

48 Hours

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Prologue

Lately, LA's weather is sunny and pleasant, nevertheless, there wasn't a significant decrease in the number of patients visiting my clinic. As usual, my secretary complains about the importance yet low worth of her job between the tiny breaks she gets while picking up phone calls, the patients maintain their deafening silence, sipping on water relentlessly while the overgrown plants insolently curl about in it's rather scarce boundaries.

I am a psychologist, 42 years old, still single and holding a license in America for more than 10 years now. Generally speaking, I haven't gotten much dissatisfactions or expectations of myself either.

Ever since my schooldays, LA had never been peaceful before but this of course, wasn't my original reason for choosing psychology, however, in selecting my doctorate, I was unable to evade my interest. I would admit that my take on psychological crimes cases are largely related to my passion towards the psychological coordination between husbands and wives. It is in no disdain towards the responsibilities of my occupation but more of the recognition I have of my fate, I understand, after all, living is not easy. 4 years ago, an autistic 40 year old man was suspected of wrapping his son in a plastic wrap and disposing him in a bin 2 kilometres away from his home. His wife, a thai woman, was unable to comprehend English, her psychological well being unfortunately went viral after the incident. I remember it being a not so pleasant Christmas, in the control room of the Federal Bureau, the man that sat opposite, eventually shed a tear or two that proceeded on to collect in the coffee cup.

Since then, the route to the bureau grew all too familiar to me, but this applied only to the sceneries on one side of the street as I was always there in the day and back at night. I was a rather satisfactory supplier, making use of my professional skills to win the souls of the devils and subsequently selling out to Satan. Of course, this did not include my own soul.

My soul did not require any rescuing, I allowed it unlimited enjoyment in hell and thereby learning from the pain. This (police) gang did not need to know of my sexual orientation which would not be beneficial to any of my product sales, it would make them think of me as a psychologist with personal psychological problems.

Beginning last year, I intended on reducing my cooperation with them, the substantial amount of private patients resulted in the lack of attention for myself, I definitely did not wish for the overwhelming pressure to eventually require the attention of another psychiatrist. However, in the last week, a major case involved a number of men of Asian descent. This may have been due to the peculiar case itself and my psychological relations with Asians, when the 40 year old police inspector David phoned me an invitation, I did not refuse.

Simply speaking, a young and popular Korean group came to LA last Friday in preparation for a tour, interviews and a series of MV shooting activities. They disappeared the moment they disembarked the plane, local company personnel who was arranged to welcome them did not manage to and their accompanying staff had been separated while exiting a different channel and had lost contact ever since.

"I only heard two people calling out one of our member's names but failed to wait for the others", said a local staff.

It was only until yesterday, a Tuesday morning that the police located a few boys in the villa of a suburban farm.

Unfortunately, when they were discovered, only one male was alive, sitting in the tub attempting to swallow great amounts of heart disease pills.

"This boy is just like you, he is Chinese." says the young trainee Mike, to me.

Evidently having withstood an intense amount of mental stimulation, the boy had refused to communicate with people ever since he was discovered by the police. The most helpless point being, he was the very person who knew the entire story and at the same time of being a victim, he also became the biggest suspect. In addition to the temporary autism, he had demonstrated obvious mood swings and tendencies of violence. Yesterday, as he was handed a pen to sign an identification document, he made an attempt to assault the police officer. Due to the highly sensitive nature of this case, he was now locked in an all day monitor room.

Although his hair is disheveled and having gone at least 2 days without shaving, I would still have to admit that God had given him an outstanding appearance and stature. If I had not known beforehand that this was an idol group, I would have used "heavenly shocking" to describe him.

It was blatantly obvious that God had a preference towards him, apart from blessing him with good looks, he was able to retain his life.

His Chinese name is Wu Yi Fan, English name Kris, 24 years of age, his parents divorced early and he experienced a short term overseas life, heterosexual and has had several girlfriends. Judging from his resume, his family background is rich, well educated, no significant medical history, no cosmetic surgery done, no drug dependence and no criminal record, he had smooth stardom coming ahead. His interpersonal skills were normal, and was even the leader of an idol group, he had no autistic tendencies.

Most of the confirmed deaths were of Korean nationalities, there were only 3 who were like Kris, ethnically Chinese who further developed themselves in the Korean entertainment industry. Mike handed me a group photo taken at their Tokyo concert, they looked intimately close with similar looks. According to the horrible judgments of the Europeans towards Asians, they were definitely unable to figure out who was who.

"Judging by the time of their deaths, these 4 must have happened between the past 18 hours from discovery." Mike singled out 4 photos from the crime scene and placed them in front of me, these photos all had their English names written in ink respectively. At this stage, the letters were even more recognizable as compared to their faces.

"He is called Chanyeol, found in a closet on the first floor at the villa. Cause of death is identified to be abdominal stabs, the suspected tool of crime is a prop for magic." He pointed to the retractable sword on the door in the picture, "tool of crime is suspected to have pierced through the door and into the victim's abdomen, causing his death." The boy in the photo seemed to be quite tall, his hair in the back of his head was tied, his body was slightly crooked and loose strands of hair were hanging over his face.

"Luhan, Chinese, is the only one who was found outside the building." Mike's slender fingers pointed towards the 2nd of the 4, "He attempted to climb the chimney but unfortunately, the linens he used were made of cloth and therefore unable to withstand his weight, snapping quickly." The face of the boy in the photo was unharmed and he appeared handsomely fair. Mike seemed to be terribly apologetic for the failure of this only fugitive, "I do not understand, the plastic rope in the center of the first floor living room was far more solid than strips of torn bed linen, why? What was he thinking?"

"You can ask him", David said abruptly from behind, I had worked with him umpteen times and quickly held out my hand. "It's been a long time since I saw you, old friend", he smiled and shook my hand. "That kid is currently the most direct breakthrough.", pointing at the lucky survivor in the control room, "If you breakthrough to him, I'll invite you on a ski trip to Canada."

"I'm wholeheartedly thankful for your generosity, however" touching my nose, "shouldn't you be honoring me with a trip to Hawaii from the last time before talking about this. Moreover," I watched as Kris stayed inside motionless, "You know, I have always been unable to communicate about work with children, not to mention some kid this cute."

"His adorable phase of life is over, especially if he were to continue maintaining this silence." David patted my shoulders, "This is your job, soul selling master. Let me see his obedient and crying expression while recalling this case and keep that expressionless face back in your bag." He said as he walks out through the door. "Has anyone ever told you how sick you are?" I said, jokingly. "Of course", he nodded, "My wife tells me that daily, it's really weird that you've realised it too." he said while blinking his eyes. "Go back to hell." I sent David out again and turned to face Mike, "Does your leader torture you like that everyday?"

"No, it's just you." Mike cheekily said as he raised his eyebrows, "Oh, there is still Mr. Survivor."

"Abusing of prisoners? I can tell you, you need to know that this is racial discrimination." I joked and jabbed Mike with my arm.

"Oh, come on, he abuses us." Mike helpless says, "That kid's expression maintains all day, so motionless, just like a mute person. We watched their past MVs on the computer in the office, they were dancing and singing like grasshoppers, I really can't imagine it's the same person."

"Hey, he was alone with so many other dead people in the same room for at least five hours, if it was you, you would have become a dead grasshopper." I said.

Mike smiled with his twisted mouth, "Dead grasshopper? If we went a little later he would have departed for heaven with a stomach full of heart disease pills, oh or maybe it's hell."

"Are you really doubting him?" I said, "I prefer the metamorphosis of dark humor."

"Maybe", Mike curled his lips and shook his head, "However he needs to work with us. Look at him right now, covered in thorns, just like a lion who has had his claws and teeth plucked out."

"Lion? Cubs?" I said.

"Does a 24 year old seem young to you?" Mike bent his head.

"Oh, of course. I like mature people. To be precise, if someone of his age were to become my lover I would feel like a criminal" I said.

"Come on," Mike shook his head in utter disbelief, "I don't hook up with a woman over the age of 24."

"Oh, right. I forgot you were a cub." I smiled to him and before he could retort, I picked up another photo, "Who is this? His skin tone is sexy, I mean comparing to the others."

Mike looked at me despairingly and shook his head, continuing with his work, "KAI, Korean, also one of the 4 dead within 18 hours." My eyes scanned the sombre photo and listened to Mike's incessant speech, "Before his death he seemed to be involved in a fierce scuffle, the fatal blow was the impact against his neck. "This one seems interesting," Mike smiled, "until the very end, his hands still clutched tightly onto the beige button, the button tore off from that kid's shirt." He pointed to the daydreaming Kris seated on the chair, "the skin particles in his nails have also been confirmed to belong to our sole survivor." I nodded, cute cub, you do seem to be in some trouble.

"Lay, Chinese, 23 years of age, death caused by excessive bleeding." Mike picked up the photo at the bottom.

"His time of death was a really short one, seems like the last death." Mike said.

"Is this a display photo?" I asked.

"This is a photo of the crime scene, as for the display photo" Mike turns and looks at Kris, "You would have to ask him."

At first glance, this looked like a magazine cover photo. The boy called Lay is seated on the chair in the bedroom facing the window. In the mild shining sun, the peaceful face, mouth and even the slight smile did not reveal any form of pain. Judging from the photo, he looked like a teenager sleeping under the Sun, if not for the shallow cut marks on his drooping right wrist, and the blood trail on the carpet leading from the door all the way up to his wrist.

"Cuts of this depths do not cause death easily, but for people who suffer from naturally severe congenital coagulopathy, it is hard to determine." Mike's voice boomed, "Without any timely medical rescue and matching blood supply, the rate of him losing his life is 100%."

"Is this suicide?" I asked.

"What do you think", Mike said.

"I don't know." I shook my head, "I'm not a professional, it's only going by my gut feelings" Look at his expression, he looks peaceful." I pointed at the photo.

"That's right, he really does, however" Mike picks up a photo of the bathroom, "the cause of death seems to be a piece of shattered glass from the mirror, it all has Kris' fingerprints. "Obviously, before Kris could take his own life", Mike pointed to the side of the tub, "he formed a really bizarre pattern with the mirror shards, he was most likely already in

an unstable mental state.”

I flipped the photo to see a crooked polygon. “Moreover, Kris was wearing 2 watches on his left wrist, one black and white while the other was pink, two absolutely different styles.” Mike recalled, “both watches were not moving, both stopped at different timings.”

“On the basin, a written Chinese address and telephone number was placed,” Mike continued, “It has been proven to be the boy named Luhan’s Beijing family address and number.”

“There are also many details yet to be explained, such as the big hole above the Dance Revolution machine and the boy Sehun who fell into the basement to his death, and just beside it was a small trampoline..” Mike said, “Also, this empty safe which is linked to a rubiks cube It is after all my first time seeing a rubiks cube coded safe.”

“Two small Chinese characters were also found written on the bottom right side of the mirror in the first floor’s bathroom...” I reached for the photo from Mike’s hands and carefully scrutinized it, those two words meant “Leave quickly.”

“This Chinese national boy called Tao left his entire fingerprint on the bottom left of the half mirror.” Mike flipped through the photo and said, “He died of an abdominal hit, tools of the crime is suspected to be a broken vodka bottle.”

“Location of death?” I asked.

“In the living room.” Mike said.

“What about the rest?” I asked again.

“I already said too much,” Mike shrugged, “You know it too, we have our rules and regulations to follow, after all,” He looked at me apologetically, “You aren’t one of our staff.”

“I understand,” and kept silent for a moment, I packed up the photos, “Thank you for explaining, it is more in detailed than any other times.” I smiled and looked at Mike.

“I did not saying anything in extra details, it was your listening which heard everything in more detail than usual.” Mike blinked.

“Alright then, I admit.” I lowered my head and giggled, although it is said to be fair, however somewhere in between, there’s inequality, such as the passage of young beautiful life which is often more than regrettable, such as God’s choice to let one live and others die.

“One last question”, I lifted my head and blurted, “was last friday a special day? A religious holiday?”

Mike looked at me and shooked his head, “to them, it was indeed a date worth remembering, it was their 2nd debut anniversary.”

“You even know this?” I glanced at Mike.

“I shouldn’t be knowing but there are certain details I must know.” Mike said, “Alright, I can’t say anymore, I’ve made a mistake.”

I flashed an understanding smile. “When may I talk to him?” I looked down and organized some files.

“Whenever you’re ready,” Mike looked at me again, placed down the files and photos in his hands, “However you must inform me 30 minutes in advance as there are some small and tedious preparatory work.” Then he walked towards the control room.

“Ready to work?” I asked from behind.

“Oh, you must be kidding, he had once attempted to attack one of our colleagues, and as for you,” He looked at me from top to bottom, “such a gentle and weak doctor, I wouldn’t

want you to become a photo.”

“I am now in the city’s most secure place.” I blinked in his direction, “Mr gentle and frail doctor personally has magic most of you don’t.”

Nodding ambiguously, .. Mike went in anyway, “I’m sorry, duty calls. Also,” He turns back again, “Don’t mention magic to me or I would be suspecting you.”

Chapter 1

Simply judging from the appearance, I would be unable to confirm this person to be autistic and violent. I understand that people who are reluctant to speak feel that the person in front of them would not understand what he was saying. And in his current state, he was indeed normal.

“Hello,” I closed the the door of the control room and approached the table, “I am Frank.” I looked at him, bowed slightly and sat down, “Would you like a cup of coffee?”

In response to my mediocre interrogations, he seemed to have no intentions of answering them.

“I personally feel that the bureau’s coffee isn’t up to standards as well, however, I’ve brought some tea...” I said, “It was brought back from mainland, do you have any interest in trying it?” As I spoke, I gestured for Mike to bring the tea in.

“I’ve noticed that you haven’t drank water in a long time, humans need to hydrate themselves,” I spoke, looking directly at him, “that’s if you really want to keep on living.” He maintained that motionless posture but his slender eyelashes fluttered slightly.

“I’m not a cop, not a friend who has come to chat with you and neither am I a nanny who’s here to cheer you up,” I said smiling, “I am a doctor, someone whom you need most right now.”

He stared at the ground, with eyes that reflected a lack of soul.

“You’ve been through alot this week. However, there has to be a day,” I bent my waist, his bent head and drooping hair covered half of his face, “one day, you will live and face all of these. Would you like to know the reason?” I asked.

He did not answer.

“Because you aren’t crazy, your mental strength is stable and you do not have amnesia.” I said, “your behaviour and emotions right now are that of ordinary people out there, especially coming from people who have experienced what you have.”

“You might not admit this but your tolerance level towards pressure is stronger than ordinary people of your age,” I said, “Although you’ve had intentions to commit suicide, you hesitated too long.”

Kris lowered his head and looked to the ground.

“You had at least 5 hours of time, but the cans of penicillin, you did not swallow it.” I looked

at him, "You could have chosen to jump to death, or slit your throat with a piece of glass shard, you made such thorough preparations for death in the bathroom, but you aren't dead."

His lowered fingers wavered slightly.

"Your desire to live is stronger than anyone else, stronger than those companions of yours who are now dead, it is the reason why you're still alive." I brought myself closer to his face, "and God has allowed you to live, perhaps this may be no reward but sufferings you were meant to receive, punishments."

His eyelashes lifted and in the brown pupil was something I could not define clearly.

"You can totally remain silent like this for the rest of your life, do a psychiatric evaluation and then find a good lawyer to defend you, you can live peacefully for the next half of your life, living it as a complacent coward. But that isn't you." I said, "If that's the case, your life ended then and there in that building."

In the few seconds of pauses, I kept my line of sight on him.

His hoarse voice uttered the first words in days, "You're overestimating me."

I could feel the crowd outside leaning forward, people who were not wearing a translator put them on. Just behind the glass mirror behind my back were a dozen of eyes who could observe us.

I smiled and looked at Kris, "Why do you say so?" I asked.

"Do you think you're really smart?" He smirked and smiled at me.

"Of course not.", I said.

"No," he smiled and shook his head, "You must be thinking you know everything at the back of your hand, that everything is well under control."

I looked at him in utter silence.

"If you know, those police out there invited you not because of the case or because of me, I'm simply just a fake, just an act." Kris looked at me from the corner of his eye, "Our main motive was to trick you into coming forward. You think I'm keeping mum because I'm in pain but I'm actually just putting on an act."

I look at Kris in front of me and started wondering if a psychiatric evaluation was actually even necessary.

"What do you feel?" He said.

At that instant pause, I replied, "I will not believe you."

"What if you were to walk out of this room and not see anyone at all?" He asked.

I pondered for a moment, "I would think that there was an emergency so everyone ran out without informing us."

"What if you were unable to contact anyone using a phone, and realised that the door had been locked?" He looked at me.

I stared at him and although the atmosphere made me really uncomfortable, I tried

maintaining my professionalism and easy-going attitude.

"I will" I spun the cup in my hands, "I will protect myself and be cautious of you." His eyes suddenly dimmed, "You are wrong."

"I would definitely not take the initiative to attack you before clearing up everything." I said. "But neither would I trust you."

He bent his head, "You are wrong I was wrong We were all wrong."

I examined his expression and attempted to ask, "Do you mean your group mates?"

He revealed a self deprecating smile and lowered his head, "Your tea smells good."

I had to go along with his change of subject, "Oh, have you tasted it before?"

"Bi Luo Chun, an old friend I had used to have lots of it, we often drank." And as he said, I gradually seemed to become his old friend. "An old Chinese friend in Korea?" I asked.

"That's right," he said, "We were not at liberty to drink freely, only during spring festival where tea often became a replacement for wine." He started reminiscing.

"Your old friend, is he still in Korea?" I said.

He froze for a moment and shook his head, "I don't know, but I guess he wouldn't want to return to Korea, he said he wanted to go home, hehe." As he spoke, he gently sprinkled tea on the ground.

I gazed at him silently.

"To be honest, I do not have many friends." He turned and faced me. "He always talked about going home, I was envious of him because for me, I don't even know where home is."

"I think what you said was right," he smiled at me, "I've lived not as a reward, but as a punishment."

Chapter 2

Kris' Point of View

LA's weather was unexpectedly colder but apart from that, nothing else about the day was different. Upon disembarking the plane, we walked towards the baggage claim area. Chanyeol, Baekhyun and Jongin walked in front and all I could hear were Baekhyun's chattering sounds and Chanyeol's exaggerated laughs. Leader Junmyeon, D.O., Jongdae and Minseok shuffled in the middle while Luhan and Sehun were glued together, as usual, as though invisible to anyone else. Tao walked beside me expressing his frustrations about his exposed predebut photos online again the night before and Yixing as usual strolled in the back, wearing his headphones and attentively observed the surroundings .

I deliberately slowed down my pace and pulled him against me, "You should stop listening in case you fail to hear the others calling out for you later," I said. He looked at me confusingly then gave an expression of comprehension, "Oh, no problem." Then, he had no intention of removing his headphones. I turned my head helplessly and continued absorbing Tao's incessant whines, keeping in the fact that I wasn't actually in a good mood either

because of the insomnia I suffered from last night and the fact that Zhang Yixing got reprimanded by the manager for suggesting a little trip home, which also served as an indication that my plans on returning home had gone to waste too.

"What? Your facial expressions look upset as though your parents have died? Are my pronunciations off precision again?" As we waited for the luggage, Luhan sprang such words like he always did, just as a person had no desire of entertaining it.

Zhang Yixing removed his headphones and mumbled a line: "He's silently mourning your life."

"My life has been blissful, especially before I met you." said Luhan while gazing outside, "if I'm able to successfully reach the van without any sprains later on, my life would be absolutely perfect. Also, your stubble isn't shaved too thoroughly." He said gravely to Zhang Yixing.

"You didn't shave your legs last night, I could feel the strong presence of the manly atmosphere on the plane last night." Zhang Yixing fixed his collar.

"What is it, do you feel undulated?" Luhan laughed and said, "If you have the ability, speak about your feelings of it on the interview tomorrow."

