

# Coffee and Regrets

*A Min7en Story*

A pair of lovers,  
worn and faded by time, hope to recapture  
what they once had  
... or walk away after bittersweet goodbyes.



This is a work of pure fiction.

This is not real. In any way shape or form.

**fiction (n.)**

1. *a. An imaginative creation or a pretense that does not represent actuality but has been invented.*

*b. The act of inventing such a creation or pretense.*

2. *a. A literary work whose content is produced by the imagination and is not necessarily based on fact.*

*b. The category of literature comprising works of this kind, including novels and short stories.*

Just so we're all clear :::grins:::

This is a not-for-profit publication.. None of the events depicted here are real and are meant for personal entertainment purposes only.

Readers are advised materials contain Adult Sexual Content and Mature Situations.



## **Dedication**

For Tiff,  
(and all bunnehs)

Thanks to everyone who wanted more of Min and Se7en.  
Sometimes things can be stormy but after the rain, flowers bloom.

Snookies and thanks for reading!

Haato.



# One

*Decadence*, Changmin thought as he licked at the whipped cream on his mocha. A dribble of chocolate clung to his lower lip. It disappeared with a slow swipe of his tongue, the bittersweet liquid clinging to his throat as he swallowed.

“Shichi,” He whispered, closing his eyes against the pain in his heart. “Ah, how this tastes of you.”

Se7en was lost to him, as faded as the chocolate in his mouth. Distance eroded their bond more than anger or distraction. Both men were busy, lost in a struggle to be heard among the hundreds of other singers in the Asian market and their personal lives became collateral damage.

Gazing out at Seoul’s stormy skies, Changmin mourned the emptiness at his side. At one time, he would have heard laughter and teasing then the warmth of a slow seduction as his lover would coax him from his silence. Now, he brooded under thundering rain, lost in his thoughts and melancholy.

The others were a phone call away. They’d become nearly ninja in their ability to slip away from prying eyes and find their way to Changmin’s apartment, a loft hidden in an industrial area near the studio. Chasms separated them in public, a cold rigidity enforced by the glowering men around them but in private, they sought one another out, rekindling the brotherly relationships they still treasured.

“If only...” Min let his voice trail off and he leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. He couldn’t bear to have the lights on. It was difficult to brood in a bright, cheery loft and the light would have shown him his reflection in the building’s floor-to-ceiling glass walls.

There was too much time for regrets, Min thought. Too much time for coffee and regrets. And no time to go back and fix what I've broken.

Their separation was his fault. Changmin wryly admitted his responsibility for the break in their relationship. When the others stepped up to the line and declared their intentions against the company, he knew he should have stood with them. Fear and obligation kept him back. Then anger and stubbornness made him refuse to budge.

The other members forgave him. He was still the baby, no matter how old or how tall he got and there was still some small part of Changmin that was angry at their dismissal of his position. Even if he regretted his choices, he felt he should have garnered some respect for his decisions. It was that pride that foundered the easy loving he'd once shared with Dong-Wook.

*Where did that dreamer go?* The voice in his head asked, a slithering whisper poking doubts into the filmy curtain of his confidence. *Where is the Minku that Shichi admired?*

"I've killed him," Min spat at the gremlin eating away at his mind. "He's dead. Dreaming about being someone...being something is stupid. After everything is said and done, the only one left standing is the company that created me. I'm nothing but some broken, beaten puppet they've thrown against the wall too many times."

Stupid, His mind murmured, lost in the rumble of thundering skies. Stupid and maudlin. No wonder he left you. No wonder he doesn't call. No wonder he stopped calling.

"He stopped calling because..." Changmin couldn't bring himself to say anything more. It *hurt* too much. The sharp words Se7en used when Min told him of refusing to speak to the other members. They'd argued a little bit and made love. Then they argued too much and made war.

After that, there was silence and Min cried, left in the dark loneliness he'd created.



## Two

“Hyung, here.” Ji tapped Se7en on the shoulder and handed him a cold beer.

The older man glanced at the smaller singer, grunting his thanks. Ji-Yong collapsed on one of the love seats in Se7en’s apartment, wincing when his abdominal muscles tightened and cramped. Arching out his belly, he stretched to work the aches loose and puffed his cheeks at the other man.

Seoul was a gleam of watery lights beyond the apartment’s glass windows. The fierce storm moving slowly across the city unleashed its fury only a few minutes before the men returned from the practice studio and was expected to last well through the weekend.

Se7en drank deeply from the cold bottle, his Adam’s apple flexing as he swallowed. Ji watched his friend with a curious fascination and Se7en glared at the younger man from underneath his dark lashes.

“What do you want?” He growled at Ji, rubbing the cool glass bottle across his flushed cheeks.

“I am not sure I like this hyung,” The singer said, slouching back against the cushions. “I liked the other one better. He was nicer.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Se7en rumbled. His voice was a rough purr, empty of any levity. Ji winced, hearing the censure in his mentor’s words.

Ji knew better. He’d been around Se7en for a long time, watching the ebb and flow of his personality. Over the past year, the older man had grown bitter and cynical, distancing himself from the playful, teasing poet he’d become. Jaded — Ji thought. Choi Dong-Wook had been jaded before but his personality now descended past that layer of darkness. Now a brittle, hard man sat next to him and Ji didn’t

know if he cared for this Se7en one bit.

“You know what I’m talking about,” Ji continued. His group always said he was bolder than he was wise. He knew he was risking getting punched in the face but it would be worth it. He *missed* his older brother, Se7en and if poking at a sore spot was going to help, he was willing to risk it. “A year ago, you would be teasing me for slamming into the wall when we practiced. Today, you yelled at me to ‘get my shit together’ and snapped at the studio manager for not having lemon for your water. That’s not you, hyung. Or at least not the you that I respect.”

“Fuck off,” Se7en snarled in English. “Just fuck off.”

“Swearing at me doesn’t mean you’re denying it, hyung,” Ji said, scooping a chunk of his blond hair out of his eyes. “What happened a year ago? What made you change? You were always a player and a tease but this...now you are just mean. You were never mean, hyung.”

Se7en pursed his mouth, his stomach churning. He wanted to stand over Ji and yell at him to shut up, that the younger man didn’t know what he was talking about. Nothing had changed, Se7en would say, so shut the fuck up. He could grab the smaller man and shake some sense into him — maybe even rattle the cockiness out of Ji’s habitual smirk.

But it wasn’t Ji’s smirk he wanted to erase.

It was Changmin’s.

It was the look on Min’s face as Se7en left him that was burned in the older singer’s mind. It was Min’s cocky, defiant I-don’t-need-you-to-love-me smirk Se7en carried with him to harden his heart against the pain.

He wanted to go back in time and shake the sneer from Min’s mouth.

Or go back and kiss the younger man senseless.

Se7en drained half of his beer in one gulp, hoping the rasp of the alcohol would numb the ache in his belly. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Ji. You don’t know shit.”

“Then tell me,” The younger singer pleaded. “You have to talk to someone, Se7en. Talk to *me*. You know I won’t share anything you tell

me. But if you don't work it out soon, you're going to break apart and you're going to take everyone else down with you."

Very few people knew of his affair with Shim Changmin. Se7en had wanted to shout it out across rooftops when he'd been entangled with the lanky singer but discretion was tantamount and in hindsight, it was for the best. Especially since he'd lost the love of his life in a rush of angry words and tears.



"So that's it? You're fucking done?" Se7en bared his teeth, slamming his palms down on the kitchen counter. Across the marble, Min stood, his body vibrating with anger. The younger man made no attempt to hide the anger raging through him and Se7en knew he should step back — give them both time and space to come to their senses but in that moment, there would be no backing down from the fight.

And damn what he destroyed in the process.

There were more words — hurtful, painful accusations that hit deep.

"Yeah," Min sneered, curling his upper lip. "I'm done. *This...you* aren't worth this, Dong-Wook. I'm tired of this... thing between us. You come in and think you can tell me how to think or how to feel. You don't know what's going on. You aren't a part of my group. Hell, they've only been nice to you because I fuck you. It doesn't make you one of us. Hell, you haven't done one damned thing since your last album. Is that why you're still with me? Because it makes you feel like you're still on top?"

"Fucking go to hell," Se7en snapped, clenching his fists at his side. If he didn't keep his hands down, he would have reached across and punched Min's teeth in.

"Why don't you fucking go to hell," Min smirked. "And close the door on your way out."



That was the last time he heard Min's voice — searing acidic words spoken in anger and with a tincture of truth. He'd been

struggling to bring his sound to America, only to run into obstacle after obstacle as other people made decisions for his career instead of letting him do his thing. When it was all said and done, the Americans decided they didn't want to take a chance on a Korean singer and dumped him after a lukewarm pat on the back and a party. He'd come back home with a burning rage fueled by what he felt was Min's betrayal.

But to share that kind of pain with Ji? Se7en wasn't sure the younger man would comprehend that kind of pain.

"I..." Se7en stumbled over his thoughts. He'd spent his days pushing his body at the gym and dance studio then wasted the nights drowning in beer and wine. Old habits resurfaced and he flirted shamelessly, only to find himself soft and unresponsive when his conquests lay naked and wanting.

He'd slunk back to Korea, ashamed and hurt. There were days when he'd nearly fallen from exhaustion after spending hours singing and dancing. He'd shaken hands and smiled widely, unsure of his English and pushing himself harder and harder until he no longer thought in Korean. Se7en felt the sacrifice of his own heritage was necessary to take himself to the next level of fame. He'd gone to America to become... *something*. Instead, he'd been tossed aside when they were done playing with him. He'd worked hard only to have the people he placed his trust in betray him.

Then Changmin turned his back on him and Se7en found out what true betrayal was.

He missed the feel of Changmin's skin against his. His palms ached to roam over Min's long legs and cup the young man's ass. Se7en wanted to feel the heat of his former lover's clenched ring around his fingers as he spread Min apart, preparing the younger man for his sex.

A sip of tea would remind Se7en of Min's kiss, succulent and sweet with a tang of tannin. The brush of soft sheets on his naked body became the feel of Changmin's fingers on his chest and abdomen. Even a spot of mint on his tongue became something erotic, the menthol memory of Min's wet mouth on his erect shaft before they plunged into a sweaty, hot sex.

Most of all, Se7en missed Min's laughter and the times they lay against one another on the couch, listening to the world murmur around them as they talked about everything...and nothing.

Se7en missed fucking Changmin and he missed loving him. He could no longer dream. Se7en's nights were filled with empty darkness, all light and colour drained from his sleep. He missed dreaming. Minku...his Changmin...led him back to his dreams and then took them back when he took Se7en's heart.

"I'm here, hyung," Ji leaned over, clasping his hand over Se7en's knee. "Dong-Wook, you've... always been someone I've looked up to. It hurts to see you in this much pain. Please, Dong-ah, please let me try to help you."

Se7en ran his hands over his face, conscious of the heat of Ji's touch on his leg. No one had touched him... no one who cared for him, anyway... not since Changmin. Feeling the concern...and frighteningly enough, the love Ji had for him in that simple touch tore at the illusionary strength Se7en though he possessed.

He crumbled, unable to hold in his anguish. It poured out from Se7en's guts, too much to hold in now that Ji eroded his control.

"I..." The tears fell, hot and heavy on his skin and trapped against his face by his palms. "I fell in love, Ji-ah....and then he broke me...broke my heart and left me with nothing. I have nothing to fix...nothing left to break apart. I am already dead inside."



## Three

The doorbell ringing woke Changmin up. He turned over and found himself at the couch's edge. Flailing, the singer tried to regain his balance, reaching out to grab the back support to stop his fall but it was out of reach and he tumbled down to the floor. His shoulder blades smarted where he hit the low table in front of the sofa and his knee ached as he took a step, a sharp pain stabbing up from his knee cap to his hip. Limping carefully across the foyer, he glanced through the peephole and sighed when he saw Yunho standing in the outside hall.

"I don't have time for this," Min mumbled. He debated ignoring Yunho by pretending he wasn't home but the door rattled as the older man pounded it with his fist. The wall clock showed nearly midnight, too late for anyone but Yunho. "Why doesn't he just go away?"

"Open up, Changmin! I know you're home." There would be no arguing with Yunho this morning. The cutting tone in his voice didn't allow for it and Min felt his back go up, ruffled by the other man's dominance.

"Fuck him," He snarled at Yunho through the relative safety of the thick wooden door. Turning, Min padded back to the living room and scrubbed at his face, wondering what happened to the evening.

The front door rattled again, the booming sound of Yunho's knocks echoing through the apartment. Sighing, Min wondered how long Yunho would give him before he broke into the place. Lately, all of them were on short fuses and Yunho's seemed to be the shortest by far. Returning to the entrance, Changmin unlocked the door and pulled it open, nearly getting punched in the face before the older man reined in his knock.

"About time," Yunho growled, pushing back the younger man. "Why do you have creases on your face?"

"I fell asleep out here," Changmin said, closing the door behind Yunho. "Sure, come in. Make yourself at home."

"Why are you sleeping out here?" The older man deposited a store bag on the table, fishing out a plastic container of iced green tea. "Here, I brought you food."

"I'm not hungry." He nearly dropped the bottle when Yunho tossed it at him. Changmin's stomach churned at the thought of drinking anything other than another beer so he put it down on the table. "I don't want any coffee."

"Go take a shower," Yunho said, not looking up as he rifled through the bag. "You stink."

The apartment was a mess, even by Yunho's standards. Looking around after a grumbling Min shuffled down the hallway to the bathroom, the older man wondered what happened to their overly neat youngest.

The kitchen counter was lost under stacks of take out boxes and flyers. A sour smell permeated the common area and Yunho couldn't track it down. After a moment of searching, he finally found an open container of natto and rice. Black mold lay a feathered carpet over the spoiled food, the edges turned white with age. Nearly puking from the smell, Yunho held his breath and headed to the kitchen, finding a plastic bag to wrap the container in.

It took Yunho nearly ten minutes to clear the living room and he seriously considered setting the kitchen on fire when Changmin came out of the shower, a towel hanging loosely from his hips. The Changmin Yunho was familiar with was always lanky but the young man emerging from the hot, steamy bathroom was rail-thin. His ribs were painfully obvious along his sides and his skin was stretched tight along his collarbones and shoulders. Sharp ridges poked up along Min's spine as he turned to go into the bedroom and Yunho bit his lip at the sight of the younger man's shoulder blades cutting up high over his back.

An investigation of the take out containers revealed more spoiled food, mostly uneaten meals left to rot. Scooping up a dish towel, Yunho cleared the counter with a swoop of his arm, not caring if he tossed out utensils or good plastic ware as he cleaned. Anything



could be replaced, he reasoned, and it didn't look like anything could get rid of the smell embedded into the dishware.

After half an hour and a bout of furious cleaning, Yunho realized Changmin hadn't emerged from the bedroom. Concerned, he went looking for the younger man, wondering if Min fell asleep. Yunho found him, still wrapped in a towel and sitting on a broad, unmade bed. Min's eyes were unfocused, half lost as he stared down at a sheaf of papers in his hands. He looked up when the leader entered and Yunho stopped short, holding the door frame as he stared at the youngest member of his group.

The bed linens were rumpled, creased from restless sleeping and reeked of dried sweat. Yunho could see the room was in better condition than the living room but that meant Min spent less time trying to sleep and more time brooding in the larger common area. Stepping over a scatter of books on the carpet, Yunho approached the younger man and sat on the bed next to him.

"I am worried for you, Min-ah," Yunho said, reaching out to grab the other man's wrist. Changmin lurched away, burying the pages under his pillow. His shoulders were rigidly set, a sign the younger man's stubbornness had taken hold. He'd be too prickly to touch... even more so than trying to handle Jaejoong when their lead singer was in a mood but Yunho felt he needed to try. "Come out to the living room. Get some food into your stomach."

"I told you I wasn't hungry," Changmin snapped. His tone was informal, bordering on rude and the hissing noise at the end of his words were heavy with his disgust.

"When was the last time you ate?"

"You're not Jaejoong so don't pretend you give a shit," Min growled, pushing up off the bed. "Actually, he doesn't give a damn either so I guess it really doesn't matter."

"Don't say that," Yunho said, clenching the bed's edge. "Joongie-ah cares about you. You know he does."

Leaning forward, he watched Min stalk back and forth, letting the younger man have a minute to collect himself. Standing, Yunho grabbed at Min's shoulder, intending to lead him out to the living room but the young man had other plans. His fist flew into Yunho's

face, catching the singer on the crest of his cheekbone and Yunho fell back, landing sideways on the bed.

“Don’t fucking touch me,” Min spat, shoving Yunho back down as he tried to rise from the bed. Nostrils flaring, Changmin stood over the leader’s prone body, trapping Yunho against the bed. “Who the fuck do you think you are? Who the hell asked you to come over?”

*Count to ten*, Yunho cautioned himself, rubbing at the spot where Min’s knuckles struck him. It was already swelling and the skin felt hot to the touch. Ten seemed to get further away and his temper flared. Sitting up, he grabbed Changmin by the arms and shoved him onto the bed, straddling the younger man’s thighs to hold him down. Min fought, trying to get his arms loose to take another swing but Yunho held on, tightening his fingers around the man’s arms.

“You ever hit me again, I’ll punch you so hard your nose is going to be in the back of your head,” The older man growled. Min’s breath was hot in Yunho’s face as he puffed heavily, trying to regain his wind. “I’m not Jaejoong. I’m not going to put up with your shit because you’re the youngest. You’re old enough to know better now. Don’t pull your crap on me, Changmin. Now get some damned clothes on and get out to the living room. I’m going to talk to you and you’re going to sit down and just listen.”

“What if I don’t want to?” Min’s answer was sullen, his eyes heavy with remorse.

“I don’t care,” Yunho said, getting to his feet.

“I didn’t ask you to come here,” Changmin replied. “I’m not a kid.”

“You want to be a man? Act like a man,” Yunho shot back angrily. “You have five minutes to get dressed and God fucking help you if I have to come looking for you. After what you just pulled, I think might kill you.”

Yunho didn’t stop when he heard Min mutter at his back but the words chilled the older man to the bone.

“I’d rather you kill me,” Changmin whispered, despair dragging his voice down to a low rumble. “If I were dead, then I wouldn’t have to feel this. I wouldn’t have to feel any of this ever again.”



"I needed him, Ji," Se7en said, wiping at his face. It didn't do any good. The tears continued to fall and he only smeared them over his skin. The younger man took pity on him and passed Se7en a napkin, waiting for the singer to continue. Swallowing, Se7en sniffed, trying to clear his head of the thoughts crowding in on him.

"Do I know him?" Ji asked softly. "And why didn't you tell me about this before? Why didn't you tell me about *him* before?"

"I couldn't. I probably..." His chest shuddered as he breathed out, carrying his pain up out of his ribcage and into his chest. "Fuck him. Goddamnit..."

"You're not like this, hyung." The other man sat closer, taking Se7en's hands. The singer tried to tug free, clenching at the tear-soaked napkin but Ji wouldn't let go. "I'll kill him. I swear to God I'll kill him for you."

"Stupid... stupid," Se7en shook his head. "See, I believed my own shit, Ji. That's where I went wrong. I *believed* that I could have a forever with someone. We started off saying that we wouldn't have that. We wouldn't promise each other that but then I needed him...wanted him. How stupid is that?"

"It's not stupid, Dong-Wook," Ji moved Se7en sideways, guiding the other man until they faced one another. "Everyone should have a forever. It's not stupid to want..."

"Yeah, it is, Ji-ah," He said. "I saw him here at a party and I thought, who is that? I only saw his back but I could tell... there was something about him. The way he stood told me he was bored so I thought; Maybe I can tease a smile out of him and then he turned around."

"Who?" Ji asked.

"Shim Changmin," Se7en barked a laugh when the other man's astonished and horrified gasp. "Yeah, I know. Remember when I told you I was stupid? How much more stupid could I get?"

"Shim...?" The younger singer leaned sideways, resting against the cushions of the couch. "Dong Bang's Shim? Were you crazy?"

"Yeah, I think so," He said. "Yeah, I guess I was. He turned

around and it was like the sky dropped one of its stars. I can't explain it. I couldn't breathe, Ji. I mean, I could but there wasn't anything in my lungs but him. Then he smiled, sort of... in a sloppy way and all I wanted was to slide my mouth on his and breathe him in."

"Oh, hyung," Ji sighed, troubled by what he was hearing. "That was not who you should have fallen in love with. Not him. He's a baby!"

"No, just... untouched," Se7en grinned, unable to stop himself from remembering the good times he'd shared with Min and the pleasure in opening up the younger man to his sensual nature. "I thought I was being so smooth. I thought; ah, I can teach this virgin everything he needs to know and instead, he taught me that I was nothing without him."

Se7en sobered, the twist in his guts returning. Ji slid his arm over the other man's shoulders, hugging the larger singer to him. Bending over, he pressed his forehead to Se7en's arm, holding him tightly.

"God you should see him, Ji," Se7en said, his mouth drying. "Naked and spread out on my bed. Those long legs and that cocky grin. He reminds me of you a little bit. Behind the dreamer is a brat... someone who can make me laugh and who keeps me on my toes. And when he decides to take the lead, there's no holding him back. He's like trying to catch that star I thought fell. All I could do was hold on and drink from his fire."

"I can't even think of the two of you together," Ji whispered. "I can't... see it."

"Oh I did. I not only saw it. I touched it, tasted it..." Se7en raised his hand, running it through the younger man's blond shock of hair. He was used to comforting Ji. He'd seen the singer through some tough times and now that their situations were reversed, he wasn't sure he liked it. "Min... gave me stability. I wanted to try everything around me again. Even the smallest things seemed like they were new when I had him with me. I felt like I was whole again. After I whored myself out to anyone who'd let me sing or dance and there was nothing left of me inside, Minku made me... feel."

"And then he took it away," Ji said, bitter and angry. "I could kill him for doing this."

"The fault's mine," Se7en admitted. "We drifted. I was going to America and he was living in Japan. Pretty soon we had to work to even speak on the phone. It was hard to hide ourselves from everyone. And when he did have time, most of it had to go to his family. How could he explain to his parents that he couldn't visit them because he had to stay in Japan? Especially when the others were on a flight to Korea."

"But love..." The other man refused to accept the distance between Se7en and Min. "Love overcomes that."

"Love is hard, Ji," Se7en whispered, drawing away from his friend until they sat side by side. "Loving is hard. It has to be worked on. Practiced with. Taken care of. And even then, it's not guaranteed."

"What happened?"

"We fought." He shrugged. "He was getting pressured by the company... by the group and I think we both were... stressed. Pretty soon everything was tense and then... he said things that hurt too much. I couldn't... we couldn't stay together any more. I couldn't look at him without wanting him... and without wanting to hurt him. Hurt him as badly as he hurt me."

Ji watched in his own pain as Se7en's eyes grew moist again. "Aish, hyung..."

"I'd give anything to take us back to when we could talk, you know?" Se7en parted his lips, exhaling hard. "I'd die just for one of his kisses. Even after he's hurt me as deeply as he has, I still want him. I still fucking want him. No matter who I try to fuck or how much I drink, I can't forget how much I love him. I can't get my heart to accept that he's no longer mine. I can't get my soul to forget that it's lost its other half."



## Four

“How is he?” Jaejoong asked as he pushed past Yunho.

It was second nature for the singer to ask after someone’s health but Jaejoong sounded so much like Yunho’s own mother, he couldn’t help but chuckle as he let Jae in.

“He’s asleep on dirty sheets no less,” Yunho said as he closed the door. “Don’t wake him up. He looks like he needs it.”

They’d come some sort of agreement between the two of them although neither man would have been able to explain what it was. After long periods of being kept apart, they drifted back together, sliding away from watchful eyes. Communication between them was clandestine at best. At worst, they would go for a week or two without hearing from one another then a small dot of a touch or a smile and a wink when they were together on stage made life easier to bear.

Neither Jae or Yunho talked about the schism between them. Each had their own ideas... their own reasons for needing to be where they were but one thing was constant; no matter how angry and hot their words became, they found one another again.

Even if it killed them to do so.

Lately the scrutiny from managers and others had lessened and they’d found the time and the means to meet. As public as their lives had become, both men soon mastered the art of staying out of sight. It was sometimes days before a fan found one or the other. Finding them together was impossible.

