyoung's head turned back and forth, the other girl intently focused on her task of peering out of the room using one eye at a time. After a moment of observation, a bemused smile crept to Taeyeon's lips and she inwardly shook her head at the antics of the strange girl before her.

I knew she was a weird one, but what in the world is she doing?

Coughing lightly to get Sooyoung's attention when her curiosity got the better of her, Taeyeon raised a brow when Sooyoung simply waved a hand behind her and muttered something almost inaudibly. She thought it might have been something about feeling like a thief, but she wasn't certain and didn't particularly care to ask again. So, resigning herself to waiting for the other girl to finish whatever it was that she was doing, she was rewarded a moment later when Sooyoung finally pulled the door closed and turned to her. The other girl's eyes swept over her once before they made eye contact and Taeyeon

forced back a sigh when Sooyoung chuckled, then a moment later erupted in noisy laughter.

Sunny did the exact same thing. For all that, you'd think they'd never seen me in a dress before... Is it really that strange?

"Okay. Go on and laugh it up. Get it out your system," she remarked dryly while smoothing a hand down the front of the strapless gray dress she wore, tugging lightly at the lacy black sash tied around her waist in a gesture of self-consciousness.

"I'm sorry. I'll stop," Sooyoung responded in a choked voice, struggling to contain her mirth. After a moment, she succeeded and managed to grace Taeyeon with a grin so fierce that Taeyeon was sure her cheeks had to hurt. It was actually kind of scary looking.

"You done?"

"Yeah. Sorry. It's just that it shocked me. I mean, you look so grownup."

"..."

"You do," Sooyoung insisted. "Just like a gradeschooler trying to play dress up."

It doesn't really look that bad does it? I'm not supposed to look like a kid in this Taeyeon thought, feeling as though another worry had come to rest on her already burdened shoulders.

"Come on. Laugh a little. It's cute that you don't look half as childish out of your uniform as you do in it. I feel like you're becoming a real woman now," Sooyoung continued to tease, but instantly became concerned when she noticed Taeyeon's fingers start to agitatedly brush and tug on her sash at her words. "Hey, are you alright?"

Shrugging her shoulders in response, Taeyeon bit her lip before looking up at Sooyoung with a surprisingly shy expression on her face. Her confidence in her appearance, which had been present since this morning when she had visited the same boutique she had previously gone to with Tiffany, was fading fast after having been laughed at twice. As the opinions of her friends held significantly more weight than that of a stranger, not even remembering how she had been spoiled with innumerable compliments by the attendant who had helped her shop was enough to halt its retreat. Normally, she was not one to care what others thought about such things, but just this once she did.

I just want to look good for her. Is that too much to hope for? I want her eyes to never leave me if my words or song fail to hold them there... I want Tippi to have only me in her eyes tonight, but I don't want it to look like I'm trying too hard. I don't want to look desperate for her attention... even if I am.

"It's just... It's just I thought this event deserved me looking my best, but now I'm thinking this is too much. I mean, you know I'd prefer casual with sneakers any other day, so I'm not really good with this 'dressing the part' thing yet. I actually had help picking this out and getting ready, but I don't know if--"

"You look great, Taeyeon. Fantastic even. Trust me when I say that you have nothing to worry about because the moment that curtain rises, you're forever going to be plagued by those fans you've never cared to have. Once they see this you... once they see the real you who has never let anyone but Tiffany-ssi even catch a true glimpse of her... well, let's just say that Ms. Ice Goddess Extraordinaire might just be deposed," Sooyoung interrupted her rambling, her words matter of fact. Pausing to let them sink in, she then continued on a much lighter note.

"You know, I can just imagine how this will play out. You'll screw up the entire hierarchy by being both the smart as hell midget as well as the hidden beauty with a voice that can actually cause the great me to stop eating just to listen. So not only will you change the fate of all the little people who fawn over you and that of those celestial beings, but you'll even affect my appetite. Now that's real power I tell you."

Taeyeon couldn't stop her lips from twitching before they curved into another smile, this time at the sheer ridiculousness spewing from Sooyoung's mouth. Thankful that the younger girl had somehow understood what she had needed and reassured her while simultaneously lifting the mood, she uncrossed her arms and motioned for her to come closer. As soon as Sooyoung was within reach she pulled her down into a hug, forcing the taller girl to compensate for the difference in height that even the heels she wore could not completely triumph over. Sooyoung then proceeded to pat the top of her head lightly, making her forget for a moment that she was supposed to be the older one.

Allowing herself to be caught up in the unnie and favored dongsaeng bonding moment, it wasn't until an amused voice had Sooyoung spinning around with words of denial flying to her lips that she realized that they had had an audience.

"So this is where you snuck off too while I was keeping an eye out for Tiffany. My, my, Sooyoungie. Cheating on me with my best friend, are we? No wonder you're always so eager to see her."

“What? No, Bunny. I would never— We were— I was just checking if— You know I only like her because she gives me food! She’s like my… like my benefactor! Haha… ha.”

“Yah. Lee Soonkyu. You should quit it before the poor girl’s brain stops functioning even more than it already has,” Taeyeon directed, looping her arms around the nonsensically babbling girl’s waist from behind and looking around her before continuing with a threat that caused the smirk on Sunny’s face to fall. “If you don’t stop bullying my precious dongsaeng, I’m going to take her to meet a better person than you.”

“What?! Yah! Give my girlfriend back before you put dangerous ideas in her head! I just got her trained to believe there can’t be anyone but me, so give her back before you corrupt her with thoughts that could get her killed. I’d prefer her alive long enough for me to grow as tall as her.”

“So then you want her alive forever huh? Because it’d take about that long for that wish to be granted,” Taeyeon stated calmly, fighting the urge to laugh as Sunny’s cheek bulged just as she knew it would.

“Hmph. It’s not like you can grow taller either.”

“True, but the difference between us is that I don’t care to. I’m already the perfect height for Tippani,” Taeyeon shrugged carelessly, the action belying how her gut clenched with hope that those words were—and had—remained true.

“Well, what do you know? In my not-so-humble opinion, my Sunny bunny’s height is also just perfect. Can you imagine what I would do without those short limbs of hers to reach places in the lower cabinets for me or how I would survive without her to tell me if the air is different down there?” Sooyoung interceded, coming back to her senses before Sunny unintentionally said something that might impact Taeyeon’s confidence, which they both knew the other girl needed every bit of. “Plus, the beautiful advantage of her unfortunate height disadvantage is that it makes it so much easier for me to be dominant like this…”

Taeyeon released Sooyoung as she pulled away, watching as she moved toward Sunny and startled the other girl by capturing her face with both hands. While Sunny squeaked as Sooyoung tilted her head up towards her and leaned down to press their mouths firmly together, Taeyeon’s jaw dropped as Sooyoung thoroughly demonstrated who truly held the reins in their relationship. Eying the two, she

decided then and there that she never wanted to learn anything more about the pair's relationship. By no means was she herself innocent, but the pace of the two already about to progress to the stage of disappearing hands was enough to make her look almost angelic. Closing her eyes at the first flash of skin, she cleared her throat loudly but it didn't seem to work as all she received in return was a sound that she definitely did want to be party to hearing.

I'm going to have nightmares. Ones where I hear things in the night that are as far from Sunny's alien sounds as she is from growing.

"YAH! I'm still standing here!"

Not receiving a response from either girl—and sincerely hoping they weren't really going to do anything with her there—Taeyeon decided to try a different tactic since she did not have time to be standing idle. Time was ticking away and despite having been put somewhat at ease by the presence of her friends, a spiral of envy at their relationship was reminding her of the uncertain future of what had never been a relationship before between herself and Tiffany.