"Language barriers," Zhang Yixing shook his head, "It would be good to mention it in Hunan but LA definitely isn't my field, I'll just let leader use his perfect English to express my undulating mood."

"Can the both of you quit being so disgusting" Tao speaks from the side with a look of despise, "acting like you're one single person, is Sehun not enough for you?"

"What are you saying?" Oh Sehun joined in with a cold, nasal blocked voice.

"Nothing," Luhan smiled at him, "We're talking about the approval to return home this year."

"A vacation? When? If it is like the last holiday, then I must follow you home." Sehun said without further considerations.

"Maybe" Luhan stared at Tao who giggled away discreetly, "the probability of it not happening is an 8 out of 10, your brother Yixing has already been told off by the manager" However, this watch you bought isn't that bad."

"I purchased it at the duty-free store." Oh Sehun picked at his eyebrows.

"Hey? Why haven't I seen you buy it, when did you buy it, why didn't you ask me along to buy one too" Luhan started the whining with Sehun again while Huang Zitao sent me a pout.

"Are there many fans here?" Zhang Yixing looked to the outside.

"Probably not." I said as I gazed outside too, spotting a mirror and started fixing my hair and collar.

"Fine fine, you are the most handsome in the entire world." Zhang Yixing rolled his eyes at me.

"Thank you." I continued as I faced the glass, "It's the first time I'm hearing you sweet talk." Unexpectedly, from the direction my insult was intended for came another line, "It is also my first time meeting such an idiot."

"All of your IQ have not increased much, you are way past your youth." Luhan said as he dragged his luggage behind.

"When you exit later, lookout for a yellow pickup van, don't get lost."

I spoke towards both the front and the back of the gang then took one last glance in the mirror at myself, satisfied. Zhang Yixing looked out again, and put on his headphones. A few minutes later, we were in the airport lobby. The number of fans were more than expected and all we could do was follow the person in front, heads down.

"Why is Zhang Yixing gone again?" I scanned the crowd behind and inquired Luhan.

"Wasn't he following you?" Luhan said.

"Who said he was following me." I continued to search and finally spotted Zhang Yixing in a corner, heading in another direction.

"Zhang Yixing!" I hollered, he obviously had his headphones on and failed to hear me.

Chanyeol who stood behind saw my gesture, swung his arms and shouted towards Zhang Yixing, "Yixing~~ here, not there~~~"

Observing the stubborn Zhang Yixing head in his own direction, I sighed and squeezed my way through to him. "You're still running?!" I tapped his shoulder and pulled off his headphones, "Would you die without just a short while of music?"

Zhang Yixing looked at me in bewilderment and pointed in the direction he was heading for, "Isn't our yellow van"

I turned to see Minseok standing in front of the van waving to us and said, "Come with me." as I pulled him along in our original direction.

I never knew the incomplete sentence he meant to say, "Isn't our yellow van just there?"

5 minutes later, the 12 of us had boarded the van, in the co-driver seat sat an Asian who claimed to be a reception staff while the driver resembled a local.

"All the other staff rode in another van headed straight for your accommodation." He spoke fluently in Korean, "In a while, you will reunite with them."

"May I ask," Kim Junmyeon said to the other, "Where are we staying and how long will this journey take."

The people in front smiled a little, "your accommodation criteria is really good, you will see it in a while."

"Shit! My phone can't be used in the United States? I specifically enquired about it before coming here, they said I could." Kyungsoo frowned and fiddled with his phone.

"Neither does mine have a signal." Chanyeol said, "It's alright, perhaps in a while Look outside! It's our concert promotional poster!" His attention was soon directed at the light board outside the window.

"That's right", "It seems like we are pretty popular here", "There were so many fans welcoming us" Everyone gathered in front of the glass with their comments, these chatters during our reunion had gotten all too familiar to me.

I observed as Oh Sehun's pink watch was now worn on Luhan's wrist, they began discussing the ring on Luhan's finger, seemingly to be related. Jongin had long entered his dreams the moment he boarded the van, Tao patiently rehearsed his English self introductions while Chanyeol tilted his head to rest on my shoulders.

Zhang Yixing who had obviously entered his own world again turned his head and gave me a fright.

"Are you sure we're in the correct van?" He asked.

"If not?" I stared at him peculiarly and as the amount of people dozing off increased, I felt a little sleepy too.

He seemed to drift into his sluggish mode, glanced at his phone, and looked back at me again, "What is wrong with you, wake up, I am speaking to you"

"What is it?" My memory is vague, all I remembered was the warm sunlight beaming that afternoon.

"The other day the person who reprimanded me who picked up the phone" his voice sounded intermittently in my memory, ".... was a woman"

Just before the drowsiness took over me completely, I could still remember the confused person, knocking on his head with one hand and reminding the sleeping members on the other. After that I really couldn't recall anymore.

When I woke up, Jongin was the only one awake. We were all lying around on a carpet in the living room of an outlying area and I realised an uncomfortable object stuck to my neck.

"Don't play with it, I've tried, it cannot be removed." Jongin said while seated on the couch.

"When did you wake up?" I asked

"5 minutes ago."

Glancing at the clock which indicated the time to be 10, we had been asleep for more than 4 hours.

"Why didn't you wake us up?" I attempted to shake Luhan awake.

"It's useless." He spoke emotionlessly, "Wait awhile, they'll wake up."

Sure enough, everyone got up. Tao stroked his head and stumbled to the toilet, Chanyeol hysterically broadcasted the fact that his cellphone and bag were gone, Baekhyun exclaimed about the luxuriousness of the suburban villa and then proceeded to whine about being thirsty, Sehun squeakily asked Luhan something while he frowned, pressed against his temples and shook his head. Yixing desperately wanted the brass ring over his neck to be removed, I went over and patted his hands, motioning him to stop.

It was a strange living room with uncordial colorful matching, a huge mirror up on the wall just beside the doors, a dance machine placed in the corner and a safe right next to the stairs with a rubiks cube hanging over it.

"What is going on?" Junmyeon enquired as he walked up to me and Jongin, shaking his head, sighing and then begun fixing his disheveled hair.

Jongin remained seated on the couch, staring at the doors.

"That is a password protected door." He said.

"What? Are we being kidnapped?" said Baekhyun in fear as he scanned the surroundings, searched for his phone but failed.

"From the moment we boarded that van, it was already suspicious." Luhan said, "but it is of course too late to speak now."

"How is this even possible, we have just landed in America ..." Chanyeol said with droopy eyes.

“Perhaps it is the crazy fans,” Baekhyun said with hopeful eyes, “maybe it is just a joke.”

Everyone remained silent, evidently no one believed that theory.

“That better be it.” Junmyeon said, using his arms to cover his face.

Suddenly, Tao pointed at the wall behind us and shouted, “Look, what is that.”

On the wall just beside the mirror, a paragraph of English was casted gradually. The words were cute, but not the content.

Dear boys, welcome to the white paradise, the most magical house in LA.

Let’s play a game.

It’s good for you to know the following things:

Don’t try to get out of the house, it is out of your capabilities.

You have a small magic ring on your neck and there is a small knife hidden inside it.

It will give you a little punishment if you break the rules.

You will have to divide yourselves into two teams.

The two boys standing nearest to the door will be the captains. Both of the captains will choose their first team members. The ones who get picked will choose the next members. It goes on like this until nobody is left.

The game is very simple and has only two rules:

1. After 48 hours, only one boy should be alive in this house.

2. The last two boys who are alive should belong to one team.

Good luck my dear boys. We wish you the best of luck in this weekend.

Your housekeepers.

“What does it say, leader?” Tao looked at me.

I had not recovered my senses, but the the timer above the door had indicated a series of numbers.

47 h 59 m 59 s

Chapter 3

This was a countdown, as the figures experienced the process of depreciation. Watching as time elapsed second by second, the house immersed into a deafening silence.

“They are telling us ... there is no way out of here and besides, a knife lies beneath this ring. Chanyeol said as his face grew ghastly.

“In 2 days time, there will only be a sole survivor.” I skimmed their horrid expressions.

“Also, we are to be divided into 2 groups, the last two people who survive are to be from the same group.” Luhan said, “If there is a breach of the rules”, he pointed at his neck, “the knife would supposedly play it’s role, emerging from this ring.”

Everyone turned invariably silent, the only sound came from the countdown board, ticking ceaselessly, reducing.

“Teaming method...” Jongdae whispered, “the two people closest to the door will be the captains, they will start by choosing people, the chosen ones shall then proceed to elect the

next and so on until everyone becomes a candidate.”

Everyone coherently turned, eyes on the two people standing closest to the door, Minseok and Zhang Yixing.

“Insanity, will anyone believe this nonsense, it must be fans’ prank!” Minseok said as he shook his head and flung a chair against the window.

The window’s ability to withstand any blow is equivalent to tampered glass, yet Minseok who stood right beside the window had fallen to the ground. Chanyeol stumbled his way over to look and screamed, falling to one side, blood began oozing profusely from his neck, forming a pool around Chanyeol’s feet.

I plopped right down on the sofa, all of them had lost their pretense of nonchalance and erupted into chaos. Baekhyun ran up the 2nd floor screaming, Jongin flipped the tea set onto the ground while Luhan and Yixing paled as they watched the train of events unfold right before their sight, Sehun retched several times and clutched his stomach.

Jongdae was the most hysterical, not only did he run forward to hug Xiumin, he flipped him over as well. Panicky shrieks and running sounds, including mine, reverberated into the surroundings as the sight of the knife and the intricate deep red slash made its appearance into everyone’s visibility.

“What is this! What exactly do you want!” Jongdae cried and rushed up to the front door, pounding his fist against the password lock. Kyungsoo and Junmyeon dashed forward while Jongdae continued bawling and trying all kinds of number combinations

“You still have two chances” the lock announced in a monotonous voice, Jongdae frantically tried again.

“You still have one chance” declared the voice.

“Stop trying!” Jongin advised from behind.

“You are unlucky, bye bye.” Everyone stood deep rooted to the ground. Jongdae’s cries screeched to a halt. He fell to the ground and in that instant, a pool of blood surrounded his body.

The house momentarily became silent, only the noises of the persistent flowing blood could be heard.

“Jongdae?” Chanyeol whispered as he stood forward, scrutinizing the lock and then at the fallen candidate, unable to believe his eyes.

“Why would a person trying to break the passcode die?” Chanyeol flashed his intensely pale face, “WHY?!!” he hollered against the 4 corners of the room.

“No,” he mumbled, “I need to get out of here ...” And as he spoke, he circled the entire area, entered the kitchen, clambered up the stove and pounded against the rooftop window. It remained silent and still. He descended with heavy breaths, took a pan and made his way up the stove again with intentions to break through the rooftop window but one second before it, I rushed in and helped him down.

"Let go of me!!" He struggled with all his might and yelled, "I don't want to die here! How do you know it can't be broken through!"

I staggered a few steps before walking towards him and gave him a tight slap across his face, he went silent.

"Do you want to die?" I looked at him.

"We aren't urgent for that moment." I walked over, snatched the pan from him and made my way back to the living room, head down.

I had almost forgotten how long it had been since everyone went silent, it was as though it had been eternity.

As the countdown clock reduced by half an hour, Junmyeon decided that he had to break the silence.

"Let's find a dark and dim place and carry them there." He looked at the bloodied corpses. Everyone stood up and began their aimless searches. The shuffling of their feet overshadowed the power of speech.

"There is a basement there." Sehun opened the doors and turned to speak.

The basement was about 2 floors deep, there were no lights, it was chilly and at the end of it was a locked door seemingly resembling a garage. Junmyeon and Kyungsoo carried Jongdae while Luhan and myself lifted Minseok, exploring our way in. Old furnitures were kept in limited boundaries. Halfway through, I seemed to have kicked a metal shelf of some sort that had it dislocated but I could not be the least bit bothered.

"Where do we put them?" Kyungsoo asked.

"As deep in as possible." Said Junmyeon.

As I made my exit, I saw Yixing and Jongin kneeling on the ground and wiping off the blood stains. Everyone sat back down again, the countdown board displayed 46 hours 32 minutes.

"How?" Jongin said as he wiped his hands, as though asking everyone and himself as well. Seeing as the rules of the game stated on the wall did not change, "Maybe," it's the first time I'm stammering while speaking, "We should, we should divide into teams."

Everyone looked at me then turned to look at Junmyeon. What was this insinuation, everyone was aware.

I looked at him with expressions as though to ask if this was how it was supposed to work.

I don't know, maybe it is supposed to be done like that? He returned the gaze.

Is adaptation to the rule the only way to survive? I sent him a look again.

Probably, weren't we taught to do that since young? He slowly lowered his gaze.

After a few minutes, he lifted his head in difficulty, shifting his sight to the two people nearest to the door, Yixing and Chanyeol.

"Let's split up." He announced.

The two people stood up silently and walked towards the center of the living room where there were two carpets, one green, one blue.

Yixing who stood on the blue carpet lifted his head and asked Chanyeol, "Who chooses first?"

"Let's use our old techniques." Chanyeol smiled and spoke.

The two counted to three and stretched out their hands together, indeed, Yixing never had luck playing this game.

Looking at the original K team, Chanyeol hesitated for a good 10 seconds.

"Jongin." he said at last. Jongin stood up from the couch and walked to his side, they seemed to have shook hands from behind.

"Kris." Yixing called out just as Jongin reached. It was almost like I had expected this. In that instant, I saw Luhan's eyes dim for a second.

I stood right beside Yixing, Jongin looked at the both of us blankly and listed a name which took us all by surprise, "Luhan." I felt Yixing's hand grabbed mine as though expressing a gastric pain. The air seemed so thick, Luhan frowned for quite some time before he finally stood up and only after a moment of silence did he slowly make his way over. I looked at Jongin almost to say, "Why?"

He didn't return my gaze but instead, "because you want victory, but without Luhan, you won't win." He lifted his chin, "Also, I wouldn't want to miscomprehend things you say in Chinese when you do."

Having underestimated his calm and clarity, I shook my head and smiled at him, shouting, "Oh Sehun, come here!"

Chapter 4

I must admit, that was one of the few reprisals I had ever done. However, it was clearly a wrong choice at retaliation resulting in disastrous endings.

"Tao." said Luhan with his head lowered after a few seconds of silence.

Tao leaped up after having froze for two seconds, "Damn it Luhan why are you taking your anger out on me!"

"I'm not venting my anger on you." At this point the house had become a platform for Chinese communications, the rest of them resembled fools trying to decipher the content of their argument. However, it was nothing too challenging to figure, from when Jongin chose Luhan, Chanyeol's mouth had never once sealed .

Luhan lifted his head to look at Tao, "I naturally have my reasons for electing you."

"I am not joining!" Tao's face reddened.

"Arbitrarily doing anything you want, damn it I'm not playing this anymore!" Luhan reacted agitatedly, an opposition to his usual personality, his voice and Tao's overlapping. All the Korean members looked in horror as the two people quarreled. Kyungsoo softly asked Junmyeon what they were saying while Junmyeon dragged him away from behind Tao gently. Baekhyun squinted as his eyes turned teary, and Chanyeol frowned as he watched Baekhyun, probably feeling remorseful for not having chose him first, the situation that has

yet to come was evidently not one he could control nor predict.

“Luhan” Yixing gently called out, Luhan finally brought the quarrel to a halt. Tao looked at me with his bright red neck almost as though anticipating a word from me. The group with Tao would probably win, I sighed lightly and thought that perhaps he shared the same sentiments as me.

“Since someone has chosen you, just go.” I spoke coldly to him in Korean. “Are you too impatient at life?”

Tao looked at me with his reddened eyes while the others had faces that depicted awkwardness. However it did not matter, I had always been able to shun awkward atmospheres.

He strutted with his long slender legs towards me, “You’ve thought about it clearly?”

“I’m not in any position to ponder about it,” I looked at him relaxingly, then lowered my head to avoid the eye contact before ignoring his Chinese conversation and speaking in Korean, “Quit being so attached to me, I have been bothering you for a long time.”

He didn’t talk for some time, maybe it was the hurt or perhaps my seasoned ignorant expression?

“Is this the truth or is this falsity?” That silly kid was now taking it seriously, shit, I blamed myself silently for elevating the complexity of problems.

“I am a person who doesn’t lies.” I said.

“I will go to that group, I am just curious to know if this is the heartfelt truth.” His eyes narrowed and reddened slightly. From my understanding towards him, I knew that it would eventually form tear droplets which would then erupt into a valley of tears.

I lifted my head to look at him, then at the countdown board, “You have already wasted a huge amount of everyone’s time.”

“What are you saving this amount of them for?” Indeed the tears started flowing, “To kill?!” He shouted at me. Chanyeol immediately held him from behind, using Korean to comfort him softly, Luhan and Sehun both looked towards the ground, speechless. I calmly wiped away the saliva he spitted on my face.

As I watched him being dragged to the other group, I hurriedly called out to Sehun, “next.” Then looked back at the ring on Tao’s neck, thank god, everything was fine.

Sehun numbly lifted his head, as though having just woken up, he still seemed to be unaware of what he had to do and looked at me in bewilderment.

“It’s your turn to choose.” I said softly.

He numbly raised his head again, scrutinizing the remaining people, Baekhyun, Junmyeon and Kyungsoo, then he looked at Chanyeol and Luhan who stood on the opposite side before depressingly saying, “What do I do when I’m done choosing.”

The hall was quiet for two seconds, I was clearly aware of the ticking clock.

No one answered his enquiry.

As though lazing down, Sehun smiled and said “well, whatever.”

Chanyeol and Jongin met gazes, Yixing unknowingly glanced at me, I looked down and thought to myself, I've done such a 'good' thing.

"Sehun you need to pick one" Chanyeol speaks anxiously.

Sehun's head remained bowed in silence.

"If you are not choosing we will." Luhan said.

"Baekhyun." Just as Luhan's voice softened, Sehun squeaked. I watched as Chanyeol shut his eyes, bent down and supported himself with his hands on his knees, his hair fell into a mess right beside his ears. Jongin acted as though he was scalded by something, using his hands to cover his forehead as he turned behind.

Baekhyun stood beside Sehun with droopy eyes, Yixing then again looked at me with unknowing intentions, I estimated that he probably regretted selecting me. "It's your turn." I said to Tao, his eyes reflected a pond of deadwater which obviously showed the loss of passion to bother about an organism like myself. Kyungsoo and Junmyeon looked at each other helplessly and seemed to whisper a plan.

"It's all identical," Junmyeon faked a laugh, "It is not as though we would become enemies instantly, we could think of alternatives" he said, "Since Kris is already in this group, I'll just go to Chanyeol's." He looked at me, acquiring my advice.

"Of course, no problem." I nodded immediately, then, him and Kyungsoo walked to stand beside Tao and Baekhyun respectively.

The green and blue carpet, stood 5 people respectively. I watched Luhan and Tao's abrupt upsetting emotions, lowered my head and wished I hadn't revealed anything.

Luhan's eyes were glued to the ground, he was probably unable to withstand the gaze coming from both Yixing and Sehun. Tao looked at the door with his reddish eyes, he probably thought that once he was out of that door, he would never ever pay attention to me anymore.

However Tao, if you were to make it out of that door, you would forgive me.

This was probably it, my memory seemed to have deleted many others in my vague impression, I saw Yixing walked over to pat Luhan's shoulders, Chanyeol, Jongin and Baekhyun hugged and buried their heads together, Junmyeon sat in a corner, as though trapping himself in his train of thoughts while Sehun squatted in a corner, zoning out. Luhan seemed to have seen but did not walk over.

If I knew that at that very moment, my eyes were the sole recorder of this entire episode, the only precious and exclusive memory, I would have insisted on keeping it wide open to observe every single person. If time could rewind to that very moment, I would definitely be willing to pay for it at all cost.