And for all of their sakes, Yunho and Jaejoong knew it needed to stay that way.

At least for now.

At least for them.

As for the others, only time would tell how things would turn out. Their fates were out of their control but Yunho refused to believe

that anyone else would determine their destiny.

"When was the last time you saw him?" Yunho asked, crossing over to the window to close the vertical blinds. Jaejoong hovered near the foyer, keeping out of sight until the glass walls were covered.

"A week and a half ago. He called me, drunk and swearing." Jae relaxed visibly as the night was shut away from view and Yunho turned on the living room lights. "I tried cleaning up but he shoved me away. He still blames me for..."

"I thought we agreed there'd be no blame given," Yunho said, stepping over a half-full trash bag he'd left on the floor. "It... we end up hurting each other when we talk about it. I don't want to go back to that, Boo. Not after we've struggled to get to... this."

"This," Jae said softly. "You're right. We've come too far, no? I wish he'd tried to come as far."

The word he tried for was connection but the burr of his country roots slurred its meaning. Yunho knew what the man meant. They'd parted for a bit, angry at the choices they made but over a few months, they found themselves hurting too much inside to stay apart. A single phone call ended their *détente*. The same could not be said about Min's relationships with Jae and the others.

"He's younger," The leader said. He took smaller steps towards Jae, drawn inexplicably to the sweet-faced man.

Their fingertips touched first; a tentative searching for skin on skin then their palms brushed next, sealing their handclasp. For a while, it was all they needed. Just to touch one another was heavenly after the drought of affection they'd been forced to endure.

Closer in, Yunho took the time to savour the man he'd fallen in love with time and time again. The Jaejoong before him was older and wiser, seemingly more in command of who he was. The years of being at Yunho's side had strengthened the singer's confidence and the irony of Jae standing up to the company who created him wasn't lost on Yunho. In some ways, it was Jaejoong's only means of telling the world that he was finally his own man — that he wasn't the piece of perverted filth his father accused him of being.

"I like your hair this colour," Yunho whispered, touching the soft



brush of bangs on Jae's forehead.

Leaning in, he inhaled the sharp, rich scent of the man's soap and the spice of shampoo Jae used. He knew if he licked at the soft skin under Jaejoong's ear, the singer would lift his chin, raising it so Yunho could suckle freely at the spot. A stroke of his thumb at the juncture of Jae's chin would part the man's mouth for Yunho's possessive tongue, leaving Jaejoong vulnerable and murmuring soft noises of surrender.

Those were things better done in the privacy of a rented hotel room or better yet, in the dark of Jaejoong's room. In the middle of Changmin's living room wasn't where Yunho wanted to splay his love out and explore. Not now that they finally had time to be together, alone except for the trouble brewing between them.

"I miss you," Jae murmured. He didn't trust himself to touch Yunho. Their hands touching was enough to make him cry and he blinked, catching a tear on one of his lashes. "I miss sleeping next to you. I miss hearing you talk to me in the middle of the night." He looked down, unable to hold back the emotion crackling in his voice. "I miss having you hold me when the nightmares hit me. I miss that most of all."

"I'll be there again, baby," Yunho promised, taking the slender man into his arms and hugging him tightly.

The kiss was sweeter for its tenderness, a long lingering taste of one another's mouths. Yunho breathed in Jae's whispering moan, taking it into his chest and holding it in until he thought he would burst from the lack of air. When he exhaled, he took another sip of Jae's mouth, then another until he could no longer taste anything but the other man's intoxicating kiss.

"It's bad enough that you called him over," Min snarled. "Do you have to fuck him here too?"

Jae grabbed Yunho's arm before the other man stepped back. Their eyes met, a silent war of wills fought over Changmin's soon-to-be-dead body then the leader looked away, glancing at their youngest before exhaling out his anger.

"Let me talk to him, Yunnie," Jae prodded. "Maybe go strip those sheets off the bed? Maybe get them in the wash?"

"Fine," Yunho agreed slowly, sliding a kiss over Jae's swollen lips before stepping away. Bumping Min's shoulder, he headed back to the bedroom, his long legs carrying him quickly away from Changmin's sulking pout.

"How are you doing?" Jae cocked his head, studying the younger man.

The last time he'd seen Min they'd parted on brittle terms, even though Changmin had been the one to call him over. When he'd come over late that night, Min had been fragile and torn. If possible, tonight he looked even worse.

"I'm good," Min muttered, putting his hand down on the couch arm to steady himself. He blinked as he sat, looking around the room as if he didn't recognize it. Jae watched the younger man closely, not saying anything as Min stared at the window for a long minute, wondering when the other would realize the blinds were closed.

"You're not good, Minku," Jae whispered. He sat on the coffee table in front of Min and placed his hands on the younger man's thighs, leaning in as Min's face screwed up with pain.

"Don't call...me that," He choked out, tangling his fingers in Jaejoong's until his knuckles were white and tense. "I can't... hear that word and not..."

"Why don't you call him?" Jae asked. "Why don't you end this and pick the phone up to call him? Both of you... are hurting so much..."

"Have you seen him? Talked to him?"

"Do you really think Yunho would let me go to Dong-Wook right now?" Jae's mouth quirked with a wry smile. "Do you know how that would look?"

"He's stupid," Min said.

Jaejoong, unsure if the other man meant Yunho or his former lover, remained silent.

"I miss him, hyung." The little boy was back in Changmin's voice, lost and openly bewildered. "How can I still miss him after all this time? It's like it happened yesterday and I'm still waiting for him to find me... to tell me that I'm being stupid and that I should listen to what you have to say."

"You've never listened to what I had to say," Jae remarked.

"He kept pushing at me," Min explained softly. "Like I wasn't pushing at myself enough... he had to push me too. Yunho was... everyone was so angry and I just couldn't... I didn't want to feel anymore. I just wanted it all to go away." Changmin closed his eyes and fought back the tears threatening to fall. "I didn't expect him to go away. I didn't expect to stop... feeling anything but pain."

"Dong-Wook... your Shichi... the two of you are so much alike in some ways," The singer said. "You are stubborn and full of pride, both of you are men who want to take the world on and fight it until it submits. I know how that feels. Or at least now I do."

"I know that this is your... fight," Changmin acknowledged Jae's pained expression with a shake of his head. "No, I'm not going to argue about it. I just wanted to tell you I understand why you... did this even if I don't agree with you. I do understand why. It was one of the last things ...he said to me."

"What was that?"

"That sometimes a man has to stand against the tide, even if he knows the ocean is going to sweep him away into oblivion," Min replied. "Because he stands to protect something dear to him."

"Yes, it's like that," Jae agreed. "Even if...everything I've done is a mistake, I need to... take control of my life. I've let it happen to me for too long. I've drifted too long, letting life take me where it wanted to. I need to do... more. I need to be more than just something pretty for people to look at."

"You were never just something pretty for people to look at," The younger man grumbled and a hint of the old Changmin peeked out for Jae to see. "Sometimes they'd drool too. It's disgusting. I felt like there should have been a sheet or a tarp in front of us sometimes to catch the slobber."

"Ah, you are so romantic," The singer teased. "Is that how you treat our fans?"

"Fans?" Min's eyebrows raised up in disbelief. "I was talking about the event crews. If you even looked like you were tired they'd make their bones into a chair so you could rest. It's too much sometimes."

"Aish, you're an idiot," Jae said with a shake of his head. "But then, I already knew that."

"Because I haven't called him," Min finished Jae's thought. "Suppose..."

"Suppose what?"

"Suppose he doesn't want me?" Min asked. The ache started anew and he dropped his head, ashamed at the fear icing his chest. "I don't think... I can't... it would be too much to reach out to him and have him hurt me. Not like that. It would... be too much, Jaejoong-ah. Too much."

"If you don't reach for what you want, then you'll never get it," Jae reminded the younger man. Cupping the man's chin, he lifted the other's face until he could see Min's bloodshot eyes. "Call him, dongsaeng. If anything, it will let you know where you stand with him."

"Suppose..."

"Suppose nothing. Assume nothing, no?" Gripping tighter, Jae forced Min to turn to look at him. "You will know either way. He will want you or reject you but you at least will know. Isn't the love you had with him worth that? Isn't it worth knowing if he still needs and wants you as much as you need and want him?"

"Yes," Changmin whispered, sliding forward into Jae's arms. He shuddered in the embrace, feeling the strength of Jae's soul wrap around him. "I've missed you, hyung. I've missed you as much as I've missed...him."

"Well, then it's a good thing I'm not as stubborn as the two of you," Jae teased. "Or you'd be neck deep in your own shit instead of Yunho changing the sheets on your bed. Call him, Min. Because I can't watch you kill yourself like this. I'd rather help you heal a broken heart than bury your broken body."

# Five

When Changmin woke, he sensed he was alone in the apartment. He'd fallen asleep to the lull of the older members' voices, a comforting blend of Yunho's deep rumble and Jaejoong's lighter treble. A headache reminded him of the beer he'd drank the night before and the sweet scent of soap on his sheets did little to ease the throb in his temples.

He'd have to damn Yunho later for using the shower gel he'd stashed in the back of the laundry room. He'd run out of detergent at some point, and since clothes washing was taken care of by a service, he'd not bothered to stock up the wash area. Now his sheets smelled like vanilla, coffee and cloves.

The wash room was where he'd shoved Se7en's belongings after their falling out.

Now he was lying in a bed that smelled of his ex-lover and Changmin found his body responding to the erotic scents clinging to his body. His sex grew thick and heavy. Its tip dampened, the slit moistening with every second Min lingered on his memories of Se7en touching him.

It been too long since someone... since Se7en touched him. No one else had come close to setting Changmin on fire. He hadn't wanted anyone else to try.

Sliding his fingers down his belly, Min closed his eyes. He moved his hand slowly, running his nails over his abdomen. Without thinking, he drifted his other hand up until his fingers rested at the edge of his mouth. His teeth were sharp on his fingertips and Changmin swallowed, aching inside to have Se7en's touch on him.

His tongue was damp on his fingers and Min sucked on the tips before sliding further in. Moistening his fingers, Changmin made them as wet as he could. He needed some relief, especially with Se7en's scent around him. Carefully, he reached down, tentative of

touching himself. The initial brush of his finger against his tight ring made him gasp and his erection pulsed with need.

Broaching his own clenched core made him gasp. Min pressed against the entrance of his body and moaned when he pulled at the base of his sex with his other hand. When he turned onto his side to give himself more freedom, his bed linens tightened around his body, wrapping around his chest and legs.

“God,” Changmin groaned and pushed in with his index finger, stretching himself with the breadth of his tip. The slender invasion brushed on the nerves of his body, sending bolts of sensation rippling through the length of his sex. It twitched in his hand, jumping further when he slid his palm up and down the shaft until he throbbed and writhed in response to his own touch.

Sliding in only made the want intensify. He couldn't reach deeper without releasing his hold on his sex but the tantalizing feel of something inside of him was erotic. Another stroke of his hand made him shudder and Min ran his thumb over the damp head, spreading his seed over the tip and into his own skin. He wanted to taste the pearly liquid, as he'd tasted himself in Se7en's mouth when they kissed after sex but it seemed too forbidden...too taboo and he kept his hands where they were, enticing him into submission.

The tip of his finger brushed against the centre of his body's tingling core and he jerked upwards, unable to withstand the sensations coursing through him. The sheets tightened more and their scent thickened, drawn out by the heat of his body. Moving his hand faster, he pulled on his sex, falling into a steady rhythm until his jaw ached and his face tightened against the rush of his orgasm began to hit him full force.

With the sheets swaddling his limbs and chest, it felt as if Se7en held him, riding him to his peak and Changmin gasped, begging and writhing as he dove his fingers into himself. The stretch of his core broke him and he arched, his muscles locked and tightening. His sex exploded, lines of liquid soaking into the bed and spreading on his overheated skin. Screaming with his orgasm, Changmin gasped and cried out, rocking in Se7en's imagined embrace.

“Shichi!” Min cried out, riding his own fingers until his sex gave

its last.

Moaning, he twisted, tensing the linens around him. His emotions broke, filling him with the sorrow and anger he'd kept at bay when he'd first walked away from his dark-eyed lover. Sobbing, Changmin rocked himself gently, finally curling into a ball amid the soiled linens that smelled of Se7en and sex.

"I love you, Dong-Wook," Changmin whispered, his tears as hot as the spill of his seed. "I miss you, baby. God, I miss you so much."



The bed gave under Yoochun's weight and Junsu howled as his lover's elbow dug into the small of his back. Laughing, the baritone curved over the young man's back, biting into the plump rise of his ass before sliding over onto the bed. Shoving at Yoochun's shoulder, Junsu burst into giggles when Chun fell off of the bed, flailing comically as he hit the floor.

"I'm dead," Yoochun cried out. "You've killed me. I'm dead."

"For a dead man, you're very loud," Junsu commented, looking over the edge of the bed.

"I am a ghost," Yoochun said. Making mock-scary noises, he rose slowly, crimping his fingers into monster hooks. "I am looking for my lover. He killed me. He pushed me from a cliff..."

"This is a very short cliff," The other man said, studying the height of the bed. "We don't even have a frame under it."

"That's because it made too much noise." The baritone reminded him. "And stop breaking my concentration, I can't be a scary ghost if you pointing out the flaws of my death. Just go with it."

"But I'm trying to..." Junsu's phone chirped and he frowned, reaching for it when he saw the number on the screen. "Hold on, Chunnie-ah."

"Eh?" Yoochun rose from the floor and matched Junsu's frown when his lover shushed him with a wave of a hand. "Who is it?"

"Shush." Junsu slid his phone open to answer it. "Hello?"

"Hello, Junsu-ah." The voice on the other end was subdued, so very different from the self-assured, confident singer he knew. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," Junsu replied, widening his eyes at Yoochun. "How are you, Dong-Wook?"

"Dong-Wook?" Chunnie whispered loudly. "Min's Dong-Wook? His Shichi?"

"I'm going to shove a pillow in your mouth," Junsu threatened under his breath. "I'm good. What can I do for you?"

"Do you have some time?"

"Of course," Junsu replied, shoving Yoochun to the side.

"Good, because..." Se7en murmured. "I need some help and if I call Jaejoong..."

"Yunho would skin you and use your hide for a rug," The younger man finished. "What do you need me to do?"

"I need... Changmin," The singer whispered into the phone. "I need to talk to him and...his number is disconnected."

"Oh, the phones." He gaped at Yoochun.

"What?"

"The phone... their phones, remember?" Junsu prodded. "The company gave them new phones and numbers. Se7en doesn't have Min's number."

"Oh, I forgot," Yoochun said. "Do you remember how long it took for us to get Yunho's new number?"

"It was like a spy mission," His lover replied. "God, I'm glad we weren't a part of that. Poor Yunho and Jaejoong."

"Hello?" Se7en's voice echoed through the phone line. "Remember me?"

"Oh, yes. Sorry," Junsu apologized. "Hold on, let me get it for you."

"Do you think that's wise?" Yoochun asked. "I mean, suppose Changmin doesn't want you to."

"What's the worst he can do? Hit me?" The tenor cocked his head as he muted the phone. "Okay that's pretty bad. He's strong. It could hurt. But, Chunnie-ah, this is love. Don't you want them to be happy? Don't you want them to find their love again?"

"I'm more worried about Min finding my face with his fist," Yoochun grumbled. "Yeah, give him the number and we'll deny everything but I'd rather Changmin be angry at me and happy with



Se7en than trying to kill himself with neglect.”

Junsu reopened the phone line and gave Se7en the number, ignoring the trembling discomfort in his belly. Yoochun leaned in and kissed his neck, reassuring Junsu that he was doing the right thing. Junsu said goodbye and closed the phone, leaning back into Yoochun’s embrace.

“Do you think we did the right thing?” Junsu asked.

“Yes,” Yoochun replied, slanting his mouth over the other man’s in a hot kiss. “Because Changmin should know how good it feels to have someone who loves him in his arms.”



Se7en stared at the number he’d jotted down. The simple strokes of ink were stark blue on the back of a takeout menu. Such a simple scribbling that could change his life forever or damn him to an eternal hell. It would all depend on the man on the other end of those blue ink scribbles.

Taking a deep breath and a gulp of sour mash whiskey, Se7en punched in the number. He felt his belly jump as the line connected and then his guts twisted into a knot at the sound of Changmin’s voice mail. He hung up before the message beeped, listening to the dial tone echo in his ear.

“Did you not answer because it was me, Minku?” Se7en stared at the phone. “Or is it because you found someone else to make you moan?”



Changmin heard the phone ring, expecting it to be picked up by the answering service on the other end. When a familiar, exotic voice said hello, he nearly stammered then swallowed, getting a hold of his nerves before he spoke.

“Hello,” Min murmured, trying to sound cool and collected. It was easier now. He was older and more experienced but the voices inside echoed insecurities deep within him. “I...need you.”

“Can you come over?”

“Now?” Min asked then caught himself. “Yeah, I can come

over.”

“I’ll let the doorman know you’re coming so he’ll let you up.”

“Half an hour? Is that good?”

“That’s fine. It will give me time to get...ready.”

“Should I bring anything?” Courtesy was ingrained in him, even when he was skirting into dangerous territory.

“No, I don’t need anything.” The voice was reassuring, even as Changmin’s nerves tingled. “The only thing I need right now is you.”

“That,” Min said softly. “That I can do.”

## Six

When the door opened, Changmin stood at the threshold, nervous jitters rumbling in his stomach. He'd dressed carefully, choosing a pair of black jeans and a black t-shirt. He'd almost left his long black pea coat at home but in the cold of the building lobby, he was grateful for its warmth.

He thought it gave him an insouciance air about him. Or at least he hoped it did.

"Hey." The man stepped back, leaving Changmin room to go past him and into the apartment. The space was wide enough to be an invitation but not enough to seem as if he needed distance between the long-legged singer. If anything, Min would have to brush up against the lean, muscled body to go past.

Changmin wasn't entirely certain he was ready to do that.

"Are you coming in?" The tone was familiar but cautious.

It had been too long since they'd seen one another. Even longer since they'd been civil but Min's phone call had ached with need and want. Those emotions alone would have opened the apartment up for the youngest Dong Bang member. If it hadn't, the sight of his body clothed in stark black was more than enough to crack open a locked door.

"Yeah," Min replied, nodding curtly.

There were hot words unspoken between them. The past hung as heavy and low as Min's dark sadness draped over his soul. They'd first touched a few feet from where they were standing right now and Changmin wondered if he would have told his younger self to run from that touch if he could take the time back.

Taking in the beauty of the man's toned body, Min wondered why he waited so long for his senses to be set on fire and why he thought he could run away from the flames that were going to consume him.

Changmin was taller than the other singer but he felt more like a little boy than a man when he ducked past. Their bodies brushed, masculine and unyielding and for a moment, Changmin wondered if the other man would grab him but he stayed perfectly still. When they touched, Min's skin crackled with anticipation and an erotic shiver began to creep up from his sex. Min's breath shortened as his hand made contact with the other's shoulder and he swallowed, wondering if he'd made a mistake in coming.

"You look good but then you always look good."

The man's dark eyes followed him. Min could practically feel them on his back. Unbuttoning his coat, he was surprised to find the man's hands on his shoulders, lifting the heavy fabric away from him. The coat was tossed on a nearby sofa and the man's hands returned to Min's body, slowly roaming down his arms and up his rib cage.

"You look damned good," He murmured against Min's neck, letting his lips press against the downy skin below the younger man's ear.

"You do too." He replied, feeling the rough silk of the man's lips. Changmin caught himself from moaning in disappointment when the singer pulled away and the need to chase down another kiss nearly overwhelmed him.

"I'm glad you came. I thought...where we left things... it wasn't right," The man admitted. "I wanted to say... I'm sorry. I've always been...sorry about everything but I didn't know how to say it."

"I..." Changmin took a breath in, exhaling to steady his nerves. "It's been too... long. We should have spoken sooner...done this sooner."

"Yeah, I agree." The singer stepped back, contemplating Min's tense shoulders as the younger man turned around to face him. "You called me, remember? You said you needed me. And after... everything that happened, I kind of find that hard to believe but here you are, looking good enough to eat and damn if I don't want you. Still. Again."

"I need to.." Min couldn't finish his thought. Not when the other man took a step forward and they were standing nearly close enough

to touch. Their heat mingled, turning Changmin on despite his desire to talk things through. He raised his hand to push the man back but when he placed his palm over the other's broad chest, he lingered, unable to move.

"Am I confusing you, Changmin?" The words were whispered but they boomed in the silence of the apartment. Min's heart skipped then picked up the beat, heavy and pounding with excitement. "After the last time..."

"I don't want to talk about the last time," He said, dropping his gaze to focus on the other man's sensual mouth. Min wondered how they would taste. If they would seem any different than they had the last time he'd touched them. For once the voices in his head were silent and he missed the raging storm of advice as his thoughts lay stagnant. "It was..."

"My fault," He admitted to the younger man. "Maybe I moved too quickly or you were just too young or... something."

"Or something." Changmin agreed, parting his lips when the man's fingers caressed his chin. "There was always something... and someone..."

"Then everything blew up and... other people..."

"Other people," Min repeated, closing his eyes as the singer's hands dropped down to his hips

When the man's strong fingers cupped his ass to pull Changmin in tight against him, Min gasped in surprise. The sound was lost under the savage press of the other man's mouth on his and Min moaned, fitting into the curve of the man's muscular body. Slender and lithe under the other singer's touch, Min slid into his arms, fitting into the other's embrace. He found himself walking backwards, his knees suddenly pushed into the arm of a couch. Flinging a hand out, he caught the back of the sofa before he tumbled over the arm and into the cushions.

The singer eased up, slowing his kiss until Changmin melted under him. Pushing his tongue against Min's lower lip, he coaxed the younger man into parting his mouth. Leisurely invading the young man's mouth, the singer tasted and teased Min's tongue, lapping at the roof of his mouth. His teeth caught at Changmin's lips, tugging

and nibbling before deepening the kiss again, sucking on the tip of the younger man's tongue.

"Do you like this, baby?" He asked, curving one hand into the small of Changmin's back. His fingers reached under the hem of Min's shirt, skimming the few inches of bared spine before tugging the material up more to stroke at Min's shoulder blades. His kisses grew more aggressive, hungry butterfly nips on the edges of Min's mouth and jaw.

"Hyung!" Changmin panted, letting his head drop back as the man pushed gently on his shoulders, guiding the younger man onto the couch. Min parted his legs, instinctively needed to feel the weight of the other man on his belly and groin.

"I like this," The singer murmured, lifting Min's shirt all the way up and hooking the hem around the back of his neck. "We have all night, baby. I want to take my time with you."

When the older man's thumb brushed over Min's nipple, he arched, unable to stop himself from pushing up between the other man's legs. He could feel the press of the man's erection against his thigh and the heft of his arousal both thrilled and frightened him. When the man's mouth closed over the other nipple and suckled him to a peak, Changmin bit his lip to keep a whimper from escaping. It had been too long for his body and the man's touch was nearly more than he could take.

"I..." Changmin knew they should slow down. Rushing things between them would complicate things. He knew they should talk but his body felt on fire and the man's skillful hands seem to find every sensitive stretch of skin on his body. "We...need..."

"All we need is this, yes?" Rough with emotion, the other singer's voice rasped as he spoke. Looking up through his dark hair, he stared up into Min's flushed face. "Maybe we should start here? Where it's good and then later... if we need to, we can talk?"

"I just think..." Changmin felt the man's fingers on the waistband of his jeans and then the pop of a button give way.

Parting the slightly open waist of Min's pants, the singer slid his nails back and forth under Changmin's belly button. He stroked roughly at the young man's taut skin as he lifted his face up to steal a

kiss from Min's mouth, teasing out another whimper from Min's throat.

"You think too much, baby," He whispered into the depths of Min's mouth, taking a kiss before returning to lave once at Min's perked up nipple. "Why don't you just let go? Why don't you just fall into this and see where it takes us? After all, didn't you say you *needed* this? That you *needed* me?"

"Yes, hyung," Changmin returned the man's whisper, forcing himself to relax and experience the rush of conflicting sensations his body was struggling to absorb.