"Hey, could you stop long enough to tell me what I wanted to know? After you do, I'll go find another place to hide out until it's time for me to go on. I promise you guys can do whatever you want as soon as I'm gone because I'm pretty sure the door has a lock that you can—and will—hopefully make use of."

Just tell me if Tiffany's here or not so I can go attempt to cleanse my brain of what I just heard and witnessed Taeyeon thought, repressing a shudder.

"Aww. Is poor Taengoo feeling a wee bit frustrated? Don't worry. When everything works out tonight, I'm sure Tiffany will be more than willing to help you take the edge off the withdrawal you've been suffering for the past two months," Sunny replied, causing her eyes to shoot open and heat to creep up her neck at the implication.

Note to self: never joke with Sunny again because she's becoming more and more vicious when she retaliates...

"I— That has nothing to do with what I'm talking about. I just want to kn—"

"There's no need to deny your addiction to her. After all, I believe we're all adults here and know how much you enjoyed your quick 'fixes' in the past," Sunny interrupted, embellishing her remark with an almost impish smile and wink.

Struck silent by the unforeseen attack and the memories it evoked, Taeyeon wasn't sure whether to just groan or bang her head against the wall at her inability to deliver a suitable comeback.

I had nothing even remotely related to... to that with Tiffany in my head until she said something. Crap. I need to get rid of it. Must think of other things... Like that ugly ass toupee our old music theory professor now has. Or that dining hall employee whose mole winks at me whenever she gives me extra servings that I pass off to Sooyoung...

"What's with the bothered expression, Taengoo? Can't you tell that I'm just messing with you? This is just payback for the other day. I obviously know what you're looking forward to the most is less base than that," Sunny said, responding to her prolonged silence with a touch of exasperation. Still busy trying to empty her mind, Taeyeon unintentionally ignored her, causing Sunny to look to Sooyoung for aide.

"Bunny, maybe you should take her and..." the rest of Sooyoung's suggestion was lost to her as Sooyoung leaned down to whisper it into Sunny's ear. Whatever she said caused Sunny's eyes to widen as she shook her head in what appeared to be disbelief.

"Aish. This idiot."

"What? Who?" Taeyeon asked, her attention recaptured by Sunny's frustrated declaration.

Is she calling me names again? What exactly did Sooyoung just tell her?

"You. Now come with me," Sunny demanded before grabbing her arm, forcefully pulling her from the room.

Where are we going? No one's supposed to know about me performing yet, so what is she doing? I'm not even fully ready since I still have to put on the—

"Wait a minute, Sunny. I have to grab the—"

"Sooyoungie, could you grab the tie in that box sitting in there on the counter? We probably won't be back here before the concert starts and she's going to need that. Also, could you go check with my uncle to make sure they're ready to set her up with an in-ear monitor and see if her accompanist has arrived? When you're done, we'll be near the stage, so just join us there."

Without waiting to see if Sooyoung heard her or was even willing to do as requested, Sunny dragged her past gawking stage hands, technicians, and other performers, seemingly unperturbed about revealing her presence. Unlike earlier, when she had snuck Taeyeon into the dressing room with all the stealth of a seasoned professional after meeting her at the back door of the university's amphitheater, Sunny did not seem to care one iota about the murmurs of those interested in the reason the 'genius' was amongst them. Instead, she seemed far more concerned with dragging her as close as possible to the curtain that hid those in the wings from view. Sunny motioned for her to look towards the opposite side of the amphitheater, then stepped aside and shoved her closer to the opening, where Taeyeon carefully peered out into the still lit hall to find what her best friend wanted her to see.

Immediately, her eyes locked onto a struggling figure being led down the aisle towards the stage and even without Sunny telling her, she knew it was the person she had needed to know was present tonight.

"She doesn't look happy to be here," she murmured to herself, her gaze unwavering as she studied Tiffany's scowling face as best as she was able to considering the distance between them.

Professor Lee made attendance mandatory tonight because I asked him to, but it looks like she's been forced to come. Could she have had plans already? Maybe with that girl she was pressed against yesterday? Or someone new?

"It really doesn't matter whether she wants to be here or not. All that should matter to you is that she is. All you should care about is the fact that she will be right in front of you and has no one to use as an escape. As you can see, her friends are the ones who seem intent on her attending for some reason, so I'm sure they won't be assisting her," Sunny pointed out from behind her, her voice soft as she continued in deference to potential eavesdroppers. "So the words you've wanted to say to her and everything you've felt since you parted, you have this opportunity to convey it all to her. You really have nothing to be worried about right now... except maybe finding back your confidence that she always seems to get the best of."

That's easier said than done Taeyeon thought before deciding to reveal what she knew to be the underlying reason for all her anxiety to her best friend. Sunny had, after all, helped her before, so why not now as well?

"I understand what you're saying, but it's kind of hard to find it when frankly... I'm absolutely terrified that she'll run again. Before I can tell her what she has more rights to hear than anyone else, I'm scared

she'll just take off and never look back," she confessed, without taking her eyes from a still struggling Tiffany. "And what am I going to do if that's what she wants, Sunny? To not see me? What am I going to do if she really wants to be with someone like that girl she with yesterday or someone who hasn't even appeared yet? I know I'm not supposed to want so much after what I did to her, but can you really blame me for wanting her to not even think of leaving me by myself? "

"You know, you and your irrational fears are exactly why you're--"

"An idiot, right?" Taeyeon completed with a slight smile, forcing her now longing gaze away from Tiffany as she turned around to face Sunny. Since she already knew herself to be one, she couldn't exactly fault Sunny for labeling her as such.

"Yep. The title fits you so well because I can't believe that you're worried about her running away considering how you look right now. Now, I know I may have laughed a bit--"

"A bit? Sunny, both you and Sooyoung just about died laughing when you saw me."

"Okay... So I laughed a lot, but it was because I realized then that there is no way that this can turn out bad. Well, that and I imagined you with the tie that you probably only liked when it was coming off of her. Seeing as it's pink and all, it's just too funny to imagine you spor--"

"I get the picture. Move on please," Taeyeon requested, shaking her head at the image of herself that Sunny prompted to come to mind.

She didn't need to remind me of how ridiculous I'm going to look with that thing around my neck...

"The point I'm trying to make is that once she catches sight of you and once your song reaches her, I do believe you'll have a hard time getting rid of her. And do you want to know why? It's because she is going to know that she will never find another girl like you. She'd be an idiot of the same caliber as you if she even thinks she could," Sunny stated boldly, knowing her pep talk was working when thoughtful expression crossed Taeyeon's face. "Just think about it, Taeyeon. What kind of girl wouldn't choose to hold onto someone who's stayed faithful to her even when the opposite hasn't been true? Someone who's gone to such lengths in the past few days to organize this entire concert just for her? What kind of girl is really going to say no to you when you're offering her all that and more?"

“After everything I’ve done, she could.”

“But she won’t. And on the off chance that she does, she won’t run away from you for long.”

“But she’ll still have run away.”

“Well, who wouldn’t when faced with you? Just make sure she knows you’ll chase her until she stops.”

“But what if she doesn– ”

“Then you’ll just have to catch her.”

“But what if– ”

“You will.”