Jongin and Chanyeol's team occupied the entire 2nd floor so we were naturally left with the first. Although there was a limited amount of bedrooms on the ground floor; just one, but fortunately, there was a separate bathroom and kitchen. Clearly under such a situation, everyone had no mood to sleep.

We were facing a larger problem, the absence of water. Drinking water was not found and even the toilet's flush was sealed, water that gushed out was purified alongside cleansing wash, the blue foamed water seemed to be really unreliable.

Fortunately, there was enough sandwich and bread in the fridge to feed the entire population on this level for two days.

Naturally, we were unaware of the stock and facilities equipped on the 2nd floor. Although we had not made the boundaries of the two teams clear, imposing of a disturbance on the other group was definitely not a good idea. If the entire building only had one kitchen, all I could say was goodluck. Sharing of food was naturally something we used to do but now I wasn't exactly sure.

At half past dawn, 5 people were lying or seated in that 20 metre or so bedroom, exhaustion filled the air but no one went to sleep.

"Should we be doing something?" Kyungsoo said.

"Nothing." I said.

"So why did you suggest the splitting of groups then." He said, looking at me.

I maintained, Baekhyun tugged on his shirt, "it was leader Junmyeon who initiated it." "No," Kyungsoo looked at the ground, "it was him, Junmyeon simply complied."

I know, I was the culprit behind the groupings, listening to some lecture was definitely something unavoidable.

"What is the use of saying anything now," Sehun rolled his eyes, "if you had your opinions, why didn't you voice them then." Kyungsoo looked at Sehun, "Since you don't have opinions, I dare not voice mine either."

"Can the both of you stop bickering" Yixing said wearily, "it is already this bad, can we not have any internal mess ups" Kyungsoo looked at Yixing and said, "You are the leader, we'll listen to you."

"Listen to me?" Yixing faked a smile, "I just happened to be near the door then."

Sehun looked at Yixing, then back at me and said, "I'm fine with anything." Baekhyun hid behind Sehun, leaning against the bed, "Kris is the oldest here and has been the leader of M for a really long time, we'll listen to you." For a moment, no one spoke. To be honest I was the least bit interested in such a leading job.

But Yixing nudged me, I turned and saw his disheveled hair and the anticipation in his eyes for me to voice something. That felt just like when the person you had trusted the most blindfolded you, bringing you to the edge of the cliff, only to say in overwhelming anticipation, "Open the door quickly, we're home."

I turned my head helplessly and looked at the rest, "we've debuted together for such a long time, although there isn't much time left to spend together but working together isn't impossible, it's just like how we did in the past, isn't it." I said.

"In the past we cooperated for the sake of stardom, now for survival, we need stronger willpower." I said with a smile.

"I see that your drive for fame is really huge," Sehun looked at me, "support of the interactions between leader Kris and members."

I paused for a moment and said, "I seldom interact this intimately with people."

"You haven't?" he said with a little meaning of aggressiveness.

I adjusted my sitting posture with a little interest, "I admit, at times. But at this point," I smiled and looked at him "do you even have authority to comment? Or should I say, you are actually unaware of people filming you when you interact intimately with others?"

Sehun stared at me in puzzlement, "of course it's because there are people watching, have you seen me interact intimately in private?"

That was a rhetorical question, the other three people rolled their eyes.

"I'm not even a gay," he added in stupidity, of course, no one in such a situation would have to mood to make a joke out of it.

"What do you say they are doing?" Yixing adjusted his head and looked out the window, pointing at the ceiling.

"Perhaps the leader is having a meeting with them," Kyungsoo said confusedly.

"Chanyeol is probably fussing along with the leader," Baekhyun adds, "Jongin probably dozed off because of the boring discussion."

"In short," Yixing said, "they are discussing ways to deal with us."

"Maybe not," I said, "perhaps their topic is as juvenile as ours."

"You say, what if I happened to select Luhan instead of you then, what would be the situation now? Yixing watched me with slanted eyes and sent me a nudged.

"I would be on their team, plotting ways to kill you well."

"Why me?" Yixing suddenly spoke in Chinese.

"Because I enjoy doing the challenging tasks first," I said.

He froze for two seconds and then shoved me, expressing his delightful protest.

"I'm thirsty," Sehun looked at us, standing up, indicating his wish to leave the room.

"There is no water, I've checked," I said, "even the bathroom and kitchen lacks it. Unless you would like to go upstairs and ask if they have any."

"Does the vase in the living room contain water?" Baekhyun asked.

"Are you crazy?" Yixing said.

"I've been driven out of my mind by thirst," Baekhyun said, "If a flower can consume that essential substance, so can I."

"Then you go take a look, I said to Baekhyun, "don't switch the lights on to alarm them, if there is, bring back the entire vase."

"Alright," He struggled to get on his feet and walked towards the door.

Within a minute, all our drowsiness vanished with the shouts of Baekhyun, his high pitched screams travelled all the way from the living room, "who are you! Don't come near!" and soon after, splinters and shattering sounds were heard.

"What is going on!" Sehun sat up abruptly.

"Hurry!" without my signal, everyone scrambled up and ran for the door. Before it even opened, another cry came and was followed by sounds of shuffling.

I opened the door, it was pitch dark. Baekhyun's yet another scream informed me of his whereabouts. I saw someone holding something which pierced through the other, all of us did. People from the 2nd level shuffled their way down the stairs, the lights lit, and beside the switch stood Jongin. My gaze immediately shifted to the shattered piece of glass and the collapsed Baekhyun, beside him lay a bloodstained man with a piece of glass having pierced through his chest.

That person, was Junmyeon.

Chapter 5

"Leader!! Chanyeol's mouth agape, as he rushed over from the stairs, kneeled on the ground and watched Junmyeon helplessly. Jongin dashed over too and lifted leader's head to rest on his thighs and attempted to stop the blood from escaping his chest using his palm, a piece of shattered glass was pierced into Junmyeon's right ribs while all he did was pant heavily without a word.

"Leader! Leader you can't die!" Chanyeol cried and said as he watched Junmyeon's breath grew weaker. "I, I .. why .. would I be the leader?"

Baekhyun was rendered speechless.

Jongin silently lifted his head to look at Baekhyun, then at us, Chanyeol gave Baekhyun a strong push as his tears fell, "What have you done!" In that instant, Baekhyun started sobbing too and shook his head continuously.

Yixing squatted down and held Baekhyun's shoulders, "Take your time to speak, what happened."

"I came out in search for water" He looked helplessly at Yixing.

"I know, subsequently?" Yixing asked.

"I walked to the sides of the sofa and discovered a person wearing a hat, standing just beside the mirror with a knife and also a torch" Baekhyun stuttered ceaselessly.

"He looked at me, held the knife beside his face and approached me" Baekhyun spoke and started crying.

"Then then he reached his hand out to me so I pushed him" he said, "he fell backwards and the mirror shattered."

"And you proceeded to murder him?" Tao asked

"No! No! I didn't want to! I didn't want to!" he looked frantically at everyone, "he laid on the ground with a muffled voice and said something I couldn't even grasp hold of ..."

Baekhyun's eyes took much difficulty to recall all that happened in the dark, "then, then, he crawled towards me and grabbed my hand"

No one uttered a single word, subsequent events were all crystal clear to them, Baekhyun had picked up a piece of the shattered mirror and slashed him all over.

"Leader" Sehun and Kyungsoo crowded over, we didn't move forward, giving them their space.

However, Junmyeon's breaths became more rapid, he had long lost the ability to speak and

just continued shaking his head. He scanned and searched through the crowd and suddenly grabbed onto Jongin's hands, as though wanting to utter something. Eventually, a tear drop fell, and the breathing stopped.

Those were probably reluctant tears because as I observed, there was no knife on the ground, just a screwdriver.

Luhan picked up the screwdriver and a screw which had fallen from the broken mirror, he looked at Baekhyun, "the knife you were talking about was probably this."

"Before heading upstairs today, Junmyeon told me his suspicions about a hearing device from beneath this mirror." Luhan continued, "he didn't inform us and came down to check alone."

"And why didn't you inform us?" Jongin lifted his vengeance filled eyes, Luhan was lost for words.

"How would Luhan know he was coming down, you can't simply push the blame to someone else!" Tao's tone was still that of someone who did not think before speaking.

"It was himself who suggested not turning on the lights, which led to the misunderstanding by Baekhyun!"

"Hey, bro!" Tao said as he fidgeted with his sleeves, "everything was caused by Baekhyun, there is no point in blaming us, in the end it's just Baekhyun who doesn't trust us, he thinks that we would be out to kill in the middle of the night!"

"That's not it" Baekhyun said as he sobbed, I thought that was the psychotic man"

"Baekhyun's innocence and flaws is nothing worth your judgements" Chanyeol looked at the ground instead of Tao, "leader would forgive him, as long as it wasn't intentional."

"Of course it isn't of my authority," Tao's eyes reddened again, "all of you never wanted to be on the same team as me."

"Huang Zitao stop speaking!" Luhan hollered in Chinese.

"If you were this reluctant to be on the team, you could have said so," Jongin commented as he walked up front, "We don't need you."

"You think I never voiced it? Tao's eyes reflected an alluring gaze as he took a few steps in front.

"Are you picking a fight?" Jongin's eyes were in fury.

"You think you would win?" Tao slanted his head and stared at him.

"Enough." I spoke coldly.

Kyungsoo helped Baekhyun up, with his face covered in tears, he turned back to take another glance at Junmyeon, Yixing walked over to tug Tao backwards a little. Tao grievously looked at Yixing while Yixing shook his head.

Chanyeol's gaze never left Baekhyun while Jongin just stood rooted to the ground, with no intention to move.

"This is also a segment of the game." I said to Jongin.

Luhan watched the both of us before coming forward to pull Jongin, "let's move leader down to the basement."

Leaving us an expression of rivalry, Jongin turned his back and lifted Junmyeon to the basement with Chanyeol. Luhan rushed over to help open the basement doors. Kyungsoo bent down to clean up the traces of blood, and the few pieces of of glass still left against the

wall, perfectly depicting our faces of segregation.

Everything returned to the calm and clarity from before. Chanyeol and the rest scrambled back upstairs, I grabbed hold of Luhan.

"Is there water upstairs?" I asked him.

He shook his head impatiently, "I checked, there isn't even water in the bathroom, there are lots of alcohol, a wide range of liquor."

Liquor? Getting drunk was not a really bad choice but if I were to sober up thereafter, the countdown block would have reached 0.

"We have food here," Yixing said to Luhan, I stared at Yixing, trying to keep in the concerns I had.

"Oh really." Luhan bent his head, and remained silent.

"Are you hungry?" Yixing widened his eyes and asked Luhan in a deeply pressured voice.

Just a few years ago, Yixing was required to lose weight in preparation for debut and Luhan had stolen a packet of instant noodles, back then, he said "You must be hungry," in the exact same tone.

Certain things, have subconsciously become habits.

Luhan lifted his head to gaze at Yixing while he grasped Luhan's hand and dashed to the kitchen, I followed suit, watching him conveniently open the refrigerator to retrieve a sandwich, "There are only chilled ones, consume it quickly, consume it here."

Luhan looked at Yixing, grabbed the sandwich and started devouring. He forced himself to chew and swallow at an increased pace, revealing a smile which hadn't been seen in a long, long time.

That foolish, frowned-brow smile.

"Do you want another?" Yixing pointed at the fridge.

"I'm good," Luhan wiped his mouth, "If I don't go up soon they would start with the suspicions." Luhan turned his head to look at me, "thank you." he said.

After all he was slightly distant from me, though it was just a sandwich, I found the thanks unnecessary, I still owe you an N number of meals.

"Do you want to bring Tao one" He maintained his gaze on me.

"Forget it, that's too risky." I pondered for awhile before speaking, "moreover, he often starves himself." As I recalled his yearns for chips every night at the dorms in the past.

"Then I'm leaving," Luhan gave Yixing a pat on his shoulders, acknowledging his leave by nodding at me before hopping his way up, leaving me and Yixing in the kitchen.

In the dark night, reliant on the borrowed glimmer of moonlight, I seemed to have returned to the winter 5 years ago, lunar spring festival.

Back then, Yixing stood in the exact same way in the kitchen, reliant on that dim lit moonlight, he boasted about the expectations and hopes he had brought with him to Korea and how many people were present to send him off.

"My principal mentioned during assembly that I came to Korea and that I have my own tieba

now!" He said satisfactorily and confidently with those dimples of his, "I will definitely become somebody, if I don't, I'm definitely not returning!"

The former him was full of blabbers, unlike the silent and calm person now.

"I'm unlike you, grown to be this dashing and I'm unlike the others who can manage things well, he lowered his head, "I must be successful in one aspect, no, the best to be exact."

"How many people are attracted by you?" I asked. He placed his fingers beneath his chin and recalled, "Dad, Mum, Grandfather, Grandmother, people from the liberal arts society in school and people from my class came too, my homeroom teacher, teacher Oh who thought me to sing and a few other juniors"

"How many people do you think are fans of me?" I smiled at him.

"Are you implying there is more than mine?" he pouted.

I lowered my head, smiled and shook it. "None." To be honest, I did not want to make myself look that pathetic, I had the initial attention to pull a lame joke.

Yixing practised dancing like mad, being the earliest to reach daily and the latest to leave. He danced even when others were sleeping or even reuniting for lunch, when people relaxed and enjoyed entertainment, he was dancing too. People who neglected him had no choice but to start noticing, watching as a China trainee like himself trained and sweated like rain in the dance studio with his disheveled hair, experiencing the subconscious amount of pressure posted.

"Yixing senior really loves dancing", said Chanyeol who attended the same class as me.

"He is really desperate to debut" Kyungsoo whispered to Junyemeon, as I accidentally eavesdropped while passing by.

In winter 2010, certain things changed, he seemed to become calmer and silent, I walked into the bathroom to see a bottle of wine, along with a sober him.

He used to be really cautious, avoiding the violation of rules.

Lifting his head to see me, he laughed, "Do you think we are being foolish?"

I took the wine bottle from him, sat myself down and started drinking.

"I broke up with her." He said capriciously.

"It is just a break up, something which was bound to happen anyway." I said.

"I have been dancing to the extent" he continued speaking, "that I've lost everything Will I still be able to debut?"

I retained the silence, looking at him whose faced remained as pale even after being drunk.

"If I am unable to debut What do I do" He laughed slightly, "I haven't even graduated from high school."

"There would be no regrets, it's the same for me." I stared at that bottle of wine.

"Five years," he raised his fingers, "I'm giving myself five years If I don't debut in five years' time, I'm returning home."

"Returning home for what?" I said.

"To search for a job, to feed myself." He smiled, "Look at my face would I succeed as a bar dancer?"

I looked at him and shook my head in ignorance, "This is my business If you would like

to compete, you need to do some plastic surgery.”

“Hey,” he too shakes his fingers ignorantly, “You as a bar dancer? This business would not pass

I smiled and shook my head while dragging him up from the toilet floor and out the door to see drizzles which did not pose much of a hindrance.

“Do you have a cigarette?” He asked me with his reddish eyes.

“I thought you don’t smoke?” I said.

“Give me one.” He said as he reached into my pocket for the half filled cigarette box, retrieved a stick and place it in his mouth then reached back in for the lighter. It took him forever to lit it.

“Give it to me.” I snatched lighter and lit the cigarette for him as I watched him cough and choke.

I reached for one too and lit it. In that night where our future seemed blatantly unpredictable, we both knew however, it was the best night ever.

From the kitchen, Yixing’s eyes contact followed Luhan up the stairs and back to the bedroom. Leaning against the kitchen table top, I watched Luhan leap rapidly up to the 2nd floor, greeting Chanyeol and then patting Jongin’s hands. In that darkness, Chanyeol and Luhan flailed their arms and turned around, using the voice they thought was soft to continue with their chatting topic.

“Baekhyun would never do such a thing, I am unable to believe this.” He shook his head, commenting in a really assuring voice.

“He would never, but someone would make him,” Jongin’s voice was mildly soft.

Chanyeol froze for seconds and opened his mouth huge, “Are you saying Kris

Jongin stared at him and turned to glance around, “Would you please lower volume!”

Chanyeol covered his mouth and blanked out for a moment, “Kris would never do such a thing when it comes to killing, he would probably do it personally.”

This moved me for a moment, indeed someone who has trained with me for so many years, he had probably witnessed me receiving scoldings in class all too often, it was unbelievable to malign me for having the intellectual ability to send someone off committing a murder.

“Then who would it be, it can’t be Kyungsoo or Sehun who ordered Baekhyun to kill leader, I wouldn’t believe that even if they were crazy

“Hey~~ In comparison,” Chanyeol drifted into deep thoughts, “it seems like Kris is the most suspicious

I imagined his retarded expression, lowered my head and held in my laughter.

“Oh right, there is Yixing!” Chanyeol exclaimed as though he had found a new path and received another glare from Jongin who then covered his mouth and scolded, “Luhan is in the bedroom behind so would you please keep your noise level down!”

“Also, Yixing is the leader.” Chanyeol said in a deep voice.

“That kid,” Jongin shook his head, “his sole enemy is himself.” He lifted his head to look at the ceiling, “So what if he is the leader, you are the leader but you’re equally useless.”

Chanyeol bent his head and played with his figures, giving Jongin a whiny, misunderstood

and unjustified look.

"I don't think anyone of them would do such a thing" Chanyeol said in a daze, his eyes looked like a set of windows, undamaged regardless of the blows. "Perhaps things may not be that complicated."

Jongin lowered his head in silence.

"Leader went down to check the mirror, Baekhyun went out and saw leader. Because the surroundings were pitch dark and he was afraid" Chanyeol continued, "he lost his composure and pushed the mirror against leader."

Chanyeol ran his hands through his hair.

"I have known Junmyeon for 6 years," Jongin whispered, "6 years he had never once looked at me with those expressions like just now As though yearning to say something" Chanyeol touched his back.

"If this game was real," he lifted his head, "I would definitely not die earlier than that gang."

I know, and in that gang, I was included.

I was reluctant to listen on and just as I was about to return to the bedroom, Baekhyun gently opened the door and walked out, in the pitch darkness, he seemed especially minute. Chanyeol was obviously alarmed by the movements and sounds so he looked towards that direction, realising it was Baekhyun, he ignored Jongin's gestures of holding him back and jumped down the steps with his long legs. He gave Baekhyun a hug and intended to take Baekhyun upstairs, Baekhyun hesitated for a moment but followed him.

I walked towards the bedroom to see Sehun and Kyungsoo who were doubtfully asleep and Yixing who sat beside the windows. I walked over and sat beside him.

"I am extremely thirsty." He said.

"If you sleep, you won't be thirsty." I replied.

"I might just be dead tomorrow so sleeping today is not worth it." He glanced out the window, there was an unusually great amount of stars today. But of course, it may have been due to my inconsistent habit of looking at the sky.

"That is indefinite," I patted the back on my hand and glanced at him, "perhaps you would live till the end."

"A person like me?" he looked at himself in contempt.

"What kind of person are you?" I asked jokingly.

"I'm the kind who would be killed the moment I join," he expressed his largest self confession, "and I have been really unlucky recently, last week my watch turned faulty, the week before my ice cream cone broke and dropped on the floor" Although it was difficult for me to compare the past two incidents with our current one, I pretended to be understanding and gave him a pat.

"Up till now, I still refuse to accept the fact that," he said gloomily, "I am unable to eat some good food before meeting my death, if only they knew how many years I had been on a diet for"

As I observed this glutton, my heart started feeling unusually calm.

" It has been more than a year since I went home and I haven't even gotten my salary from last month " with his incessant complains, he basically emphasized the theory that death came at a wrong time.

I leaned against the window and pointed outside, "Look, at least the night scenery today is beautiful."

In the instant pause, he asked me, "If you survived, what would you do?" His eyes brightened up, resembling the stars outside. "I would lead a normal life." I answered.

"And how are you going to live normally?" He questioned.