"Don't you think that we're past the point of you calling me *hyung*?" He laughed, chuckling against Min's exposed belly. Tracing the younger man's belly button with the tip of his tongue, he continued down, nipping at the silken hair trailing down past the elastic of Min's underwear. "Say my name, baby. Let me hear you call my name out while I see how you taste."

His jeans were laid open, the snick-snick-snick of his zipper gradually being lowered gave Min the shivers. When the other man's mouth found the bulge of his hard sex in the pouch of his underwear, Changmin thrust his hips up, letting the singer push his black jeans down from his hips. Min was lost in the hot touch of the man's tongue on his thighs and then gasped when his kiss again found his erection, teeth scoring the shaft through the cotton fabric, wetting it until a dark circle spread over the light blue material.

"Tell me you want this, Min-baby," He murmured, finding the salty head of Min's sex under the dampened fabric. He could taste the younger man's essence, an earthy musk more sensually dark than any chocolate he'd ever had on his tongue. "Tell me you want me here, baby. Tell me this isn't a mistake."

"No mistake, hyung," Changmin cried out when the man's teeth bit lightly down on the tip of his sex, a heavy reminder to drop the formality between them. Tangling his fingers into the singer's lush black man, he moaned, needing more of the man's mouth on his body. "I... want this. I ...need this. Please, make me...forget...everything. Let me feel... you, Bi. I want only you right now."





# Seven

Min forced himself to relax. *Just feel*, He told himself. *Don't think. Just feel.*

*But it feels...wrong*, His body and mind whispered.

The mouth on his was rough and lascivious. There was something missing; a bit of tenderness, a bit of easy possession. The hands on his bare thighs and shins were grasping him too tightly, nearly bruising his skin as not-quite-long enough fingers explored places that in Min's mind, they should have already known.

"This is...wrong," Changmin gasped, his eyes opening wide. "Hyung, please... stop. I'm begging you, please. Stop."

"Stop?" Bi growled and closed his mouth over the head of Min's sex, the younger man's shaft still trapped beneath his undergarments. He sat back on his shins, leaning over and placing his hands on either side of Min's shoulders. "What the hell do you mean...stop?"

"I can't...This is wrong, hyung." Min pleaded, gently pushing at Bi's wide chest. The older man didn't budge. He just stared down into Changmin's tear-damp eyes. "Please, Bi... I can't."

"You can't?" Bi snapped. "You can't? Your a fucking cock tease! Who the fucking hell do you think you're playing with?"

Stars exploded across his eyes when Bi's clenched fist slammed into Min's cheekbone. The force of the blow rocked Min's head back and he hit the hard wood edge of the couch's trim. He'd never been in an actual fight before. He'd often slapped and punched Jaejoong but the contact usually smarted, nothing like the spearing pain jabbing through his eye and cheek.

This was a punch powered by anger and rage. Min winced when the other man brought his hands up again.

Tasting blood, Changmin tried to sit up but Bi's hands on his shoulder shoved him back down into the cushions. "Hyung, please. I don't want..."

"You don't want this? Just like the last three times?" Bi spat in Min's face, spittle landing in the cut under Min's eye. "You call me up. You get me hard and then I get you hot enough to want what I can give you and you jerk away. This isn't a fucking game, Changmin. What the hell do you think you're going to get here besides my cock? Some kind of promise for forever?"

"No," Min said, shaking his head. "I just need some time. Give me some time."

"You said that the last time. And the time before that." Bi growled. "How many fucking times do I have to do this? How many times do I have to lick you until you are hard and then take a cold shower because you're too much of a coward to have my cock in you."

"I can do this," Changmin asserted. "Let me try..."

"I don't want to try," Bi said, sliding from the couch. He left Changmin laying exposed, wet from Bi's mouth and bloody from the other man's fist. He paced away, his hands on his hips as he stared up at the ceiling. "I'm tired of trying this with you."

The older man walked off a length, then circled back around. His anger was palatable, mirrored by Min's consternation. They stared at one another, chests heaving with exertion. Changmin let his eyes drop, licking at the split in his lip.

"Maybe if we... switched things..." Min suggested, swallowing his spit and bitterness. "Maybe if I could make you feel..."

"No one fucks me, Changmin," The older man said, turning to stare at the younger singer. "And it is *never* going to be you."

Sex was different than love, Changmin realized in his bones but he didn't think the distinction would be so... harsh. His body still burned with want but his stomach rebelled at the thought of Rain's tongue in his mouth. Se7en...his Shichi... never turned him away when he suggested something different. The other man... the man he'd loved... was open to the adventure of sensation, something he'd shown Min with each kiss and touch.

Rain would never give him that.

Rain *could* never give him that.

His body ached but not for the man standing over him. His heart

broke knowing he'd never have it again with the man he wanted standing over him... with the man he wanted covering his body with kisses. His soul hurt more than his face...and probably never heal.

"I'll leave," Changmin hooked his t-shirt back over his head and straightened his jeans, zipping them close. "I'll just..."

"Let me tell you something," Bi grabbed Min's upper arm before the younger man could pass him. His fingers dug into the singer's flesh, tightening his grip until Min cried out in pain. "Don't call me again. Don't let me see you again because the next time I do, I'm going to take what you've been offering me...even if you don't want me to."

He let Changmin go and the younger man stumbled, his long legs tangling together. Min caught himself before he fell on the floor.

"I'm sorry," Min said, wiping at his eyes as he stood. "Bi, I'm..."

"This...isn't for children, Changmin. I'm telling you, if you ever cross my threshold again, be prepared to play a big man's game. I don't want anything from you other than your ass around my cock, maybe your mouth on mine. You're pretty but I have to tell you, who ever you're trying to get over, don't use me to do it."



The cold air hit Min full in the face, blinding him with its chill. Despite being late in the afternoon, the sky was nearly pitch black, thickened with storm clouds. The threat of rain lingered in the air, a soft misting drizzle dewing Min's tousled hair.

He walked without seeing where he was going, his legs moving him down the building's long steps. His foot hit the railing and caught, pitching him forward. Min winced, bracing himself as he fell, expecting to strike the hard marble stairs.

Then the world tilted and Min found himself staring up into a pair of velvet brown eyes he'd begged God to see again.

"Minku..." Se7en caught Changmin up, holding the young man in his arms.

They stared at one another as the sky opened, drowning away the city's sights and sounds then Changmin's breath hitched and he let go a sorrowful cry.

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“Oh baby,” The older man lifted Changmin up, holding the younger man’s slight body against him. “I’ve got you. It’s okay... I’ve got you now.”

# Eight

"No!" Min struggled in Se7en's arms, horror and shame crawling over his face. *Don't let him see you. Oh God, how can he see you here?* His mind screamed at him.

Changmin knew he had nothing to be ashamed of. They'd both walked away from one another. He owed Dong-Wook nothing other than a civil hello when they saw one another but at the moment, Min wanted nothing more than to crawl into the ground and pull the cement slab he'd nearly bashed in head on over him.

"What happened to you?" The older man skimmed his fingertips over Changmin's cheekbone. "Did you get hit?"

"Let go of me," Min snapped, struggling to get free of Se7en's arms. "I'm fine."

"You don't look fine," The singer responded.

While Min had never been bulky, his lean form was even thinner, nearly bird bone light in his arms. Changmin sprawled graceless over his forearms, his limbs seemingly too heavy for him to move. The younger man's dark eyes flicked back and forth, unable to focus on Se7en's face and for an alarming moment, the older man was worried he'd been drugged. Then a familiar blush crept over the singer's closed-off features and Se7en realized Min was embarrassed.

The bags under Changmin's eyes strangely reassured him, although the forming bruise joining him alarmed Se7en. Dark pink swells were shaping around the purpling marks, about the size of a man's knuckles. He was too thin, too light in Se7en's arms. The easy smile that always seemed to hover around Min's mouth was gone, replaced by a streak of bitterness etched in the lines on his face.

Se7en longed to bring the smile back to the younger man's eyes.

And to feel Min's mouth on his again.

"Let me help you," Se7en said softly, lifting Min to his feet. "Stop fighting me."

The rain began, soaking them through their clothes. Min shivered, wondered if the cold water could wash everything away, including his shame and mistakes. His face felt hot and he was sure there was steam rising from his skin where the cold water drops hit.

"I can't," Min whispered, feeling his body respond to his former lover in ways that it hadn't with Bi. "All I can do is fight you."

In his heart, he knew it was true. Every cell in his body screamed to crawl away... to not let Se7en see how far he'd fallen from being loved...from being cherished. He lay in Se7en's embrace stinking of another man's mouth and wearing another man's mark on his face.

"You're about to fall on your face," Se7en murmured. "I'm going to get you into the car."

"How did you find me?" Changmin asked, his words slurring. His head throbbed, the swell on his face aching when he spoke. Blinking, he tried to clear his vision but the world grew misty. The rain was a thick sheet and he could barely see across the street. "Why are you here?"

"You can't drive remember?" Se7en said, helping Min to the curb. He fished a set of car keys from his pocket and opened up the door to a parked black sedan. "I called the hyenas to get your number and when you didn't answer, I asked them for your address but I found out you'd left. You gave the doorman the address when he called your taxi."

"You bribed my doorman?"

"I assisted your doorman in paying for his dinner over the next few weeks," Se7en said. "So yes, I bribed your doorman. Get in the car."

"Is this your car?" Min bumped his head on the roof getting in and his vision spun again. "I think my face hurts."

"You don't look good," Se7en agreed. "What happened?"

"I was stupid," Changmin admitted. "And I think I'm going to..."

His stomach rebelled, emptying onto the street. Se7en stepped back, the gush of liquid splashing over his shoes. He gagged at the sour smell of Min's vomit but he kept his throat closed. Glancing up at the building, Se7en pursed his mouth and contemplated his

options.

"Are you drunk?" Se7en asked, smelling the beer from Min's belly. "It's in the middle of the day."

"I needed to get drunk," Changmin said, sniffing. "I needed to... go up there..."

"Who's up there?" He asked, handing Min a bottle of water from the back seat of his car. "Did he do this to you?"

"What makes you think that it's a he?"

"You'd let a woman hit you?" Se7en studied Min's face. "I'm guessing it's someone strong and only a little bit shorter than you. Yunho?"

"No," Changmin grumbled. "Jae-ah would kill him if he hit me like this."

"What makes you think I won't kill who hit you like this?"

"Because I'm not yours anymore," Min's gulp hitched his breath and he fought to keep his sobs from spilling out of him. The sorrow was nearly too much to take. It hung heavy under his throat and pressed down on his stomach, a malevolent stone weighing him down. Slung down in the passenger seat of the sedan, Min looked up at Se7en, mournful and sad. "Was I ever yours, Shichi?"



Bi heard the doorbell ring and frowned. He'd not gotten a call from the front desk to tell him he had a visitor and it had been nearly an hour since he'd tossed Min out of his apartment. Since he didn't know anyone else who lived in the building, he couldn't imagine who was at the door.

If someone had bet him a million dollars, he'd *never* have guessed Choi Dong-Wook.

"Huh," Bi stared at the other dancer, curling his lip in a derisive sneer. They'd never been friends of any sort. Competition on several occasions, especially on the charts and from the look on Dong-Wook's face, Rain had a sneaking suspicion that they were rivals for a long-legged, sweet-faced young man. Turning away, he waved Se7en in and walked towards the kitchen area. "Come in."

Se7en closed the door behind him, looking around the

apartment. It was spacious and luxurious, a far cry from the more streamlined, modern look he preferred. He didn't want to imagine Min spread out on the couch but he couldn't help wonder if that's where his ex-lover submitted to Bi's kisses and caresses. The furniture was expensive-looking, not someplace comfortable to sprawl on and certainly not soft enough to cradle lovers as they enjoyed one another.

Although by the disarray of the sofa's cushions, he guessed more than sitting took place there earlier.

"Do you want a beer?" Bi asked from the kitchen, holding up a cold bottle. "But then you're probably not going to stay long enough to finish one."

"You're not surprised to see me?" Se7en asked, shoving his hands in his pockets. Rain's cocky smile was telling, especially when the other man glanced at the disheveled couch. If Se7en didn't capture his hands in his jeans, he knew he'd end up punching Bi's face in.

"No, I know why you're here," Bi replied. He took an apple from a bowl on the counter. Biting into its dark red skin, he took a mouthful and chewed. "Or I guessed... Changmin."

"He's mine." Se7en walked over to the kitchen counter, taking his hands out of his jeans and leaning his palms on the counter.

"If he were yours, you'd not have let him up here," The other man said before he took another bite of the apple. Bi chased the fruit down with a gulp of beer. "And he came looking for me, *dongsaeng*. Obviously you're not enough to keep him... satisfied."

Se7en's fists clenched before he realized it and he forced himself to relax his hands. "We've..."

"I don't care," Rain said, gesturing with the apple. "I don't if you two fought and broke up or if he's cheating on you. *He* called me. He wanted sex and I wanted to give it to him. Anything that's going on between the two of you is not my business."

"Yeah, I know," He acknowledged with a wry grimace. "What's between us isn't your business but what's between you two is mine."

"Oh?"

"Yeah," Se7en said with a curt nod. "I saw his face. You hit him."



"I got angry. He's lucky all I did was punch him," Bi replied, shrugging as he tossed the apple core into the trash and wiped his hands on a kitchen towel. "He's a fucking tease, dongsaeng, and if you're the one he's been whoring to forget, then I've got to wonder if you've ever gotten your dick past the edge of his hole."

Se7en's temper flared and he was around the counter before he realized it. Bi's hands were up, shoulders ready for the attack and the younger man forced himself to slow down to a stop. Taking a deep breath, Se7en tried to calm himself but the fiery rush in his belly refused to be tampered down.

"Did I piss you off? Maybe he only puts out for those pussies he sings with. Is that it?" Bi tilted an eyebrow up, mocking the younger man. "*Have* you ever fucked him because I can tell you, I haven't. He gets me hot and then pulls away. I'd had enough of it. Or rather, I didn't get enough of it. He keeps offering me his ass and then saying no when I'm about to take it so yeah, I punched him. It was either that or just fucking take what I wanted. Next time, it's not going to be my hand hitting that asshole. It's going to be my dick."

"Fucking son of a bitch," Se7en growled.

Se7en heard his hand crunch when he slammed his fist into Bi's mouth. The other man's teeth cut the skin on his knuckles, shooting pain up his arm and into his shoulder. His elbow creaked and as he spun on his heel to cut his other fist into Bi's chin, he was blocked when Rain's hand came up to shove him back.

"Fuck," The older man said, spitting blood into the sink. "One. You get one and that's it."

His push had been hard enough to put distance between him and Se7en. The younger singer took a few steps away then recovered, heading back into the fight but Rain was ready for him. He ducked his shoulder, pushing his upper arm into the soft of Se7en's diaphragm and shoved up, taking the air out of Se7en's lungs.

A well placed knee into Bi's groin staggered the older man back and he gasped, sickened by the blow to his genitals. An elbow to the back of Bi's head brought him down and the bulkier man fell, dropping to his knees. Gasping, Bi spat again, struggling for air. The gut-wrenching sickness of his sac being shoved up into his stomach

made it impossible to breathe and with Se7en looming over him, he was vulnerable for another blow.

Grabbing Bi's shirt, Se7en yanked the other man's chest up so he could look Bi in the eye. Defiant, the older man swiped at Se7en's legs with a haphazard punch. The hit was ineffectual, landing awkwardly near Se7en's ankle.

"If he ever calls you again, you're not going to answer." Se7en leaned over to growl in Bi's ear. "If you see him at a party, you're not going to make eye contact. As far as you're concerned, Shim Changmin is a ghost that you never met."

"And if I don't?" Bi snapped, rolling away from Se7en's grasp. He landed on his back, gasping for air. His genitals were still throbbing and he spread his legs, hoping to ease some of the tingling pain coursing up and down his body.

"Then I'm coming back," He said, his voice tight with anger. "And I'm bringing those so-called pussies with me. We'll see how well you do then."



Se7en opened the car door, reassured when he saw Changmin slouched and asleep in the passenger seat. His hand ached and when he bent his fingers, his knuckles were slow to respond. A cricking noise in his wrist alarmed him a bit but the satisfaction he felt in his gut as more than enough to make him whistle as he started up the car.

"What?" Min started, waking up just enough to blearily blink at his surroundings. "Where..."

"Go back to sleep, Minku," Se7en said, patting the other man's thigh and trying not to wince when a creaking pain curled his hand into a claw. "I'm taking you home now — my home — where you belong."

# Nine

It was a curious dream, Min thought as he drifted on a gentle tide of sensations and comforting smells. He lay on a soft wave, curls of warmth around his legs and hips. His nose was pressed into vanilla and cloves, spicy and fragrant while the earthy perfume of cooking meat teased his empty stomach. A cool breeze washed over his naked chest and face, the wind carry the heavy scent of a hard rain. Smiling, he fell back into his sleep, lulled by the sound of a rumbling voice speaking softly in the distance.



“Did you bring a rice cooker?” Se7en asked Ji before the smaller man had the chance to close the door behind him. “I need a rice cooker.”

“What happened to your old one?” The singer held up a small box, the price tags from a department store stuck over the cheerful family smiling on the front. “And who the hell texts that they have an emergency over a rice cooker?”

“The old one had too many memories,” Se7en said, taking the box from Ji and placing it on the counter to unwrap. “I threw it off of the balcony one night when I was drunk.”

“How can a cooker have too many memories?” Ji asked, peering into the array of containers on the kitchen island. “And what did you do? Buy out all the banchan vendors?”

“There’s only a few. I don’t know if he likes other stuff now.”

Ji reached over and plucked a pinch of sesame bean sprouts only to get the back of his hand slapped by Se7en. “Hey! You’ve got like twenty dishes here! Who the hell is going to notice...”

“Touch that and die,” Se7en growled, piercing Ji with a hard look. “There’s some in the fridge if you want something to snack on.”

“Shim Changmin,” Ji mumbled as he dug through the banchan

in the fridge. “Hard to believe that skinny bean sprout’s got you all turned around.

Grabbing a plate from the dish drainer, he arranged a hefty selection, making sure to empty out the bean sprouts to spite the older singer. Tossing the plastic container in the trash, Ji ate a piece of cucumber with his fingers, smiling as he watched Se7en try to sliver thin strips from a chunk of semi-frozen meat.

“Do you know what you’re doing over there?” Ji asked around a mouthful of spicy vegetable.

“No,” Se7en muttered. “The damn chef on T.V. made it look so easy.”

“Here, let me do it,” Ji said, bumping Se7en with his hip. “You’re making my head hurt just watching you.”

“Do *you* know what you’re doing?” He asked, handing the knife to the younger singer. “Do you think you’re the next *Le Grand Chef*?”

“Yes, my mother taught me how to cook,” The singer nudged Se7en with his elbow. “This knife is dull. Where’s your sharpener?”

“What’s that look like?”

Ji rolled his eyes and shoved Se7en out of the way. “I’ll go look for it. Get the rice cooker unpacked and tell me why you’ve gone crazy for a skinny giraffe.”

“He’s not a giraffe,” Se7en grumbled. “He’s...sexy.”

“I’m sexy.” Ji grinned when Se7en rolled his eyes at him. “No?”

“Not to me,” The singer replied. “It would be like having sex with my younger brother.”

“Aish, I’m always the younger brother,” Ji laughed softly, sharpening the knife with quick, sure strokes. “Want to tell me what happened to your hands?”

Se7en glanced down at his battered knuckles, his hand swollen nearly to uselessness. “I.. uh... punched Jeong Ji-hoon. He pissed me off.”

“Huh,” Ji grunted, wiping the knife down. Leaning over the meat, he began to pare off nearly translucent strips. “What did he do to you?”

“It’s not what he did to me...” Se7en trailed off, not missing the sly look Ji gave him. “He and Changmin...well, not...”

"Talk to me, Dong-Wook," Ji said, gesturing with the knife. "Before I go into that bedroom and gut your giraffe."

"They didn't... do anything," Se7en said, shaking his head. "Not that Bi didn't try. Not that Changmin didn't... want..."

"I am so going to gut your giraffe..." He threatened, coming around the counter. Se7en placed a hand on Ji's shoulder, stopping him.

"No, it's not like that," The older man said. "We've not been together and Min... I know Min. He would want to push himself...to test himself."

"Letting Jeong Ji-hoon touch me isn't what I'd do to test myself," Ji mumbled. "He's an ass."

"Did he touch you?" Se7en stilled, steeling himself for Ji's reply.

"He tried when I was a trainee." The young man grinned, twirling the handle of the blade over the back of his hand and catching it again. "But I'm very good with knives. Tell me about your giraffe, Dong-Wook."

"I keep telling you he's not a giraffe," Se7en replied. "He's slinkier, more sensual. I call him Minku."

"Minku?" Ji repeated. "What does that mean?"

"*Mopi*... the expensive kind, like a ferret but... luscious," He shook his head at Ji's snorting laugh. "Don't laugh. It's how he is with me. I...miss having him with me. I miss watching him read and pretend to ignore me. He teases me that way. Minku..."

"You sound in love," Ji said, putting the knife down to give his friend a soft smile. "Even after he's broken your heart, you are still in love with him."

"I can't help but be in love with him," He replied, shrugging. Se7en knew he was helpless against the feelings he had for the young, tall man. "When I'm with him, the world is peaceful. He makes me... he shows me how new everything is. I can't explain it. It's like his words are dipped in paint and they splash on me, changing everything from black and white into a kaleidoscope of colours."

Glancing at the closed bedroom door, Se7en willed himself not to go check on the sleeping young man. He'd peeled Min's clothes off,

forcing his hands not to linger on the stretches of silken skin and lean muscle. Leaving Min in his bed, he chanced a soft, lingering kiss before fleeing the room, turning the light off before he shut the door.

If he went to Hell when he died, Se7en knew that would be his own personal torment...leaving a sleeping, naked Min behind in the darkness with only a hint of the other man's taste on his tongue to carry him off.

"He's going to break your heart," Ji warned. "If he's done it once, he'll do it again. Don't open yourself up for that."

"Is that wisdom coming from my dongsaeng?" Se7en teased. "From the heartbreaker to the heartbroken?"

"Ah, I've had my heart broken, hyung," Ji said, batting his eyelashes and laying his head on Se7en's shoulder. "He just doesn't know it."



Se7en opened the bedroom door cautiously, not wanting to wake Changmin up. Ji had been gone nearly an hour before he was willing to risk looking into the room. He'd doused the hall sconces, knowing from experience it would flood his bedroom but a sliver of light escaped from the door as he peeped in.

He found Changmin sitting up in his bed with soft tea-coloured sheets swaddling his hips. Se7en leaned against the doorframe, entranced by the unconscious grace in Min's movements as he read from the pile of paper spread out on the mattress.

A red ribbon lay discarded by his bare knee, the tiny scrap of fabric worn shiny from Se7en's fingers. The older man knew what the ribbon had tied together. He knew what Min was reading. He knew each word and each scribble of heartbreak on the page.

He'd written those letters to the lover who'd tossed him aside, keeping them in the drawer by his bed. The words forced themselves from his heart, begging to be written to the page but Se7en hadn't found the strength to send them on to Changmin.

He didn't think his heart could take the pain of getting his letters back... unopened and unread.

"Did you mean this?" Changmin asked suddenly, not looking up

from his reading.

Se7en wasn't surprised to discover the young man was aware he was being watched. Min's intelligence and awareness were some of the things he admired the most about the singer. That and his long, supple legs; Se7en thought, eyeing Min's lean body.

"Did I mean what?" Se7en asked, crossing his arms as he shifted in the doorway. "I don't know what you're reading."

"This..." Min didn't glance up from the page but his voice grew shaky, a trembling feather caught on an unseen wind.

*"Anais Nin wrote... Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don't know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings..."*

*I think Nin had it wrong or at least Nin didn't understand love and death, not like I do. Not like I loved you. Not like I still love you.*

*Silver once tarnished can be rubbed bright again with hard work but it will dull black again over time. You once called me your tarnished angel... that the black of my wings were etched into the grooves but your love would silver my flight so I could soar again in the wind.*

*What you did not know was that you are my wind.*

*You catch me up and throw me into the sky and I can only fly with you under me, carrying me. Holding me. Comforting me.*

*Without you I am earthbound and heavy, unable to lift my head up to look at the sun... to look at the moon... to even see the stars in the blackest night even though I know you've put them there.*

*I wish you were here by my side, Minku. I am in need of your hand to rub me silver once again. I am in need of your kiss to quench the thirst in my mouth. I am in need of your soul so I can lift my head up and see the stars.*

I am in need of your heart because that is where the stars truly live..."