Knowing they were at a stalemate because Sunny would be quick to invalidate any concern she brought up, Taeyeon could do nothing but give into the other girl. She was still hesitant to believe, but was more willing to now that Sunny had bolstered her hopes and battered her fears. In the war that had been waging within her, her best friend had turned the tide in favor of the latter and severed the chains pessimism had had on her. For the first time since she had arrived tonight, she felt as though everything would turn out the way she wished it to. She had only needed to be reassured.

As much as I’ve hurt her, I’m not willing to let her go... I’m not the ‘if you love them, let them go’ type. So if she wants to run again, then I guess I’ll just have to invest in a damn good pair of running shoes and give chase, won’t I?

“I hope you’re right about that, Soonkyu,” she finally replied, feeling her confidence returning and determination settling over her.

“Oh please. You and I both know I’m right. I’m psychic, remember?” Sunny waved a hand flippantly, as though banishing any thought that she could be wrong. “And you’d better stop using my name before I decide not to play nice today. After all that ego inflating I just had to do and the things I’ve done that you don’t even know about, I think I deserve some respect.”

“What things don’t I know about? ”

“ ... ”

“Sunny, what did you do?” Taeyeon prompted, noting the sudden panic in her friend as the other girl suddenly whirled around and spotted an approaching Sooyoung, who was being followed by one of the audio technicians and the music department’s maknae, Seohyun.

“Oh look. It’s time to get you set up! I still need to go use a little aegyo on the light geeks to make sure everything is timed correctly, so I’ll see you later. Make sure you’re nice to our brilliant maknae, okay?”

“Lee Soonkyu...”

“Later, Taengoo. Keep your eyes centered on the front row and good luck!” was all Sunny said before she scurried off with a confused Sooyoung, who barely had time to pass off the tie in her hands to Seohyun before she was dragged away.

Utterly bewildered, all Taeyeon could do was stare off in the direction the pair had disappeared. That is, until Seohyun stepped forward and dropped the loosely knotted tie over her head, commenting in an all too knowing way that it looked like one of the ones that her Tiffany unnie always wore.

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“Yah! Damn it. Let me go!” Tiffany shouted, scowling as she tried to free herself from the two girls frog-marching her down the aisle between them.

What the hell?! This is— Aish! I swear I’m going to kill them. Just as soon as I—

Tiffany lifted a jean-clad leg as best as she was able and brought her boot down hard, its heel targeting the foot of the girl on her right. Her plan was to attack and escape in the surprise that followed, but she was outmaneuvered by her intended victim as they swiftly moved their foot outside of her limited range. Stumbling forward as she was unexpectedly thrown off balance due to her failure, she winced as the already firm grips on her biceps tightened in an effort to keep her upright. Once she was stable again, her arms were secured even more firmly against her sides, but not before a dangerous growl

from the girl on her left effectively dissuaded her from pursuing any other such attempts at liberation.

Considering who the person was, she wasn't crazy enough yet to ignore the threat of someone she knew had to be the main culprit behind an abduction that had gone far too smoothly for it not to have been premeditated.

Frowning in remembrance, Tiffany still could not believe how quick and efficient her kidnapping had been. Not only had her two kidnappers been lying in wait outside her bedroom to seize her the moment she had exited, but they had also already had her car running by the time they had 'helped' her to the parking deck of their building. The scheming key thieves had even gone so far in their complicity as to enlist the aid of the on-shift guard, whose involvement had been marked by his opening the back door of her hijacked vehicle for them and then further by the cheerful wave he had sent her way before returning to his post. Furthermore, to add insult to injury, her abductors had let her discover for herself the true extent of their machinations after unceremoniously shoving her into the backseat like she was the criminal instead of them.

Freaking child safety lock... On both freaking doors... Damn her... Evil little—

Tiffany continued to grumble—with a few more choice words about girl on her left—for a few moments more before frustratedly sighing. Recalling her earlier disbelief at the discovery of the child-proofing, she could only imagine how much more outraged she would be right now had the duo currently 'escorting' her down the aisle towards the stage used duct tape on her as well. As she hadn't exactly made the ride to the university pleasant, she was fairly certain that they probably wished they had invested in some to forestall her righteously bombarding them with questions, accusations of betrayal, and threats of cutting ties. Well actually, she was positive that at least the blond-she devil in the driver's seat had wished she had had some, considering how she had muttered "I knew we should've grabbed the tape" before telling her to "sit back and get the hell over it... or else".

With such a response, was it really any wonder that she was ignorant as to why she had been forcibly brought against her will to a concert she hadn't planned to attend?

Of course, just like every other music major, she had received the campus-issued bulletin regarding their compulsory attendance, but that didn't explain her now ex-friends forcing her to come using such an extreme manner. She had revealed to Jessica and Yuri last night that she had something important to take care of this evening and they had been understanding. They had given her their support and hopes

that everything went well. They had even told her that they probably wouldn't come to the concert since they themselves had other plans. So that was why she was at a complete loss concerning their actions... and at even a greater one over how in the world they had reserved seats in the front row that they were now arriving at.

"Yah! Jessi~" Tiffany whined, thinking the other girl must still be angry over her trying to harm Yuri when she was roughly pushed into one of the three theater seats tied with a length of black ribbon.

"Shut up and just sit there."

"But why am I here?"

"Because I brought you. Need another reason?" Jessica asked menacingly as both she and Yuri took the seats on either side of her. "Try and get up from there and plan on losing your ability to walk... Permanently."

"Yes, I do need another reason," Tiffany declared firmly, forcing herself to believe that she wasn't that intimidated by Jessica's threatening aura. She further convinced herself that Jessica's *bluff* had nothing to do with the reason why she was not just taking off now that she had the ability to.

"Well, I don't care."

"When you ambush me and drag me somewhere that even you said you weren't going, you can't expect me to not want to know why, Jessi. I mean, since Yuri's a dance major and you don't like events like this in the first place, you didn't even have to come since your dad's all buddy-buddy with the Dean. Plus, you said you guys had plans."

"Believe me. I don't want to be here anymore than you do."

"Then why are you? And why did you drag me with you? You know I have some things to take care of—" Tiffany paused, feeling like someone was looking over her shoulder. She twisted around in time to see a fellow student hastily straightening in the row behind her and she glared at him.

Maybe I shouldn't be talking about this here. Damn nosy people...

"With your ex-lover person," Jessica contributed when she didn't finish, turning back to give her own

glare to those in the row behind them before facing the stage once more.

Guess I don't need to be worried about speaking freely now Tiffany thought, before continuing with what she was going to say before.

“Yeah. Her. You know I was planning to go—”

“Like I said, I don't want to be here. But I'll be damned if all this drama doesn't get settled tonight.”

“Wait, what? What does coming here have to do with that? It's not like I can approach her here or could find her in all these people. You know that's why I used your connections to get her address,” Tiffany replied, feeling completely baffled by Jessica's delayed answer to her questions.

This is... She is... Oh God, she's making my head hurt. Maybe Yuri will give me a straight answer.

“Yur—”

“I think it's about to start,” Yuri cut her off, gesturing towards the stage when she looked her way.

“Can you just tell m—”

“You should really watch, Fany-yah. I hear the opening act is specially performing tonight.”

Looking put out as her quest for answers was once again thwarted, this time by Yuri's gentle insistence rather than Jessica's sundry responses, Tiffany debated responding. She wanted to continue her questioning, but deciding that it would be futile to further harass either girl at this point, she instead sulkily sat back in her seat before turning her attention towards the stage as directed.