"Probably ... eating, sleeping and drinking." I vowed. If it was me in the past, I would definitely have left out the "drinking" line.

"Hey," he rested his hands against the back of his head, revealing his two dimples vaguely, "If you were to die tomorrow, you would probably be sleeping and eating today, apart from the fact that you can't drink water."

"That might not be the case." I smiled and replied.

"If tomorrow is my death day," I looked out the window, "I would probably find someone to share a kiss with."

He froze for two seconds and laughed cheekily, "regrettably, through the past few years your personality has shaped negatively, with all the male hormones."

"That is why I won't die." I said.

"Look! There is a female mosquito here!" Ignoring my look of despise, he continued pointing his fingers at me.

Are you sure I won't kiss it to death?" I slanted my eyes and said.

"If you really can't do it, Luhan should be able to collaborate." He said passionately, giving in all the constructive suggestions.

"I am really picky," I tidied my collar.

"Congratulations for picking my right hand after all these years." He smiled and said. I froze for two seconds before sending him a kick, saying, "it is incomparable to the model affair you have with your left hand."

Baekhyun and Chanyeol's conversation continued, just like the old days. I failed to remember the conversation and I wasn't exactly sure why but as I opened my mouth, it felt as if I could talk to the air anytime because I knew that it would reply. I could almost imitate Zhang Yixing.

"I am going to stop speaking." He closed his eyes and said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I need to conserve my saliva" and continued to speak with his closed eyes, "hanging out with you offers no escape, I need to save myself."

"Congratulations on your perfect self teaching method," I said, "everyone has their good traits."

"Why didn't I choose Luhan then?" He frowned.

"You could have saved this line as a puzzle for yourself," I squinted my eyes, "voicing it out was not necessary."

"According to your intellectual ability, you would be done by the others in a few." He said helplessly and painfully.

"After all I am bigger in size, it would take some time for people to defeat me," I said in contempt towards him, "the one who is easier to defeat would be you, dancing machine."

"Oh yes, repetitive machine," he looked at me attentively, "which of your buddies can help us spy a little."

"Chanyeol?" I rolled my eyes, "Why won't you just look for Luhan."

"Why aren't you looking for Tao?" he squinted his eyes, leaned on me and yawned.

"You think Tao would talk to me? It would already be considered good if he doesn't hit me." I pulled a blanket and covered his body.

"If you have done something wrong, you deserve punishment." He voiced, never failing to give me sincere advises at the correct time.

"Are you going to sleep?" I looked at him, "With less than 40 hours to live, you are actually preparing to fall asleep right before death."

"It is basic human instinct, just like kissing." He said as he shut his eyes, "people who sleep to death are most blessed."

"If someone comes along to kill you, I won't save you." I continued.

"Alright, see you in heaven." He hummed.

"What if I was the one who killed you." I said.

"Then you would go to hell to decide, just you?" he twists the edge of his mouth scornfully.

I didn't mind that look of disdain on his face, in fact, I laughed, we were all pretty much used to this kind of contempt towards each other.

Yixing drifted off to sleep, I shifted his body to lean against the bedside then gently walked out the door and towards the bathroom. In the pitch darkness, I watched as Baekhyun lay beside the glass wares in the living room, not certain of his actions. I left the bedroom door ajar for him, in half an hour or so, he got up and strolled towards the bathroom. He turned on the lights, I leaned against the doors to watch him approach the mirror, whip out an eyeliner and start drawing those eyes carefully. He proceeded with the right eye after the left and then occasionally wiping it off, as though preparing for a performance right at the moment.

Lowering my head, I suppressed the really peculiar feeling in me and in failure to think of any ideas, I left the door open and crept stealthily back to the bedroom.

Chapter 6

The next afternoon, the faint tinkling of glasses and bottles outside woke me up. Everyone creased their eyebrows due to jet lag and fear, but nevertheless no one was able to fight against the fatigue.

"What are they doing?" Sehun turned his body around and muttered.

"Somebody might be coming to save us," I closed my eyes and creased my brows, "The truth revealed, and there's police outside."

"That'd obviously be the best but..." Kyungsoo said, "But don't you think they're coming a little too late?"

Baekhyun rubbed his eyes and sat up, looked at the door and said, "I'll go out and see."

The moment he stood up, I overcame my fatigue, struggled to get up and staggered over, "I'll go with you."

To our disappointment, the police were nowhere to be found, but only Chanyeol and Luhan placing a few empty goblets on the tea table. Jongin and Tao were sitting on the sofa, each holding onto 3 bottles of Vodka and Tequila each and raised their voices at us, "We were too thirsty and we found a few bottles of alcohol, let's drink them together."

A sleeping, black Scorpion was drawn onto the table glass overnight, and in that instant, the pace of my heartbeat felt a little off beat.

"Who drew this?" Baekhyun said.

"Me." Chanyeol said, "You guys came too late, and I was bored so I drew a little."

"Did you miss Kris so much?" Baekhyun walked over to Chanyeol and shoved him a little, rubbed his eyes, turned and walked back to the bedroom. He knocked on the door and hollered, "Wake up! We're having alcohol!"

I gazed at the Scorpion drawn onto the glass and my heart pounded. I vaguely remembered something, but it felt like a dream.

After about 2 minutes, Sehun staggered out of the bedroom unsteadily. "What alcohol..." He stared at the neat rows of goblets lining the glass table oddly.

"There isn't water anywhere in this entire building, but the second floor has a few bottles of alcohol..." Chanyeol opened a bottle of Vodka and poured it into the cups one by one.

"Even though this isn't that good for the stomach, but... it's definitely better as compared to dying of thirst." He looked at me and Sehun, and gestured to us to drink.

Tao walked up to the front, took a glass nearest to the edge of the table, followed by Jongin and Luhan. Luhan held up a glass, pushed the glass next to it in my direction and glanced at me. Sehun also thought of getting a glass, and just as he was reaching out for it, Chanyeol took it, and he had to take the glass behind it.

"Ah~ Seriously~~" Chanyeol rubbed his stomach and placed the glass he took back to its original position, "First, I have to get rid of this personal problem." He said as he ran to the toilet.

"Sigh, Kyungsoo and Yixing are still not waking up." Baekhyun walked to the table, and just then, Chanyeol walked out of the toilet. They made eye contact for a moment, Baekhyun's hand hesitated and took a glass, and Chanyeol quickly took the glass behind it, but it wasn't the glass that he took from Sehun beforehand.

"Kyungsoo!" Jongin yelled loudly, "Wake up!" but Luhan simply walked into our bedroom and dragged Yixing up.

There were only 2 glasses of alcohol left on the tea table; Yixing rubbed his eyes as he walked to the table. Tao suddenly held up one of the glasses and handed it to Yixing. Kyungsoo arrived a few moments later, and had to take the last glass of alcohol.

I saw that Chanyeol's and Kai's expressions were a little odd, and this expression didn't falter but instead, intensified as Kyungsoo gulped the alcohol down. This was especially prominent in Chanyeol as he slowly walked by Kyungsoo's side with a pale face, concerned about his every move and even wanted to make him sit.

These odd actions were quickly explained, Kyungsoo quickly curled up on the sofa, clutching his chest and panted with an abnormally painful expression on his face. Chanyeol

seemed to be at a loss as he knelt beside the sofa, using his hand to wipe away Kyungsoo's sweat. Jongin tried to make him sit up, repeating, "Vomit it out, vomit it out!" "What happened?" I pulled Chanyeol away from the sofa. "My heart feels very uncomfortable... I can't breathe..." Kyungsoo held onto his chest tightly, his breathing rapidly increasing. "Is he allergic to alcohol?" I heard Yixing ask Sehun softly. "No, we drank together before in the past, he had a good alcohol tolerance level ..." Sehun was alarmed, and looked at the bunch of people, terror-stricken. "Hold on... Don't give up..." Chanyeol sobbed as he held Kyungsoo in his arms, "Sorry... Sorry..."

The movements of the person in his arms gradually died down, until a few minutes later when he stopped moving completely. Chanyeol stared blankly at the person he was holding in his arms, and did not dare to check if he was still breathing. "He's dead." Tao lightly touched the edge of his nose to check for any signs of breathing, and looked at Chanyeol. Within those few seconds of silence, everyone probably harbored various different thoughts. "What did you put in the alcohol?" I looked at Chanyeol. Chanyeol ignored me and continued hugging Kyungsoo blankly. He seemed to not have figured out his thoughts.

Jongin gradually became sober from the grief, stood in front of Tao, raised his head and slowly said, "You cheated." Astonishingly, Tao did not defend himself, submerged his hands in his pockets and looked away.

"If the game is going to be played this way," Jongin said, "Talking about being fair chances is just bullshit, isn't it, panda?" He said and shoved Tao's chest. Tao bit on his lip, and actually didn't retort, as opposed to how he would normally react.

"A panda would only let another panda survive, the irony would be the penguins that believed him." Jongin laughed till he looked extremely unsightly. "This is too absurd." Luhan said, "Who was the one who played fraud first? If it had been an arbitrary decision, Sehun would have been the person lying down here right now, dead."

I watched them quietly, enjoying the show.

Sehun lowered his head, expressionless, and looked at his wine glass which was half empty. I closed my eyes and suddenly felt very weary and disgusted; it could be the side effects of consuming alcohol with an empty stomach. The silent Scorpion on the tea table quietly shook its poisonous tail ostentatiously.

I don't remember how they handled with Kyungsoo's corpse, and couldn't recall the arguments they had. I only remember Yixing leaning against my side, sighing softly. "The end of the Scorpion's tail was probably poisonous." He said. "I don't know." I said.

He glanced at me again, walked over and placed his own transparent goblet on top of the black Scorpion's tail, gently turning the glass. What a perfect collaboration, what an ideal marking.

Sehun slowly leaned over. He hasn't put his glass down yet.
"Who do they want to kill?" He said.

That was a good question asked; perhaps they themselves didn't even have a unified answer yet. My train of thoughts were interrupted when I heard the sound of an object smashing onto the floor upstairs.

"I only said that I didn't know the overall side effects of these heart disease pills." It was Luhan's voice.

"It was one entire bottle; the effects were expected!" Chanyeol's voice.

"Fuck, you sound as if you didn't agree in the first place..." Tao cursed in Mandarin.

"What are you saying! Speak in Korean!" Jongin's voice, the sonance of the table being pushed.

"I'm saying that everyone agreed from the start! Now what is all this fuss about?" Tao cursed loudly.

"I agreed to two pills! Not the entire bottle!" Chanyeol's husky voice was especially prominent, "What I agreed to, was to make them unconscious so that they wouldn't be able to attack us..." What he said after that was muffled out by the sounds of Jongin's and Tao's violent argument.

Subsequently there were sounds of heavy objects crashing onto the floor. I took a few steps to the foot of the stairs to witness Jongin strangling Luhan by the neck, up against the wall.

"Remember this, you're the one who killed Do Kyungsoo, and Kim Junmyeon." Jongin's face was flushed red, and swung Luhan's face to the side. Luhan's eyelids drooped down, watching the floor.

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Tao's voice reverberated, and pushed Jongin away from behind with one blow, hitting the floor directly.

"How was Kim Junmyeon's death even attributed to Luhan?!"

"Junmyeon only told him! He only told him!" Jongin stood up and screamed at Tao, a tearful tone in his voice.

"Enough." Luhan interrupted the discomposed voices and fixed his collar, "There was bound to be someone dead."

There was silence for two seconds, Park Chanyeol narrowed his eyes as he looked at Luhan, "Yes, you've probably sequenced the order of our deaths, when am I going to die?"

"You've overestimated me." Luhan said, "But if you continue this way, I reckon that you'll probably die before me."

Chapter 7

It was a sunlit day, flowers and plants outside the window blossomed as though obnoxiously

showing off their willpower. Under the reminder of the ticking countdown timer, our life seemingly evaporated into the colorful surroundings of the house.

2 hours later, Luhan descended the stairs.

"Thank you," I uttered randomly, knowing he would understand.

"Why the formalities." He totally expressed no intention of attending to me and approached Sehun who in the corner who momentarily squinched his little eyes and revealed a smile.

"Are you fine." Luhan walked over and rustled his hair.

"My tummy is a little uncomfortable." Sehun rubbed his gastric although his eyes remained fixated on Luhan's face.

"It's because you drank liquor with an empty stomach, you need to consume something, oh? Don't you" he spoke and turned to me, "Don't you have food?"

Sehun rubbed his tummy and whispered into Luhan's ears, Luhan seemed to calm down and he flashed a smile. Sehun hurriedly dragged him into a kitchen, probably to feed him another sandwich.

I lowered my head, he had such immense popularity, if I was in that group, would this dazed dummy beside me right now inform me about food? I glanced at Yixing, another person had fallen before he even had time to comb his hair which now resembled a distorted bird nest, his hands dipped into his pockets as he bent at his waist, fixing his eyes at a spot on the ground. I wondered what he was thinking.

Since he had told Luhan, he would probably have told me too. I comforted myself with the self question and answers deciding then and there to treat him better.

Chanyeol descended the stairs, his expression wasn't as joyful as it used to be.

"How is it?" I placed my arm on his shoulder, "the rap we were supposed to film for the MV today, have you memorised it all?"

He lifted his bulging eyes to look at me but remained silent.

"You don't have to feel apologetic." I looked at him, "You should learn from Luhan, it is a game afterall." I pointed to the kitchen.

He lowered his head, seeming to ponder over something rigid and after a moment, he lifted his head, "I don't want to kill anyone."

"Neither do I." I said, "Then do you want to live?"

He thought about it and nodded his head vigorously.

"Killing me or dying, which would you choose?" I joked.

He broke the short period of silence and said, "What about you, kill Yixing or die, which would you choose?"

I glanced over at the still dazed Zhang Yixing, his soul seemed to have left. I sent Chanyeol's shoulders a pat and brought his ears close to me, "I cannot be of comparison to you, I am a lot more narcissistic."

"If this is the only way to survival, I would rather die." He stood behind me. I lowered my head in remorse, that perspective of mine, had disappeared since I was age 10.

I smiled and turned to look at him, "It is easier said than done." I said and left him my backview.

By noon, everyone rested disorderly in the living room, thirst had overtaken our power of speech.

Tao emptied an entire bottle of wine, looking at me through his forcefully opened eyes in that drunk and dazy state of his.

Chanyeol and Baekhyun lay on the sofa, observing their palmistry, Chanyeol exclaimed exaggeratingly that he would meet with a robbery in his life this year.

Which reminded me, this year was my coming of age year, Luhan's too.

"Stop looking at me, I'm not wearing red undergarments." The sound of him travelled although his back was turned, seemingly knowing I was thinking of something.

"Bro what did you say?" Sehun leaned in and question.

"I said I am unlucky this year." He reached out to touch Sehun's ears.

"You will survive." Sehun squinched his eyes and said.

Luhan laughed, "I will try my best."

"If I die will you be upset?" Sehun looked up.

Luhan lifted arm in slow motion and gently rustled Sehun's hair.

"I haven't been to see your house in Beijing." Sehun lowered his head again and fiddled with his fingers.

I observed as Luhan's eyes shifted its attention towards the window motioning to speak but swallowed it back again. I knew he resembled me, not being the type who would call home to his parents often.

Befriending Luhan was a 2008 event.

He had mistakenly signed a contract because of many inappropriate reasons, in between the two years of wait he thought of endless ways to join other companies. Right to the end when he was on the verge of giving up, an opportunity fell right before his eyes. Upon debuting, we agreed on keeping mum about the procedure he went through to enter this company, to be honest I knew, his preparation time took longer than anyone else.

Both Yixing and I auditioned before coming to Korea but as for him, he came to await and audition.

Entry to the company was smooth for him, having a grasp of fluent Korean which was better than anyone else alongside his ultimately unique talent, making friends. Initially, I hadn't favoured him, on his long list of friends, I seemed like the only exception. We shared a common language, a common friend Yixing, two people who were supposedly able to get along however developed into feign avoidance.

Upon debut, he nailed the label of being adorable. With such a succeeding degree of adaptations, from game rules to using them, he learnt it unbelievably fast. Having the looks and popularity which could not easily be overshadowed by mine and the fact that he was older than me, it gave us an abnormal level of coordination. However, we didn't simply click just like that, on the contrary, I enjoyed hanging out with Tao who idolized me and he liked hanging out Yixing, throwing insults at each other.

Estimateably, we all enjoyed befriending people who didn't appear as threats or harm.

Luhan seldom returned home or even call, unlike Yixing and Tao who made calls almost every three days. He was exceptionally similar to me in this aspect but we have never talked about it. To be honest, Luhan did not have an adorable personality, he hated being cute and I was unsure if he was actually thankful for that face. In private, he didn't enjoy

talking that much, I often observed as he smoked in a deserted corner, he was indeed a heavy smoker.

"Are you returning home next month? Will you help me bring some things back." He rarely asked me for help, which left a very deep impression.

"What? Nothing too heavy." I said.

"It isn't." He passed me a white carrier "It is nothing too expensive, thanks for taking the trouble."

He was forever being that polite which probably attributed to the fact that I appeared really coldly.

It was a beautiful pair of earrings, I passed it to the girl but she didn't appear to be as elated as expected.

"Thank you for taking the trouble." She retrieved the earring box but did not even give it glance before keeping it in her bag.

"Is there no message you want me to pass Luhan?" I spoke awkwardly.

"Ask him to work hard." The girl's face was calm as water, "Also, don't give me anymore things in the future."

I brought that sentence along with me, nothing more. In that autumn Seoul, I still remember his honest expressions. In the years that came, he maintained his liveliness, popularity and even his craziness He had his closest best friend Oh Luhan, expectedly debuted, rose to fame and popularity, nevertheless, hiding in places fans could not go to feed his smoking habit.

It was those tiny changes, the invisible ones just like that expression he just portrayed ... I wasn't intimate with him, but I never failed to notice the tiny faults everyone else could not spot.

Perhaps, we were just that similar.

Oh sehun sat in a corner of that living room silently staring at the dance machine beside him. Suddenly, his eyes brightened.

Those 2 machines we turned a blind eye on, those two non existent yet distinct dance machines. I scrambled to my feet and walked over to see a little signage hung:

Dear boys,

You want some water?

You have to fight for it.

You are all good at dancing. Choose one from each team!

The one who wins gets the water. The one who loses gets some punishment.

"Fuck!" I grabbed the signage with much agitation and hurled at the dancing machine, using my legs to kick it wildly while Zhang Yixing came and hugged me from behind. "Is it fucking fun!" I turned and screamed at the countdown board before having Yixing pushed me onto the sofa.

He panted and stared at me just like I did and after awhile I admitted defeat before lifting my

head backwards. I guess I had just used up my last drop of saliva, never speaking again.

Everyone fell silent, although the dancing was originally our job, the dehydrated bunch of us had already lost the power to dance. Moreover, there was that little punishment.

But if we didn't dance, there would be no water.

Amidst my daydreams, I forgot the time but the person who snapped me out of it, was Jongin's voice.

"Come on, Lay!" He said.

Chapter 8

Everyone's watchful gaze coherently landed on Yixing, who was sitting on the sofa, taken aback for 2 seconds before standing up subconsciously.

"His waist injury hasn't healed yet." I held onto Yixing, who was walking towards the Dance Revolution machine, "It was the performance before we boarded the plane, you know it." I looked at Jongin pointedly.

He let out a grunt of displeasure and looked at me mockingly, "Why? How about you play with me then?"

I held back my reply, I was a coward.

"Who doesn't have any injury," Jongin smirked, his gaze belittling Yixing. That was the gaze Yixing was all too familiar with when he first arrived in Korea, he knew Yixing's weakness too well.

"It's okay, I'm alright." Sure enough, Yixing pulled my hand away, walked away from my side and stood onto the Dance Revolution machine. Luhan looked at me anxiously, his gaze almost saying, "What do you want?"