"Did you write this?" Min asked again, his voice as soft as the sheets surrounding him. "Did you mean this?"

"I not only meant it... I still mean it," Se7en said, walking slowly

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into the room to sit on the end of the bed. “You’ve been gone from me too long. The tarnish has returned and now...I am blinded by the black that covers my eyes. Will you help me see again, Minku? Will you rub my wings until they’re silver again? Or am I going to die here on the ground, waiting in the darkness until you love me once again?”



# Ten

"I can't..." Changmin murmured, looking away from the pain in Se7en's eyes. "I...I've been telling lies to myself. There are so many lies, Dong-Wook. Too many lies for us to...for me. I've buried my love for you in those lies. I don't know if I can..."

"You are the one who can hurt me the most," Se7en said, standing to give himself space. His chest hurt. His heart pounded, a dying bird struggling to get out of its cage to feel the wind on its wings one last time before it fell to the ground. "I don't know what's worse... your lies or your honesty."

"Se7en..." Min started to leave the bed then realized he had nothing on but his underwear. "Where are my clothes?"

"In the wash," The older man replied. "You threw up on them. I forgot about them until about half an hour ago."

"Oh," Changmin gathered the bed sheets around him. "Thank you."

He pulled the love letters together, trying to fold them back into place. Their creases were slight, as if only folded once and not gone over time and time again. His eyes watered with tears at the sight of Se7en's choppy handwriting. He'd once mocked the singer for having an ugly script but the words held in the ink far outstripped anything else in his mind at the time.

"You are the only man... the only person that can bring me to my knees and make me beg," Se7en rubbed at his face and cast his head back, staring at the ceiling. "Do you like that? Do you like having that kind of power, Changmin? Knowing that you can humble me until I crawl through glass and dirt just to hear you say no to me time and time again?"

"It's not like that," Min protested. "It...hurts me too."

"Really?" He turned, looking down to stare at the young man sprawled on his bed. "Because I can tell you, Minku, I've not heard

you beg me for anything.”

“I beg every time someone else touches me,” Changmin looked around, spotting a pair of sweats on a chair across the room. Unmindful of his bared body, he cast off the sheets, dressing in Se7en’s cast off lounge pants. Tying them off at his waist, he stood, shoulders back and defiant. “Do you think Bi is the first one I’ve tried to... forget you with?”

“Is that what you are now? Is that what you’re trying to convince me you are? Some indiscriminating slut sleeping around with anyone who’ll have you?”

“I tried...” Changmin spat. “God knows I’ve tried to get you out of my mind... out of my skin. If I could take a knife and scrape you out from under my skin, I would.”

“Then why don’t you?” The older man shouted, gesturing behind him. “The kitchen’s right there. Ji’s even sharpened the knives.”

“Because no matter how much I scrape and pray, you’re still there,” Min whispered. He dug his heels into his eyes, his fists covering his temples. “Because no matter who touches me, I only feel you.”

“Then what are we going to do, Changmin?” Se7en asked, unashamed of the tears falling down his cheeks. “Because I can’t live without you. And you don’t want to live with me.”



The banchan sat uneaten and the kalbi Ji worked on remained marinating in the chiller, turning dark in the ginger-infused soy sauce. In its new pot, the rice grew cold, the warming button turned off by Se7en’s trembling fingers. Night pushed Seoul back from the windows, the surrounding buildings softly dimmed and lit by the occasional light. In the distance, streams of red and white flowed over roadways, curving around the river and hills.

Alone in his apartment, Se7en sat on the couch, wondering what he’d done to bring himself to such misery. It was karma, he laughed to himself, bitter and slightly drunk from the warm soju he’d gulped directly from a newly-opened bottle.

The front door opened and Se7en glanced up, shaking his head at the slight, blond man who let himself in. Tossing his keys on the counter, Ji opened the fridge to grab two beers before joining Se7en on the couch. Twisting off the caps, he handed one to Se7en, clinking his bottle against the other in a mild salute.

“What happened, Chil-ah?” Ji asked, softly. “Why are you sitting here in the dark and calling a friend to hold your broken heart together when you should be in bed making love to your giraffe?”

“You always make me smile, Dragon,” Se7en snorted. He turned the bottle around in his hands, cutting under the paper label with his thumb nail. He ruffled the other’s bright shock of hair, combing through the white-gold silk with unsteady fingers. “What am I going to do, Ji? Why am I doing this to myself?”

“Because you’re a romantic, hyung,” The younger man fit easily into the curve of Se7en’s arm, leaning them both back into a tangled slouch.

“I’ve never been a romantic,” He scoffed. “Romance is... butterflies and cupcakes. Look what happens when I profess my undying love. He sharpens it and then stabs me in the heart with it. His cupcakes are iced with my cold blood, whipped into a frosting for his little mink tongue.”

“Now he’s a vampire?” Ji asked, looking up at the other man. “What’s wrong with you, hyung? Why don’t you fall in love with someone real instead of this fantasy you’ve been chasing?”

“Someone real?” Se7en peered down at Ji. “Tell me what you think real is?”

“Real?” Ji repeated, slinging his legs over Se7en’s until they lay tangled together. Resting his head back on the older man’s shoulder, Ji met Se7en’s inquisitive gaze. “This is real. We are real. Everything in the moment is real. Everything in the past... that’s a memory and anything in the future is an illusion.”

“So if I blink, and remember where you are, does that make you a memory...” Se7en asked with a laugh. “Or an illusion?”

“Neither,” Ji said. “Because I am real. I am here. I’ve never left you.”

Ji’s mouth brushed under Se7en’s chin, following the line of the

man's strong jaw. The older man sighed, relaxing into the warm body in the crook of his arm and dropped his head forward, resting his temple on Ji's forehead.

"I can always count on you, little dragon," He pressed a kiss to the curve of Ji's ear, laughing when he heard a gasp from the vicinity of the front door. "Of course, *now* we have company."

"The question is," Ji chuckled softly "It is a memory that's come to visit or an illusion."



"So he just left Dong-Wook there?" Yunho asked, stealing a mushroom from Jaejoong's plate.

"That was mine." The singer shot his lover a filthy look. "And you don't even like mushrooms."

"I do when they're yours," Yunho said. "They taste better when they're meant for you. Less like dirt and more like a kiss."

"You're drunk," Jae snorted, reaching for the bottle of soju they were sharing. A waitress passed by the small dining room, closing the privacy screen to conceal the singers from the main restaurant.

"Almost," He agreed with a bouncing nod. Stretching out his arms, Yunho hooked Jae with the hand to the back of the singer's neck and pulled him close. "Kiss."

"Kiss," Jae grumbled but he complied, pursing his mouth against Yunho's.

"You taste good," Yunho murmured, canting his head to get a better angle.

Softly brushing his lips on Jaejoong's. Cupping the other man's chin, Yunho pressed his thumb against Jae's jaw, gently pressing to coax Jaejoong to yield. With a soft moan, Jae parted his lips, letting the other man invade his mouth. Yunho's tongue licked at Jae's, his lips moving slowly in a sensual caress. Sighing in satisfaction, Yunho captured Jae's lower lip in his teeth, pulling and sucking gently before ending the kiss.

"You taste good too," Jae whispered into Yunho's departing mouth. "Like my mushroom."

"Aish," He laughed, pushing Jae away. "I'll find you another

mushroom.”

“No, you’d just take that one too.” His nimble fingers snatched a bit of meat from Yunho’s hot pot, blowing on the steaming beef before popping it in his mouth. “That’s good....”

“Answer me,” Yunho said, prodding the other man with his foot. “You were talking about Changmin. Did he go see Se7en?”

“No, Dong-Wook came to see him.”

“Did he know where Min lived?” Yunho frowned. “I haven’t told him. How did he find out?”

“Chunnie-ah...or Susu told him,” Jae said with a shrug of his shoulders. The singer wondered how much he should tell Yunho. Gauging by the red spots on the other man’s flushed cheeks and amorous grin, he decided he much rather have Yunho in his bed than having to pull him off of Bi’s dead body. “It doesn’t matter, Yunnie-ah. Se7en and Min at least have seen each other.”

“What happened?”

“Changmin...needs some space.”

“How much space does he need? They haven’t been together for a year. They could have walked around the world on foot by now!”

“They...have too much pride,” Jae said softly. “Sometimes, pride is worse than anger to over come.”



“How long have you been standing there?” Se7en asked, extracting himself from Ji’s arms and legs. He crossed over to the foyer, a bit unsteady on his feet. The low slung sweats he’d tied on rode down his hips, exposing his belly to Min’s angry gaze. “And how did you get in?”

“I still have my key.” Min held up his ring of keys, dangling them for Se7en to see. “I guessed you didn’t change the lock.”

“I didn’t have time,” Se7en said. He stood, angry and tense, with his hands on his hips. The sensual mouth Changmin once loved to drink wine from was now a thin line, a challenge for the other man to soften. “You walked out on me only a couple of hours ago. I thought I’d have at least until morning.”

“Only a couple of hours and you’re already cuddled on the

couch with..." Min craned his neck to look at the couch. "Is that Ji? You're with Ji?"

"Who I'm with isn't any of your business, remember?" Se7en shrugged, refusing to glance behind him. "Ji's welcome here. You're not."

"I came here to talk to you," Changmin growled, pushing past Se7en. His long legs ate up the distance between the front door and the couch. Before Ji could raise his hands up, Min hauled his fist back and punched the other singer, rocking Ji into the sofa cushions.

"What the hell?!" Se7en sprinted across the room, grabbing Ji's shoulders. Looking over the man's face for damage, he found nothing on Ji's face but a wide smile. Twisting around, Se7en shouted, "What the hell are you doing, Min?"

"He's telling you that he loves you," Ji said, wiping at the thin trickle of blood coming from his nose. "Why don't the two of you go into the bedroom and talk? I'm going to find an ice pack for my face and go home."

# Eleven

Seoul could have fallen in the silence between the two men and they would not have heard it. Changmin stood in the corner of the master bedroom, staring out the window at the city below, numb to anything other than the breathing of the man behind him. If he could take a few steps backwards, Min was certain he would be able to hear Se7en's heartbeat.

Can half of a heart still beat? His gremlin whispered. If you hear it, will it be the other half of your own heartbeat? Will you then feel alive?

Changmin rested his forehead against the cool glass, listening to Se7en move around the room. Even after a year, he could see the older man in his mind, Se7en's ruffled black hair swept back from his strong face. The creak of a spring and the shuffle of bare feet on a rug meant the singer was sitting down. In a few seconds, if they were still lovers, he'd lay back and pat the mattress, giving Min a wicked grin and a wink in the hopes the younger man would join him.

The singer didn't know what hurt more; seeing Ji laying on Se7en's long body or not hearing the pat-pat-pat of the man's hand on the bed.

"Are we going to do this?" Se7en asked. "The view's nice but you've seen it before. Even after a year, the city doesn't change much from up here."

"You're angry." Min tapped his head against the window.

Of course, he's angry, his mind whispered. There are times when I want to move into someone else's mind...someone intelligent..

"Great, now my own brain's against me," The younger man sighed to himself. Sliding around, he leaned until his shoulder blades hit the glass. The cold would bolster him, he thought, remind him that he wasn't totally to blame for their parting although at the moment, he couldn't remember what started the argument to begin

with. Cocking his head at Se7en, the singer asked softly, "What started this? This argument?"

"What killed us?" Se7en looked down at the carpet, not seeing Min wince at the cut in his words. "You tell me. You walked out. Even after everything you said to me, I was still willing to work things out. *You* closed the door on us. *You* didn't answer my phone calls and *you* were the one who changed his phone number."

"The company gave us... new phones," Min started to say. Even knowing he was telling the truth, it still sounded like a feeble excuse. "I... shouldn't have let it go this long. I'm sorry."

"Sorry would have cut it if it were only a few weeks, maybe a month," The older man said, looking up. His eyes were cold, frigid amber against Min's entreaties. "It's been a year and the first time I see you, you're almost undressed and bleeding from another man's hands. What happened to you, Min? Who have you become since you left me?"



Ji pressed the ice pack against the side of his face, wondering if he shouldn't pull over and wait for some of the swelling to go down before he continued driving. The night sky was beginning to darken, the evening's stars lost behind the glow of the city's lights and Seoul's temperamental weather. His Audi was newly waxed, the gleaming black glossy paint swirling with neon from the billboards on the main strip and he hated to get spots on it.

"If I don't crash because I can't see," He grumbled, hitting his phone link on the dashboard. Letting the GPS access, he let the system scroll through his list of friends, hoping to find someone home in the early evening. "Who do I know nearby? Hell, who won't give me crap about Dong Bang's baby hitting me in the face?"

Ji knew who was nearby. Every time he drove to Dong-Wook's apartment, he couldn't help but glance down the street, foolishly catching a glimpse of a certain balcony on a particular building. It was silly. It was as if he were one of the giggling girls in their school uniforms chatting over cakes and teas when a hot guy walked by.

"But he's definitely a hot guy," Ji murmured softly, rumbling



with a longing moan.

He clenched his teeth, aroused at the thought of the man's long-fingered, artistic hands and down-swept mouth exploring his body. Tapping his fist on the steering wheel, Ji admonished his self control. A quick drop of the ice pack between his legs didn't help. His face still throbbed and his groin took up the beat.

Pulling over, he parked where he could see the building he always sought out. A foolish thought strayed into his mind, wondering if the older man was home or if he were busy. Finding the apartment was easy. He'd studied the floors so often he could identify the drapes and he thought he saw them flutter but couldn't be sure. The ache in his heart lessened a bit at the thought of the older man looking for him among the crowd and he sighed, resting his chin on the wheel, hoping to catch a glimpse of his crush.

It hurt to see Se7en in pain. He loved Dong-Wook...as much in the present as he'd done in the past. Cocky and brash, the persona of Se7en hid a romantic, sleepy-voiced singer who'd run into more than a few rough patches in his life. The trip to America had been disastrous, and despite the talent and dedication Se7en brought to the studio, he'd been cast aside when the studio was done 'trying on the Asian thing'. Nothing he had done seemed to matter, even working to smooth out his English only gained him derision from some of the management.

"No one wants to hear a failed ESL student sing love songs," Se7en said after a few mouthfuls of whiskey. "He said that right to my face, like I wasn't standing there. I guess he thought I couldn't understand him. He kept bobbing his head and smiling while he insulted me. I wanted to punch his face in but I couldn't. Everything I had was riding on whether or not he'd promote me."

"You should have punched him before you left," Ji said, patting his hyung on the shoulder. "And what's an ESL student?"

"God I love you, Ji. It means English as a Second Language. Don't feel bad. I had to look it up."

Se7en's bold laughter was nice to hear, especially after weeks of brooding. The America trip had been hard on his mentor but worse was the steeped anger and hurt Se7en wouldn't speak about. Now

knowing the other man was in love with Shim Changmin, everything made so much more sense.

The lean singer was everything Ji was not; somber, handsome, elegant... and tall. Wrinkling his nose, Ji made a monkey face at himself in the rear view mirror. Mostly, he thought in sheer disgust – Min was handsome and tall. He knew he was cute. Ji traded on it. He used his amiable features and flexible body to sell his music, often trading on his charisma to get him past doors that would normally be closed to him.

The industry viewed him as unthreatening and silly, sometimes shocking but not so much that he'd be shunned. He encouraged that image, hiding his proclivities in plain sight. No one expected the court jester to be anything but outrageous. He'd be famous before they realized he'd meant to push every button on purpose and stretch every rule he could.

Life isn't worth living if you didn't bend it until it breaks, Ji thought with a grin. He sobered thinking of the men he'd left in Se7en's apartment. But that doesn't work for hearts, Chil and I know now that you've bent your heart past breaking and you still love him.

"All I've got to say is; he better be worth it, hyung," Ji nodded, reaching for the ice pack again. The cold leeches any feeling from his cheekbones and he was grateful for the numbness. It was becoming difficult to see out of his eye and he worried that Min had gotten him in the middle of his nose. He'd have two black eyes before midnight if that was the case. "Damn, I should get some aspirin. That'll help."

He took one last longing peek at the apartment above him, wondering if he'd ever see past the drapers. Pursing his lips, he stared at his phone, his fingers itching to reach out and tap out the number he'd stolen from TOP's phone months ago.

"You'd tell any of the others to go for it, Ji," The young man whispered, staring at the brightly-lit screen. "You'd cheer them on as they dialed and help them get dressed when they went on their date. But oh, I don't even know if he likes... guys like that. Hell, I don't even know if he'd like me like that."

Only one way to find out. He thought. Call.

The phone was ringing before Ji even had the headset in and the

soft growling voice on the other end gave his stomach the shivers. Under his t-shirt, his nipples peaked, roused only by the sound of the man's gentle hello. Swallowing, Ji plunged in, puffing out his cheeks before speaking.

"Hey, gae!" Ji winced when the pain in his nose and cheek traveled across his face and into his teeth. "I'm glad you're home. I kind of need a small favour."



"I don't know...what happened to me," Min admitted. His lashes were wet with tears and he wanted to wipe them away, erasing any sign of weakness from existence. "Just everything... became so much. The members..."

"You can't blame this all on the members, Changmin," Se7en said quietly. "Jae and the others did what they felt they had to do in order to remain sane. You chose to react the way you did. You're the one who said things in anger, not them."

He rested back on his hands, crossing his ankles out in front of him. The older man was the picture of casual elegance; a beautiful face and a sculpted body clothed casually for a night in. Only the tenseness around his mouth betrayed the tenuous hold he had over his emotions and Min wanted nothing more than to wipe away the crease between the other man's eye brows but he'd lost the right to do that long ago.

"I'm not..." Min closed his mouth, worrying at the necklace he wore. "Standing here in front of you right now is the hardest thing I've ever done."

"Walking out that door...walking away from me should have been the hardest thing that you have ever done," Se7en said, tilting his chin up to meet Min's eyes.

There was a shimmer across his burnt amber gaze, tears swelling from heartfelt emotion. Unlike the young singer, Se7en never hid his emotions, even when they could be seen as unmanly. Not for the first time, Min found himself envious of the man's confidence.

"I know I should have... been a better lover..."

"You should have been a better friend," Se7en replied. "You

should have let me be a better friend.”

“I just... everything was so...” Changmin explained. He paced, counting off the strides in the back of his head. He reached five and turned around, laughing that everything in his life seemed focused on that one number... that single number. “It felt like they were leaving me. Like they wanted to leave me. I hated Joongie-ah for turning me away. It felt so... good to be angry at him. And then you came back and I should have loved you better...held you tighter and I didn’t. I know that now. I didn’t... I didn’t know that a year ago. Things are different now. I’m different now.”

“I’m not so certain I like the different Min.” The other man said. “The man I fell in love with took care of the people he loved. Even if he was heavy-handed with it, he still...thought of people. He still thought of me even when the world was pushing in on him. My Min would have talked to me. Or at least reached out to me in some way. You...this Min...shoved me aside and to be honest, baby... I’d had enough of being shoved aside to last a lifetime by then. I needed you. I needed you to need me. I didn’t need you to tell me I was just a piece of shit on your shoe.”

“It’s so easy for you. Everything is just...” Changmin threw his hands up in the air, exasperated. “Haven’t you ever made a mistake? Haven’t you ever done anything that made you wonder if what you were doing was worth it?”

“Hell yeah,” Se7en laughed, a bitter hard sound, and said, “I fell in love with you, didn’t I?”

# Twelve

Dong-Wook curled over, resting his elbows on his thighs. The painful sorrow he held in his guts spilled and his tears fell hot, streaming down his face. There was too much shame ... too much anguish in his heart. Unable to control the storm of madness and shattered love, he finally broke apart, falling into pieces in front of his former lover.

“And damn you, Minku,” He gasped. His breath came in short pants, tearing little sounds rumbling from his chest. “I still fucking love you. Damn me for still fucking loving you.”



# Thirteen

There was no room for air between them. Min's mouth was on Se7en's, drinking in the older man's taste. Their tongues battled, a small wet war of passion and need. Se7en's moan was rough, a crooning sound that tickled the back of Changmin's throat as he pushed himself forward. The rug was thick beneath his knees, coarse to the touch when he used his fingers to balance.

Min didn't want to break contact, not after tumbling down to his knees and catching Se7en's face up in his hands. He thought he would beg for any shred of forgiveness his former lover might give him but when he caught the older man's clove-infused scent, he took what he wanted... what he needed.

Se7en's kisses were a rainstorm on the parched desert of his soul.

It was madness to continue but Changmin refused to break away. He needed this... he needed this man to hold him. He needed this man to keep him in his life.

When they broke for air, sobbing and gasping, Changmin tangled his fingers into Se7en's hair. The older man reached down, hooking his hands around Min's thighs and pulled him forward, splaying the young singer out on the bed. Covering Changmin's body, Se7en straddled the younger man, his knees landing on either side of Min's legs.

"I love you, Shichi," Min whispered as Se7en's mouth descended on his. "I've always loved you."

It was too hot between their bodies, too much fabric keeping their skin apart. Se7en tasted of his tears, silvery salt framing his wide, lush mouth. Min licked the man's lower lip, washing away the man's sorrow with each swipe of his tongue. He swallowed, taking the tears into his belly.

"If I could take away your sadness," Min whispered. "I would. I would die if you needed me to. Just please, don't turn me away, baby."

Please, don't turn me away."

"I can't," Se7en threaded his fingers through Min's hair, cradling the man's skull in his palm. He stared into Changmin's face as if the young man's beauty held the wonders of the universe. For the older singer, Min became his focus, an ivory and silk warmth he could hold in his hands. "I couldn't let you go. Even when you..."

"Don't," Min said, touching his fingertips to Se7en's lips. "Please, don't say..."

Se7en kissed Min's fingers. "I made mistakes too. Even when...we... turned away from each other..."

"...You still loved me," Changmin breathed.

"We're idiots, you know," The older singer stroked Min's cheek, settling his weight on his elbows and knees. His feet dangled off the mattress, as bare as his heart. "You made me fall in love with you...made me want forever with someone who understood me...with someone who understood my dreams. I don't know what I did to lose you."

Gripping the linens, Se7en's head dropped, his forehead resting on Min's collarbone. "I wanted to die because I lost you."

"You didn't lose me, baby," Changmin said, rubbing his cheek against Se7en's hair. "I lost me."

Pulling Se7en down, Changmin wrapped his arms around the other man's waist. He snuggled in close, needing more than the feel of the man on him. He needed Se7en to fill him, to stretch his heart out until it burst. The parts of his body not touching Se7en were too cold -- too far away from the man's hands. The parts that were close itched, needed more.

*I could wait*, Min decided, losing his breath under another of Se7en's punishingly sweet kisses. *I can wait for more... at least until we talk.*

"Or if you can stand to listen to me," Min murmured out loud.

"God, I've missed that." Se7en laughed, tossing his head back and snorted, inhaling a sharp gasp of air. Nipping the end of Min's nose, he laughed harder as a red flush crept over the younger man's cheeks. "I've missed you talking to yourself. How are your inner demons?"



“The main one is going to move out.” Changmin ducked his head, wanting to crawl under the covers. “I think he’s unhappy with my life choices. I can’t blame him. I’ve not been happy with them either.”

“You’ve made better,” The singer conceded. “I have to ask you one thing, Minku...”

“Anything,” Min whispered, sidling back into Se7en’s tight embrace.

“Am I going to be one of your life choices?” He asked, his eyes closed against the pain that could drown him. “This... between us... is this worth anything to you? Now? Or when you slide out of my arms, is this going to be the last time I hold you?”



The apartment door loomed in front of Ji. A small lit button glowed in the frame and when he pressed it, he couldn’t hear the bell ring inside but a few seconds later, the door opened and the man Ji lusted for stood in front of him.

His hair was light again, a caramel brown with darker streaks underneath. Wispy bangs hung down over the front of his face, the shadows of the hallway turning his deep brown eyes nearly black. His mouth was somber but Ji knew a smile could transform the man’s icy features to a delightful beauty.