By the time her eyes came to rest on the platform only meters in front of her, the curtain had already begun its ascent and its smooth, gradual movement cued the rapid extinguishing of the hall's overhead lights. In the darkness that barely allowed one to see their neighbor, the curiosity-filled murmurs of the settling audience faded to nothing as anticipation rippled through the air. Then, after a few moments passed absent of sound and illumination, three spotlights appeared downstage and steadily brightened as they began moving. Lighting only the areas they fleetingly crossed over, they finally converged at center stage to reveal a solitary figure with their head down and face in shadow.

Shooting forward in her seat with a gasp as she recognized the form she was intimately familiar with, Tiffany breathed out their name softly in wonder.

“Taeyeon...”

As if she had heard her, Taeyeon lifted her head then and an intriguing splash of pink around her neck briefly caught Tiffany’s eye, but it was not dwelled upon as her admiring gaze swept down and then back up the petite form of the other girl. Transfixed by the stunning sight the other girl made in a close-fitting gray dress that flared slightly at the waist, she was lost to the shocked murmurs of recognition around her and too awestruck to dispute Jessica and Yuri’s side comments about Taeyeon’s improved appearance sans glasses. With silken curls falling over her softly rounded shoulders and dark eyes sparkling uninhibited, Taeyeon enchanted her just as she had in their first encounter and subsequently, held her and every member of the audience under her thrall. Without saying a word, the girl whose affections she planned on reclaiming had the entire audience holding their breath as she lifted the microphone she tightly held to her mouth.

“Good evening,” Taeyeon greeted with a serene smile, her gaze panning the audience in an encompassing gesture before settling on Tiffany, whose heart began thumping twice as hard as normal.

She can’t know I’m here. It’s too dark for her to see, isn’t it? ...But why do I feel like she knows exactly where I am?

“I’d like to first welcome you all to Soshidae University’s First Annual Winter Concert—whose name I am very sorry for. I’m afraid I’m not very creative, so you all unfortunately have to suffer for that. Perhaps I should just stick to my school work?”

A titter of polite laughter traveled through the audience and Tiffany smiled slightly at Taeyeon’s lame attempt at humor.

“From the response I just received, perhaps I shouldn’t try and make jokes either. So, instead, I shall introduce myself to those of you who don’t know me. My name is Kim Taeyeon and I’m a senior Music major here at Soshidae. I will be the first of many performers tonight and while it may be selfish of me, I hope I will be the one that none of you forget,” Taeyeon admitted and Tiffany unconsciously leaned forward even more than she already was in her seat, her mind beginning to churn with questions as the other girl continued.

She's performing? I knew she could sing, but I've never heard her. What is she doing?

“Because you see, tonight’s performance is very important to me. It’s the first time I’ll be performing a composition of my own and it’s all because there is someone who I need to hear me. I owe this someone an apology, but more than that... I owe this someone the truth I denied them.”

Who? Is it the girl Jessi said she was with? Or is it... is it me? Is she talking about me?

“So, I want to tell this someone... the person who owns this—”

Tiffany’s eyes widened as Taeyeon gently lifted what she now saw to be a pink tie around her neck up with her free hand, not having looked closely at it before but now doing so. Recognizing it as one of her own, she felt her breath catch and heart still as Taeyeon looked down at it as though it was something she treasured. It made her wonder where Taeyeon had gotten it and why she had kept it, but her thoughts were utterly derailed in the next moment as Taeyeon looked back up and allowed the tie to drop from her hand. An indescribable maelstrom of emotion hit her then, when Taeyeon moved to place her now empty hand over her heart before continuing to speak in a much softer voice.

Taeyeon-ah...

“—and this, that I was never playing a game with you. I know my words alone might not convince you of that, but I hope my song does. I hope you hear it and understand what were, have been, and still are my feelings for you. Because this song... this song is my heartfelt plea to you. For you, Tippani Hwang.”

Tiffany swallowed, the lump that formed at hearing her name called in that oh-so-familiar way she cherished going down with difficulty as she collapsed back into her seat. Her eyes were beginning to sting, their corners collecting the first stirrings of moisture as she realized that Taeyeon had just taken the step that she had been longing for her to take. Instead of her stepping back to the other girl as she had decided to do, Taeyeon had stepped forward—no, she had leaped forward to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding that had separated them. In front of people they had fooled and kept in the dark, Taeyeon was revealing what she had before seemed intent to keep silent.

It was like a slap to the face to Tiffany, effectively waking her to the wrongs she had done Taeyeon even better than Jessica’s words and her own realizations had the day before.

As the spotlights on Taeyeon dimmed and the stage slowly lit up, taking on an almost ethereal glow

that extended out over and exposed the first few rows of the audience, Tiffany could not tear her increasingly teary eyes away from the girl who appeared to have no thoughts of looking anywhere but at her. ♪ She felt like she would suffocate under the adoring gaze she was the unaccustomed recipient of, its weight growing more burdensome as the amphitheater was filled with the sounds of a flute accompanied by a piano. Her heart clenching uncomfortably as a sorrowful melody swelled and abated, she was unable to do anything but be still as Taeyeon parted her lips once more. When a beautifully emotive voice slipped past them, for the first time since that day she had run away, she could do nothing but finally listen to what Taeyeon had to say.

seuchyeo ganayo... uriui sarangeun

Did it pass by... Our love

kaseum apeun chuoekingayo

Is it just a heart-breaking memory?

doraseoneyo... keudaeui maeumeun

It's turning around... Your heart

nunmullodo jabeulsun obnayo

Can't I catch it with my tears?

My Love~ saranghaeyo. saranghaeyo. keudae deutgo ittnayo...

My Love~ I love you. I love you. Are you listening...

My Love~ ijimarayo. jiuji marayo. uriui sarangeul.

My Love~ Please don't forget. Please don't erase. Our love.

Taeyeon-ah... What have I done to you? To us? I'm sorry, Taeyeon-ah. I... You... Tiffany thought brokenly, her tears spilling over as Taeyeon used the short break between verses to blink her own glistening eyes rapidly. Fisting her hands together in her lap, Tiffany bit her lower lip hard at the remorseful smile that flitted across Taeyeon's lips before she parted them once more.

naui nunmuri keudaen boinayo

Can you see my tears?

haruharu keuriwohabnida

I long for you every day

kaseum ddeollideon keudae ibmachumdo

My heart beat when we kissed

ijeneun chuoeki dwoettnabwayo

but now it's all a memory

My Love~ saranghaeyo. saranghaeyo. keudae deutgo ittnayo...

My Love~ I love you. I love you. Are you listening...

My Love~ ijimarayo. jiuji marayo. uriui sarangeul.

My Love~ My love~ Please don't forget. Please don't erase. Our love.

maeil nan keuriumsoge

Every day I long for you

harureul beotineunde

That's how my day goes by

keudaen eodittnayo...

Where are you?

Taeyeon stepped forward as she held the note, opening her eyes that had closed and coming closer to the edge of the stage as she continued, the slight tremble in her voice causing Tiffany to release a shuddering breath before lowering her head.

naega...

I am...

mianhaeyo... mianhaeyo keudae iji mothaeseo...

Sorry... sorry that I can't forget you...

My Love~ dorawajwoyo. ddeonaji marayo naegyeoteseo...

My Love~ Please come back to me. Don't leave my side...

jebal...

Please...

After the last note of the piano faded, not even a second passed before the amphitheater erupted in applause; not a seat except for Tiffany's remaining occupied as Taeyeon received what would be the only standing ovation of the night. The now unburdened girl on stage bowed in acknowledgement as shouted praises emerged from the din, but still only had eyes for the girl who had yet to lift her head. Meanwhile, Tiffany had raised a hand to her mouth and was breathing heavily into it, trying to restrain her emotions as best she could. She was trying to keep herself from sobbing aloud as happiness, love, guilt, and newer feelings of being undeserving of Taeyeon's love wreaked havoc within her.