I felt like slapping myself a hundred times, I felt like pulling Yixing down from the Dance Revolution machine, but I didn't. Instead, I foolishly watched my brothers court their own deaths.

"Lay, you're an opponent I respect, but you will not taste victory." Jongin crossed his arms as he scrutinized Yixing. Yixing was silent as he stared at the screen.

"Let's start?" Jongin looked at Yixing provocatively.

Suddenly, Luhan exclaimed, "Hold on!"

The two people standing on the Dance Revolution machine turned their heads and looked at Luhan, expecting him to continue.

Luhan looked at me then at Jongin, he seemed like he was at a loss for words, "What will... the punishment be?" He asked.

"I don't know." Jongin said, "Or else, you could dance on my behalf, when you lose to Lay, you'll then be able know the punishment." He was calm and composed as he looked at Luhan.

"Moments ago, didn't you just say that there'd bound to be people dead?" He sneered at Luhan, waiting for Luhan's decision, "Why? You changed your principles when you become the target?"

Staring at the screen of the Dance Revolution machine, Luhan was silent for a long time.

"Let's start." Yixing said, back facing the members.

"How do you want to play? Freestyle doubles?" Kim Jongin looked at him and asked, Yixing lifted his head, and everyone knew what it stood for.

We were all too familiar with Dance Revolution machines; especially the Piu Dance Machine we were looking at right now, it was the type of dance machine we used to train with back then. The Piu Dance Machine, also named the New Century Dancer, became popular in Asia within a decade, and its popularity can be accounted for its difficulty and its many complicated styles.

For people with dance backgrounds, the objective and mode of the Dance Revolution machine has already surpassed the norm. For freestyle, dancing ability and confidence would be the main scoring points, implying that one has to go by instinct to know the moves beforehand, and this did not appear impossible for one like me.

However, for Jongin and Yixing, not only could they play the most advanced level of freestyle, they could also set their own difficulty for the game. For example, like what Jongin mentioned just now, one person would play the parts meant for two, implying that their score would double every time they make a move, and usually, their hands would be full from all the work.

We have all played this "impossible" game in the past when we were wagering, and even these 2 people have had a difficult time trying to pass this level. If one lost his calm and confidence during the game, it would be an immediate mess.

Yixing smiled, his eyes drooped, "I'll go with anything."

"The third song," Jongin looked at the screen.

Turning around, Zhang Yixing froze for a moment before speaking in Mandarin, "Get out of

here alive, my parents are in your hands.”

Then, he motioned for Jongin to start.

I was unsure if that was directed to me or Luhan, I did not even manage to give him a reply when he started the game.

What I saw was a game that didn't seem like a game at all, and to be precise, it was torture.

Every time Yixing needed to bend his waist and limbs to touch the arrows on the dance platform, I never failed to witness his sweat trickling down the ends of his hair and the drops of sweat which were flung away, in flow with his vigorous body movements. That gaze of his did not dare to relax at any moment, that expression that told us that he was still holding on even though he couldn't keep up anymore, did not appear unfamiliar to me.

Countless late nights, solitary dance studios, in front of the huge mirror inconsistently flickered a glimmer of hope and confidence, along with the unwavering mood, despair. “Your movements are not explosive enough.” The dance teacher said, impassive. This was the reason why Yixing was unable to be promoted to the ace class after the dance assessment back in that summer in 2009. To Yixing, one who specialized in dance, not belonging to the ace class implied that he had absolutely no hopes of debuting.

“I have the endurance.” Yixing replied, bowing.

I wasn't bewildered because he would always remind you that he's still alive when you thought he was abrogated.

I had already forgotten how long it had been, but I knew that the two were already at the stage where they were struggling to persevere. The two dehydrated men gritted their teeth, faces ghastly. Zhang Yixing's waist was probably numb and unfeeling by now, and due to a long period of hunger, Kim Jongin's expression wasn't good as well; that expression that told us that he was going to faint was probably begging for the game to come to a quick end.

At that instant when both of them completed the same movement, the game halted. Both game screens stated that the stage was cleared, told them to enter the next round by hitting the button.

Kneeling on the dance platform, both people panted and heaved loudly, staring at the screens, not a single word was able to escape from their lips. Yixing lowered his head, bit on his lip and shut his eyes tightly, his left hand holding onto his waist, and he wasn't even able to stand up. Jongin's lips were deathly pale, both his palms on the floor supporting him, waves of nausea overcoming him incessantly.

If they were to dance another round, we'd undoubtedly be able to have a winner without

having them dance till the end.

“They can’t continue on anymore, we’ll have people to substitute them.” Sehun walked up and smiled in my direction.

Opposite us, Luhan stood up and walked up to the Dance Revolution machine. He turned around to look at Chanyeol and Tao and said to Chanyeol, “See, this is retribution, I just said that you’ll die in front of me.”

Perspiration continued to drip from Yixing. He was sprawled on the floor looking at Luhan with eyes filled with worry.

“How are we going to play?” Luhan smiled as he looked at Sehun.

“Your choice,” Sehun cocked his head to the side.

“We can’t play freestyle, but if we were to play it normally, we wouldn’t be able to distinguish a winner.” Luhan said. Sehun lowered his head, deep in thought, there were definitely many gaming styles, but he and Luhan were good in different aspects; it was a tough decision to make.

“Let’s draw lots.” Luhan turned around to look at Chanyeol.

After running upstairs to find a piece of paper, he asked for Baekhyun’s eyebrow pencil, Chanyeol made around 10 slips of paper, folded them and placed them in his hand.

Luhan motioned to Sehun to let him draw the lot; Sehun picked up a piece of folded paper, opened it, and inside wrote: “Kneeling”

I was stunned.

Kneeling was a dancing style which those crazily superb dancers invented, meaning that one would have to dance on his knees, and this required one to have a lot of strength from the waist and limbs. This was a style in which we would never want to choose, because not only would your knees be scraped, it would also cause one to be prone to waist injuries. Moreover, this dance had no beauty to speak of.

One of the reasons as to why we did not choose this dancing style was because it was used as a form of punishment when we were still trainees. Everyone would be watching the person get punished, and usually one would lose their interest in dance due to the utter humiliation, with some even losing their drive of being a trainee. Sometimes, this was the main motive of the punishment itself; losing interest in being a trainee also meant that debuting was probably not suitable for them. Those who chose to continue would then be less mindful about their reputation, burden, humiliation and slander. They would become more persevering, more competent and would complied well with the company’s expectations, becoming purely a vocational artiste.

Among all 12 of us, only one member who had undergone this punishment, and that very member, was Zhang Yixing.

At the start of 2010, the picking of suitable candidates for the new boy band the company was going to debut was just around the corner, and Zhang Yixing, who had been already promoted to the ace class showing significant improvements, was one of the candidates for the main dancer position. Even though the intense competition continued, Zhang Yixing became the most likely candidate for the main dancer position, coming right after Kim Jongin due to the fact that the company was planning to advance towards the Chinese entertainment market. Even though he was two years a senior ahead, nevertheless, there were many eyeing the main dancer position.

“He’s not even good looking, isn’t it just because he’s Chinese...?” I heard that line while Yixing and I were on our way back to the dormitory, but our intellect told us that we couldn’t afford to make any mistakes during that period of time.

Our flaws just had to emerge at the wrong time. During the night at the end of February in 2010, I received a call from the management leader, telling me to arrive at the small practice room in the company’s guest room at the highest story to be put through the legendary face inspection. During this inspection, my entire face would be accessed and evaluated before deciding if I needed any cosmetic surgery before my debut.

I went for the inspection with perturbed emotions. Even though I was very much against the idea of cosmetic surgery, I still hoped that I would be lucky enough to be able to pass the inspection with my genuine face; maybe I would only need a few fine adjustments.

The guest room was one which I had never visited before, but there wasn’t any professional waiting for me in there, contrary to my expectations. Switching on the lights, I saw a small bathroom, a bedroom with a bed, as well as the legendary small practice room inside the guest room.

Walking into the practice room, I noticed that there were mirrors in all directions, and there were cameras in all corners. A peculiar voice that came from one of the speakers at the corner of the room instructed me to rotate in a 360 degrees motion, to put on various different expressions, to straighten both of my arms, to bend down and more.

I did them.

Subsequently, the voice instructed me to strip myself off my top and jeans, as well as to put on poses the voice instructed me to just now. After much hesitation, I said, “I’ll go to the

washroom first.”

Walking back to the living room, I tried to open the door, but I realized that I had locked the door from inside when I shut it beforehand. Trying to calm myself down, I walked back to the washroom which had a shower. I dialed once, to Zhang Yixing.

After notifying him of my location and situation, Zhang Yixing promptly arrived at the company. Realizing that he did not have the key to the door, he replied me with a text message, “Handle it on your own first, and don’t make them suspicious.”

Soon after, he went over the wall and climbed to the company’s guard room on the second storey, broke the glass, retrieve the keys to the entire building, unlocked the door and fled with me swiftly.

We didn’t inform anyone about it. The next day, before the guards almost informed the police about Zhang Yixing destroying public property and stealing the keys, the management leader held off the matter. “You won’t have to inform the police,” He said, “Tell all the trainees to gather in the multifunction room.”

That day was a sunny one. Zhang Yixing declared, in front of all the trainees, that he only stole the keys because he wanted to check if he had left his wallet in the practice room. Even though his reason was a little absurd for him to get to the extent of smashing the window, the leader did not pursue the matter, but gave Zhang Yixing 2 choices to choose from with a pleased look on his face; Immediate delisting, or undergoing the kneeling dance punishment on the Dance Revolution machine

Thus, Zhang Yixing completed his punishment under the scrutiny of all his senior trainees. His scraped knees and perennial tormenting waist injury was the result of this punishment.

Standing in front of the Dance Revolution machine, Sehun and Luhan were silent, Chanyeol said in a fluster, “This is entirely my fault, I shouldn’t have placed this lot inside, draw again, draw again.”

Hesitating for a moment, Luhan raised his head and said, “Forget it, since the main objective is to distinguish between the winner and loser, this would be the most efficient way.”

Sehun looked at Luhan and smiled, “Moreover, neither of us has tried this style before. It’s fair and just.”

Watching the both of them kneeling on the dance platform in preparation for the game, Yixing, lying on the floor, raised his eyes, “Forget yourself,” He said to Luhan in Mandarin.

Chapter 9

In front of the dance revolution machine, Sehun squinted his eyes and turned, "Don't give in to me." He said.

Head faced in front, Luhan said, "This might just be an ideal excuse. If you win, in the future tell the public that I gave in to you and not that I wasn't good enough."

"You are facing death can you please cut the juvenilities." Sehun pouted.

"Who said I was going to die," Luhan warmed up, "Although I'm just a few years older than you, that doesn't mean I'm not as agile."

"You are the most shameless senior I have met." Sehun shook his head.

"You are the most arrogant youngest of age I have ever seen." Luhan smiled and commented.

"Shall we start?" Luhan turned to Sehun, "You better do your best, there has never been once you've won against me in games."

"You have no say." Sehun avoided the eye contact, "Why did your parents send you to Korea, meeting you was the unluckiest thing that has happened to me in my life."

"My parents didn't send me to Korea," Luhan giggled, they had disdains towards this place, I came on my own accord."

"Ha, that sure has been" Sehun lowered his head, his sentence line dangled halfway through. He didn't complete his sentence, and Luhan hung his head down too.

After a few seconds of silence, Luhan smiled and said to Sehun, "When you get the water, don't forget to make me a cup of bubble tea."

"There is no milk" Sehun set his gaze towards the front, "and no tea."

"Then" Luhan kept his head hung down, "make it when you get out." He smiled as he removed the love ring on his middle finger, "This thing revolves, go play with it."

Sehun picked up the ring, "You haven't figured it out."

"I am not an expert at figuring puzzles" Luhan laughed, "You play with it."

Sehun nodded and received it, wearing it on his middle finger.

At which point will your life start counting down, you will never know.

Both parties were obviously clueless of the kneeling method of playing. Although frantically using their hands in replacement of their knees to cover up the faults, their rhythms still remained a mess. Not even halfway through the game, the mistake indication level continuously accumulated causing Sehun's screen to glow with red light and subsequently, Luhan's red light flashed too.

"Luhan can't continue anymore." Yixing sat on the ground and shook his head, "He is all

messed up.” Jongin who stood on the opposite side yelled at Sehun, “Don’t panic! Take it slow and don’t mess up!”

They all seemed to be helping the wrong people.

As the room for mistakes gradually took decreased, both parties maintained in their kneeling position, panting incoherently, not allowing their line of sight to leave the screen at all. The odd music reverberated solely through the silent living room, the situation from both sides deteriorated rapidly, living just the tiniest chances for mistakes.

Everyone maintained the deafening silence.

Suddenly, Luhan stood up and changed his methods of gaming; using his feet to stamp. The chaotic situation of his took a rapid turn for good and his mistake level started maintaining constant.

Indeed, the dance revolution machine had no idea if the knee or feet was coming into contact.

Sehun astonishingly turned to look at Luhan, unaware of the situation but as he hurriedly turned back to face the screen again, his mistakes level had reached 0.

The ground of the dance revolution machine retracted to it’s two sides revealing a hole in the ground, he fell straight through with no preparations and then I heard two low and deep crashing sounds.

“Ping! Bang!”

The dance revolution machine projected celebrative sounds of Luhan’s victory while an entire carton of mineral water descended from the ceiling, along side some gold powder which landed in Luhan’s hair.

“Sehun!!” Chanyeol shouted into the dark and black hole.

Jongin dashed towards Luhan who was slumped on the ground, picked him up from the collar and sent him a punch. Staggering two steps back, blood flowed out from the side of Luhan’s mouth. “Hypocritical bastard.” Jongin said through his clenched teeth, making his way down the basement.

I entered the basement, Chanyeol and Baekhyun had located the torchlight and was one step ahead of me, exploring. A stench traveled towards us.

Relying on the weak light source of the torch, he found Sehun lying beneath the dance revolution machine. Beside his fallen spot was a dislocated trampoline. He must have fell and hit his feet on the sides of the trampoline frame before falling head first knocking against the sharp corners of the trampoline legs and landing with his head in a pool of blood, not breathing.

Luhan who stood beside me hysterically suggested, “We should bring him up outside first.”

I looked back at Luhan, “he is already dead.”

"But in here, the atmosphere isn't good" Luhan continued, "and he was having a cold"

Yixing walked towards Luhan and squatted down, giving the shaking Luhan a hug.

"Luhan, let's go out." Tao said in attempt to life Luhan up on his numb and wobbly feet but got pushed away by Luhan, trying to move the corpse.

"Luhan!" Tao said as tried to pry Luhan away with all his might, "He is dead."

As though not hearing anyone else speak, Luhan tried to lift Sehun in a fit of panic. Yixing stared at him, left the basement only to return again. He went in front of Luhan, pried open Luhan's mouth with his two fingers and forced Luhan to down the entire bottle of alcohol. Having downed half a bottle of alcohol, "Is it enough?" Yixing stared, as tiny drops of the alcohol blurted out from Luhan's mouth.

Lifting his head up, Luhan widened his eyes and asked Yixing, "What happened? Has the plane not taken off?"

Yixing bent his head in silence by the side, picked up the drunk Luhan in a horizontal position and carried him out the basement.

It was one long afternoon, I had forgotten where we were, the reason we were playing this game and what awaited us at the end.

The wall clock slowly pointed towards the 4 o'clock mark. Chanyeol and Tao stretched out their slender long legs on the couch and their fingers in a blur, Baekhyun fiddled with the empty wine bottle while Yixing spreaded himself across the carpet, tolerating the pain emerging from his waist injury, Jongin looked exactly like I did yesterday, having just woken up from a deep sleep with an expressionless face, gazing out the window.

Luhan no longer looked solemn, he smiled foolishly in his sleep while I wondered about what he was dreaming.

"What do you guys think is kept in that safe?" Baekhyun questioned as he stared longingly at the safe with a rubik's cube hung.

"Who knows, you have to ask Luhan." Tao said.

"Perhaps it contains the password to the door." Chanyeol said with much optimism as before.

"Perhaps there is a bomb install in it." Jongin tilted his head and continued looking out of the window.

I stood up and staggered towards the toilet, refusing to admit my lowest tolerance mark for my thirst while Yixing who remained sprawled across the carpet experiencing dehydration from the large amount of perspiration he had lost from before. Before Luhan had awoken, Jongin seemingly played the role of the team leader, himself and Chanyeol had already brought the water up the 2nd floor and Tao had went up to drink some too. Before getting myself drunk or resorting to drinking my own urine, perhaps I should get on my knees to beg Jongin for some water and then have him kill me directly in this house.

Two hours later, Luhan finally woke up. With his hands supporting and stroking the pain in the back of his head and the lack of emotions in his eyes, he did not question the absence of Sehun. He did not seem to have gone mad nor experience amnesia and just like every other human being, he had gradually gone through some changes, yet still keeping his life. "The water is upstairs," Jongin said to Luhan.

I took a glance at Jongin before strutting my way towards him with difficulty, and knelt before him.

"Give us some water, just a little bit is fine." I kept my eyes glued to the ground.

Just as I expected, I did not receive an answer.

"Yixing can't go on anymore." I said with my head hung.

"Ha," a sound from above travelled towards me, "If I were to give you a cup of water, you would give it to him?" His voice was filled with disdain. "Another hypocritical bastard."

I looked at the ground, unable to bring myself to lift my head.

In that rather long period of silence, Tao stood up and walked towards the stairs. Jongin extended one leg to block him, refusing his actions without speech.

"That is not your water." Tao said.

"You're right, it is water Luhan won." Jongin said coldly, "won through cheating."

"Luhan!" Tao turned behind and called out only to get no response.

Yixing who was still sprawled across the floor covered his head and said through his hoarse voice in Chinese, "Forget it, Tao."

I walked over to Luhan and asked, "Give us some water."

After freezing to the spot for a few seconds, he said, "Alright then, let's exchange some food for water."

"What food?" Chanyeol asked.

"Sandwich in the fridge." Luhan said calmly.

Chapter 10

Frank's Point of View

Kris sprawled over the office table to sleep, even the abundant amount of tea was unable to resist his drowsiness, to a person like him who had not gotten any sleep for at least 3 days, some sleep was definitely beneficial.

Seems like my conversation with him had relieved a lot of the pressure and as a doctor, I was very pleased.

As I walked out of the control room with the empty cups, I saw Mike waving at me continuously. I walked over with a smile and placed the empty cup in his hand, "Was it uncomfortable to watch?"

"You were so amazing!" his eyes glowed, "you need to know that I haven't been home for more than 24 hours and that my girlfriend thinks I am going to elope with you."

"Oh is it?? I blinked at him, "It seems that your girlfriend knows how to better appreciate my charm."

"Save it." He replied nonchalantly. "But it is true that Mr Survivor really did buy your charms."

"Of course. It is of my obligations to make an upset boy happy." I said and walked towards the bathroom, "Don't forget to bring another two cups of tea, this isn't simply the finale."

Mike retrieved the cups lazily, "Well, I am the bartender. Continue cheering up that cute little emotional boy, we are responsible for observing in the crowd."

As I exited the bathroom, I looked at Kris who was still sleeping, his disheveled golden hair against the table.

"On account of my significant contributions here, can't you reveal some of the details originally only known by the insiders." I said beside David, his rould and bald head somehow refrained me from being serious.

"Look, Frank, if the dead speaks, it would be a really frightening thing. Without any professional training, I'm afraid your heart won't be able to take it." He said.

"I will be responsible for my heart," I said, "I have the best heart medications."

"Really? What brand is it?" He laughed and looked at me.

I watched him helpless and whipped out a bottle of pills from my black pouch, "I don't usually have the habit of revealing my personal health issues to any colleagues And moreover, I am not in the (police) business."

David looked at the bottle of pills and pondered, "This seems to be a very popular brand."