*Damn, I wish I could make him smile,* Ji thought. When the man turned and Ji caught a good look of his tight ass and long legs in the torn jeans he wore, he swallowed hard. *Forget smile. I want to make him moan.*

“How can I help you out?” The man’s voice was soft, a silken blanket covering Ji’s agitated nerves. “And what happened to your face?”

“I ran into a pole,” Ji offered up as an excuse. “I hit it harder than I thought because it really hurts. I was hoping you had some aspirin or something.”

“Follow me,” He said. His legs were long, carrying him quickly down the front hall and into the main living room. Clean lines and honey wood floors were a nice frame for the man’s lean body and Ji

smiled when he spotted the draperies covering the length of the far glass wall.

They're nice. Different from the inside. Ji thought. Brighter than I thought.

The honey oak floors extended into the hall and into the bathroom. A thick black rug covered most of the bathroom floor, picking up the dark flecks in the cream paddedon counters. Patting the stone, the man rifled through an inset cabinet on the wall.

"What?" Ji asked, staring at the man's ass as he bent forward to look deeper in the shelves.

"Sit," He said. "Let me take a look at that."

"I just hit a tree."

"It was a pole a minute ago," The man said, his voice muffled in the interior of the cabinet. "And unless trees or poles started wearing rings, then I'm guessing from the shape of the bruise under your eye, that someone punched you."

"You're too smart for your own good," Ji said. He hitched himself up onto the counter, welcoming the stone's cold touch. The chill helped his arousal go down, something he welcomed now that he sat with his crotch in plain view of the older man.

He closed the cabinet door with his foot, his hands full of antiseptics and cotton swabs. Uncapping a brown bottle and soaking a gauze square, the smile Ji wished for bloomed when the younger man recoiled at the wet daub.

"It's not going to hurt," He said, holding Ji's chin gently in one hand and gently dabbing at the cuts on Ji's face. "It's just peroxide. I'm going to try to get this cleaned up then put a plaster on it. We'll get some anti-inflammatory pills in you but you might want to stay the night. They're strong and could upset your stomach."

"You just don't want to let me out of your sight." Ji teased.

"Maybe," The other man laughed, wiping the area dry and applying a plaster. Brushing his mouth over the covered wound, the scent of his cologne and the mint on his breath made Ji swoon. "There. A kiss to make it better. If it starts to hurt, I can give you another."

"Pill?" Ji stammered, struggling to keep his breathing even.

"You're only allowed two pills every six hours," The man said, shaking out a dosage into Ji's hand. "But if the kiss made you feel better, I'll give you as many as you need."



"I was stupid..." Min said. He inhaled the scent of Se7en's skin, the older man's throat well within reach of Min's mouth. It was agony not to kiss the velvety temptation in front of him. A moment later, he surrendered to his lust, leaving a wet imprint of his lips on Se7en's neck. "I don't know how to say... I'm sorry. I don't know how to tell you that I can be trusted with your heart again. Hell, I don't trust me with your heart."

Being in Se7en's arms felt good and Min wondered what insanity he'd let take over him to give it up. He felt the other man sigh, chest moving against his and the older singer shifted, wrapping his legs around Min's. They lay there, quiet and lost in their own thoughts before Se7en spoke.

"We have two ways we can do this," The older man said. "We can go over what happened until we are sick of talking or we can go forward and build on what we have left between us."

"Is there enough?" Min asked. "Is there enough to build on?"

"There's more than what we started with," Se7en pointed out. "When we first met, neither one of us knew what love was. Now, we know how to love each other. We have loved each other...and "

"We still love each other," Changmin finished.

"So yeah, my Minku, I think...no, I know we do," Se7en said. "So I think there's enough to build on...if you do."

"I do. I want... to." Min whispered. "I want you to have faith in me...to trust me even if I don't trust me."

"I do trust you. I have faith in you, Changmin." The kiss on Min's mouth was gentle but he felt it reverberate down into his shattered soul. "I will always have faith in you. Just like I will always love you."

"Then yes, go forward" He said, stretching up to capture his lover's kiss. "It hurts too much to live without you, Shichi. I don't want to imagine an eternity of pain and if I lose you, I know that's

wedspawn

what's waiting for me."

## Fourteen

Washing dishes never had been something Min liked to do. He avoided it at all costs and even bet the chore in video games against Junsu. Elbow deep in dish soap suds with Se7en standing next to him now was his idea of Nirvana.

They'd kissed, stroking one another's faces and arms. An hour passed, then another, warmed by words and lips. Min's stomach ended the interlude, rumbling loud enough to drown out their whispers. Laughing, Se7en rose to his feet, offering his hand out to the younger man. Taking that hand... touching those fingers... seemed like a rope thick enough to pull him out of the mire of his anger and despair. Changmin took it willingly, gripping Se7en's fingers tightly as he slid off the bed.

There were dishes in the sink and Se7en ran hot water over them, intending to wash them while they waited for their food delivery to arrive. He squirted in soap and the lavender scent tickled Min's nose. Moving closer, Changmin was surprised when his lover handed him a scrubber.

"Here, you wash," Se7en said, opening a drawer to pull out a dish towel. "I'll dry. It'll go faster that way."

"When did you get domestic?" Min grumbled, wrinkling his nose and snorting, trying to clear away the tiny bubbles that drifted near his face. "I remember when you didn't even know where your pantry was."

"Yeah well," He shrugged casually. "In Los Angeles, I was left on my own a lot and not a lot of delivery places spoke Korean. I wasn't near K-Town so... I ended up cooking a lot. And cooking means... cleaning."

"Really?" Min eyed him suspiciously. "Then why did we just order food?"

"Because I'd rather spend my time with you than cooking."

"Ah, but I'm washing dishes," Changmin pointed out. "Or is standing next to me considered 'spending time' with me?"

"Faster you scrub, the sooner we can go sit down," Se7en said. Rolling his eyes up, he sent a pleading look to the Heavens. "God, I sounded exactly like my mother. I opened my mouth and my mother fell out!"

"I do not want your mouth and your mother combined in one image," Min growled. "Not if I'm going to be kissing that mouth later. I do *not* want your mother anywhere near there."

The doorbell rang, saving Se7en from having to answer. Wiping off his hands, he grabbed his wallet and paid the delivery boy, taking the bags of food into the living room. A quick tug on the tie and the bags opened, releasing a fragrant meaty scent into the air.

"Come on, time for food," He said, plucking out a branch of cilantro from a container and waving it in Min's direction. "Look, I've even got your favourite."

"It's only my favourite when I'm stealing it from your mouth," Min muttered to himself. Looking at the rest of the dishes, he frowned. "What about these?"

"Leave them," Se7en called out, unpacking the bags. "The housekeeper can do it."

"You have a housekeeper? Why the hell am I doing your dishes?!" A sponge flew past Se7en's head, leaving a wet mark on the couch. He grinned at Min, winking as the tall singer stalked over to the couch. He flopped down and imperiously waved for the older man to serve him. "I want the shrimp. And all of the bean sprouts."

"You can have half of the bean sprouts." Se7en dished up the pho, adding the condiments. "But I'll let you have all of the shrimp. There's chicken for me."

They ate in silence until Se7en held out a mouthful of noodles for Min to eat. Angling the chopsticks for the younger man, Se7en turned his head when Min slurped them up, splattering broth on both of their faces.

"You're a mess." Se7en leaned forward. Slowly, he trailed a finger over a spot of broth and sucked it off. "I think that would take too long. Maybe there's a better way to do this?"

"Yeah?" Min rested his hands on his thighs, arching so their mouths were nearly touching. "Like how?"

"A napkin?" He held up the paper square, chuckling at Min's answering frown. "No?"

"No."

"Hold still then," He murmured. "This is going to take some time."

He traced the younger man's mouth with the tip of his tongue, dabbing off the tiny spots of broth. Se7en studied Min's face, making an elaborate show of kissing off each dot. He curled his lips over a beauty spot, sucking hard on the spot until Changmin pushed him away, laughing so hard he couldn't breathe.

"That tickles. Stop."

"Come here, one last drop," Se7en cupped Min's head and drew him in, taking pleasure in parting the young man's lips with his and sliding his tongue against his young lover's teeth. Suckling and kissing, Se7en stroked down Min's sides, urging the man into his lap.

"Are we done eating?" Changmin asked, sliding his take-out container onto the table. "Because I think I'm full of soup right now and could use something... more substantial."

"I don't know if I'm substantial but maybe I could be a bit of sweet after your dinner?"

"Like a dessert?" Min curled his fingers into Se7en's shirt, sliding over to nestle his rear into the space between his lover's crossed legs. "I like cake. Dong-Wook cake but I'm on a diet. I promised I would ease back into eating my desserts."

"Or we could talk..." He offered, moving his arm so Min could cuddle into the curve of his body. "And easing back in is a good idea. Even when I want to do less easing and more...*back in.*"

"We should talk," The younger man agreed, settling into the warmth of the man's embrace. "Tell me about America."

"Aish, America," Se7en leaned back, nesting further into the loose cushions. Stretching out his legs, he settled Min between them, pulling the younger man until his back rested against Se7en's chest. "Let's see, what do you want to know?"

"Did you do any signings there? Were there a lot of people?"

"A couple of signings. At phone stores, believe it or not." Se7en shrugged when Min turned his head and gave him a curious look. "I just went where they told me. They held one after my launch party and I'd spent most of the night up and talking to people but it was nice. There were a lot of fans, more than I expected. I was kind of surprised."

"Women?"

"A lot of them were women," He conceded, chuckling at Min's annoyed tsk. "They were different. Most of them were Asian and they brought gifts. It was... sweet. I was touched."

"Because you weren't expecting it?"

"No, I wasn't expecting gifts. Hell, I wasn't expecting there to be anyone but they were wrapped around the building." Se7en sighed. "I was shocked and I thought maybe this would give the record company some idea that I could be promoted in the U.S. but it didn't seem... it didn't seem to matter."

"It mattered to those people standing in line for you," Min pointed out. "You got to meet them. I mean, they knew who you were. They drove to be there and you didn't have a record out or anything."

"Yeah, that was cool. I was...down," Se7en admitted. "The party at the club... the night before... I spent the whole time trying to talk people up but it was hard. My English... wasn't great but at the signing, people were.. excited to see me. It was nice. It made me feel better."

"And the women?" Min poked at his lover's ribs. "How were they?"

"American women are...louder? I don't know the word." He shrugged. "They're not cheap or act like whores but they are... louder in personality. It's hard to explain."

"Brasher," Min supplied with a not. "Bolder."

"Bolder, yes," Se7en agreed. "Not in a bad way but bolder. More... I don't know... they weren't shocking or outrageous, just larger personalities. And most of them were Asian — Korean... Chinese... a mix but they were all... American. That loudness. It was nice. It was like a loud hug from someone you know. Very different."



“None of them came to the signing wearing torn jeans?”

“None of them came to the signings wearing torn jeans that should be declared illegal.” Se7en sighed. “God I love those jeans. Do you have any idea what your legs in those jeans do to me?”

“A little bit,” Min admitted then slyly looked at the older man. “I could wear them again.”

“Yeah?” Se7en kissed behind Min’s ear. “How about if we do something different?”

“Different how?”

“I think, Minku, that it’s time we went on a date,” Se7en declared, hugging the man from behind. “Why don’t we plan on having dinner out someplace. I’ll get a driver and you... wear those jeans. Let’s start this love between us at the beginning again.”

“If I remember,” Min narrowed his eyes. “You kind of took part of my virginity in the back of a limo.”

“Yeah,” Se7en grinned, fondly remembering the stars shining down on them thru the moon roof. “I really want to peel those jeans off of you... and take that *virginity* of yours all over again. And if you’re a good boy, I might even let you take mine.”



# Fifteen

"You're wearing a suit?" Ji snorted from his seat on the bathroom counter. "Are you kidding?"

Se7en adjusted his thin black tie, tightening the knot. Reaching for a cufflink, he threaded the post through one hole then the other on his French cuff, fastening the stud in place. He turned the post, settling the onyx stone circle against his snow-white shirt.

"No, I'm not kidding," He said, nudging the younger man's knee with his elbow. "Sometimes it's nice to go on a date looking like a gentleman." Eyeing Ji's torn jeans and ratty t-shirt, he shook his head. "Hell, sometimes it would be nice if you looked more like a gentleman."

"That would be false advertising, hyung," Ji grinned.

"If you weren't at least sometimes a gentleman." Se7en nodded with his chin at Ji's face. "You would have punched Min's face in for doing that to you."

"I would have to stand on a chair to punch your giraffe's face." Ji ducked as Se7en playfully grabbed at his hair to ruffle it. "I might have had a chance if I was standing on the couch and took a flying leap."

"He's not that tall," The older man said.

"Hyung, he's almost tall enough to wade into the ocean and not drown because his head is above the water," He shot back.

"He's only eight centimeters taller than me. Not a lot of difference."

"You're taller than me," Ji reminded Se7en, nudging the man with his bare foot. He pinched Se7en's trouser with his toes, wrinkling the dark grey fabric. "Actually, sometimes I feel like everyone is taller than me."

"What about your..." Se7en asked, his eyes twinkling with mischief as he attached his other cufflink. "What are we calling

him?"

"Unobtainable," Ji grumbled. "I was brave enough to go over there the other day... after Min punched me."

"Oh?"

"I thought I should maybe take some aspirin. He took care of me, kissed me on the forehead and sent me on my way."

"At least you got a kiss." The singer pointed out. "That's more than most people would have gotten."

"Yeah, and God he smells good," Ji sighed, pulling his legs up and wrapping his arms around his knees. "Like lemon drops and sweet black tea. I couldn't think. Hell, I didn't even know what to say."

"You're too shy sometimes," Se7en said. "Actually you're too shy all the time."

"Only you know that," The younger man ducked his head, hiding his face on his thighs. Se7en's intense scrutiny raised all of Ji's insecurities and he exhaled, wishing he could chase away the hot red on his cheeks. "Aish, I hate being..."

The older man tangled his fingers in Ji's bright hair, gently pulling him up. He kissed the younger man on the end of his nose, smiling at the blushing pink creeping across Ji's face. "You hate being bold for the camera when you're not really bold inside?"

"It makes me feel like a lie sometimes," Ji admitted, putting his chin on his knees. "But... I can't be me in front of the cameras. Not if I want to be *someone*."

"You are someone," Se7en said, giving his friend a quick, one-armed hug. "You are a fierce dragon. It's just that no one knows how soft your belly is."



Min stood under the overhang protecting the front of his apartment building. The morning had been full of sunshine but as the afternoon crawled forward, the sky hung heavy with clouds. By twilight, the scent of rain filled the air and Min looked down at his favourite torn jeans, worried they wouldn't be warm enough for the evening.

Traffic on the busy Seoul street parted and a sleek, elegant town car pulled up to the curb. Nearly the same dusky grey as the storm clouds, its glossy paint shimmered and Changmin caught his reflection on its surface, distorted and elongated by the car's tight lines.

A familiar bulk unfolded from the driver's seat, a chauffeur's perched low over his brow. His silver-shot black hair was cropped short, a spiky hedgehog haircut on his square head. The man's smile was brief, a slice of welcome on his stern face then it was gone, washed away under his sober professionalism.

"Sir," The driver said, tapping the brim of his hat as he bowed his head in greeting. He crossed around the car, opening the back door. "Might I get you out of the possibly rainy evening?"

Changmin grinned, resisting the urge to hug the man. "Hi!"

"Good evening, sir. I hope you're well," He said, motioning for Min to slide into the car. "We'll be meeting the depraved pervert you have chosen to let back into your life at the restaurant. It's not too late to change your mind and make other plans for the night."

"No," Min winked. "Let's go meet the depraved idiot."

"That was pervert, sir," The driver was about to close the door when Min put his hand out to stop him.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course, sir."

"Dong-Wook...Se7en... he only calls you *Gyosha*," Changmin said. "Would you... Will you tell me your name?"

"Of course, sir," He leaned over and whispered into Changmin's ear. "The pervert is probably waiting for us. If you're ready to go, sir."

"We can go," Min said, sitting back. "Thank you."

"Yes, sir," The driver replied, closing the door softly. Adjusting his hat, he rounded the vehicle and got in, starting up the engine and pulling the car into traffic. Meeting Changmin's eyes in the rear view mirror, he nodded once and turned his attention back to the road. "I'll tell the depraved idiot that we're on our way."

"I thought that was pervert," Min laughed.

"Never argue or correct a passenger, sir," The man said. "Idiot

you called him, idiot he shall be.”



Se7en knew the moment Changmin walked into the restaurant. The murmur of conversation intensified, becoming a river of speculation and awe. The private room he'd rented was a secluded corner of the rooftop restaurant, its wide glass windows able to accordion in to give the eatery an al fresco feel. He chose it because the food was good and the corner rooms could be closed off, giving them much wanted and much needed privacy.

There wasn't a word he could imagine that could describe the fluttering feeling in his belly when he first saw Changmin cross through the restaurant. The room door had been left open, just a crack wide enough to give him a clear view of the entrance.

Those sexy long legs that Se7en loved so much were encased in torn, faded denim. A loose white shirt hung a little large from his shoulders and when the younger singer drew closer, Se7en spotted the small black monogram of his own tattoo on the pocket.

“That's one of my shirts,” Se7en said, nearly reaching for the young man as he entered the room. The maître d studiously ignored the two men's lingering glances and the almost touches of their fingers as they walked to the table set near the window.

“I borrowed it,” Min said, taking the napkin from the hovering maître d and settling into his chair.

Spreading the linen over his lap, he waited for Se7en to sit down before thanking the man for leading him to the table. The maître d left, assuring them their waiter would be by shortly and closed the door behind him, sealing the room off into a comfortable silence filled only with the sound of the two men breathing.

The table had been set up so the men sat on either side of a corner rather than across of one another. Se7en approved. He liked being within reach of the other man's soft skin and ripe mouth.

That mouth touched his palm when Se7en ran his hand over Min's chin, cupping the young man's face. He leaned forward, their lips nearly touching when a discreet knock sounded on the door. Sighing, Se7en pulled back and gave permission to the waiter to

enter, unfurling his napkin to hide the bulge growing in his trousers.

The menus were heavy in their hands, thick paper inked nearly solid blue with descriptions of food Min couldn't concentrate on. He snuck a look at his lover, admiring the way the man's suit jacket fit over his shoulders and chest. The man's long torso was made for fine materials and Min ran his fingers down the soft fabric of Se7en's former shirt, imagining his own touch was really his lover's and he bit his lip hard, keeping a longing moan in his throat.

Sipping cold water helped douse his erection but his sex perked back up when Se7en shed his jacket and tossed it on one of the extra chairs against the wall.

The man's tattoo was barely visible through the fabric but Min could still see the swooping black ink and his mouth watered. It had been too long since he'd run his tongue over Se7en's hot skin... been too long since he'd suckled at the man's tattoo with the taste of his lover's seed still on his tongue.

His next sip of water did nothing to quell his throbbing sex.

"Crab?" Se7en asked, looking up from the menu. "Of course, I don't think I could stand to watch you eat crab."

"I like crab."

"I do too," The other man murmured just loud enough for Min to hear. "I just don't I could watch you suck butter and crab meat off of your fingers."

"How about a steak?" Min glanced up at the waiter. "Are they good?"

"We only served aged beef, sir," The man answered. "We're known for our seafood dishes if you'd prefer something lighter."

"They have lobster," Changmin noticed, keeping his smile from becoming too broad. "I like lobster."

"Lobster comes with butter," Se7en said. "Same problem as crab."

"I prefer crab," The other man said. "I think I'll have the crab and...a filet, rare please."

"The same," Se7en grumbled, "With garlic butter."

Changmin let the older man choose the rest of the meal. His attention drifted to the view, a thin-threaded black screen keeping

out any insects but letting the night air in. Despite the threat of rain, the breeze was cool and refreshing.

The waiter was gone by the time Min turned around and the door was closed, securing them in their own world once again. Se7en touched Min's face again, running his fingers over the younger man's lips. He kissed Se7en's palm, feeling the scar on the heel. He intimately knew each curve and bump on the man's hands.

"I told him not to bring the crab," Se7en said, bending forward to nuzzle Min's ear. He toyed with the black stud there, licking at the stone.

"But I like crab," He moaned.

"Yeah but baby, I have plans for those fingers...and mine too," The older man said, suckling Min's ear lobe into his mouth. "The only thing I want to eat with my hands tonight... is you."



"Dongsaeng," A familiar, erotic purr tickled Ji's ear. "How are you?"

"Fine," Ji swallowed and ran his hand through his hair. Swearing inside, he paced and fretted at his lower lip, wondering if he could find it in himself to be G-Dragon for a moment while talking to the older man. "How are you doing?"

"Well," He replied. "I was about to go out for dinner."

"Oh..." The singer said, stumbling over a pair of Converse he'd left on the floor. "I shouldn't keep you..."

"Actually, keeping me isn't a problem," The other man said. "I was hoping you'd join me. I was about to give you a call to ask if you were free."

"Uh, yeah," Ji murmured, taking a breath to smooth out the shake in his voice. "I could eat something."

"Good, then. Shall I pick you up?" He asked. "Or would you like to meet me?"

"Either works." His nerves were rattled but he was proud of the cool tone he'd managed. *Smooth there, Ji, he thought, Learn something from the pimp master, Se7en.*

"How about if I pick you up?" The other man's purr deepened,



drawing out the words and sending a tingle under Ji's skin. "That way, I'll know where to drop you off after breakfast."



# Sixteen

Stars played hide and seek in the clouds above their heads. The threatening storm lurked at the far edge of the city but from their vantage point on Namsan mountain. The North Seoul tower lit up the far ridge, its banded white bright against the dark sky. With the moon roof glass in place, the couple had the sky at their beck and call but their eyes were only for each other.

"I've missed this," Se7en said, swirling his fingertip into a piece of cheesecake.

He'd ordered a variety of desserts from the menu and had them packed up along with thermoses of coffee and tea. Instructing the driver to head to Namsan, he'd handed the man a few bills and asked him to take a taxi back home. Curling his lip up at Se7en as he took the money, the driver bade Min a goodbye with a cautious warning not to be molested by any wandering perverts.

Min replied that he had all the pervert he needed and that the driver should have a good night.

Se7en was not that gracious and roundly cursed the man under his breath and slammed the door when the driver left.

"He likes you," Min said, unpacking the desserts from the bag. The restaurant included porcelain plates and silver utensils with the order and Changmin worriedly examined the fragile dishware. "Why not give us plastic?"

"Because the dessert chef is a master at sweets," Se7en said. "He believes plastic ruins the taste of his creations so he includes proper dishware if you're a regular customer."

"We never ate..." Min stopped himself. He didn't want to imagine who Se7en had shared meals with and not as intimate of a restaurant.

"My cousin is one of the assistant chefs," The older man explained. "Our family eats there a lot to support him. You're the first

date I've taken there."

"So those people there... know you?" Changmin reached for a bottle of iced water from the car's small fridge. The icy splash on his tongue cooled down his mouth but did nothing to ease the blush on his cheeks. "They knew we were...on..."

"I told the maître d that you and I are friends and since we're in rival companies," Se7en said, popping open a container to investigate its contents. "I wanted something private. Especially considering my friend's going through a rough time right now and doesn't need people staring at him while he eats."

"Thank you for that," Min exhaled. "I appreciate your lying for me. I know you..."

"It wasn't a lie, Minku," He said, putting a hand on Min's thigh and squeezing. "No matter what, you *are* my friend and you're having to live your life under everyone's scrutiny. If you do something or don't do something, people work to connect it back to your group. Even having dinner with me, as innocent as it is, would lead to rumours and consequences that you shouldn't have to deal with. That's reason enough for privacy."

Min lay back against the leather seats, touched at the man's thoughtfulness. "Thank you. Really, thank you so much."

"It's not a problem, baby," Se7en said, stealing a quick kiss. "I also got to kiss the burgundy sauce off of your lips. *That* was worth it! Now open your mouth. I've got something white and sticky for you to suck on."