Honestly, she didn't know what she should do; not when she knew Taeyeon was waiting for a response she wasn't sure she had the right to give her anymore.

I don't... She... I need to leave. I need to go. This is too much at once.

“Jessi, my keys,” she croaked without looking up at the girl she didn’t know was impatiently signaling Taeyeon to hurry and get off the stage.

“What keys?”

“Give me my car keys, Jessi. Please,” Tiffany pleaded, finally looking up to see Taeyeon kicking off her heels with a determined look on her face.

Turning to Jessica with a look of sheer panic on her face, Tiffany grabbed onto the edge of the other girl’s jacket, ignoring Jessica’s swatting at her hands as she managed to retrieve what she sought. She quickly stood and easily sidestepped her best friend, but not before sparing a glance at Taeyeon, who was already running for the stairs that would bring her off the stage. Hearing Taeyeon’s call of ‘Pani-ah’ behind her as she again ran away, she was half way up the aisle before she wondered why Jessica had let her go after putting so much effort into getting her there. However, the thought did not slow nor stop her from running out the doors, intent on going to the only place she knew Taeyeon could not immediately reach her.

Home...

.....

“Pan-Pani-ah!” Taeyeon shouted again as she watched Tiffany disappear out the doors, feeling slightly out of breath after hurrying to get off the stage.

Damn. I want to chase her, but I really need to get into better shape first.

“Don’t worry. You have time enough to catch up to her. In fact, you probably beat her to where she’s going,” a voice assured from her left, causing her to look over and then hastily stumble at seeing Jessica and Yuri fast approaching.

Je-Jessica-sshi? She was waving at me when I was on stage and now she’s smirking... Um...

“Where’s she going? No, wait. How will I beat her there?” she asked, deciding that she wasn’t that scared of Jessica. Not when she ended answers from her, at least.

“Our apartment. And let’s just say that she’s going to be using public transport,” Jessica replied,

twirling something around her finger twice before closing her fingers around it. She then extended her hand out to Taeyeon and uncurled her fist.

“When did you detach her car key, Sica?!” Yuri exclaimed, her surprise matching Taeyeon’s own at seeing key and fob lying in Jessica’s outstretched palm.

“When I went down to start her car and engaged the child-safety lock on the doors.”

“But I thought the guard did that, Sica. That was you?”

“Mmm,” Jessica nodded. “Haven’t you learned how devious your girlfriend can be by now?”

“Umm... What are you two talking about?” Taeyeon interrupted before Yuri could respond, bringing their attention back to her.

“Oh, it’s nothing. We just made sure Tiffany was here is all, but that’s beside the point. Right now, it’s more important that you use this and go to this address.”

Taeyeon readily accepted the key and a piece of paper Jessica dug out of her pocket, glancing down at it briefly before looking back up at the blond girl wonderingly.

“Why are you helping me? Don’t you like... hate me or something?”

“I don’t hate anyone. I hate messy situations; which is why I will tell you now that if you ever hurt Tiffany as much as you did before or break her heart in any way again, I will make sure you never get another chance to do so. I’m not overly fond of getting my hands bloody, so don’t make me regret helping you tonight. Don’t make your friends regret getting my help tonight. Got it?”

Nodding quickly as Jessica speared her with what could only be described as an ‘I can maim you in a second if I want’ glare, Taeyeon only let herself relax when the other girl’s expression morphed into a smiling one. Yuri was shaking her head at her girlfriend’s behavior, but also smiled at her before looking down. Following the other girl’s gaze to her bare feet, Taeyeon curled her toes in embarrassment as Yuri chuckled. The taller girl stooped down and quickly undid her sneakers before removing them and moving them towards Taeyeon. Then, she wrapped her hand around Taeyeon’s leg

and lifted it, causing Taeyeon to release a startled yelp as she had to grab onto Yuri's shoulder to keep her balance.

"Yuri-sshi, what are you doing?"

"Lending you my shoes. You're feet are smaller than mine, but Tiffany would kill us later if you got hurt in any way and you never know what you could step on," Yuri answered, tying the first shoe with a double knot.

"But I have shoes. I can just—"

"Best not to waste time getting them. Plus, you'll move faster in these even if they're a little big."

"What about you?" Taeyeon asked, touched by Yuri's thoughtfulness.

"I have another pair in the dance studio. Don't worry. Just concern yourself with Tiffany. Her car is in the MA deck. Space twenty seven."

Yuri finished tying the other shoe and stood, receiving a side-hug from Jessica, who narrowed her eyes when Taeyeon didn't move immediately.

"Yah! Get your ass moving already! We're not giving up our apartment tonight just so you can stand there!"

.....

Jessica Jung is worse than the devil incarnate, if that's possible Tiffany thought, climbing out of a cab in front of her building.

Wrapping her arms around herself as she shivered, she hurried across the empty sidewalk and inside to the lobby, glad that Jessica had at least left her house key alone. While she had been intermittently cursing her best friend during the ride home, she couldn't stay mad at the other girl for long about stealing her car keys again because she was too busy trying to hold herself together until she was in the comfort of her own room. Not wanting to be seen crying by anyone, she had forced her tears back and kept her head down, but now that she was almost home, it was harder to keep them at bay. All she

wanted to do was crawl in her bed and hug her pillow, because at least then she could anchor herself to something as she mourned her loss.

As she told herself that Taeyeon deserved better than her.

She only bruised my feelings, but I did more than that. I stuck a knife in and twisted it until the wound bled. I hurt her until she was pained enough to write her heart into that song. I hurt her and yet, she still wanted me... still wants me by her side. It's where I want to be, but I'm too selfish for her. I only cared about my own feelings in all this, so how can I even say I love her? How can I be—

A hand suddenly settled on left shoulder and spun her around midstride, causing her to teeter slightly as she was caught off guard. Her arms shot out instinctively to reestablish her balance, but it was an unnecessary action as the person who accosted her quickly pulled her to rest against them. Looking up, she opened her mouth to tell the person off when their arms boldly slid into her opened jacket and around her waist, but froze upon seeing that it was Taeyeon who held her close. Seeing the troubled expression on the face of the girl she hadn't been in such proximity with in what felt like far more than two months, she could say nothing as Taeyeon's pained question made her avert her eyes in shame.

“What is it with you not listening and running away from me, Pani-ah?”

How can you still come after me? What did I do to deserve it? I don't want to let you go even more now, but I have to, don't I? I have to make you see that it can't be me, don't I?

“Pani-ah?” she heard after a moment spent basking in the warmth Taeyeon exuded, which she knew she would no longer have once she made it upstairs and locked the other girl out.

I don't want you to, but...

“Let go,” she quietly ordered, keeping her gaze on the floor to ensure she didn't show Taeyeon how much she wanted her to protest. How much she wanted her to say no.

“...”

“Let go.”

Taeyeon was silent for a minute more before she quite deliberately leaned away and lowered herself into Tiffany's line of sight, obstinacy coloring her one syllable response.

“No.”

“J-just let me go, Taeyeon.”

“No. I won’t. Not now. Not again. Not ever. Not even you slapping me will make me. Nor would it stop me from going after you if you somehow managed to get loose,” Taeyeon doggedly replied, straightening and moving her arms up around Tiffany’s torso, easily maneuvering them beneath the slightly oversized red and white varsity jacket the other girl wore.