"Do not question my taste." I said, "I have never consumed popular brands, things including the police."

"Oh, this may not be a good habit." David said, "You might die miserably."

"What, has your heart start malfunctioning from all the shock you receive in a day?" I asked, "I thought heart attack came as a habit to you people."

"Frank," David held onto that small bottle of pills in curiosity and looked at me, "If one day I find out that you are a part-time magician, I would definitely have you arrested."

"Oh is it, shall request to be locked up with that little kid then?" I laughed and asked.

"How?" He jabbed me with his arm, "You actually have a rather unusual hobby."

"Look at all your dirty thoughts," I smiled, "I am just carrying on with my work that's all, something you people forceful people wouldn't understand oriental magic." I turned and left for the control room.

I opened the door to disturb Kris from his dreams, I mean, if it was actually a good dream.

"I'm sorry," I used my feet to close the door, "for interrupting your sweet dreams."

Kris seemed to be pondering over a decision before giving me a cold laughter, I guessed he meant to say his dreams weren't that of fairytale stories.

"Are you hungry?" I asked, "If you don't mind, I would like to recommend the seafood noodles here, although it isn't authentic, it does have its specialties after all."

"It's fine, I'm not hungry." He said and used his hand to fix his disheveled hair.

"Alright then." I smiled, "It's up to you."

His face seemed a little too pale for an Asian, his facial features and chin looked as well shaped and slim as though it was carved. However, he had an amazingly dashing pair of eyes, as he looked at people it was as though there was a layer of mist covering.

"Do you know many things I am unaware of?" He suddenly asked.

"Example?" I looked at him.

"Example things like apart from me, in the federal bureau right now" He said, "are there other people from our group?"

"Dead people?" I couldn't figure out his intention so I resorted to choosing the words I spoke carefully.

His moving pupils seemed to reflect a lost emotion, seemingly selecting the words he said as well, "All are dead?"

"You are clueless yourself?" I looked at him, thinking to myself about the peculiar expressions and highly protective information rules Mike and David were talking about that did not used to exist before. "I am just a doctor, but I think if you afford to help them, I mean the police, they would do their best to help you as well."

That pair of beautiful eyes seemed to be covered with a thicker layer of mist, receding into an ever darker shadow.

Chapter 11

Kris' Point of View

Our dinner was a simple one; this was a slimming trip which yielded excellent results. After eating a sandwich within a minute, I gulped down a huge bottle of water.

"I feel like having Hunan cuisine." Yixing slipped into his glorious delusion once again.

"Not being able to eat what you feel like eating before you die, is one of the saddest things in life," I said, "Even prisoners facing the death penalty get to have good food before they're executed."

"If only I knew things would turn out this way, I wouldn't have lost weight in the past." He said blandly.

"If only I knew," I poked his dimples, "You wouldn't have become a celebrity."

He looked at me, "If I could start over again, I would still choose to be a celebrity." He smiled at me, "It's been so many years, and don't you know me well enough?"

Walking back to the living room, not a soul was to be found, Yixing and I looked at the completed Rubix cube at the staircase and the unlocked safe. We didn't know which method Luhan would choose to kill us.

We didn't know where Baekhyun was. I examined the extremely exquisite drawing of the Scorpio, and I never knew actually he had such a special ability. What you need to know, is that I am one who admires people of high aesthetic ability; they must meticulously observe everything in their surroundings; when you've already forgotten something, and he'd still be able to remember.

Night fell again, and half of 48 hours had already past. Baekhyun lay on his bed and seemed like he'd already fallen asleep, while Yixing rested on the carpet beside the window. A meteor flew across the sky. According to legend, the passing of a meteor forbade the passing of another person.

Yixing saw it as well, blinked a few times and remained silent.

"It'd be pretty good if people died to become meteorites," I said, "We could fly everywhere."

"I don't wish to become a meteorite," He said, "I want to become a tree and not go anywhere."

"Is it because you've felt that you've been moving around too much in this lifetime that you want to be tranquil for the next?" I looked amused.

He responded by rolling his eyes.

"If you ever would become a tree, where would you wish to be planted?" I questioned.

"The courtyard outside my house, of course." He said.

"Alright, I'll help by watering you." I mused.

"I appreciate that; I'll make sure to thrive and grow well." His dimples showed as he chuckled softly.

"Those words that you said before you went on the Dance Revolution machine," I looked at him, "Were they meant for me?"

He went silent for a moment, then beamed, "That hasn't expired yet, and it's still valid."

I glanced at him, lowered my head and said, "My mother's doing relatively well in Canada... My father's alone in Guangzhou... I mean, if..."

"I understand." He looked outside the window and the moonlight lit up his face.

I lowered my head and smiled a little, this was our tacit approval. If he really turned into a tree, I'd probably just have to glance at his leaves to know if he needed water.

That night was especially calm and silent, I didn't even hear any muffled whispers from upstairs like I used to. It might have been because of our smaller number; I got up and walked in the direction of the toilet. The silence of the night became especially imminent when the door to the bathroom creaked.

I stood especially meticulously outside the bathroom for a moment because I knew that Baekhyun and Tao were still inside the bedroom. I took my precautions before slowly wandering in.

The bathing cubicle deepest into the bathroom was shut.

Slowly advancing closer, I caught a glimpse of Baekhyun's special eyeliner lying beside the bathroom mirror as well as scribbles of the two Chinese characters, "Quick, run" from the

corner of my eye.

I would have been able to recognize the handwriting even if it were to be burnt into ashes. "Tao?" I whispered softly in the direction of the mirror, but the door to the bathing cubicle remained unmoving.

Turning around, I placed my hand lightly onto the door of the bathing cubicle. Caressing the clean, white frame, no one spoke, if you didn't count the faint breathing I heard.

Absent-mindedly, I felt as if I had returned to the scene at the hotel we were staying at in Tokyo on the day before SMTOWN. Tao was propping the toilet with his body, shutting me inside, "Don't hide from me, leader." He laughed bitterly, accompanied by the same faint breathing.

I didn't want to avoid him, I wished I had been hallucinating and imagining everything, but he remained as the younger brother I wanted to safeguard and protect.

Tao had a seductive and bewitching face coupled with his perfect figure and wushu skill, the intense contradiction he had allowed him to debut swiftly into everyone's field of vision.

During the first round of promotional activities we had in China, he was especially attractive and conspicuous, even managing to surpass Yixing and Luhan.

However, being overly eye-catching does not necessarily imply something good, especially when this attention turned onto the both of us. Unable to suppress his emotions, he often spouted what he wasn't supposed to say on variety shows. Of course, this would definitely be a good thing for the host, but in the fans' point of view, what they saw would become something 100% true.

I forgot when it started, but I finally noticed the changes in Tao. His responses towards the host's indirect and roundabout questions turned from awkward rejections to elated acceptance; even I praised him in my heart about his good grasp of his coupling popularity with the members. Only after half a year then I realized that what he had always been saying the truth. He wasn't actually bothered about his pairing popularity and the fans' reactions towards it.

After a long while, even the people around us found it bizarre and uncanny. The brazen and wanton gazes he gave me whenever he looked at me left a thorn pricking by my side and left me at my wits end. When we were late in the morning after taking the same hotel room the day before, Luhan actually told me softly, "Dispose of the hotel's wastebasket on your own."

From then on, I started to automatically keep a distance from him, and only had few personal interactions with him. The overly sensitive Tao speedily became aware of the changes in me; he merely smiled, and started becoming a reticent man of few words.

After that, he hoodwinked the company and started dating; his partner was a female trainee from China. They went out shopping hand in hand and even kissed publicly, his brazen actions becoming the subject of many discussions. The second time I warned him to moderate his actions, he actually told me, "I thought this was what you hoped for."

I was probably the one who caused the whole disaster to occur, but I couldn't figure out where I had gone wrong. I felt that I was blessed to have someone still willing to call me "brother", and I felt that I should continue to try my best to protect him.

Moonlight slowly penetrated into the silent bathroom. Turning around, I picked up the eyeliner pencil, and wrote a clumsy looking peach on the mirror, circling the two words that he scribbled. I didn't look back when I exited, but only spoke to the air behind me, "What I said yesterday, were lies."

I remembered that night extremely clearly, I remembered every single word I said, every single action I made, and what I could have done but didn't. The moment I walked out of the bathroom, Baekhyun stepped out from the bedroom. I paused at that instant when our shoulders brushed against one another, but I ultimately chose not to say anything.

He entered the bathroom as I walked back to the bedroom.

It hadn't even been a minute when I heard loud scuffling coming from the bathroom while I was on my bed. The sound of fists pounding against the wall; the sharp reverberation of shoes screeching against the floor; the muffled gasps for breath.

"What happened?" Yixing clambered up, staring vigilantly in my direction and tried to walk outside.

"Don't go!" I muttered solemnly, looking at Yixing's dazed expression.

Following the sound of someone thrashing on the door of the bath cubicle, the door slammed shut. The members from upstairs rushed down the stairs as softly as they could; the light lit up the living room brightly, when Chanyeol clambered into the room clumsily, everything became silent again.

"We can go in now." I told Yixing.

Chapter 12

Baekhyun was curled up on the floor in the bathroom. A thin, white plastic rope was wrapped around his neck tightly, one of his hands still clasping onto Tao, who was standing beside him, tightly.

Baekhyun lay on the floor; his breathing ceased.

Chanyeol crouched down, staring at the white plastic rope, and seemed as if he was trying to focus on his sight and hearing sense.

"What happened?" Jongin glowered at Tao coldly. Tao, face pale, avoided his gaze; Luhan leant against the wall, silent.

"Luhan..." Chanyeol picked up the length of white plastic rope, turning towards Luhan, "Was this the bundle of rope you took from the safe?"

Glancing at Chanyeol, Luhan wanted to help him up from the floor, but he got shoved away, "Why didn't you discuss anything with us beforehand?!!" Chanyeol roared, choking in tears. The hand which was shoved away dangled mid-air, Luhan lowered his eyes, and withdrew his hand.

"What is this?" Jongin stood up, walked towards the mirror dubiously. "Mandarin?" He turned his head back slowly, looking in the direction of the 4 of us.

"You only kill us Koreans and not the Chinese... Is this some secret between you Chinese?!" He glared at us menacingly, exerted all his strength and shoved against Tao's chest. Tao did not retaliate.

"You've misunderstood." I held back his hand that he used to push Tao.

"Right... How could I have forgotten?! You, and him," Jongin pointed a finger at Yixing, "You two were just next door, how could you two have arrived later than the rest of us?!"

"I told him not to come near." Tao narrowed his eyes at Jongin provocatively.

The next second, the only memory I had was of Jongin and Tao grappling each other in a wrestle.

The screaming and wailing Jongin was a rare sight, "Without my permission, how could you kill Baekhyun!"

Trampling and crushing Jongin underneath his foot beside the door in a few moments, Tao spoke in Mandarin, "Fuck, don't think that only you, have the guts!"

"Ah!!!" Jongin pounced towards Tao, who was much taller than him, in a craze, his eyes burning with pure insanity. Tao wrestled him all the way till the living room, and sent a blow to his face, his elbow sending another blow to his knee. Jongin knelt forward; Tao pounded Jongin's waist beneath his foot and Jongin revealed an excruciating expression.

"Stop fighting!" Luhan desperately pulled Tao away from behind, but Tao seemed as if he couldn't control himself anymore. He didn't stop, only until I exerted all my strength to shove him hard from the back.

Within those seconds of quietness, Luhan released his hand that was grasping onto Tao tightly. Tao turned his back around, Chanyeol walked towards the injured Jongin, but I saw the red-eyed Jongin sit up and extended his hand towards a bottle of alcohol on the tea table. He staggered in the direction of Tao's back.

Time seemed to have slowed down in my memory, "Tao!" Yixing screamed in Tao's direction, utterly horrified. Tao turned around to look at Yixing and momentarily noticed Jongin's figure smashing the wine bottle towards him. He used his arm to defend himself instinctively; the bottle smashed onto his arm, the strong liquor splashing onto his hair. When Tao used his hands to cover his alcohol stained eyes, when he used his hands to cover his eyes...

The clock on the wall ticked away...

Tao widened his eyes in Jongin's direction, traumatized. He lowered his head again, his eyes boring at the broken wine bottle stabbing through his abdomen. His entire body was held by the broken glass bottle all the way till he crashed into the wall behind.

At that instant, everything seemed inaudible, my instincts shattered inside me; there was only Tao's helpless and overwhelmed expression, and his abdomen which was bleeding profusely.

Yixing seemed to have run over, desperately pushing away the stunned Jongin; Tao slid down the wall, leaving a streak of dark red blood on the wall. I stumbled over; I think I fell down twice in the process, Tao's head tilted to the side, his eyes identical to those I saw for the first time.

"Leader... I'm hurting..." He said, his words intermittent.

Did I say something, or did I not? I can't remember anymore. That memory was just a

streak of white, maybe my immune system crossed it out.

After that, Tao fell asleep. He didn't move at all, turning colder by the second.

Black spots covered my sight and my hearing became muffled. I stood up and picked up a bottle of alcohol, smashed it against the side of the tea table, and staggered over to Kim Jongin at the corner of the room.

He was still standing there, completely stunned. Beside him was Chanyeol, who was trying his best to pull him away, but it was all too late. You see, your neck seems very vulnerable, everything will end very quickly.

Does Chanyeol wish to come over to speak to me? I held him by the collar and hurled him onto the ground.

You seemed possessed; you didn't wish to retaliate at all, was it because it was the first time murdering someone? You're too inferior, just look at you; you're going to be killed by another very soon. I held up the broken glass bottle slightly, turned the bottle around smoothly; Kim Jongin, accompany your Huang Zitao!

Luhan's face appeared in front of me before I could lower my arm.

An alarm sounded in my head, my hand stopped for a second. I lowered my head, I saw Luhan slotted in between me and Kim Jongin.

"What are you doing?" My eyes asked.

"Let me extricate myself first." His head drooped, his hair dangling before his eyes.

My brain stopped working for a few seconds, not understanding what he meant. My eyes wandered till Kim Jongin, who was being dragged upstairs by Chanyeol. I bypassed Luhan and pursued the direction to the stairs. Once again, he blocked my view, his body blocking the stairs, his palms pressing against the wall.

It seemed as if my intelligence had deteriorated, how could I have forgotten that Luhan belonged to the other team?

"Do you think that I wouldn't dare to kill you?" I asked him.

"Kill me then." He glowered.

How shameless; I backed 2 steps. How could I have forgotten that this was a friendship meeting between the Chinese and Koreans? Moreover, Luhan was always the most professional friendship mascot. But too bad I wasn't Zhang Yixing; I was always resistant towards a warm friendship. Don't try to take advantage of my endurance; you've overestimated my kindness and your own emotional intelligence.

However, he was suddenly given a painful blow on the face, his nose bleeding. He fell onto the floor. "Get out of here!" I glanced back and saw Zhang Yixing roaring at him.

Luhan scrambled onto his feet quickly up the stairs and didn't glance back again.

I thought that our many years of friendship had been ruined on that fateful day, but I had neither authority nor right to reproach him. I should be like him, the perfect survivor, taking advantage of everything and everyone else; and take the initiative to survive. If we look at it from this point of view, we were all less feminine as compared to him.

Chapter 13

Emerging from the control room, I felt the need for a breath of fresh air. This emotional teenager had his back turned against us, head facing the wall, allowing himself an assuring and secure corner for the tears.

If one is sad, the tears should be allowed to flow. This, was probably something he wasn't taught in that Korean company.

He treated me as a pastor, confiding and expecting me to redeem his soul. I was unable to, in fact, I would be selling his soul. The only person in this world who could betray him, ultimately was himself.

That night, him who was inevitably exhausted had nothing to say. I walked alone to the terrace for a puff and when I returned, the entire police bureau had erupted into a state of chaos, a Korean woman clad in office wear with a flustered expression was talking to David, waving her cellphone in her hand. David gestured for her to calm down repeatedly, instructing Mike to find a translator on one hand while solemnly looking for a piece of pen and paper in preparation to do some statement recording.

This was obviously none of my business, Kris in the distant was still sprawled in the monitoring room, unable to witness the panic which had evolved on the outside. To him, the story had ended the day before, not knowing the cause and results, just experiencing the process, perhaps his part was no longer important. Humans don't wear polarizers while scrutinizing his corner, the pain, happiness, joy and depression all just as appearing as dust in God's eye.

That night I drove him in the breeze, it was the familiar road, but I accidentally lost my way. Perhaps everyone had just been travelling between their lost routes, especially once the coordinates in life have been lost. From the social relations perspective, I was just a psychologist hired by the police, however he remained as the likely-to-be veritable criminal. We sat face to face, as I turned I would be entering the air of freedom but him, he would be facing prison which would inevitably deprive him of his youth. As two equals, in some way, he was my teacher.

From yesterday till today, himself and his dead friend have imparted me the dignity of survival. Everyone involved in trade offs had eventually chose to fight, allowing me to be envious as an elderly, such respectable group of children.

They have lived their lives more seriously, unlike me, who was much alive as the dead. Waking up, I would think I have lived without any compensations, I perceived this gentle sunlight not to be deserving of gifts, I have never once changed this humble desire to condescend which I had perceived to be living in dignity.

Perhaps I was wrong, perhaps this group of young children had long required the experience of sacrificing to reach their petty dreams, insignificant dreams to the extent that a successful person like myself seemed to find ridiculous with a single mention, which however ignited its way into the blood and body of the most young and charming humans.

Not only in that house.

Perhaps I would never have submitted to admittance, if no difference in distinctions had existed in the eyes of god, these bunch of boys I initially perceived to be overly beautiful and feminine had as a matter of fact completed much more courageous things than me.

With the story halfway through, I had not known before, that the previous night would be the last time Kris brought up these kids before the trial.

The next morning, Mike greeted me while Kris appeared to be extraordinarily calm, he had a portion of his hair tied up behind with the simple help Mike delivered, he actually offered a word of thanks. Although his motions were not free, he still had the habit of bending at his waist to bow and thank and while compared to his solemn face and his identity as a suspect right then, it was especially absurd.

I thought, perhaps if there were a few others bowing with him by the side, it would have seemed less obtrusive.

That day, I met with a good tempered middle-aged woman, the mother of Kris. Beside her stood Kris' stepfather and my old friend Konrad Steinweg, a prestigious and expensive lawyer in LA, specializing in helping major suspects acquit.

"It's been a long time since I saw you, you're still such a regular here." Konrad extended his hand, this man of German descent who grew up in the States actually appeared stricter than other Germans.

"Same, I knew that every time you appeared I would be unable to continue my work," as I reluctantly shook his hand.

"Please just hand all the matters to me in the future," He said, "I understand that speaking too much wouldn't bring him any benefits." Konda leaned towards me as I expressed my understanding.

"However regarding things that happened subsequently, I am still curious." I said.

"You would definitely be included in the list of attendees during the trial." He said and let out a laugh.

I frowned, "so soon?" feeling as though something was not right.

“You have to go ask that gang, however,” Konrad drooped his eyes, “viewing from my current understanding of the situation, he is indeed in a substantial amount of trouble.” It seemed that confidentiality agreements had me excluded from a lot of information.

I walked towards Mike and saw Kris leave the control room, probably to meet with his parents and the lawyer for a discussion. I lifted my head and spoke to Mike: “You have always kicked away virtuous people.”

“Come on Frank,” Mike pleaded, “the person who has sealed that cub’s mouth was definitely not us or his lawyer, of course we all wished for him to speak more.”

“The judicial process has taken such a short period of time, what charges have you held against him.” I said.

Mike glanced at me meaningfully, “what he said might not necessarily be the truth and what you have heard might not certainly be the facts.”

“What does this mean?” I was not at all skeptical of the honesty and credibility of that patient.

“Well~~~” Mike looked at me, “Which side exactly are you on? It seems to be that of Mr survivor.”