"Shichi!" Min gaped then choked slightly on Se7en's cheesecake-laden finger hit his tongue. Closing his lips, he suckled it clean, running his tongue around the digit. Swallowing, he groaned with pleasure. "That's good."

"Yeah, he makes good cheesecake," The other man agreed. "I've got a few things in here. Victorian sponge cake, crème brulee mousse and something chocolate that looks deadly."

They shared the cheesecake, eating bits and pieces of it with their fingers. Feeding Se7en proved to be difficult as he preferred to chew on Min rather than the dessert, leaving long smears of white on his face which Min felt obligated to lick off. Se7en claimed the

chocolate, passing Min the crème brulee. Digging past the sugary crust, Min licked each spoonful clean as he nestled down between his lover's legs, resting his back against Se7en's chest.

"This is nice," Min sighed. He couldn't remember the last time he'd spent more than ten minutes sitting down and doing *nothing*. Even Se7en's languid fingers brushing over his stomach was more comforting than erotic. The older man played with the trail of dark hair under his belly button and Min hummed with pleasure.

Se7en bent forward and gently kissed Min's lips. Angling the younger man, he set their desserts on the credenza built into the separating wall between the front and back seat then slowly lowered Min down until he lay on the wide leather seat. He kissed Changmin slowly, sliding his tongue against his lover's. Min lifted his hips up as Se7en's hands roamed under him. The older man kneaded the man's muscular backside, stroking the back of Min's thighs.

"How about this, Minku?"

"That's nice too." Changmin shifted and spread his knees so Se7en could settle between them. "You feel nice."

"How about if I make you feel nice too?" The older singer worked his hand between their bodies and reached for Min's waistband. His fingers snapped open the button of Min's jeans and moved down, unzipping his fly. "Just lean back, baby, and let me show you how to fly."



"So they're out on a date?" Junsu asked, moving his legs out of the way so Jaejoong could get around him.

The lead singer cradled a bowl of buttered popcorn against his belly, carefully stepping around the couple on the near end of the couch. Handing Yunho the bowl, he sat down and pulled himself into a ball, sighing contentedly as his lover hooked one arm over his shoulder.

"I don't like it," Yunho grumbled, taking a handful of popcorn before Jaejoong could take the bowl back.

"Do you think he's going to hurt Min?" Yoochun asked, leaning over his lover and grabbing the bowl from his best friend. Pouring

half of the popped kernels into a bowl he'd used for rice crackers, Yoochun put the snack between Junsu's legs, balancing it on his thighs.

"No," Yunho said, shaking his head. "I'm afraid Min's going to hurt Dong-Wook."

"Well," Chunnie exhaled. "I don't...know what to say about that."

"Me neither," Junsu frowned. "I don't think any of us bet on that one. I didn't."

Jaejoong thought hard and shook his head. "No, none of us thought about that."

"So who wins?" The tenor asked. "No one?"

"You bet on what I would think about Se7en and Min?" Yunho growled.

"We bet on what you would do," Yoochun corrected.

"How you'd kill him exactly," Junsu supplied, leaning forward to meet Yunho's eyes. "Dong-Wook. Not Min."

"Aish, you three are sick," The leader said. "Don't you have anything better to do with your time?"

"No," Yoochun grumbled. "It was a good bet. Lots of outcomes. I choose beating. Junsu said that you were going to choke him to death. Jaejoong said you'd go get him drunk."

"Then you owe Jaejoong money," Yunho replied. "I got Dong-Wook drunk right after I found out about he and Min."

"Aish," Junsu grumbled. "I hate owing money to Jaejoong. He pesters me."

"Then pay him quickly and you won't hear anything." Yoochun unfolded himself from the couch and removed the bowl from Junsu's lap. Grabbing his lover's hand, he pulled Junsu up. "Come on, I'll get my wallet from my room and you can borrow money to pay him."

"What if your mother comes home and finds us in the living room?" Yunho asked before the couple left.

"She's out with my aunt for the weekend and my brother went with his friends." Yoochun shrugged. Giving the older men a suspicious look, he cocked his head and warned, "Just don't have sex on the couch. Actually, don't have sex anywhere in the living room."

"I think he has us confused with him and Junsu," Jae grumbled playfully, taking away the cushion Yunho found to throw at the departing singer's head.

"Now he's concerned about a couch," Yunho snorted. "Our couches were nothing but his mother's..."

"It is his mother's couch," The other man pointed out. "And that's his bedroom. I know he doesn't have any money in his wallet. He borrowed money from me to buy dinner. They're not coming back for a while."

"Slimy," Yunho commented softly. "Greasy. He is a grease ball. Isn't that what the fans call him?"

"Are you really worried about Dong-Wook?" Jae asked, tucking his feet under Yunho's leg.

"I was," Yunho admitted, feeding a white fluffy kernel to Harang who snapped it up quickly. "Not that I don't love our dongsaeng but both of them were...brutal to each other, I think but Se7en needed Changmin to support him. Especially since he's come back from America."

"It's hard," Jaejoong whispered. "When you think the person you love has turned away from you."

They'd spent the day together, hidden away behind closed doors and under sheets. A series of car rides and more hiding led them to Yoochun's house, a movie primed on the DVD player and buttered popcorn at the ready. Yoochun's dog was at their feet, sprawled under Yunho's feet with his paws on the lower shelf of the coffee table.

It was a nice lazy day, spent alone as a couple and then with the other pair. It was time both young men knew they'd fought to get, especially after their earlier break.

"Do you ever think about what would have happened if you and I hadn't tried to work things out?" Yunho asked softly.

"I didn't want to think about it," Jae admitted. "There were times... certain times when I looked to my left and expected to see you there and there was no one... empty space where your smile should have been. It was harder on stage... in front of people because I wanted to break down and cry but I couldn't. I thought you would

be... ashamed that I let the group down by letting the fans down and that's what kept me going. Even in my deepest sorrow, I needed to please you... I wanted to make you proud of me."

"I'm always proud of you, Boo," Yunho whispered, kissing a tear from Jaejoong's face. "Even if we disagree, I am proud of you for standing up for what you believe in. I would be lying if I said I wasn't angry because you didn't do what I wanted but I would be a hypocrite if I couldn't be proud of your independence and strength. You have faith in yourself now. I have to celebrate that not condemn it because you go against me."

"Thank you," Jae sniffed, kissing Yunho's fingers after they stroked his cheek. "Do you think Min and Dong-Wook will come to an understanding?"

"I think they are like us in one way," The other man said, sucking the salty water from his fingertip. "I think they love very fiercely and sometimes, it burns a bit too hot for them to stand but they'll learn. If you want to catch a beautiful star, you're going to have to learn how to handle its fire."



Se7en lowered his head down. He bit at the ridge of skin on his lover's navel, then licking at the bronzed skin under Min's belly button, continued down until he reached the broad elastic of Min's underwear. Hooking a thumb under the stretch material, he nuzzled at the growing bulge under the fabric, moving the elastic aside to let Min's tip free of its confinement.

The head already glistened with Min's liquid, translucent white on his darker skin. Se7en scraped his teeth along the head's ridge, reveling in the softer velvet texture compared to the steely slickness of Min's shaft. Changmin's seed was a salty burst on Se7en's tongue and he sucked at the slit, drawing more of it out. He stroked the base of Min's erection, using the underwear to roughen the arousal. Twisting the fabric around Min's erection, he found the prominent vein running down the shaft, concentrating on following the line with his fingertips while his palm worked the surface.

"Shichi," Min groaned, his hips moving on the slick leather.



His jeans provided little traction and he slid a bit, moving him about in Se7en's grip. The torturous feel of the man's hand through the fabric was driving him insane and the heat of Se7en's tongue on the tip of his erection was nearly enough to drive him over the edge. He wanted to feel all of his lover's mouth on him and more importantly, be thrust deep into Se7en's throat when he came.

"Shichi what?" Se7en teased Min, stroking around the pearly head with his tongue. He parted the slit with a press of his thumb on its pout, licking at the more sensitive skin immediately inside of the opening. "Do you like this, baby? Do you want more?"

"Damn you," Min growled. He blindly thrust his hips up to ease his erection tip past Se7en's tongue. "Fuck me, damn it."

"I'll rather suck you first," Se7en murmured. "Lift up, Minku. Let's get these off of you so I can get all of you in my mouth."

The jeans required a delicate removal even though Changmin was more than willing to rip them off. Se7en urged caution, reminding Min that he adored the pants and the younger man grumbled under his breath as his lover pulled his legs free. With even slower precision, Se7en pulled at Min's underwear, slowly revealing his long stretches of muscle and skin.

Starting at Min's left ankle bone, Se7en traced his way up the younger man's shin muscle, over his knee and around the hard strength of his thigh. Pursing his mouth, the older singer cupped his left hand around Min's ass cheek to hold the young man in place, intending to nuzzle and suckle at the jut of bone on Changmin's hip.

"Um, what's that?" Se7en stopped, staring down at the sharp black lines boldly engraved under Min's hipbone. Resting back on his knees, Se7en cocked his head and took a closer look. Blinking didn't erase the lines and as the clouds shifted in the sky above, the light of the moon came through the glass of the sky roof, washing Min's skin with a silvery glow. "What the fucking hell is that? Is that a tattoo?"

"Yes," Changmin said, biting his lower lip. "I wanted... Jaejoong took me to get it. I didn't want it to...show but I...needed it."

"What the hell ...?" Se7en took a calming breath, looking away for a second then up into Min's widened eyes. "What the hell does it mean? Is that ... Japanese? Why the hell do you have kanji on your

wedspawn

hip?"

"It says shichishoku, and the kanji is... wrong. I mean the kanji is... probably Changnese but I wanted those two for a reason," Changmin whispered, lifting his hand to brush his fingertips gently over Se7en's mouth. "And I did it for you."

七色

## Seventeen

"He got a tattoo," Se7en said, wiping the sweat from his torso with one of the studio towels. "A fucking tattoo."

"Yeah, I know how that is," Yunho replied, nodding knowingly. "It kind of takes you by surprise. I didn't even know until you told me."

"Shit," The other singer swore under his breath. "Shit and I told you Jaejoong took him. Fuck."

"It's okay," He smiled at Se7en, shrugging. "I've learned lately that I can't control Jaejoong and I probably should never even try."

"Good lesson to learn." The man saluted Yunho with his water bottle, chugging down a mouthful to cool himself off. "Jae probably get pissy when you try."

"Pissy doesn't begin to cover it," Yunho snorted, opening his own bottle to take a sip. "Raging pissed is a better term. So what did he tell you about it? Why did he do it?"

"Because he wanted to... express himself." Se7en exhaled, his breath a harsh rasp. "He wanted it to mean something... something to remind him of me and that he should keep reaching for something that might be out of reach. *Shichishoku*."

Yunho searched his knowledge of Japanese and came up empty. "What does that mean?"

"Seven prismatic colours formed by light coming from a prism."

"Explain, idiot," Yunho said, bending over to stretch his legs out.

"He was the white light, focused on only one thing... pure white." Se7en dampened the towel then ran it over his face. "He met me, the prism, and his focus shifted and his world became vibrant, full of colours. Still intense but different. Beautiful. He met me and in his mind, I made him beautiful... feel smart... feel like he could do anything he wanted to do."

"Shichishoku..." Yunho repeated. "He was always that. He's

always been beautiful and smart. He makes us feel stupid most of the time.”

“Yeah, but now he feels like he can see it.” He shrugged. “That I made him see it. I told him that he was silly... he was always those things but he told me to fuck off and let him make his own decisions about what he wants on his body.. or who he wants in his body.”

“Why do you share those things with me?” The man snapped at his friend. “I don’t want to think about Min... damn it. Why do you talk about that with me?”

“Give it up,” Se7en snorted. “The only reason you don’t want to hear it is because you have wet dreams of him and Jaejoong.”

“I swear, I’m going to drain the water out of this bottle and shove it down your throat.”

“Yeah, I love you too.”

“So where did you leave it?” Yunho asked.

“I bit the spot then sucked him off.” Se7en grinned and sprinted out of the dance studio, dodging Yunho’s water bottle as he went through the door.



Changmin was waiting for him when he got home.

Se7en leaned against one of the glass decorative walls separating the living room from the rest of the house, silently watching the young man sitting on the couch. Min’s ever-present headphones were on, sealing him off from the world. Min’s bare feet rested on the couch arm, his toes bobbing in time with the music.

It looked like the younger man stole some of Se7en’s clothes to wear, a white t-shirt two sizes too big for him and a pair of black cotton pants he rolled up at the hips to make them fit. Lithe and long, he easily fit into the curves of the couch, his shoulders and feet propped up on either end.

He never understood how Changmin believed he was plain and unremarkable. From where Se7en stood, he could clearly see why his breath was stolen from his body the moment he saw the younger man on the outside balcony.

Min’s hair was dark again, fringed around his face and cut up

shorter in the back. The style made him look younger but elegant, accentuating the delicate bone structure of his face. The light shifted as the sun weakly shone through the clouds Changmin's dark brown eyes changed, marbled with amber and sienna.

"I can hear you breathe, you know," Min said, not looking up from the book he had in his lap.

"You have headphones on," Se7en said, padding over to the couch and sliding over the arm to sit between Min's feet. "How can you hear me breathe?"

"I can always hear you breathe. Even when you're not around men," Changmin replied, meeting Se7en's amused gaze with a serious expression. "I'll know the moment you die because my world will be plunged into silence and I'll go mad with loss."

"I never knew you were such a romantic."

"I'm not," Min said, turning the page and looking back down. "I am rationally plotting ahead for my care once that happens. I'll have to have money set aside and find a good facility to take care of me. One with a rice cooker, of course."

"I am going to pay for the rest of my life for that, aren't I?" Se7en pulled on Min's toes and stroking at the bottom of his feet. The other man didn't react, visibly steeled against the tickling.

"Yes," Changmin replied. "Especially since you killed the one I gave you. Murdered. That's a better word. You murdered the one I gave you."

"Murder is such a harsh word." Se7en winced and he stilled his caress of Min's feet. "It...fell."

"Unless it walked out to the patio and somehow got up to the railing then pitched itself off to fall twenty stories," Min said, eyeing the man from under his lashes. "Then I don't think it could have supposedly fallen."

"How about if we forget about the rice cooker and talk about your...tattoo?" He asked, changing the subject.

"How about if we talk about how my ex-then again-but soon to be ex-boyfriend saw my tattoo, pulled up my pants and then drove me here to sleep?" Min cocked an eyebrow. "In another room."

"I needed to think." Se7en explained. "I came to realize

something.”

“Oh?” The eyebrow didn’t go down. In fact, it was joined by the other in a sarcastic expression of mock surprise.

“Hear me out,” He said, pulling Min’s feet up so he could sit on the couch between his lover’s bended knees. Changmin resisted for a second then allowed Se7en to settle in, his eyes wary and hooded. “Don’t look at me like that. You remind me of a praying mantis about to eat her mate.”

“Why would I eat you when I have a perfectly good balcony I could throw you off of.” Min said slyly. “Apparently its very existence drives perfectly rational appliances to toss themselves over so no one would question the demise of a clearly unhinged singer doing the same.”

“Look, I’ll buy you a damned cooker for every day of the week if you’ll just shut up and listen to me for a moment.”

“Shut up?” The eyebrows lowered, narrowing the distance between them.

“Minku,” Se7en rested his forehead against the other man’s shins. “Just let me talk.”

The young man set his book aside and leaned back against the arm of the couch. “Talk then.”

“The tattoo...” Se7en steepled his fingers over his mouth, thinking of how to say what he was thinking. “My first reaction was that you were too young...”

“I...” Min stiffened.

“Let me talk.” He held up his hand, cutting the younger man off. “Please.”

“Sorry,” Changmin mumbled, biting his lower lip between his teeth. “Go ahead.”

“Okay...and stop doing that because it’s distracting me,” Se7en said, reaching forward to touch the tip of his finger to Min’s moistened mouth. “I can think of a thousand other things for that mouth and those teeth to be doing besides chewing on yourself.”

“You’re supposed to be talking, remember?” Min nipped at Se7en’s fingers then kissed them. “Go on.”

“Our relationship... is odd,” He started. “When I first saw

you...when we first got together you were kind of innocent. No matter how much you'd seen or knew, you were still naïve in a lot of ways. Then we fell together and our relationship... I don't know...happened or developed, however you want to say it."

"We were in our own bubble, with everything outside staying outside. I think in a lot of ways whenever we had to go our separate ways, we put everything between us on pause," Se7en said. He hooked his hands under Min's calves, keeping eye contact with the younger man. "But we... the world kept turning and we changed but our relationship didn't change with us. You became older, more independent and I... took a beating to my ego."

"What happened in America was fucked," Min growled, resting his hand on Se7en's face, stroking at the soft hair at his temple.

"Yeah it was," Se7en agreed. "But when I came back, I wasn't expecting who you'd become and I don't think you were expecting me having to deal with my failures."

"Those weren't your failures, Shichi," The singer said. "You did everything...worked for everything..."

"See, the young man I left would be more comforting," He laughed, wrapping his fingers around Min's wrist and pulling his hand down. Se7en kissed his lover's palm, licking at the long line leading down his palm. "I'm not used to this fierceness. I don't know what to do with this independent adult. I see you in him but there's so much that's changed."

"Not all of it for the better," Min said bitterly. "I hurt the people I loved because I was angry. The members... God, Shichi, the things I said to them...the things I said to you..."

"We agreed to go forward," Se7en reminded him. "See, that's what I'm trying to tell you. Last night when I saw the tattoo, I was infuriated because you did something like that without telling me... without consulting me, especially since it's still healing, so I knew it was recent."

Min stiffened again and tried to yank his hand free of Se7en's grip but the older man held him fast. Growling menacingly, Changmin said, "Let go."

"No, not yet," Se7en kissed the fist he now held in his hand.

"See, I was wrong, baby. I was wrong for thinking that because you're not the little boy that needs to run to me for approval every time you want to do something. I think I was too used to you calling me... asking me if I think something you do is a good thing. I think in my eyes, you were still that lost little boy I found on the balcony. That date last night was lovely...romantic and special..."

"Yeah?" Min said, eyeing his lover with an intense suspicion. "It was like the one we had in Japan."

"Yeah, that's what's wrong with it." He said. "I was trying to recreate our beginning instead of starting new. I owe you new, Minku. Starting fresh shouldn't mean starting from the beginning again. It should mean starting from who we are now."

"I confused. So my tattoo made you stop because what? I'm different? I'm older?"

"Yeah, and I should learn to love the man who got the tattoo," Se7en kissed Min's clenched fingers. "Not admonish the boy I thought was there."



Dinner was simple, pasta with butter and shrimp. Se7en kept to drinking wine, enamoured at watching Min sip his beer while cooking. The young man moved with an assured confidence, reading the recipe at each step and organizing his ingredients as he went along. He didn't ask for help or advice and when Se7en stepped into the kitchen for more wine, Min slid around him without stopping to linger for a caress. The seriousness made Se7en smile but he couldn't help but feel a little sad. The young singer appeared to have lost the wonder in his world. Things weren't new anymore and life became something to go through, from Point A to Point B, without any stopping along the way.

"That's my role in this," Se7en thought. "It's time for me to be the dreamer and teach him how to see rainbows again."

He started by stealing a pea pod from the washed pile Min lay out to dry. Changmin frowned at the theft but didn't say anything when Se7en bit into it then offered the rest to his lover. Hesitant, Min took a second before biting into the pod, chasing it down with a



mouthful of Tsing Tao.

"It's nice having you cook," Se7en said as they sat down for dinner. "Something you've just started or have you been doing it for a while?"

"I've had some time to learn," Min grinned ruefully. "And I've had some brilliant failures. I'm personally responsible for the burning death of at least three saucepans and one cookie sheet."

"So are we even in kills because the cooker counts more or are you ahead?" He asked, teasing a wider smile out of Changmin.

"I don't know if tossing an appliance from a great height is the same as immolating helpless cookware," Min replied. "The rice cooker obviously insulted you and you had to avenge your honour."

"It reminded me of you," Se7en said quietly and the humour disappeared from Changmin's lips. "No, don't take away that smile. I earned it. I want it back."

Saluting the other man with his beer bottle, Min smiled at Se7en's teasing. "Sorry, it's been...tough."

"Tough?"

"Smiling," Min said. "It's been hard to smile sometimes. It's better now that I've talked things out with the other three."

"Was it hard?" Se7en asked. "Working things out?"

"Yeah," Min nodded. "But it was worth it. It's not perfect but... I'm trying. It's hard for me to let go of anger. I wish I could... I wish it were easier but it's not."

"It's because you're strong-willed," He said. "That's a double-edged sword sometimes. Great anger and great ambition. I get like that too."

"You don't snap people's heads off," The young man replied. "I said some pretty shitting things to Jaejoong."

"Did you say the same things to Yoochun and Junsu?"

"Funny thing is," Min said, poking at his pasta. "No, I didn't. Just Jaejoong."

"Why?"

"I think it's because Jaejoong is..." Min stood and retrieved another beer, stopping long enough to refill Se7en's glass with red wine. Sitting down, he untwisted the cap of his beer bottle. "When I

was younger, I looked up at Jaejoong. I made him someone in my mind that I wanted to be. He was... is handsome and talented. I always felt like I wasn't as good or as strong as he was."

"You and Jaejoong are probably the most unlike people I've met."

"Yeah, I know that now but back then, I thought I could be... Jaejoong," He laughed. "What I didn't realize was that I couldn't be Jaejoong because he already was Jaejoong. I needed to be Changmin."

"What made you discover that? The break between the two and three?"

"The break in the five," Min corrected. "And it wasn't really a break, it was... is a disagreement."

"It was touchy there for a bit," Se7en said.

"It still is sometimes but that's more the company than us," Changmin replied. "In the beginning of this, I was so angry at Jaejoong because I felt like he was betraying me... us... the company. SM was, in my mind, our father, sort of. It felt like they were being unfilial."

"It's a company, Changmin," The older man said then stopped himself. "I'm sorry. I know your relationship with SME is different than mine with YG. We've... gone over that."

"If you mean screamed at each other when you say 'gone over', then yes, we have." Picking up his fork, Min speared a shrimp, chewing on the bright pink meat.

"I was being nice." Se7en replied.

"I was being honest," Changmin took another bite of shrimp. "I think I took my anger out on Jaejoong. He was... my parental figure in the group..."

Se7en cocked his head, "Not Yunho?"

"No. Yunho is...more like a mentor," Min explained. "Jaejoong... I put him on a pedestal. He was my mother and father, my hyung and the man I wanted to be. Even as I got older, I think part of me left him up there."

"That's..." Se7en was unsure how to express his conflicting thoughts. "I don't know what to say about that."

"I do," The younger man replied. "I was wrong. I shouldn't have made Jaejoong ... a symbol. He's a man. I wasn't betrayed or let down. He loves me as a brother but he doesn't owe me anything more than that love. His choices have to be his... just like my choices have to be mine."

"Like that tattoo?" Se7en asked.

"Exactly like that." Min nodded. "I chose shichishoku because a prism is something tangible that white light, an intangible, passes through to become something else."

"Shichi for me?" The older man used his thumb to wipe a drop of butter off of Min's lips. He licked his thumb clean, tasting Min on his skin.

"Partially," Changmin said. "But a prism has more than one side...usually three. I have a lot of influences in my life... you, the members and my friends. Shichishoku represents what comes out.. what has come out of those influences. I'm a stronger, more varied light than I was before you... and the others... joined my life. So you see, while I carry a part of you... your name... on me, what is there has been changed to represent me."



# Eighteen

They took their time, learning one another's habits and moods all over again. Min was more serious while Se7en more thoughtful. Battered down to the soul, they were the walking wounded, leaning on one another for support as they healed.

Dinners were spent at restaurants known for privacy. Breakfast was usually something quick and caffeinated, on the phone before they rushed off to their day. Then late night as Min shed his t-shirt and sweats, his phone chimed from the side table. Curious, he bent over and snagged the cell before it vibrated onto the floor.

"Hello?" Min juggled the phone against his shoulder.

"Hey baby," Se7en purred into Changmin's ear. "You heading to bed or can you talk?"

There was something in the pitch of the older man's tone, a thrumming sound carried over the phone that made Min's sex perk up and take notice. He was bone tired but his blood raced, fired up by Se7en's satiny voice. Changmin trailed his thumb under the elastic of his boxers, remembering Se7en's slow hands over his body.