Aish. I guess I’ll have to... Why’d she have to be wearing heeled boots? Better yet, how’d she run so damn fast in those things?

Lifting her head and straining upward on her toes slightly as she pulled Tiffany closer than before, Taeyeon placed her chin atop her repeat offender’s shoulder. Then, she raised a hand to the other girl’s hair, sliding her fingers into the soft strands as she turned her head to place a soft kiss against the side of Tiffany’s. Inhaling the light fragrance of shampoo as she did so, she tightened her hold and ignored how the runaway girl in her arms grew stiffer by the second. Instead of caring about Tiffany wanting her to release her, she closed her eyes and allowed her lips to linger because she couldn’t and wouldn’t let Tiffany go.

After speeding through she wasn’t sure how many red lights and earning herself more than a few lengthy blasts of the horn from fellow drivers in order to be waiting in the lobby for Tiffany’s arrival, she was not going to give up so easily at such a response from the other girl. Considering what their friends had done for them and her own feelings on the matter, she would not allow Tiffany to push her away. After seeing up close the red-rimmed eyes that spoke of tears she had hoped she had been imagining back at the amphitheater, she would not let Tiffany run again. She would not permit the other girl to cry over her again unless she was right there to console her.

I won’t let you get rid of me as I know you’re trying to. I don’t know exactly why, but I won’t let you do it... Pani-ah, do you know how much I’ve missed having you this close? If you only let me hold you for a few minutes longer, I promise I can convince you to stay. I promise I’ll never give you anything to cry about again unless it’s from happiness.

“Please. Please let me go,” Tiffany entreated, voice cracking as she tried to find the strength to break free of Taeyeon’s embrace before her resolve completely crumbled.

Before I really cry in front of you. Before I don't care that I'm not worthy of what you're offering, please just let me go, Taeyeon-ah.

“What don't you get about what I just said? N-O. No. I'm not letting you go, Pani-ah. Not when I chased you all the way here. Not when you're exactly where I've wanted you to be. Not until I finish telling you what you never stick around long enough to hear.”

Tiffany yearned to bury herself in Taeyeon's arms in the face of the other girl's unyielding resolve, clinging tight to the form that fit against hers best. She wished to place kiss after kiss against Taeyeon's face and everywhere else she could reach, illustrating by action alone how much she had missed her and how much her words meant. She ached to slip her fingers between Taeyeon's slender ones, feeling her pulse run rampant at just holding the warm hand of her love. She desired the chance to do those things and more... but she wasn't worthy of the opportunity to act on her wants.

She couldn't forgive herself so quickly now that she was equipped with the knowledge that Taeyeon had shed tears over their separation just like her. Or that she had achieved her initial goal of tormenting the other girl when she had foolishly been consorting with others. She couldn't pardon herself knowing that Taeyeon had wanted just as much as her the entire while. That the girl, who had come after her despite how she had treated her, longed for her just as much as the opposite was true.

Thus, instead of doing anything she wanted, she reluctantly reached up to place her hands on Taeyeon's shoulders and pushed against them as she spoke words aimed to twist the knife in the wound she'd created further.

“Go away. I didn't ask you to chase me. I don't want you to.”

Liar.

“I don't want you to hold me. I don't want to be in your arms.”

I'm going to hell for this.

“I don't want to hear anything from you. Your words don't matter to me.”

But this is for the best... Right?

“You do-you don't matter to me. I don't lo-I don't like you,” she finished in a rush, forcing the words out and cursing her inability to lie about the last. No matter what other untruths she spoke, she couldn't

say that she didn't love Taeyeon when she knew she did.

Feeling Taeyeon's hand slip free of her hair a moment later, Tiffany clenched her teeth to refrain from taking back what she said in order to keep it there. In the silence that descended over them, Taeyeon's other hand fell from its place next and was followed by the weight of her head being lifted from the shoulder Tiffany wished it to stay on. Then, Taeyeon stepped back and her own hands dropped to her sides as she searched the other girl's expression, looking for any sign of Taeyeon not believing her. However, she found nothing but flickering eyes that finally settled as Taeyeon nodded her head once sharply. Detachment present in her gaze, Taeyeon took another step back from her and Tiffany made to follow before she realized it would be defeat the purpose of what she had just done. So she remained where she was.

"All right. I understand. I won't hold onto you when you don't want me to. You're free to go if you want, Tippani-sshi."

So much for you not letting me go. Were those just empty words? Tiffany thought, puzzled and upset by the sudden change in Taeyeon's demeanor. By the formality and by the fact that she didn't even try to fight...

Frowning and not realizing that Taeyeon could see the glassy sheen that was returning to her eyes, she turned and began walking away, keeping her steps slow as she waited for Taeyeon to stop her. When she made it to the elevator and inside without hearing anything from the girl she left behind, she pressed her lips together and stabbed the button for the second floor with more force than necessary before looking down at her boots. She blinked back angry tears as she heard the door begin to shut, irritated at herself for hammering the last nail into the coffin that was her time with Taeyeon. She couldn't even blame Taeyeon for believing her because who wouldn't after taking into consideration the words she had just said and her actions of the past two months?

What the fuck am I doing? I should just tell her, right? I don't deserve her, but I—

"Damn it, Tippani, didn't I make my feelings clear enough for you yet?"

Head immediately lifting at the furiously spoken question, Tiffany watched with shocked eyes as the closing elevator door was stopped by an arm intruding in its path. The door slid back open and Taeyeon stood there, not looking like what she had just done had caused her the slightest bit of pain as she trembled with other emotions. All vestiges of her previous passivity were long gone, her expression

torn between frustration, affection, and ferocity. Gulping as Taeyeon entered and backed her into the corner, Tiffany felt trapped and slightly claustrophobic in the enclosed space as Taeyeon proceeded to slam her hands against the walls on either side of her.

She hadn't counted on Taeyeon turning aggressive.

"I don't believe that crap you just said out there. You're trying too hard to get rid of me for any of it to be true," Taeyeon growled, leaning in closer Tiffany, who was now trying to make herself one with the walls.

I only let you go just now because I was sure you would turn around before you reached the elevator. I heard your hesitation and felt your reluctance, so I was sure you wouldn't go this far. Aish. What's wrong with you? Why would you... I know you don't want this because your eyes are all red again, Pani-ah.

"You wanted me to come after you when you left the concert and even just now. Even though you were tense, you didn't want me to release you because you wanted me to hold you and still do. And you want me to tell what it is I have to say to you because just like me, you need reassurance too. So don't try to act as though you don't *like* me, Tippani. Because you do. You want me... just like I want you."

Moving her right hand from the wall, Taeyeon gently cupped Tiffany's face in her hand, smoothing her thumb across the other girl's cheek as she continued speaking with significantly more tenderness.

Tiffany trembled in response.

"Didn't you earlier hear me calling you *My love*?"

She tilted Tiffany's head down and angled her own up until she was a hairsbreadth from the other girl's lips. Tiffany's breath caught.

"My love, didn't you hear me asking you to come back and not leave my side?"

Watching Tiffany's tongue dart out before lifting her gaze back to steadily dilating eyes, Taeyeon slowly smiled, her lips grazing Tiffany's with a featherlight touch.

"Didn't you hear me say it? Or do I need to say it even more directly?"

She purposefully brushed Tiffany's lips once more with her own, eliciting a mumble of discontent from

Tiffany for her teasing.

“Pani-ah, I lov—”

“Wait. Not here,” Tiffany cut Taeyeon’s declaration off, just as the chime indicating they had reached her floor sounded. There was no way that she would hear those words in an elevator of all places.