“Well, I will be present at the trial.” I asked helplessly, “You should be able to speak of the charges now.”

After a moment of silence, Mike lowered his head, “a triple charge for murder.” I froze, “who?”

“Korean males Kim Jongin, Park Chanyeol, and Chinese male Zhang Yixing.” Mike slammed the documents he had in his hands, lifted his head and completed his sentence, leaving me his back view.

Chapter 14

Some time after, I returned to my normal life, the mountainous amount of patients had me lacking attention for myself, my encounter with the young Chinese-Canadian teenager had gradually been forgotten just like all my other patients. Only occasionally when I read the newspapers, media reports and speculation on this country widespread case would I be reminded of my once close contact with the core of it.

In fact, I was not the least bit worried about his situation, which was ultimately not just attributed to my trust and understanding towards Konrad. As far as I know, when a person is placed in such a mandatory environment which also posed a tangible threat to his life, all

acts can be classified under the scope of self-defense.

Perhaps a person like me who knew nothing much about law could be seated in the jury, voting for his innocence. However I was slightly wavered and uneasy by Mike's words, if he lied to me again, helping him would be entirely out of question.

"I have time, I mean for the trial." I said.

"Oh is it?" Your patient appointments have actually been scheduled all the way to next month haven't they? It seems like you have taken a serious interest towards this kid, to the extent where he has now become a VIP patient." David said with a smile.

"I said I have no way around cute kids," I revealed a smile, "this is really meaningful, I am someone hired by you but ironically, I'm hoping now that you'd lose the case."

"You judge a book by its cover," David said through his hoarse voice, "in the future I would have you treat the ugly criminals."

"Please don't torment me like that," I said, "you will only result in me wanting a change of occupation. Alright, that's it, see you next week, say hello for me."

"Are you referring to Mike or that kid." He laughed.

"Figure it out yourself." I hung up the phone.

Thursday, the sky was somewhat gloomy, being accustomed to deciding on my mood according to the weather, I felt a tingling hinge of fear. As I drove nearer to the court, I saw a large group of media personnels, many of whom had Asian faces.

As I got out of the car after parking, the media started filming me, probably because of the suit I was clad in and the free access bureau badge pinned. An asian who could not comprehend english extended her mike towards my mouth, asking if I was a lawyer or an investigative officer.

I waved, intending to end the episode.

A loud voice abruptly traveled towards my ears, "is that the family of the deceased" and then the crowd swarmed in the direction behind me, I instinctively looked back to see an old looking middle aged man guarding a middle age women from all the gossipy inquiries from the media, in addition to their helpless situation, they probably did not understand what the media was asking.

I sighed and squeezed my way through to protect the two, "Will you please give way?" I said as I brought them up the stairs and towards the entrance, majority of media were serenaded outside.

"Thank you." The middle aged woman said with her head down.

"Korean? Chinese?" I asked in simple english, anticipating their comprehension. The middle aged woman look to the male, "Chinese." Said the man in Chinese.

"Oh is it? Same here." I smiled, watching as they clearly felt more relieved. That woman held up my hand and said, "When we arrived there was a language barrier, the reception staff seemed so busy, we were worried about not being able to find the way today."

"Everything is fine, haven't you arrived?" I brought them into the court waiting room, there were still not many people present, I made my way to the coffee machine in the corner to pour two cups of sweetened coffee with milk.

"Only coffee is available, please make do with it." I said.

"Thank you, thank you ..." They quickly stood up to take it, however not seeming to be too interested in coffee, "Are you from the police department as well?" He asked.

"Oh, no," I said with a laughter, "I am a doctor."

"Doctor?" They seemed to be puzzled, "doctors have to be present in court too Forensic doctor?" They suddenly tensed up. I hastened to comfort them, "No, no, I'm just a psychiatrist, one who had contact with the suspect."

Their expression changed slightly, probably upon hearing the word "suspect."

"If it is not too intrusive, you are" I wrestled with the choice of words, cautiously asking, "whose parents?"

The middle aged woman looked at her husband and spoke, "I'm not too sure if you know him, but my son is called Zhang Yixing."

Chapter 15

The trial stood in progress.

In my point of view, this was an experience beyond my original expectations as Lan had told me many interesting things soon enough.

"I wish to hand over the results of the psychiatric evaluation of the defendant, Wu Yi Fan, to the judge." He handed a document to one of the staff.

"His state of mind is stable; he can sign to be held responsible for his testimony." Following his words, he handed another document.

"The psychiatric evaluation and his testimony are both valid." The judge said a little while later.

"According to the evidence the police has provided, not only has the defendant been concealing part of the truth from us, he has also tampered with the truth without authorization." He gestured to the slideshow as he continued.

"First of all, the villa isn't as suppressed and sealed up as he testified." He pointed to the glass window of the sunroof in the kitchen, "According to the 7th line of section 3, the defendant declared that that one of the deceased, Park Chanyeol, once attempted to use a saucepan to smash open this window, but the defendant stopped him in time because he was afraid that there would be some form of punishment after breaking the window. However, in actual fact, this window had been smashed open."

I was speechless upon seeing the smashed window that resemble a window anymore.

"This has caused the rest of the testimony to be deemed illogical and invalid, because if the sunroof had in fact been smashed," Lan turned around to look at the jury, "They would be able to realize that all the windows in the kitchen were actually only made from normal glass, and they would also be able to realize that survival had been plausible."

"Secondly, according line 12, section 7 of the testimony, the defendant declared that the highest door in the basement was locked, deterring their escape. However, the truth is, in fact, the lock to this door was opened, it was only latched on."

"Were there any fingerprints or traces of any of the people involved found on the door?" The judge questioned.

"No," Lan turned to face the judge, "The door knob and its surroundings were very clean." "Of course, the most substantial point would be..." Lan continued, turning to face the jury, "As we all know, even though the defendant was the only survivor the police found, we found that there were not in fact 11 deceased, but only 9."

I recalled the question which Kris asked me, "They're all dead?"

"According to the line 2 section 7 of the testimony, the defendant declared that members

Kim Jongdae and Kim Minseok died a while after they entered the villa because they broke the window and tampered with the lock, causing them to die with a slit at the throat. But the truth is..." He looked at Kris, "We were not able to find both of their corpses anywhere in the villa, and neither did we find any traces of blood. Both of them are now missing."

Mini discussions erupted from the audience. The judge pounded the table with his hammer and said, "Silence".

The murky train of thoughts in my head slowly cleared up, but were still interposed by some obstacles, which I was unable to pass.

I looked in Kris's direction but could only stare at his silhouette; I didn't know how he would be able to explain the mess.

"I am very interested about that last point that the prosecuting attorney has mentioned." Upon seeing Lan return to his seat, Konrad stood up, smiling softly as he advanced towards the jury.

"9 dead youths, 1 fortunate but mentally traumatized leader, and 2 members missing inexplicably." He turned around to face the audience, "Who carries the biggest suspicion?"

"Tentatively, without bothering about the explanation about Kim Jongdae's and Kim Minseok's deaths from my client, I wish to first introduce some background information about this villa." Upon speaking, he took out a stack of information and documents, and handed them over to one of the staff members to pass it to the judge and jury.

The infamous white villa lit up on the screen. There was a farm on the left of it. Beautiful mountains and lakes, a good spot to vacation, was located behind the villa.

"White paradise is a villa located beside an abandoned farm north of the city suburbs, was bought by an American magician, Luise Klein in the year 2011 in May. This magician was engaged in various magic shows in Seoul, Korea during the period between the years 2005 to 2009. The case took place when this magician was still teaching the arts of magic in Australia, and due to the various investigations we have started on this case, he has returned to Los Angeles for further investigations. Now, I hope to be able to summon him to court as a witness."

A handsome, medium built white man was summoned to court.

"Mr. Klein, please vow to only make statements true to whatever of your knowledge. Otherwise, you would be sued for perjury." The judge said.

"I swear that I would only make statements true to my knowledge." The magician said.

"May I know where you were when the incident took place, which is in the year 2014 from

March 28th till March 30th?" Konrad asked.

"I was teaching magic at the south of Sydney, Australia, there are immigration records." The magician said.

"Were you aware of the use of your villa located north of Los Angeles, during that period of time that the incident occurred?" Konrad walked to his side.

"Yes, I was aware of the usage." The magician answered, "In February this year, while I was temporarily living in Korea, a friend of mine whom which I got acquainted with due to work, Kim Song Bin, put forward a request to borrow this particular villa."

Turning his head, Konrad looked at the judge, "The person mentioned, Kim Song Bin, was one of the senior directors at a certain telecommunications company in Korea. He is the father of Kim Jongdae, one of the missing members."

Discussions erupted in the audience.

"May I ask if Mr. Kim Song Bin ever mentioned his reason as to why he needed to borrow the villa from you?" Konrad continued his questioning.

"Yes, he told me that his son was coming to Los Angeles and wished to spend their weekend at the villa." The magician said, "He even said that he was going to thank me properly the next time I return to Korea because he needed it hastily and suddenly."

"May I ask if he requested for anything else from you?" Konrad asked.

"Yes, at the request of my old friend, I arranged for a local chauffeur as well as a Korean assistant, and also gave their phone numbers to Mr. Kim Song Bin." The magician said.

"Is there anything else apart from this?" Konrad stared at him.

"Yes, there was also a car with a metal shield. It is a type of car which could shield away mobile signals. I used it before while I was performing magic once. There are also small volumes of harmless ether gases; they only give off a hypnotic effect that enables one to fall asleep easily." The magician said uneasily, and added on, "These things can be purchased legally, and they're perfectly harmless." He underlined his point again, "I assumed that his son was just going to play a joke on his friends."

"Thank you." Konrad turned to face the judge, "I am done with my questions for this witness."

"Quiet." The judge directed his voice towards the discussing audience. I looked at David and Lan, their faces did not have any traces of shock or surprise.

"On the day when they first arrived in the United States of America, under circumstances where they were still exhausted from work and stress, EXO member, Kim Jongdae brought his entire group, note that these EXO members did not give consent before being brought to the villa while they were unconscious, and did not make any form of contact with the staff members at all." Konrad said, "After a period of 2 days, 9 members were dead with only 1 alive, and Kim Jongdae himself still remains missing. I think that the truth is clear..." He turned around to look at us, "Kim Jongdae, a member of EXO, is highly suspected of planning this entire multiple murder case. The person standing dock should not be the

young sole survivor.”

I looked at Kris’s mother and her expression relaxed a little.

“As one of the victims involved in the case, as well as being put under threat of having his throat cut anytime, all of the defendant’s actions were out of self-defense as he was placed under a special situation at that particular time in order for him to survive.” Konrad turned around and bowed slightly to the jury, “I have completed my statement.”

Kris’s silhouette remained still; I didn’t know what he was thinking about then.

“I feel that a phrase that the defendant’s witness, Mr. Klein, brought up just now might need some attention.” Lan stood up, and continued to walk towards the jury, “The phrase is, a joke.”

“He mentioned that he thought that the son of his good friend was going to play a joke on his friends, I only want to debate over the probability of this reasoning and inference.” Lan said comfortably.

“March 28th to March 30th was nearing a particular date, April 1st, April fools, and this day also happened to be their two year debut anniversary.” As he spoke, “I am speaking of this not because I admit to researching on this group but because Kim Jongdae had told me this beforehand.” Turning his head to begin a new slideshow as he clarified.

On the legendary wall displayed a shattered mirror, unfortunately, much to my disappointment, no interminable game rules were seen, just significant Korean characters which I was unable to comprehend. I felt the Korean pair seated on my right gasp.

“The meaning of these Korean words is: Two year anniversary.” Lan explained.

“In the 2nd segment of the testimony, it was mentioned that a lengthy English text containing the game rules were projected, this is indeed a plasma mirror, but it wasn’t simply just used for projecting the game rules, regarding this point, I would mention it future when summoning for my witness later.” He said.

“Earlier on, the defendant’s lawyer mentioned that Kim Jongdae had in fact made no contact to any staff, at this point, I would like to call for Ms Huan Song, the accompanying manager on this trip to come forward.”

Much to my consternation, I turned back to find a familiar face, it was the hysterical woman who was continuously waving her hands away while on the phone in the federal bureau.

“May I ask, for how long have you been looking after this group.” Lan questioned.

"A year and a quarter." She replied.

"Was member Kim Jongdae aseptic, how was his relationship with the other members?" Lan questioned.

"He had a really warm personality," the woman said after a moment of hesitation, speculatively selecting the adjective "warm", "he mixed really well with all the other members."

"Before the accident, were there any arguments or anything out of the ordinary?" Lan asked.

"Fights? Oh, no," She shook her head, "fighting was impossible coming from him."

"Upon the plane arrival at LA, did you receive any contact from him?" Lan gazed at her as he directed the really important question.

"Yes, I did." She nodded in admittance. I felt Kris lift his head to face the crowd.

"Upon arrival in America, I made used of my American sim card while the Korean phone remained switched off. As my Korean phone was basically almost out of battery and I had forgotten to bring the charger, I had my contact lines redirected to my American card and calls forwarded so I figured there would be no problem." She said solemnly.

"This has therefore caused the miscommunication between me and Kim Jongdae, in which I had only received his message on my Korean phone after the occurrence of the incident" She announced.

"What were the contents of the text?" Lan asked.

"The content was: Do not worry, we will be back tomorrow morning, you can forward me the name of the hotel." She said with her head bent low.

"Thank you." Lan turned to face the judge, "I would like to call forward another witness, Magician Mr Klein's Korean assistant who took them to the suburbans, Mr Zheng."

An Asian faced young man ascended the witness platform.

"May I ask if Luise Klein had passed on any orders" Lan enquired.

"He had me take the kids down to the vacation villa in the suburbans, along with a car and a driver's number. He also called for some of the hypnotizing gas we usually used and told me that a kid would keep in contact with me." The young man spoke.

"Did he contact you in the end?" Lan asked.

"Yes, we contacted, hearing that he was Korean, I was especially friendly and had rendered my help enthusiastically." The young man said.

"Actually it wasn't much, just the driver taking us out to the suburban villa, the hypnotic gas had them sleep for awhile." He recalled, exerting all the might he could, "when we reached, the kids were still sleeping, I passed him and another kid a box of water, introduced the housing concept and the simple methods of projection."

"And how did the projection work?" Lan inquired.

"The projection wall and dance machine were linked, firstly they had to key in some of the details, I am absolutely unsure how long they took to fiddle with it. Also, that countdown

clock,” he continued, “had a linkage with the projector.”

“What about the rubiks cube safe?” Lan asked.

“Yes, it was indeed a rubiks cube safe but was unable to be open, it contained nothing.” He answered.

“The hole in the dance revolution machine?” Lan persisted.

“Oh, that hole would open up every time a person lost, however, there would be a trampoline beneath so the person would bounce up, it was a prank Luise used to fiddle with.”

Kris who stood in front of me shivered slightly.

“These rings, did you see them that day?” Lan asked.

“These are just normal magician rings, Luise had many discarded magician props kept in the villa.” He expressed in destitution.

“Thank you.” Lan turned to face the judge, “I have no further questions.” Under the instructions of the court staff, the Korean man left the courtroom.

“The most conspicuous point of the whole incident which resulted in the chaos of the entire episode, was this magic ring.” Lan turned to explain, lifting up the magic ring concealed in a transparent bag, “if we follow the description on section 2 line 5 of the defendant’s testimony, if a knife was intended to emerge under special circumstance, then it would simply not be deemed a normal magician prop.

“However, the odd thing is, this so-called knife does not actually exist.” Lan held the ring in his hand and turned to Kris. Kris seemed slightly startled, gradually lifting his head up to look at the ring in his hand.

“We found a total of 10 rings in the house, they were all normal rings with no knife or harmful weapons hidden, death by this was utterly impossible. Lan turned again to look at Kris, “Under no life threatening circumstances, what have you done.”

Kris began to tremble vigorously, slowly bending at his waist.

“Park Chanyeol, Korean male, death by injuries inflicted to the abdomen.” The slideshow displayed the photo I had seen at the very beginning, ‘death location was being the wardrobe of the 1st floor bedroom,” Lan pointed to the hook and blood stains on the wall, “after the happening, it was found to be tainted with the defendant’s fingerprints, solely the defendant’s fingerprints.”

“Korean male Kim Jongin, death caused by an impact directed to the head, weapon leading to death seemed to be a saucepan.” Lan pointed to the saucepan dumped aside in the photo, “fingerprints on the saucepan belong only to two people, the defendant and our victim Park Chanyeol. In addition, the button that the deceased Kim Jongin held onto tightly has been confirmed to be from Kris’ top.” Lan gently strolled in front of Kris, “the dander in his fingernails, also belongs to you.”

“Zhang Yixing, Chinese male.” Lan continued, “death by excess loss of blood due to a slash at the wrist. His blood trail traced all the way from the 2nd floor bathroom to his location of death, the 2nd floor windowed bedroom, armrest of the chair. Weapon of death, a piece of broken mirror shard, solely with the fingerprints of the defendant.”

Kris hunched and shivered, clutching onto the bars tightly, I was unable to define his expressions.

“This was an actual game, a surprise party, in the game, there were no tools which could cause death. However the defendant transformed the game into a massacre.” Lan said.

“Objection.” Konrad spoke, “the prosecutor’s usage of words has violated my defendant’s personality.”

“Objection effective.” the judge announced.

“Evidently, this was not as simple as a surprise party, I have an inquiry.” Konrad stood up.

“Can be stated.” the judge said.

“Deceased Oh Sehun fell through the hole from the dancing machine, dying from an impact to the head. Opposing what the witness has stated, bouncing up.” Konrad projected Oh Sehun’s death photo.

“In the defendant’s testimony, the defendant mentioned their movements in and out of the basement umpteen times to move the corpse. Lan answered. “How would we confirmed that the trampoline had not been moved?”

I looked at Kris’ backview, perhaps he was aware of the reason why Oh Sehun had not be bounced up delightfully by the trampoline.

“If we speculate from this, in conjunction with their 2 year anniversary and April fool’s, EXO member Kim Jongdae and Kim Minseok had conjured special plans to create this stimulating surprise party. Firstly they made used of their fake deaths to emphasize the seriousness and truth of the game, in hope that they would notice the signage hung on the dance revolution machine. One round into the games, the loser would be bounced up from the trampoline while the winner would proceed to press the surprise button flashed on the screen, subsequently, the rules of the game would transform into the words you are

currently looking at, “Two years anniversary”, wholesomely scripted to be joy filled and perfect.

I recalled, not remembering Kris explain any attention set on the word “surprise” flashed on the dance machine coming from Luhan or anyone else as Sehun fell to his death. I had almost forgotten the fact that I had not listened to the complete story.

“Therefore, in this actually game which was scripted to just be a game, the members died of internecine murders which were not gone as planned by anyone. The sole survival emerging from these trail of murders, is the defendant.”

Lan pointed to Kris, projecting his voice loud and clear towards the crowd.

I was unsure of the time when Kim Jongdae and Kim Minseok had realised the chaos of the game, be it when everyone had neglected the dance revolution machine, when Kim Junmyeon met with his death or when the trampoline had been dislocated. Amidst their frantic escape did they not expect the subsequent events to unfold like that.

Many at times, situations come this close as to the expected outcome.

Mid time, I walked towards Mike and exited the doors. Judging from his lethargic state, I laughed and said, “You need to protect his mental state, he seemed to have unraveled a chain of new events today.”

“I know.” Mike lifted his eyebrows, “I’ve witnessed. But there were many things in which he didn’t require knowledge of too.”

“Just like how I had no use of knowing.” I said.

“Hey, you’re still brooding over it.” Mike placed his arm over my shoulders, “We don’t get it easy too, having to juggle between the protection of the suspect’s mental state and withstand the pressure from public discussions and the superiors, to be honest I don’t even get a high wage.”