"I can head to bed and can talk," Min said, sliding onto his mattress. "What's up?"

"Just needed to hear your voice," He replied and Min caught something worn and tired in Se7en's mood. "It's been a long day."

"Tell me about it." The young man settled against his pillows, propping his shoulders up.

He listened to Se7en bare his soul. The older man spoke in low murmurs, long ribbons of doubt and darkness unfurling against the bright of his ambitions. He talked about his body hurting from endless hours of training and dancing, his throat hoarse from practicing nearly to the breaking point and sometimes beyond.

"You there, baby?" Se7en asked.

"Yeah, I'm here."

"I'm sorry," He said and Min heard him exhale hard, a death rattle of exhaustion. "How was your day?"

"Better now that I've heard you," Changmin whispered.

"All I did was fill your ear with my crap," Se7en said softly. "That couldn't have been all that great."

"Shichi, my day became perfect as soon as I saw your number on my phone," The young man said.

"You're full of shit," Se7en laughed.

"Only because you shared yours," Changmin shot back then he softened his voice. "And that's okay, baby. Seriously, it's okay."



They called before bed, enough to talk about the day or complain about the food they'd eaten at events. Plans were made for Saturday night which rolled over to Sunday when Min was forced to work late on a shoot. Sunday became Tuesday then Friday, each evening spent tired but with moments spent talking.

Changmin caught himself before he stumbled down the stairs leading from SM's main building. The concrete was wet from the rain and his boot sole was slick. He grabbed the rail before he went down and reached out with one hand to steady himself against the wall.

Only to grab the hand reaching out to help him.

"I've got you, baby," Se7en said, sliding his arm around Min's waist.

Changmin's hands gripped Se7en's jacket and he slid forward, burying his face into the soft leather. The sudden cold rain kicked mist up from the hot streets, the steam smelled of black tar and waste. The side alley was packed tight with vehicles and Se7en led Min over to his sports car, popping open the lock with a chirp of his remote.

"Get in and watch your head," Se7en said, helping Min get the end of his long brown coat into the car. "They didn't design these for giraffes."

When Se7en started the car up, Changmin gave him a filthy look. "Did you just call me a giraffe?"

"Yeah, you're tall. You intimidate Ji."

"I'll step on him next time I see him, then," Min grumbled then hissed. "Shit, I am a giraffe. They can't walk down slopes or stairs. Damn it."

"I won't tell him." Se7en grinned, winking at his lover as he turned on the lights. He pulled into traffic, glad for the heavy tint on the car's windows. Glancing at Min's wool brown coat, he said, "As much as I love seeing you in that, you might want to take that off. I'll turn on the heater and you can get a nap. The traffic's bad. It'll take a while before we get home."

"What home are we going to?" Min asked, sliding the coat off and shaking the rain drops from his bangs. His dark hair fell forward, the fringe covering his sloe eyes. He adjusted the neck of his white long sleeve t-shirt, untangling the leather thong strung with three wooden black beads captured under the collar.

"Mine since I had the keys," Se7en said with a laugh.

"Ah," Changmin replied with a nod. The traffic lights were a smear of red and yellow on the windshield as the wipers cleared off the rain. Reaching into his messenger bag, Min pulled out a key attached to a length of thick chain by a ring. "Here."

"What's this?" Se7en asked, taking the chain.

"The key to my apartment," Min said, tucking his folded coat against the window and lay his head down. "Wake me when we get there."

"You're just..." A loud horn honked behind him, joined by another as the traffic light flashed green. Putting the car into gear, Se7en crossed the intersection before the light turned red again. Glancing at Changmin, he growled in frustration at the angelic-faced man sleeping next to him. "Shit. You... damn you... and I *know* you're not faking."

The short drive to Se7en's apartment building took over an hour to get through traffic and rain. When he pulled into the parking garage and into his secluded spot, he turned off the car and took a minute to study Changmin's sleeping face.

He'd had dark circles when they'd left the studio and now only smudges remained under the long dark lashes resting on Min's cheekbones. The young man's mouth bore the teeth marks, evidence

of Min's habit of chewing on his upper lip when he was nervous. Se7en shifted forward and traced Min's mouth with his finger, sliding the tip in between the part as Min sighed and drew his lover in.

The heat of Min's mouth enveloped Se7en and he moaned, his sex thickening immediately at the feel of the man's tongue on his skin. Changmin licked then bit, dragging his sharp teeth on the underside of Se7en's finger. He opened his eyes, watching Se7en's face transform from sensual to surrendered. Craning his neck, he swallowed more of Se7en into his mouth, lapping up to trap the man's finger against the roof of his mouth before drawing back.

"God, you are so fucking sexy," Se7en's voice dropped to a thick rasp. Working his hand into Min's hair, he held the young man still and closed the distance between their mouths. Their tongues met, tentative and tasting, working around one side then the next. Min gave way, letting Se7en in as he dropped his head back and mewed. Se7en drank deeply, Min's heady sensuality simmering up to a raging burn.

"If you don't get me upstairs and feed me, I'm going to eat you," Changmin threatened, ending their kiss. "I missed lunch and breakfast."

"You're going to kill me, you know that?" Se7en gasped, adjusting his jeans to make room for his erection. The tight denim cupped him against his leg and he groaned at the rub of fabric. "Okay, give me a second. I need to take a breath."

"Really?" Changmin's fingers trailed over the hard length of Se7en's sex, clearly visible and straining. "One second?"

"Okay, maybe a minute," Se7en admitted. "Actually, as painful as this sounds, I think we should head upstairs because if I'm trapped in this car with you for any longer, I'm just going to fuck you right here."



The apartment was dimly lit and Min looked around curiously, working his boots off at the foyer. Removing his socks, he tucked them into a ball and shoved them into one of his shoes. Stepping around the glass dividing walls, he stopped short, his breath stolen



from his chest.

Strings of tiny lights ran high above their heads from one end of the room to the other, criss-crossing under the raised ceiling. The rest of the apartment's lights were doused, leaving only the star-sparkle canopy to illuminate the pile of thick soft pillows arranged around a low table loaded with covered plates.

"What's this?" Min asked, walking to the table. Bending over, he lifted a lid and sniffed at the aromatic coquettes on the tray. "Oh those smell good."

"This, my darling Minku, is a picnic," Se7en slid his hand across the line of Min's back. "Come on, sit down and let's eat."

Se7en fed him, holding up bits of food and telling him where in the city he'd gotten it. A story about an elderly man selling kimchi at a cart nearly made Min snort water out of his nose when Se7en imitated the man's creaking voice and stern scolding. Over an hour of tidbits and tales filled Min's belly and mind, relaxing his shoulders and taking the tension out of his body. They ended up sitting against one another, Min resting back against Se7en's broad chest, nibbling on a chocolate covered strawberry and watching the rain wash over the city lights.

"This was a good idea," Min whispered, leaning his head back so he could look up into Se7en's eyes. "You're a good idea too."

He closed his eyes when Se7en kissed him, letting himself experience the sensations of his lover on his mouth. When Se7en's hand ran over his belly, he shivered at the touch, arching into the man's palm to complete their connection. His body responded to every touch, every moan from Se7en's throat and Min sighed, deepening their kiss by turning and wrapping his arms around his lover's neck.

"I've missed this," He whispered, tilting his chin up so Se7en could roam a trail of wicked, hot kissing bites on his throat.

"I've missed doing this," Se7en replied. "Take off your clothes, Minku. Let me see you."

Changmin felt strange disrobing in front of Se7en. The man's dark eyes were luminous, watching Min with a predatorily keen sharpness. Rising to his knees, he shed his shirt first, casting it aside

then reaching for his belt buckle. When Se7en's Adam's apple jumped in a swallow, Min felt a thrill take over him. He held Se7en in thrall, captured by the reveal of skin and muscle before him.

Unzipping his pants, he hooked his thumbs into the back of his waistband, slowly arching his body into an S-line. Pulling the fabric down in an easy glide, he swept his clothes from his ass, taking his pants and underwear off at the same time. Bending forward, he reached back to tug his legs free when Se7en reached for him and pulled him forward.

Min landed flat on Se7en's stomach then yelped when the stronger man flipped him over onto his back. Gripping the pants legs and boxers with one hand, he yanked them off roughly and savaged Min's mouth with a punishing kiss.

Angling his face, Min gasped for air, trying to withstand the torrential onslaught of Se7en's mouth. The man's hands seemed to be everywhere at once but never long enough to satisfy. Squirming under his lover's body, Changmin fought to match Se7en's fierceness, sinking his teeth into the man's collarbone and sucking up a mouthful of skin into his mouth.

"Shichi...baby..." Min mewled when Se7en's mouth began to travel down along his chest, stopping long enough to nip at his nipples. "Gods... damn..."

They were teased into hard nubs with flicks of Se7en's tongue and finger tips. The man's hands remained on his ribs but Se7en's lips roamed, touching nearly every inch on Min's long torso. The young singer's sex pushed up, nudging Se7en's shoulder and the man took pity on the begging shaft, kissing its tip before gripping Min's hips in his strong hands.

"You're mine, baby," Se7en said as he lifted his chin to stare into Min's sexy eyes. He held Min's gaze for long moment then dipped his head down, kissing the ink on his lover's hip bone. "Yes?"

"Yes," Changmin whispered, arching his back and tensing his legs as Se7en released his tattoo and swallowed his sex down to the root. "Please, Shichi... more."

Se7en's head bobbed, his mouth closing in on Min's shaft as he gripped its base. He slowed his tongue's motions, taking time in

circling the heart-shaped head and suckling at the pearly spill in Min's slit. The sensitive skin was nearly painfully taut and Min squirmed, panting with the anguish of needing more from his lover's mouth.

The older man's fingers stroked him, following the vein trailing up the underside of his shaft. Everything was new with a hint of familiarity. Se7en knew what turned him on, when to slow down and when to caress him with firmness but the sensations were overwhelmingly fresh. The man's lips killed him, erotic and demanding while softly pressing Min closer and closer to the edge.

He tingled along each nerve of his body and Min tensed, feeling his balls climb up and fit into the hollow of his thighs. Se7en's fingers touched him there, spreading his sac and rolling him expertly. Changmin didn't know where Se7en hid the lubricant among the pillows but he heard the bottle's click and smelled the familiar scent of almonds and vanilla.

A touch of Se7en's oiled fingertip sliding into him sent Min over into release. The press of heat against his core primed Changmin's sex and he clutched at the pillows, screaming Se7en's name as his orgasm coiled outward and his seed gushed into Se7en's waiting mouth.

Closed over Min's head, Se7en milked his lover with a slow drawn sucking. He played with the vibrating slit, tonguing it carefully as Changmin's orgasm took over his body, locking his muscles tightly and drawing him rigid. Licking Min clean, Se7en slid his finger in all the way, breaking into the younger man's heat with a swift intrusion.

Laying a single kiss on Min's tattoo, he licked around the area and bit gently before whispering, "Hold on to me, baby. I'm going to fill and fuck until you can't come anymore."



# Nineteen

Se7en's mouth tasted of sex and wickedness. Moaning, Min parted his lips for Se7en's kiss, wanting to crawl deep into the other man's body. Breaking away from Se7en's mouth, Min licked his lover's collarbone, savouring the masculine flavour of his skin.

"Breathe, Minku," Se7en whispered, plying Min's entrance with his fingers. Teasingly, he pulled back his hand and spread Min's legs further apart. "Keep your knees up for me, baby. I want to watch as I make you ready for me."

Changmin hissed when Se7en kissed the crux of his thigh and he forced himself to keep his legs from closing. Hooking his hands under his knees, he held himself open, quivering from the effort. When Se7en nuzzled the wrinkled skin of his sac, he gasped, sucking in mouthfuls of air. The older man mouthed Min's balls, sucking one then the other into his hot mouth. His teeth left a burring scrape on the sac then Min squirmed when Se7en breathed on the wet, spreading a cool rush of goosebumps along his crotch.

"You're driving me fucking crazy," Min growled, gritting his teeth.

"And to think, I let you kiss me with that filthy mouth," Se7en murmured, repeating the suckling, taking the man's sac and biting gently. Rolling the skin lightly against his teeth, he tongued the orb caught in his mouth, pulling on it until Min's sex trembled despite his release moments ago.

Se7en worked to get the lube onto his fingers. He wanted to take his time tasting every inch of Min's body but he knew he wouldn't last and he wanted to be deep inside of the younger man when he spilled. The oil was slick, becoming slippery when it warmed up from his body heat. The smell of almonds and vanilla was pleasant, especially mingled with the muskiness of Min's sex. He inhaled the earthiness of his lover's body and the sweet candy odor of the oil.

Letting go of Min's sac, he licked at the soft head of the young man's sex and worked his fingertip past the tight muscle ring left exposed by Min's spread legs.

"Ooohhh..." Min panted, his voice rising. It was too much but not enough. He ached to feel something larger, especially Se7en's heavy girth. Rationally, he knew it would take time. His body wasn't accustomed to being breached and although he wanted Se7en so badly his teeth ached, he didn't think Se7en could be convinced to hurry.

When the man's oiled finger slipped all the way in, he flinched and clenched his ass muscles, straining to keep hold of his knees. He writhed, needing to have enough self-control to hold himself open but Se7en's long finger probing at his core made it nearly impossible.

As Se7en's finger tip touched the bundle of nerves hidden deep inside of him, Min screamed and he arched his back, unable to hold himself in any more.

"Shichi... god please," Min begged, pushing down on the man's invading finger. "God... can't wait."

"Ah, baby," The older man murmured. Kissing Min's belly, he withdrew, chuckling at the young singer's disappointed mewl. "Turn over. If I can't get you to hold yourself open, then maybe I'm going to just have to hold you down."

Changmin's sex instantly pulsed and began to thicken at the thought of Se7en's strong body on him. He slid over, guided by Se7en's hands on his legs. He lifted his stomach up, wordlessly knowing what the other man needed from him and Se7en murmured his thanks, kissing the small of Min's back while he pulled down a pillow to support Min's hips.

"Don't touch yourself, baby," Se7en bit one ass cheek then the other, digging his teeth in almost painfully. "That's mine. You wait until I touch you before you can come again, okay?"

"Okay," Min said, nodding. He took a deep breath, clutching the tangled sheets to keep himself grounded. His sex ached and he rested his forehead against the mattress. His sweat soaked into the fitted linens and he could smell the oil when Se7en dripped lubricant down the crease of his ass cheeks.

“Spread your feet apart, Minku,” Se7en said, hoarse with need. “I want to see you. I need to see you.”

Min complied. The pillow under him let him bend his knees slightly and the position easily opened him up for Se7en’s pliant fingers. He quivered, waiting blindly as Se7en moved around. The touch of something warm on his centre made him forget to breathe and the world spun as his lover slid a finger in to explore what was his again.

The slight burn of skin and bone inside of him spread out from his crease and Min shifted, trying to slide back to force Se7en inside him. A not-so-gentle slap on his ass cheek stilled Min’s squirming and he forced himself to relax, letting Se7en lead the way.

It was hard to surrender control. He fought it every step of the way in his own life, scrambling and clawing to wrest have power over what he could do. Everything in his life was hard-earned, first his career then the ability to guide that career. He fought with a fierceness against the babying from the other members, earning their respect and willingness to treat him as their equal.

Now, he needed to surrender that driving need to control over to a man whose heart he’d broken.

In his mind, Changmin knew Se7en wouldn’t hurt him but his soul was leery. If anyone could shatter Min, it would be the man he was afraid to love.

“Are you ready for me, baby?”

Se7en’s question seemed so innocent but it was laden with more than an acceptance of the older man’s intrusion. Changmin shuddered and exhaled, hearing his voice tremble with lust and anticipation.

“Please, Dong-Wook,” He said, barely audible over his own breathing. “Take...I want you...there. I need you to... to fill me.”

“You fill me as much as I fill you,” Se7en whispered, leaving a gentle kiss between Min’s shoulder blades. “I love you. I can’t help but love you. I can’t ever stop loving you.”

“I love you too.” Changmin wasn’t sure if the other man heard him.

He barely heard himself but he felt Se7en — moaning loudly

when his lover pushed an oiled finger deep into him and then another, brushing lightly on the spot inside of him that made Min see stars. His erection pressed into the pillow, held in a prison of cotton and feathers while the older man explored Min's body.

When a third finger joined the first two, Min started mewling, twisting around on Se7en's intruding hand. He forced himself down, even though every cell in his body ached to ride the slender lengths inside of him. When more oil dribbled down his crease and Se7en used his fingers to spread it around his hole, he gasped, hearing the unspoken pleas in his own cries.

"Are you ready for me, Minku?" Se7en asked.

"Now," Changmin murmured then sighed, "Please."

Se7en slickened his shaft with the oil on his fingers, adding more until his sex glistened. He'd waited to hear the surrender in Min's voice and see the young man's body relax under his ministrations. It'd been too long for both of them. He wanted Min more than anything in the world and even thinking about causing his young lover pain broke his heart.

Guiding himself to the clenching rosette tucked between Min's cheeks, Se7en rocked himself slowly against the ring, easing the breadth of his head in. Changmin breathed hard and Se7en watched the young man force himself to relax, his ring gently kissing and suckling the tip of the older man's sex.

"You feel so good, baby," Se7en exhaled, holding himself back.

Pushing more down than in, he gently rocked in, letting Min's body suck him in. When his head cleared the muscled ring, he waited, letting the younger man adjust to the heft inside of him. Stroking the back of Min's thighs and ass, Se7en felt the quiver in the man's muscles release.

"More, please..." Min moaned.

"Wait, baby," Se7en cautioned. "Ride the burn out. Let your body get used to me again."

"Can't..." Changmin's breath hitched. He panted, straining not to rock back on the length he knew stretched out behind him. There was more of Se7en than the bulb resting right inside of his body and he badly wanted the man deeper in him.



It took longer than either of them liked but Min eventually felt his body accept Se7en's width. His instincts took over, forcing him into a rocking motion to pull Se7en in. The older man gave in, surrendering to the primal urge of their bodies' movements. Leaning forward, Se7en grasped Min's wrists in his hands, lightly pinning the younger man's arms down.

Splayed apart, Min soared, giving himself over to Se7en's body. They moved, driving up against one another. The slap of skin dominated the room then their moans rose, a crescendo of sensual sound. They lost themselves in the sensation of their bodies.

"You feel so good, baby," Se7en groaned. He couldn't imagine anything that felt as good as Min surrounding him then he remembered the feel of Min plunging deep inside of him and Se7en bit his lip to stop from coming. "God, I'm going to lose it soon."

Min felt his sac pull up, roiling against the pillows. He was close enough to feel the rush of his impending orgasm hit his spine and his skin tightened. Se7en's grip on his wrists loosened and Min shifted, tangling their fingers together. The older man held on, joined to his lover along their arms, back to chest and deep inside of him.

"Coming," Min panted. He needed Se7en to touch him and was about to beg when he felt one of his hands being let go. Se7en's fingers rubbed down his ribs before working under him to grasp Min's sex. A drop of pre-cum smeared under the older man's thumb and Se7en teased another drop from the slit, a nearly painful prickle shooting down Min's shaft from the contact.

"Me too, baby." Se7en felt Min explode in his hand and the older man groaned, releasing his seed when his lover clenched around him. He thrust in several more times, letting Changmin milk him raw. Falling forward, he filled Min's core, kissing the younger man's neck gently as he rode the wave of their pleasure.

"Shichi," Min murmured, trying to breathe. When Se7en shifted, the younger man voiced his displeasure, grumbling at the rush of cold air on his back.

"I'm too heavy," Se7en said, stroking Min's sweat-dampened hair away from the younger man's forehead. Reaching for a tissue, he gently cleaned his lover's body, leaving a trail of searing kisses on

Min's spine. Tossing the tissue into the trash can by the bed, he cuddled against Changmin's long body, murmuring in pleasure when the younger man turned to face him.

"You're never too heavy," Changmin whispered, fitting into his lover's body. "I'd let you lie on top of me forever if I could."

"That would make eating kind of hard," Se7en teased. "And we'll smell after a while."

"And I thought you were the romantic one of us." Min scoffed.

"True," Se7en said. "I have a question for you, baby."

"Anything," Changmin said. "What?"

"Why did you give me a key to your apartment?" Se7en asked, brushing his hand along Min's thigh. "Not that I'm giving it back."

"No, don't give it back." Min laughed then ducked his head down.

"Don't hide from me, baby," Se7en lifted Min's chin up until he could see the blush over his lover's face. "Never hide from me, Minku. Tell me about the key. Why give it to me and then fall asleep?"

"I couldn't... I didn't want you to not take it," Changmin admitted. "This sounds... stupid but I thought since you already had a key to my heart...where I love, you should at least have a key to where I live."

# Twenty

When Min woke up, the bed next to him was empty. He'd rolled over, reaching for the warm body of his lover and found only cold sheets crumpled up against the pillows. Frowning, he lifted his head, blinking away the sleep in his mind and eyes. Focusing on the blurry numbers on his cell phone, he sighed heavily. It was three in the morning and Se7en was no where to be seen. Stumbling from the mattress, he reached for a pair of cotton drawstrings Se7en left lying on a chaise, pulling them up over his narrow hips and tying them off tightly so they wouldn't fall.

The bathroom was empty and dark and the living area proved to be as well. Curious, Min turned around, wondering if his lover was in his often used studio-office when he spotted the broad-shouldered singer leaning against the outside balcony railing. His ankles were crossed and Se7en rested his weight on his forearms, looking out at the city. Wearing only a pair of loose, white sweat pants, Se7en seemed oblivious to the cold although Min knew it was chilly. A howling wind whistled furiously at the slightly parted French doors, trying to get in past the glass walls.

He pulled on Se7en's discarded shirt and stepped around the remains of their picnic, reminding himself to come back in and clean up before he went back to bed. Pushing the door open, he padded out on bare feet, thankful for the other man's garment when the night air cut into his skin. Coming up behind Se7en, he wrapped his arms around the man's slender waist, hugging him tightly as he kissed his shoulder.

"I'm glad it's dark," Changmin whispered. "Some fan of yours probably watches you through a telescope and would spot me otherwise."

"I don't think I have that kind of fan," Se7en murmured.

Min pulled away from his lover's cold, bare back and slid his

hands down to the older man's hips, turning a reluctant Se7en around. The man didn't meet Min's gaze, his eyes dropping to the ground, sliding away to avoid the younger man's scrutiny. "What's wrong, Shichi? Aren't you happy?"

"With you, yes," Se7en nodded and reached for Changmin's warmer body. The young man resisted, refusing to be pulled into an embrace he knew Se7en was using to avoid the question.

"Talk to me," Changmin insisted. "We promised one another we would."

"I'm just turning things over in my mind," He exhaled sharply. "Thinking about where I failed...what I could have done differently in America."

"You didn't fail in America, baby." Min frowned, lowering his face to try to get Se7en to look at him. "How did you fail?"

"I had one single," He said. Leaning his head back, he stared up at the sky still swollen with rainclouds. "And a video. I should have done.."

"Why are you beating yourself up about this?" The young man asked. "You're back home now. Things here are different."

"Are they?" Se7en shivered and his skin rippled bumps under Min's hands. "I've never... failed before. Not like that. The drama was different. I didn't try my best. I was a kid and thought it was something I could walk through. I fell on my face but I learned a lot from it. I learned that nothing is easy and no one is going to hand me anything. I have to work for everything I want. Just like I worked for you."

"You have me," Min said, pulling on Se7en's hands. "Let's talk about this inside. You're cold and I can hear your teeth chattering. Let me make you some tea and we can talk."

Once in the apartment, Changmin led Se7en to the couch, leaving the older man there with a stern order to wrap himself up in the blanket he was given. Turning on one of the kitchen sconces, he debating using the microwave over the tea kettle then remembered the hot water dispenser on the coffee maker. He filled two mugs with steaming water then dropped in chai tea bags in. Carrying the mugs and sugar cubes over on a tray, he placed them on the table and

settled in next to his lover, shoving his chilled bare feet up against Se7en's covered legs.