Placing a hand over the one on her face, she pulled it down and entwined her fingers with Taeyeon’s before leading the surprised girl out into the hallway. Guiding her to the apartment she shared with Jessica and Yuri, Tiffany dug into her pocket for her keys and then unlocked the door, dragging the curious Taeyeon inside. Taeyeon barely had time to look around the entryway and living room before she was forcibly dragged and deposited in Tiffany’s room, where she stumbled back with Tiffany’s hands on her shoulders until she ended up falling onto the large bed taking up much of the room. She quickly scrambled to sit up as Tiffany towered over her, but her fingers hit something solid and sent it tumbling off the floral patterned comforter, causing her to freeze as it drew both her and Tiffany’s gazes to its contents lying scattered on the floor.

While Taeyeon stared in shock and sudden realization of her best friend’s earlier evasiveness, Tiffany moved to the mess and bent down, thoughts of settling everything while in the circle of Taeyeon’s arms temporarily diverted as she picked up each item.

Are these... ticket stubs? This flyer... isn’t it from that boutique where I got Taeyeon into—and out of—that two piece lingerie set? And this napkin... isn’t it from that restaurant in Sinchon-dong? This piece of paper is from when she was teasing me and this... this is a... this is a picture of us? When was this taken? I’m sleeping and she’s... did she take this? Are these things Taeyeon’s?

Dropping the other objects absently into the shabby-looking shoebox sitting nearby, she straightened with the photo in hand and turned to look at Taeyeon, who sat on the edge of her bed twiddling her fingers nervously. Climbing up beside the other girl, Tiffany held out the picture and silently asked for an explanation, her eyes moving back and forth between the photo and Taeyeon. Taeyeon worriedly nibbled her lip in an adorably timid way before turning to face her, reaching for her right hand and drawing it into her lap as she inhaled deeply. Looking on concerned when the other girl began playing with her fingers, Tiffany saw Taeyeon seeking—and seemingly needing—skinship outside their usual for the first time.

“I... I collected the things in that box while we were together. I kept them because they were reminders to me of our outings... of dates during which I was really happy because I got to spend time with you. Wanting to have them for remembrance when you were gone, I secreted them away in a box for when I would need them later. For when I let you find someone better than me, I wanted to have evidence to prove we had had something that was as close to real as I could make it... I wanted proof that you had once been mine.”

“Taeyeon-ah? What are you talking about?” Tiffany asked, her thoughts turning sluggish as she struggled to absorb Taeyeon’s revelation.

Find someone better? What is she saying? Is she saying...

“I took that picture of us that time you came over to my place. Although I cherish all my memories with you, that time is my favorite. Do you remember? You came over and fell asleep while we were talking. Not making out or doing anything else, but just talking and stealing innocent kisses in between. You fell asleep just like a kid mid-sentence and looked so peaceful. I was proud that you were comfortable enough in my arms to rest and that you seemed content, but I was certain that you wouldn’t always feel that way. So, I took a picture to be able to tell myself that you once did.”

“Tae-Taeyeon-ah?” Tiffany questioned, her voice huskier than before as she realized what Taeyeon was saying. Taeyeon weakly smiled at her in response and then lifted her hand, pressing a kiss against its back before placing it against her left cheek and looking down.

“That day you slapped me here, Pani-ah... I had started to realize that day that what I was doing was wrong. Always thinking that you deserved someone better than me—thinking there was someone who was perfect for you in every way was out there and I was just a stepping stone to them—I was wrong in thinking that way. I never took into consideration the fact that maybe you wanted to stay with the stepping stone that was me,” Taeyeon confessed, missing Tiffany’s shaking her head in denial at her self-appointed label.

Come on, Taeyeon. Might as well get it all out now.

“Even though you all but told me, I didn’t let myself believe that you wanted me or that only you could decide who you wanted to be with. To me, you were my ideal that I knew I shouldn’t try and touch, but I couldn’t stay away from you. So, to be with you, I chose to do so in secret because I didn’t want anyone telling me I wasn’t worthy of you. I lied to you and let you think all that time that you weren’t

important to me because of insecurity with myself. There was absolutely nothing wrong with you or what you were asking of me... it was all me. You know, when you asked me that day in class if there was anything I liked enough about you to explore, I wanted so badly to tell you that I liked everything about you, but I held back and it resulted in me hurting you even more.”

“Taeyeon-ah, you don’t have to—”

Tiffany was going to tell her that she didn’t have to say anymore and that she understood, that it was in the past now, but Taeyeon looked back up and then nuzzled her cheek against her palm with closed eyes.

“I know I’m not good enough for you, but I love you.”

“Tae—”

“Pani-ah, those were the words you didn’t let me tell you that day. Of course, I mishandled telling you them and I’ve gotten angry at myself every day since because if I had told you everything at the beginning, you would’ve known what I was trying to say. I could’ve had you all this time if I had just...” Taeyeon sighed and Tiffany found her hand being pressed closer still against Taeyeon’s cheek.

“I really deserved it when you slapped me. I acted quite dim-witted, didn’t I? In trying to protect myself, I didn’t protect you. I didn’t protect you from me and I really dislike myself for that. I made you cry and caused you unnecessary heartache... I’m so very sorry for hurting you like I did, Pani-ah.”

Really, what did I do in my past life to deserve someone as wonderful as you Kim Taeyeon? I’ve already been so selfish, but I don’t want to think about you not being mine again. It’s too hard to try and give you up. We’ve both been selfish fools, but maybe we deserve each other because of that.

“You don’t have to apologize.”

Taeyeon opened her eyes when Tiffany placed her other hand on her right cheek; the picture of them having been tossed away with the thought that it could be picked up later. With her face cradled gently between the other girl’s palms, she could do nothing but meet Tiffany’s eyes as her touch subtly implored. Their breaths intermingling in the closeness resultant of Tiffany’s leaning in, she allowed the searching gaze of her love to discover what it would as Tiffany was now privy to all she was feeling.

Her love. Her anguish. Her frustration. Her guilt. Her regret. Tiffany could see them all as she had since discarded her mask onstage. Tiffany could probably see her surprise as well when she found herself on the receiving end of a light, but prolonged kiss that concluded with Tiffany resting her forehead against hers.

“You don’t have to apologize to me because I hurt you too. Difference is, I did it on purpose.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that I was aiming to hurt you because I saw it that first time you came across me with someone else; I saw that you cared about me. Initially, I wanted you to feel the same pain I felt. Because you never told me and because I didn’t give you a chance to, I wanted to hold you responsible for everything, even what I was at fault for. I wanted to show you that I was okay without you and then I realized I really wasn’t, Taeyeon-ah. Not at all.”

I thought she was trying to comfort herself, but I can’t blame her. I can forgive her as long as she never wanted them. As long as she only thought of me while she was doing it, I think I can forgive it.

Although, if she... with them... um... can I ask her that?

“But even when I realized it, I continued to act like I was and just changed my objective to making you claim that I was yours in front of everyone. I deliberately positioned myself in places where you would have to watch me with those girls and did more and more each time you seemed to have no response to it. I never went past what you saw though. I couldn’t because they weren’t you. What you saw was me being caught up in not wanting to be seen as weak, but Jessica made me realize I could lose you if I continued on that path,” Tiffany continued, her left hand sliding to her tie that was still around the Taeyeon’s neck.

Although Taeyeon had the urge to interrupt then, she remained silent, raptly listening because she didn’t want to make the mistake again of not hearing what Tiffany was truly saying. She didn’t want to have anything to second-guess.