"Warm me up." He ordered, handing Se7en a mug before taking his own. The soft ambient glow from the kitchen turned his lover's face golden, hiding the shadows under Se7en's eyes. Warming his fingers on the hot ceramic cup, Min shoved his cold feet further under Se7en's ass. "And talk to me. What woke you up?"

Se7en sipped at the aromatic tea and contemplated the serious young man whose toes were moving underneath his legs. "When I came back here, it felt like I was licking my wounds... like I was a dog that lost a fight. Do you know what that's like?"

"Yeah," Min said, nodding. "Like someone's punched holes out of your soul."

"I cried on the plane home," He whispered, staring down into the tea. He set it down on the table and ran one hand over his face. "Did you know that? I left my sunglasses on so everyone would think I was just playing it cool but it was because I didn't want them to see me crying. It hurt so much, Minku. I'd never... failed like that before. I've never done everything in my power to be successful only to have the people around me toss me out. I've never fallen so far before."

"You didn't fall, Shichi," Min moved closer, holding his hands out to Se7en. The other man took them, knitting their fingers together.

"Yeah, baby, I did." He opened his hand, cupping the man's face when Min's lips touched the pulse at his wrist. "I let a lot of people down. I just wasn't expecting people to...celebrate my downfall."

"What do you mean? At the company?" Changmin looked puzzled.

"Some." Se7en nodded. "A couple of the other singers and some people... a lot of people on the forums. It hurt to see... to hear people talk about how arrogant I was; believing I could make something of myself."

"Not your friends," Min said. "Not people like Ji."

"No, not Ji or the others," He admitted, "But some people who I thought were supportive of me. I guess they're right when they say

you find out who your real friends are when you're down."

"I'm sorry..." He laid his cheek on Se7en's forearm, swallowing hard. "I should have been there for you, baby."

"You had your own problems," The older man said, kissing Min's ear and biting down into the plump lobe. "We're past that, remember?"

"Are you going to go back to the studio? You'll feel better if you're working on something."

"If they'll let me," He shrugged. "I don't know yet. I told them I needed some time to deal with things and they agreed. My manager thinks it's time to redo my image. Again."

"Again," Min laughed. "What are you going to be this time?"

"I don't know," Se7en said, making a face. "Sometimes I wonder why can't I just be me? Then I remember, I don't really have a *me* left."

"There's a lot of you," Min teased, shifting his legs. "I can still feel you..."

"Oh that's bad," The older man laughed. He grabbed at Min, pulling the younger singer on top of him. They stretched out their legs, matched chest to chest and looked into one another's eyes. Changmin smiled, looking at the shine in his lover's face. "I love you, Minku."

"Yeah, I love you too," Changmin sighed dramatically. "It's a terrible burden. Having to look at you... taste you. Sometimes, I even have to have sex with you. It's horrible."

"Horrible?" His eyebrows lifted and he gasped, bringing his palm to rest on his heart. "Oh you wound me."

"I can kiss and make it better," Changmin grinned. He wiggled his hips, rubbing up against the bulge pressing into his belly. "Or I can kiss that and make it better."

"You could," Se7en murmured, shifting when Min's hand stroked at him through his sweats. "I guess we're done talking about... what were we talking about?"

"Things that made you cry," The younger man stretched and kissed his lover firmly, stealing his breath. "How about if we do things that make you cry out my name?"



Min moved against Se7en's lean body, reveling in the sinewy strength under him. He'd laid Se7en back onto the pillows, pushing the man back and ordering him to stay. Reaching for the end table, he pulled open a drawer, pulling out something Se7en couldn't see.

"What are you doing?" He craned his neck to peer around Min's shoulder.

"Lay back," Changmin growled, baring his teeth. "*Don't move.*"

"So bossy," Se7en teased then yelped when Min slapped his leg. "Ouch! You're strong, you know. Go easy."

"I know you," The younger man said. "You don't want me to go easy."

He looped a dark red silk tie around Se7en's wrist, the neckwear bright against the man's pale skin. The older man watched, bemused when Changmin knotted one end around the headboard. A black dotted blue tie took care of the other and Min tugged at the binding, making sure Se7en couldn't get loose unless he tried.

"This is...different," Se7en eyed the ties holding him to the headboard.

"Are you complaining?" Min asked.

"No," His lover said with a grin. "I wished I thought about first."

Min nodded. "That's me. Always thinking."

Changmin bent over Se7en's torso and licked at the man's pert nipple. The dark brown nub curled on the younger man's tongue and Se7en moaned when Min's teeth nipped and tugged from one side to the other. Lifting his head, Min gazed at the erotic image of Se7en tied to the bed with his head thrown back into the pillows. No matter what happened in his life, Min would always carry the memory of his lover giving himself over to him.

He slid his fingers into the waist of Se7en's sweats, working them down his lover's thighs and tossing them on the floor. Sitting back on his haunches, he gazed down at Se7en's taut, mouth-watering body, trailing his fingers along the inside of the man's thigh and smiling when he started at the touch.

Hours of dancing honed Se7en's muscles, tight long stretches of muscles and tanned skin. The swirls of black ink on his arm teased the eye, drawing Min's attention. He bent to lick the wings of the man's tattoo, flattening his tongue so he could taste all of the angel from his lover. Cupping Se7en's sex, he tugged at the man's head, teasing his wet slit with coy fingertips. Kissing down Se7en's side, Min made sure to touch each rib, moving back slowly when Se7en arched with pleasure.

Changmin spent his days surrounded by beautiful and lithe men but the rough, tumble of Se7en's mouth and blunt-ended long fingers hardened him more than any other he'd seen. He intimately knew every inch of the man's body; starting from the cowlick at the back of his head down to the curl of his right toe folding nearly in half over its neighbour. Min knew the taste of Se7en's sweat when licked from the line of silken hair under his belly button and his mouth watered whenever he thought of the tart salted plum of his lover's sex when it began to pearl with cum.

Tied to the headboard and with his arms spread, Se7en never looked sexier. His hooded, sensual eyes caught the lights of the city coming through the enormous windows, dancing spots of blue and white on the man's deep, dark gaze. His skin shone pale against the coffee coloured sheets, his black hair tufted up on the pillows holding his head up.

"Like what you see, Minku?" The man's voice was cocky, sure of Min's lust.

The younger singer licked his lips and leaned forward, placing his hands on the bed on either side of Se7en's spread thighs. Bending his head down, he pursed his lips and suckled at the turgid tip arching up towards Se7en's hard abdomen.

"I not only like what I see, baby," Changmin purred. "What I see is mine."

He swallowed Se7en's length, trapping the head of the shaft against the back of his throat and convulsed his tongue until the other man swore. Se7en hissed wordless begging sounds as Min caught the heart-shape head on the back of his teeth. Changmin left his lover wet with spit and the older man's erection trembled,



needing more of the Min's mouth.

"You're driving me insane, Minku," Se7en panted. His chest heaved with the effort of talking and breathing. Straining against the ties, he lifted his head, slinking his tongue over Min's collarbone and throat before the younger man pulled away. "Come back here."

"I will," Changmin promised. Sliding from the bed, he shed the pants he'd taken from the chair, kicking them to the side. Picking up a bottle of lubricant from the table, he crawled over until he sat between Se7en's legs. Popping the cap, he sniffed at the aromatic oil. "I like this. Chocolate. I love chocolate."

"You're still too far away," Se7en said then gasped when Min's fingers dipped down between his legs, coated with oil and sliding along the crease of his cheeks. Clenching his ass, he hissed and lifted his knees apart. Changmin took advantage of the display and pressed in, "God, there..."

Changmin drove one finger into his lover's heat. Se7en was tight, nearly too tight to be believed and Min wondered if he would even fit inside of Se7en's body. When he hit the older man's nerve centre, he purred nearly as loud as Se7en did, the satisfaction of bringing such pleasure to his lover hardening his sex. The other man was lovely to watch, straining muscles beaded with sweat and his lips swollen from kisses and biting. Se7en's control astounded Min, especially when the man kept his legs apart for Min's exploration.

The young man left Se7en's shaft untouched. He wanted to hear the older singer beg to be stroked as he thrust into him. Using the thumb on his other hand, he spread Se7en apart, working the muscle ring slowly around and ticking the man's sensitive nerves.

He removed his finger, leaving his thumb breaching Se7en's writhing body. A dribble of oil on his fingers and Min was ready to push in further, reaching deep past his lover's entrance. His own sex thrummed, dripping with a salty dew. Se7en shoved his hips down, meeting Min's exploring fingers. He took the man's digits easily, using his muscles to clasp Min tightly.

"Minku, I need you inside of me," Se7en gasped, straining to keep his orgasm from rocking him over the edge.

"I need to be inside of you," Changmin murmured, withdrawing

from the heat of his lover's entrance. He poured a swirl of oil over his shaft, rubbing it over the head and down to the root. Positioning himself, he carefully thrust in and struggled not to come when Se7en wrapped around him. Panting, he dropped his head, his hair a dark fall across his strong cheekbones and sloe eyes.

"God, baby," Se7en huffed, holding still as Min's length stretched up into him. "More. Now."

Changmin slid further in, inching into his lover's velvety heat. Se7en fit him, cradling him in the softness of his core. When the older man began to move, Min fell into a rhythm, matching the man's hips with long strokes. They rode one another, slowing when one or the other begged to hold off. Neither wanted it to end and the nerves on Min's shaft tingled when Se7en's balls rose up, cupping up under his sex.

Min's balls slapped against Se7en's damp skin and the younger man gripped the other's hips tightly, cupping under the man's ass to lift him slightly. The angle of his thrusts changed and he went deeper, running his shaft against Se7en's centre with each long slide. Gritting his teeth, Min grunted and thrust hard, slamming into his lover.

"Do yourself for me, baby," Min said, moaning as he kept up the rhythm. "I want to watch you come."

"Hands..." Se7en gasped.

Changmin chuckled, reluctantly letting go of his lover's hips to pull the ties off the headboard posts. He ran his hands down Se7en's ribs and hitched his hands under Se7en's ass, squeezing the man's cheeks together, cupping himself in warmth. "There. Do it."

"So bossy," He laughed but his hand wrapped around his erection, a red silk tie dragging from his wrist. Se7en covered the wet head of his sex with his palm, remembering the feel of Min's mouth on him. He nearly came from the memory of the younger man's sweet lips folded around him. "So close, baby."

"Me too," Changmin purred. "Need to finish you. Want to make you scream."

Se7en caught his lower lip between his teeth and clamped down on Min. The younger man shouted, his orgasm stiffening his body and his thrusts grew primal, digging deeper into the other man.

Stretched open by Min's girth, Se7en shouted and came, splattering his seed over his lover's bare stomach and chest. Reaching up, he smeared his release on his young love's skin, working himself into Min's pores. Changmin's nostrils flared at the scent of Se7en's sex on him and came hard, filling Se7en to the hilt, a small spray of white liquid curled around his shaft as he moved in and out of the man's body.

Panting, he collapsed, pulling out of Se7en and rolling over. They lay on the bed, trying to catch their breaths and thoughts. Se7en reached over and fit his hand into his lover's, hearing his heart beat falling into time with Changmin's. They edged closer, shoulders and hips touching as their bodies' quivering slowed.

"Love you, Minku." Turning his head, Se7en stared into Min's eyes, his fingers trembling as he brushed the hair from his lover's face. "I am so lost without you. Don't ever leave me, baby."

"I can't leave you, baby," Changmin murmured, sucking Se7en's finger into his mouth then drawing back. "I love you. I'm in this forever. No matter what I told you in the beginning of this, I'm in this forever."

"Good," The man craned his neck and brushed a kiss over Min's succulent mouth. "I wanted a forever with you ever since I saw you on that balcony."



## Twenty-One

Things were still stiff between the youngest and the eldest. Changmin greeted Jaejoong at the door with a smile but his eyes lit up only when Yunho came in. It left a sorrowful smear on Se7en's heart but the man knew it would take time before his young lover could put aside the anger he felt. Se7en had personal experience on that front. Still, the lead singer didn't appear to be shattered by young man's reserve although his gaze did linger a bit longer than it needed to on Min's face. Spotting Se7en standing on the balcony, Jaejoong raised his hand and loudly greeted him.

"Aish, there you are!" The pretty-faced man joined Se7en, sniffing at the meat grilling on the gas barbecue. "Hamburgers?"

"Minku wanted them." Se7en poked at the singer's ribs and Jae laughed, pulling away from the tickle. "I told him they're too thick. It'll take too long to cook them but he insisted."

"He likes thick burgers," Jaejoong said, nodding. "He likes something he can bite into."

"That's why I like Shichi," Changmin replied, wrapping one arm around Se7en's waist and bumping hips.

"Again, stop," Yunho pleaded. "I don't want to hear this."

"I keep hearing that but I hear you whispering my name with Min's in the middle of the night," Jae said, winking at Se7en. "He's got a filthy mind."

"Look, the doorbell," Yunho smiled tightly. "Probably the other two."

"I hope they brought the noodles," Changmin said, dipping a finger into the kal-bi glaze he'd made to put on the burgers. "Yoochun's mother makes a salad with mayonnaise and pasta shells."

"Is it good?" Se7en tentatively licked Min's fingertip when the younger man offered him a taste of the sauce.

"The salad or the glaze?" He asked, recoating his finger and

offering a taste to the eldest of his group. "Taste and see if it's like yours."

The peace offering was small but for Se7en, it seemed like a big step between them. For Changmin to ask Jaejoong for his opinion was monumental and when the singer bent forward, eyes closed and mouth opened in an O to suck the glaze from Min's hand, he fanned himself with the spatula, wishing night would fall suddenly so the air would be cooler.

"They are going to kill me," Yunho muttered darkly, popping the cap off of his beer. "The hyenas are here. I left them cackling in the kitchen. I should warn you, they spotted your gaming system. We might be losing them to race cars."

"I think all I have like that might be Gran Turismo." He said as a burst of noise echoed from the kitchen and Junsu ran outside, carrying a plastic container of something red. "Of course, they could just be tearing down my place."

"Did you bring the salad?" Min asked the tenor running around him. Yoochun followed close behind, grappling his lover about the waist and lifting him up off the floor.

Junsu thrust the container at Min and shouted, "Quick, take this! I made it! Don't let him tell you anything..."

Yoochun's hand muffled the man's mouth and the baritone smiled sweetly, holding Junsu still. The man kicked and flailed, unable to get his feet on the ground. Giving up, he went limp in Yoochun's arms, dragging down as dead weight. The baritone yelped and strained to hold his lover up but his knees began to buckle right as Changmin calmly took the sealed container from Junsu's hands.

"What is this?" He asked as the couple toppled to the ground. Popping it open, he sniffed at the contents. "Pork? Kimchi pork?"

"For the grill," Junsu said, poking his head out from under Yoochun's chest. "I made it."

"He chopped up the kimchi!" Yoochun bared his teeth and bit into his lover's ribs, plucking out his shirt. Junsu let loose a peal of laughter and kicked out, narrowly missing Jae's shin. "I made it. He merely assisted."

"Assisting is making!" Junsu tried to shove the other man off of

him then gave up. Batting his eyes at his leader, he crooned. “Yunniah, please.... Can you help me?”

“I’m not getting involved,” Yunho turned his head. “I think it’s best if I stay out of lovers’ arguments.”

“He never stays out of mine,” Min muttered, putting the pork down on the grilling station table next to the hamburgers. “I’ll get a plate for the pork. It smells good. I wonder what it would taste like piled on the hamburgers.”

“Probably good,” Yoochun agreed. “And before you ask, yes we brought the salad. My mother made enough for ten people I think.”

“Or maybe just one Min,” Junsu piped up, moving his hands quickly as the tall young man pretended he was going to stomp on Junsu’s fingers. “Joking! I was joking.”

“Your jokes suck,” Jae said. “I’ll go get a plate. I want to taste this salad.”

Se7en watched his lover follow the older singer then smiled when the other couple pulled themselves off the ground and bounced in after them. He heard Yunho chuckling next to him and lifted his beer bottle in a silent acknowledgement of the silliness that seemed to follow his group. Closing the grill’s lid, he checked the flame before slinging down into a lounge. Yunho straddled the nearby chaise, watching his lover and friends through the French doors.

“It’s nice to see them all together,” Se7en said, his eyes following Min’s lean form as the young man puttered around the kitchen.

“You have no idea,” Yunho replied, leaning back into the lounge. Fatigue clung to his features but his mouth was relaxed. “It’s been hard. Harder than I thought it would be.”

“You and Jaejoong are okay, though...right?”

“Yeah,” The other man said. “And Min is trying to work things out with Boo. It’s hard. They’re both stubborn and Min...”

“Min’s hot-headed,” Se7en suggested. “One thing Jaejoong is not.”

“No, Jae doesn’t have a short fuse.” He sipped his beer and sighed. “But he has a temper. Especially in this, he goes from angry for himself and the others to broken apart because the dongsaeng is

angry at him. It tears at him. I thought I'd be the one who could hurt Jaejoong the most but I was wrong... it's Min."

From his vantage point, Se7en could see his lover washing the vegetables they'd bought to grill. Behind him, Jaejoong was pulling out a chopping board and a knife, his face animated as he spoke. Min's face appeared more closed off but the older singer acted as if nothing were wrong, continuing to laugh and smile at the younger man until he teased a grin from Min's somber face.

"I think your wife doesn't want to disappoint the son," Se7en said. "It's hard when someone looks up to you and you feel like you let them down."

"You're going to be gutted by that knife if he hears you call him that. I swear, you never learn."

"Oh I don't call him that to his face, just you." The man laughed. "I know better. He's scarier than Min when he's angry."

Yunho nodded. A thin worrying crease appeared on his forehead and he glanced at the two men behind the glass. "Do you think they'll ever be... back to where they were?"

"No," Se7en said, shaking his head. "They can't ever go back. That's one thing I've learned from this past year; none of us can go back. We can only move on."

"Does moving on mean eating burnt hamburgers?" Yunho asked, reaching for the spatula. He flipped open the grill cover, turning the burgers over. Digging through the pork, he placed some strips on the far side where the flame was lower then closed the barbeque. "I just want them to be happy. Both of them. Jaejoong's my lover but Min is my brother."

"You have some very strange ideas about what a brother is," The other man laughed and jerked his legs to the side but Yunho was too quick and the spatula left a mark on his skin. "Hey, I'm not the one with the ménage fetish."

"Yeah, like you were unaffected by Jaejoong sucking off of Min's fingers," He grumbled, using a mouthful of beer to cool himself off. Nodding with his chin towards the kitchen, he said, "It is good to see them like that. Talking is good. There hasn't been a lot of that. Right now, I'll take any step I see between them as a good one."



"Are we ever going to talk about what happened?" Jaejoong asked, sharpening a paring knife. With the exception of one of the chopping blades, the rest of the set were in sad condition and he wondered if Se7en cooked anything other than instant food.

"What happened between me and Shichi?" Min asked, peeling an onion. "Or between you and me?"

"Yeah, you and me." He set the knife down and lifted himself up to sit on the counter. "I hate this thing between us. I hate the words that were said."

"I meant them," Changmin replied. "I hate that I said them to you and how I said them but not how I felt at the time. I can't tell you I wouldn't say them that way again. Only that I'd still regret it."

"I never meant to hurt you," Jae offered.

"I understand that," The younger man said. "You went ahead with what you wanted because you can't imagine anyone not feeling the way you do. You sometimes have a hard time remembering that we might disagree. The only one you think about saying no to you is Yunho and that's because he's our leader. But really, hyung, just because you're older, doesn't mean I will blindly follow. Not any more. I haven't for a long time."

"I know," Jae said, hiding his face. Min's words stung although he knew the younger man didn't mean them to. It was hard when a hero falls from his pedestal, even harder when the hero was him. "You hurt me too."

"I'm sorry." Min puffed out his cheeks and let the onion sit on the chopping board. "I am really sorry."

"I'd never had anyone... look up to me before," Jaejoong explained. "You've been the only person who has ever though I was worth something... was worth being like. I just felt like ...I let you down when you didn't expect it."

"No one expects to be let down," The young man said. "But I know that you were trying to protect us. Even if I disagree with you, I know you meant to do your best. It might destroy who we are to the world but that was something you're willing to risk because you think we're being sacrificed for money. I'm not ready to say that. I don't think I'll ever be ready to say that. I wish you three were

stronger. I wish you could stand the pace and work harder to be healthy... to get sleep and not feel worn down but I can't."

"No, we can't," Jae admitted, nodding. "It's killing me, Min. This life that SM made for me was killing me. I couldn't even think because I was so tired and the other things... it was just too much."

"No one was touching you," He said. "Why now? Why do this now when you're not as stressed as you were in the past?"

"Because now I have a way out," The older man replied. "Because I still want to sing. I want to please the fans. I want us to be together. I love all of you. I never want to look across the stage and not see you making faces while you sing with me. But I can't... breathe any more because I am so tired. I'm tired inside, Minnie-ah. I feel like I'm dead inside and my body just hasn't caught up with my soul. If I don't change things soon, I'm going to die. I know it."

"I don't want that," Min said. Reaching out, he touched Jae's wrist, lightly brushing his fingers against the man's arm before dropping his hand away. "We'll work something out. Even if it's not what is all five us right now, we'll work it out. I'm not willing to toss us aside, even as angry as I am. I don't want to do that."

"Okay," Jae murmured. "Promise me that you'll..."

"I promise you, hyung," Changmin said, clasping Jae's shoulder. "No matter how long it takes, I'll stand on stage with you again. You're as much of my forever as Se7en is. I can promise you that."

Se7en lay on the couch, his eyes hooded and his belly full. He debated getting another beer but he was too comfortable against the cushions, nestled in and warm. He could hear Changmin moving around in the kitchen but he was loathe to help. When the younger man joined him on the couch, he pulled Min down on top of him rather than move out of the way.

"This can't be comfortable for you," Min grumbled, adjusting himself so his knees lay between Se7en's legs. "And you're a bony pillow."

"You should talk," The older man snorted. "You have sharp elbows. Sleeping with you is like going through ninja training. I'm ducking shiruken sharp bones."

"Oh, nice," Min bit his lover's chin, playfully tugging back and

forth at the skin like he'd seen his Maltese do to a toy. "Remind me why I sleep with you again?"

"Because of this," Se7en said, pressing Min's back down so he could feel the hard length of Se7en's sex under his pants. "And I've got a great ass."

"True," The younger man sighed and laid his head on the man's chest. "You do have a great ass."

"Did you have a good time?"

"Yeah, one of the best," Min said. "Did you?"

"Yeah, I did," He murmured, kissing Changmin's cheek. "Can I tell you something?"

"Sure."

"I never thought it could be like this," Se7en said softly, rubbing his nose against Min's.

"Like what?" He propped himself up so he could look straight into his lover's face. Their lips almost touched and the air between them was warm, circulated between them as they spoke.

"I never thought I could love like this," He replied. Moving his hands down Min's back, he cupped the man's hips, nuzzling into him. "Or be loved like this. I never thought... this would be mine. That someone like you could be mine."

"Tsk," Min snorted. "What about me? Do you remember how uncertain I was? I think I spent more time worrying about what was going to happen than I was thinking about what was really happening. I should have gone to bed with you a lot sooner than I did."

"If you slept with me any sooner, you'd have been too young," Se7en laughed. "And no matter how much Yunho likes me, I'd be dead."

"He does like you," Min mused, "That's nice too."

"I like you," Se7en whispered, placing his mouth on Min's to steal a long kiss. "I like you a lot. I'd even say I love you. You know, if you wanted to hear that."

"I do," Changmin said. "Want to hear that because it would make my loving you easier. It's hard to love someone if they don't love you back. Very uncomfortable."

“Ah, well I don’t want you uncomfortable,” Se7en said, leaning his head back. “In fact, you don’t really look comfortable now. Those clothes look... tight.”

“Really?” Min peered around his hips, looking down at the loose sweat pants he wore. “You’re right. They are much too constricting but what should I do? Isn’t it rude to be naked in the living room?”

“Ah, Minku,” Se7en said, cupping his lover’s face. “I intend to spend the rest of my life being rude with you. I’m going to love you for that long...and maybe even beyond that.”

“Good, Shichi,” Changmin sighed and held Se7en close, his arms tight on the man’s neck. “Because having you...being loved by you... loving you is a forever worth having.”

— fin —