“If you thought I was betraying you with those girls, I could lose you and so last night, I made plans to come and see you today. I didn’t intend to go to the concert because I needed time to plan what I was going to say to you. I had your address and was on my way out the door, but Jessica and Yuri brought me to the concert. And I heard you. As I listened to you singing, I truly realized how much damage my

selfishness had caused.”

“Pani-ah, we both—”

“So we both hurt each other, but I have more that requires forgiveness. For trying to pressure you. For ignoring you and making you watch me with other people. For being immature and selfish. For not handling myself better. I’m sorry for it all, Taeyeon-ah. I would understand if you didn’t want to forgive me, but I hope you do.”

“What’s there to forgive?” Taeyeon responded with unspoken sentiments of relief as Tiffany drew back to look at her, her quick response appearing to surprise the other girl.

She didn’t do anything with them. She was still loyal to me...

“I slapped you. I kissed other people. I let them touch me in front of you. And I’ve run without hearing you out; twice.”

“Well, like I said, I deserved that slap. I’m just thankful you aren’t heavy-handed.”

“And the rest?”

“Pani-ah, you may have kissed other people, but if you were wishing it was me, then I’ll be fine imagining it was me in their place. You might have let them touch you, but as long as it was my hands you were longing for, I’ll ease your conscious by erasing their undesired traces hundreds of times over. And yes, you’ve run away, but since I know you’ll always want to be caught by me, I’ll chase you as many times as necessary to ensure you stay with me.”

“How can you forgive me so easily?” Tiffany murmured amazed and Taeyeon throatily chuckled in response.

“Silly. You forgave me just as easily.”

“I’m serious.”

“And I’m answering seriously. I can forgive you because we both know that people can make mistakes.

Nothing in life is without some error, especially pursuits of the heart. Knowing that, if I can't forgive you your wrongs and you can't forgive me mine, then we're doomed to a future marked by an unsuccessful romance and after ours, we'll continue to be faced with the same end in all we attempt. However, since I can forgive you and you forgive me, we don't have to worry about a future like that. Starting at the point of forgiveness, as long as we're both willing, we can work to make this a lasting relationship... which I really want to have with you, Pani-ah."

Say it Taeyeon, since she cut you off earlier. Say it and convince her if she tries to say no.

"I can work hard for us from now on. I can make sure you always know that I care, even if I have to tell you today, tomorrow, and every day after. If you want, we can start from the beginning, and learn more of what we bypassed before. Pani-ah, if you want it, you can take my heart that's been yours all this while and hold onto it as long as you want. Because I'll never ask for it back."

Taeyeon moved her hands to Tiffany's face, copying her love's earlier action and smiling crookedly at the wide-eyed look she received.

"I think I've made it clear by now, but just in case... I love you, Pani-ah. I just need to hear those words from you because if you're willing to hand it over to me again, I'll gladly accept your heart from you."

Blinking but unable to push any sound past her lips, Tiffany faltered as Taeyeon waited patiently for her response. It wasn't that she couldn't say what Taeyeon wanted to hear, but she just wasn't sure how she could say anything that might surpass the other girl's third confession. Counting the song, the incident in the elevator, and presently, that would make three times Taeyeon had revealed her feelings while she had not even stated hers once. She might have inferred, but she had not professed them in as much depth and certainly not with the words Taeyeon had yet to hear from her.

Come on. Three words, eight letters. How hard is it to say them?

"Taeyeon, I..."

She's waiting. She's taken all the steps first, so just say it. She won't care if that's all you can say.

"I love you," she all but shouted at Taeyeon, whose mouth twitched before she schooled her features.

"I really love you, Taeyeon-ah. I should have told you first, but a part of me still wanted to be reassured

by you. After thinking for so long that you didn't feel the same as me, it's normal I suppose. Still, you deserved to hear it first."

"I don't thin—"

"You did," Tiffany insisted before leaning back in to place a kiss on Taeyeon's forehead. "I love *you*. And you'll never be a stepping stone to anyone."

"Pani—"

"Have some confidence because you've tread all over and marked up my heart with your claims since that first kiss," she cut in, dragging her lips down to place another kiss on the tip of Taeyeon's nose.

"You had m—"

"If I'm your ideal, then you became mine. So don't ever worry about me looking elsewhere. I never will."

Tiffany kissed Taeyeon's right cheek as she interrupted again.

"You—"

"How could I dare to when you could be snatched up by someone better than me if I'm not careful?"

She brushed her lips across Taeyeon's as she glided across to the left cheek, lingering there in apology for the injury she had inflicted on it previously.

"Pani-ah, let me—"

"Talk? You don't need to right now. You just need to listen and hear me when I say that: You. Are. Beautiful. Kim Taeyeon," Tiffany continued, punctuating each word with a peck to the other girl's lips while she finally moved her right hand from Taeyeon's face to *her* tie. "Believe me. No one could replace you. So never think you're not worthy of me again, because if anything, I'm unworthy of you."

"That's not tr—"

“Last thing and let’s make this clear,” Tiffany smirked, tugging on the tie and making Taeyeon look at her curiously.

“Everything. Pink. Mine.”

“So you want the tie back?” Taeyeon questioned, understanding the English and feeling disappointed that that was how Tiffany was concluding things. It felt like the tie had more importance than her, but of course, that was just irrational jealousy speaking.

“If it comes with you in it, then I want it back. However, I was thinking more along the lines of you turning the most adorable shade of pink when I do this...”

Now comes the fun part. Let’s see how you like it...

“Yah! Pani-ah,” Taeyeon gasped out as Tiffany suddenly straddled her, the other girl leaning heavily against her and causing her to fall back onto the bed.

“See. Most adorable shade of pink,” Tiffany pointed out from her position on top, trailing a finger over Taeyeon’s exposed collar bone as she sat up and pulled the tie free of its knot.

“I think I’m more red than pink,” Taeyeon mumbled, her neck and face growing more flushed as Tiffany’s weight shifted against her hips, pressing body further into the bed.

“Technicality.”

“No, it’s not. Red and pink aren’t the same. Red is a primary color while pink is composed of re—”

“Shut up, Taeyeon-ah,” Tiffany commanded as she reached for Taeyeon’s hands next, threading their fingers together before moving Taeyeon’s arms above her head and holding them there. “You’re pink if I say you are.”

“But Pani—”

“This is so not the time for any sort of geek speak, Taeyeon-ah. Save it for later when it might be more of a turn on. Maybe you can impress me with your knowledge of anatomy, hmm?” Tiffany murmured before swooping down and capturing Taeyeon’s agape mouth.

Eagerly complying with her demands, Taeyeon allowed Tiffany to set the pace for the rest of the night as their wandering hands explored, dancing and delving about familiar places. As their ravenous mouths skimmed and devoured, reacquainting themselves with paths and locations they hadn't visited in a while. As their incoherent sounds of pleasure and echoing pleas sounded out, sometimes solo and other times as a duet. As their willing bodies pressed close during bursts of energy and even closer during the longer periods of fatigue, trying to make up for lost time. As their fervent desires became satiated needs, lulling them closer to sleep in each other's arms.

And under the afternoon rays that crept through the slats of Tiffany's blinds hours later, the two reconciled girls finally succumbed to slumber amongst twisted sheets and tangled limbs, having finally ended in a better place than they had started. For the games played between them—imagined or otherwise—had reached an impasse... at least for now.

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It may be that all games are silly. But then, so are humans.

~Robert Lynd



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