“Alright, I wouldn’t dare give you any pressure, I’m just saying” I lifted my head in the front direction, “maybe apart from the loneliness and guilt, he has now developed suicide tendencies.”

“Suicide? Impossible, so many things has happened and he’s still alive.” Mike smiled and shook his head, “his limit is high, he would probably just swallow all his emotions.”

I recalled his bent waist gesture upon realising that the ring had not contained a knife just today.

Mike got it all wrong, there is a type of humans who constantly swallow their own emotions, lack the hysterically expressions externally such as tears or screamings, containing simply the self torture in his blood.

"That's right," I looked up front, "I just hope the substantial amount of pressure in his brain has not accumulated to his limit."

Chapter 16

I thought that my fate and connection with this case, along with the silent golden-haired boy, had already ceased. Walking along the office's long corridor, I tapped my document file lightly on the wall beside me; it had already ended, but I still felt that it wasn't the end. But that's life.

Sometime, the destinies between everyone are really strange. Busy with miscellaneous things in the day, I still would suddenly think of the boy which I had only seen for a few times on my way home in the car from work. I would recall the cup of tea he poured; sometimes, warmth would flash across in my thoughts, and the pieces of memory would stack continuously, stressing on my brain. I would also recall the shadow of his shivering hand during the trial.

I realized that it wasn't normal, and thought that it would be essential for me to find a partner really soon at a bar.

Reaching home, I started to look through his boy group's past videos and information. Sure enough, he was standard kind of leader; he went through great pains to explain and elaborate on the group's name as well as the songs in the album, and sometimes, he gave off the feel of a nagging parent. I recognized Luhan's and Yixing's faces clearly for the first time. They were often together; either chiming in with each other or causing a disturbance to the people around them, and Kris would always be looking at them in both frustration and delight.

Park Chanyeol was way taller than I had expected him to be; his voice was far beyond my expectations. This boy was a child whom expressed his emotions easily, and from the psychological point of view, he and Kris were polar opposites. However, it was evident that Kris liked him a lot; the expression in his eyes when he looked in Chanyeol's direction only conveyed 2 messages: envy and indulgence.

I hoped that he wouldn't watch these videos ever again.

That fateful day, I was about to settle down in the office lounge when I received an unexpected call from my secretary. "The people in the Federal Bureau say that you're an acquaintance, so there would be no need to book an appointment with them."

I hurriedly told my secretary to send them in. Upon opening the door, I saw David smiling in front of me, and this left me completely baffled. He, who had always been busy till no one was able to see his shadow, had actually turned up at my clinic.

"You surprised me, Mr. Detective," I smoothed my brow and felt my heart, "Even though my

personal life is indeed a little chaotic, but it isn't that serious till it's illegal."

He didn't say anything and sat down, the smile still plastered onto his face, his gaze making my hair stand on end.

"Oh my," I said, "Even though you cancelled the skiing trip, you need not be looking at me like that."

"I'm here to escort you back," He murmured as he lowered his head, "It's still the same case, the same case regarding that particular Korean boy group."

My heart skipped a beat. I spun the pen in my fingers, silent.

"I know that coming here out of the blue and escorting you back is disrespectful, let alone hindering your work. But," He said, "After the previous trial, the boy became reticent once more, and this time, including his own defense lawyer."

"The case hasn't closed, and in fact, there are still no minute details about the 3 murder cases he has connections with." David propped his head up with his elbow on his thigh, "It's very hard to account for it, especially towards the media and family members of the victims."

"Shouldn't you be placing your attention on those 2 missing members?" I said.

David looked at me. He looked like he was going to say something but he chose not to in the end, "You know that after such a long time of disappearance, it's likely that these 2 missing members might have been dead by now."

My forehead creased with worry.

"The two members had no motive of planning the murders, intent to kill nor did they kill anyone, and even if we had managed to find them, it would only be considered as misdemeanor." David glanced at me, "The public and the family members of the victims also need a valid explanation of the whole picture."

I lowered my eyes, doodling randomly on paper with my pen.

"It's been so many days, and he only uttered one sentence apart from all the strange talk he made in the midst of his sleep." David looked at me, his eyes sore, "He said that he wanted to drink that type of tea."

"So, come back to us." David said, "Your patient evaluation has not been completed, and you will not allow yourself to give up on a patient halfway through treatment."

My car actually broke down on the day I returned to the Federal Bureau. I decided to walk there after hesitating and getting frustrated for a long while.

In the monitoring room, Kris's hair was still messy just like before, but his face had been slowly turning paler than ever. He was in a daze; sometimes giggling to himself out of the blue. Mike was beside me, shaking his head as he looked at the documents in his hands, "Besides sleep-talking, all he does it to giggle to himself."

"What kind of things does he say in his sleep?" I asked.

"He spoke in Mandarin first, and the translator said that he kept saying "the lighter has run out of fluid, the lighter has run out of fluid..." and then during the next few days he changed topics, and started chanting some odd English phrases..." Mike said.

"We are planning on sending him to do another psychiatric evaluation 2 days later." Mike said, "The trial clearly brought on some negative consequences on his mental state."

Glancing at him in the monitoring room, I said, "We'll talk about that later, wait until I finish

talking to him.”

Opening the door, I settled down on the seat I’ve always sat on and placed the cup of tea in front of him. I said, “Long time no see, my old friend, how have you been?”

He actually turned around and smiled softly, “I’m doing fine.”

The start of our conversation was far beyond what I had expected; I couldn’t distinguish if he was behaving like that because he regarded me as his doctor or because he trusted me as a friend.

“I thought you’d never speak again,” I grinned, “I heard that your lawyer, Konrad Steinweg, is frustrated from waiting for you. If you didn’t know, his charges are really expensive.”

“I only missed your tea.” He said.

“It seems like I have successfully managed to appeal to your preferences, how lucky.” I said. He lowered his head, silent.

“I saw Yixing’s parents during the trial,” I said, “They were sitting right beside me.”

His eyes lit up for a second, but darkened again in an instant.

“His mother does not believe that you’re the murderer at all,” I said, “She only remembered your good traits.” I observed his expressions.

His long eyebrows twitched a little, his lips moved indistinctly, murmuring, “He really resembles his mother.”

I leant in closer, “What?”

Kris smirked lightly, lowered and shook his head.

Chapter 17

Kris:

I didn’t sleep even until the sun rose the next day. I loathed insomnia as much as I loathed not getting drunk even after gulping down large amounts of alcohol.

I watched Yixing from under my droopy eyelids. I admit that I was born a pessimist, just like how Park Chanyeol was born an optimist.

As the only two people left on our team, it was evident that we didn’t have much chances of winning. I still remembered that there was one mysterious rule amongst the ten, stating that the last two survivors must belong to the same team. This implied that if one of us died, the other person would undoubtedly be pushed into a dead end. We were not people of high intelligence, I smiled, but he was worse off; there was not a trace of ruthlessness in him.

Opening his eyes drowsily, he gazed at me, “When did you wake up?”

“Just now.” I said.

“Was it because I had a nightmare?” He thought aloud, blank.

“No,” I said, “We’re probably both going to die soon, so we should celebrate with some wine.”

“Is that so?” He smiled lightly as he sat up, “But I normally eat yogurt when I celebrate.”

I looked at him mysteriously, smirking, “Be an adult.”

He looked at me and kicked me once.

It was pouring with rain that particular afternoon; the game was going to end in 12 hours. I

wasn't certain if I were to be able to live to see another pouring rain.

Beside me, Yixing was in a daze, in his own world, "Penny for your thoughts?" I asked him.

"I was thinking..." He said, "What if dreams were genuine in existence, while reality's all just a dream?"

"If we were to wake up from reality again, where would we be?" I stared at the ground in front of me.

"If we were to wake up from reality again," He smirked, "Let's just die."

To be honest, death's just waking up from a dream.

This was a sweet and beautiful dream; in this dream, we spent so much time together, wouldn't we be better off waking up from this dream together? We won't lose our way. I smiled as I looked at him and didn't say anything.

He turned around to beam at me, blinked a few times, and didn't say anything as well.

I remained lying on my bed, watching the ceiling when Yixing opened the door to the toilet.

When the door to our bedroom slammed shut out of the blue, I knew that everything had just started, and that everything would be ending soon.

Squinting through the crack in the door, I spotted Chanyeol's panicked expression while he was bending his body, as if he was fastening something onto the door. He had tied the door knob to the door bolt together with the plastic rope from outside. It was an inexpensive and natural door lock.

I kicked the locked door fiercely and vigorously, and I heard the table topple and slam onto the floor outside. It was a horrifying and tragic 3 versus 1 scene outside the bedroom, but I couldn't see, and neither was I able to help out.

"Park Chanyeol! Open the door!" I roared as tears streamed down my face. "I beg you!! Open the door!!"

He desperately made use of his entire weight to hold the door shut. I turned around, held up a chair and threw it in the direction of the door, but it served no purpose. My mind was a total blank – I scrutinized my surroundings, and spotted the retractable sword hanging on the wall. Hauling the sword down from the wall, the sword unexpectedly extended in length segment by segment. Bending down, I slid the sword through the crack in the door and sliced the plastic rope into two with one blow. I backed, and then kicked the door with all my strength.

You've always said during vocal classes: "This is a game, you needn't be too serious".

Being able to know you had been one of the most glorious things that happened in my life; you were the one who taught and corrected the way I pronounced "sorry".

Blood trickled from the corner of his lips when I pounded my fist onto his face; I'm sorry.

You've smiled too much in my direction, while I wasn't able to give others so many of my smiles. Throwing a string of punches in his abdomen, the person in front of me cringed and bent his back in pain; I forcefully hurled my foot at his kneecap, causing him to fall and kneel on one knee. I wasn't sure if those were drops of perspiration or tears that dripped down to the floor. Can't you continue to dance anymore, Chanyeol? What a pity, that was a dream that has ceased to exist.

Grasping onto his hair tightly, I threw his weight against the hard wall; his blood-stained face

was beautiful, just like the first time I've ever seen him; his eyes glimmering, reflecting the moonlight. If not for the tears threatening to spill from the corners of your eyes, I still would have thought it was like the first time I've ever seen the cute you, introducing yourself earnestly, "Hello! I am Park Chanyeol!"

I'm so sorry, I will do my best to stay alive, and atone for my debts to you for the rest of my life. I nearly couldn't hold back the raging tears pricking at my eyes when I picked him up and stuffed him into the closet. I closed the doors, unable to see him for the last time.

The one who pierced the sword through the closet door... The person whom I would deny till the day I die...

Was me.

But you, the one who spent all of your energy to learn how to rap so quickly, didn't utter a single word before you died. After smiling for your entire life, you left me only with your silence.

Chapter 18

I walked out the bedroom absentmindedly; the living room had been wrecked in a mess. I don't know which part of this action scene had I started watching from, I only knew Yixing already got a bruised nose and a swollen face, his clothes had been torn apart and he was fighting with Kim Jongin from the sofa to the stairs and rolling from the stairs and down the floor. He glanced at me for a second when I came out, and immediately received a punch from Kim Jongin as he dragged him on the floor kicking him. Yixing looked like a lifeless dog from the excess kicking, but surprisingly he dragged and rolled Kim Jongin on the floor with the other's neck locked in his arms.

Like I said, he's always like this, just when you thought he was going to give up, he would strive that inch, telling you he's still alive.

I rushed to the kitchen flashed the cupboard opened, took out that frying pan Chanyeol had once used, strode to the two who were fighting to each other in a ball. I tripped by a plastic rope just before I heard Yixing shout "careful!", that stupid yet familiar plastic rope.

I turned, suddenly my head was bombed, I felt alcohol and blood stripping from my head, soaked through my entire neck and upper body. When I opened my eyes again, I saw Luhan standing in front of me holding a lighter, he looked at me, like a dazed Satan.

My left ear was shocked when Yixing shouted "Luhan!!"

My memory masked out other noises, I think Luhan was the same because he actually turned to look at Yixing. "Yixing?" He said.

The next moment, Yixing knocked Luhan down on the floor, the lighter fell out at least 2 meters far. Kim Jongin dragged Yixing up by locking his neck from the back; he randomly picked up a broken bottle and put it near Yixing's carotid artery.

"Yixing!" Luhan instinctively roared, "Don't touch him! He couldn't have any wounds!" he said while he half kneeled trying to get up from the floor wanting to reach out to help.

"Don't come over!" Kim Jongin said to Luhan.

"You too don't come over!" he, looked at me who had attempted to get near, saying nervously while dragging Yixing with him backing off.

"Chanyeol!" Kim Jongin shouted in direction of the bedroom, no sound responded..

"Chanyeol where are you!" he shouted hopelessly, still no sound answering him.

Kim Jongin's tears rolled off his face, he looked at us three and asked me, "Where's Chanyeol?"

Chanyeol is dead, but I didn't dare to tell him. This was a 2:2 situation, Yixing was going to die. I lowered my head and kept silent, Luhan turned and looked at me, probably thinking about something.

"You killed Chanyeol?" Luhan asked me calmly in Chinese.

I hoarsely stammered, "I don't know....he's in the closet." Luhan turned and looked at the bedroom briefly. He probably already had an answer in his heart.

On the other side, Yixing smiled a little, as if saying a farewell to me.

Kim Jongin looked frightened at our Chinese conversation, realizing he's the only one who've been left out. "Luhan...." His voice shaking, "What are you guys talking about....Where's Chanyeol?....."

I looked at Luhan with begging eyes, he didn't look at me.

He looked out the window calmly, the corner of his mouth curved up a little looking like he was lost in thought. That was actually a very simple question wasn't it, the question he was asking to himself.

"Chanyeol he..." Luhan looked up smiling as he approached Jongin and Yixing, "got drunk by a few glasses, and fell asleep." He said while he walked up to Jongin, lifted his hand to

take away the broken bottle Jongin was holding.

Jongin looked at him, his eyes became ever fragile and dependent, "Really?" he whispered.

"Yes, really." Luhan nodded with a smile, he removed the bottle slowly, gently pulled Yixing away from Jongin's arm to my direction, "He'll be awake in a bit."

Luhan hugged Jongin, soothing his back, I pulled Yixing behind my back, Jongin was sobbing like a child, hands clutching on Luhan's shirt tightly.

That was a heavy raining morning, the four of us stood in this broken living room, making our lives' most intricate decision.

Everyone had himself to blame, because the answer was already written in everyone's blood.

Just like Sehun who autonomously stepped on the dancing machine, that was his answer.

Just like Tao who constantly cheated for his friends, that was his answer.

Just like Chanyeol who only looked at me shockingly but didn't resist, that was his answer.

Just like me who chose to pick up the frying pan and walked towards Kim Jongin, that was my answer.

Just like Luhan who saw me but closed his eyes and stayed silent, that was the answer he chose for Kim Jongin, also the answer he chose for Yixing and me, even more, the answer he chose for himself.

My arm lifted and fell, Jongin turned looking at me, falling slowly, one hand clutching on my shoulder, the other grabbing my clothes tightly.

I closed my eyes and pushed him onto the floor hard, his helpless eyes wide open, probably conjuring up all those invincible wars he had experienced in his short life. This should be his only defeat, the last defeat..

Luhan kneeled on the floor, until Kim Jongin's pulse stopped. He closed those unwilling eyes with his hands, "Take a rest." Luhan said as he stood up, walked passed between me and Yixing.

"I lost." He said.

Chapter 19

Fixated to the spot, Yixing and I coherently returned the gaze Luhan had towards us. He turned to flash that bright and sunny smile, as usual, "Good luck." He waved gently and voiced.

There were bound to be people who had overcome all their opponents yet chose to lose to himself. The thing more burdensome than death is to live painfully alive, he had always been more intelligent and decisive than me, always making the right choice.

I had forgotten how long had passed, Yixing lay asleep on the couch. Luhan opened the door to walk out from the 2nd floor bedroom, standing at the foot of the stairs.

“Can I borrow that plastic rope on the ground?” He said with a smile.

Looking at the ground, I knew that the countdown board had pointed to 4. As I emptied the oil from the lighter drop by drop, I made the ultimate foolish decision of my life which also became the reason I had myself crucified for a lifetime.

I gently shook my head.

As if relieved, he waved and let out a smile, “then forget it ... By the way, I require a favour from you.”

“Speak.” I said, maintaining my gaze on the ground.

“This is my home address and telephone number,” he folded the piece of paper in his hands, “it’s been almost two years that I had not spoken to my parents ...” he said casually, “I have some deposits, not much, help me pass it to them also,” he stretched his head out towards Yixing’s direction, “help me bid farewell to that fool.”

“Should I wake him up?” I looked at him.

He extended his hands into the air to stop me, “Don’t, forget it.”

“You are always wanting me to pass things for you,” I gazed at him, “Why don’t you do it yourself.”

He pondered for a second and smiled with the droopy eyes, “I am an idiot with words.” He said.

That was the last sentence he left for me, and probably the last sentence he left to the world.

Then he bent down and placed the pink watch on the ground.

He left me a smile, turned and strolled back to the bedroom, disappearing from my field of vision.

More than half an hour later, I was alerted by vibration sounds outside the door, Yixing was still asleep, I approached the kitchen window alone to take a look. My line of vision was limited, I could not see anyone, only crimson red blood flowing along with the rain. Walking up to the second floor, I only saw the door which had access to the chimney ajar, and the messy torn sheets of the bed, the entire second floor had no one.

Sitting alone in the second floor bedroom, I ran my hand across the carpet all of them used to trample over. Standing up, I strolled to the side of the stairs and picked up the pink watch, it had stopped at the time of Sehun’s death.

The game was approaching its finale, look Yixing, we’ve won.

Chapter 20

When Yixing woke up, it was already 7pm in the evening.

He rubbed his eyes before watching the countdown on the wall point towards the 3 hour indication and languidly said, "It's already this late."

Lying sideways on the couch crookedly, I looked into his eyes.

"Where are the rest?" He said.

"They're all dead." I said.

He blinked and looked up, staring thoughtlessly.

He did not question me about how Luhan died, probably not needing to know the answer anyway.

Standing up, he silently ascended up the stairs. He opened the door to the second bedroom on the second floor, and saw the messy scene.

He smiled quietly and looked out the window.

Rain was pouring outside the window, raindrops pattering as they dripped onto the leaves and window ledge. I wasn't certain what was in the atmosphere during that particular night that replaced our speech.

Those things I never told, those languages I was unsure of.

"Hello, my name is Zhang Yixing." he smiled shyly as he scratched his ear, "You are the first Chinese person that I've come to know."

"Wu Yi Fan." I stretched out my hand, giving him a high five.

Late at night in February 2012, I sat in the dormitory, staring at a bunch of keys in despair and desperation. He lowered his head and flashed a smile before placing his arm on my shoulder, "It is nothing, perhaps if I became a gigolo, I might even earn more than a star like you."

On a rainy night in winter 2012, he smoked the first cigarette of his life, deciding to reward himself, he walked towards a black and white styled watch. Looking at the expensive price, he whipped out all the cards and money, looking at the clerk sheepishly, "I have not brought enough cash, will you reserve it for me?"

Last night, the meteor flew across the sky. He sat beside the window with his mouth slightly curved, "If I happened to wake up tomorrow, I would not want to live alone." He looked at me with a smile.

Some things were better left unmentioned.

We stood consecutively in the bedroom. I advanced forward and hugged him slowly from behind.

He did not look back, and neither did he utter a single word.

"When are you going to kill me." He asked dismissively, his eyes still fixated outside the window.

I closed my eyes, and buried my head into his shoulder.

I am deceitful and two-faced. I have been for my entire life, but just during the exact point of time when I had to be the most two-faced, I somehow lost the power to use such virtuosity.

"Now," I whispered, my voice trembling and husky as I gently brought my lips to the side of his face. Trembling as I turned him around, bringing a kiss to his lips.

He opened his eyes expectedly and looked at me with that look. It was an expression far indescribable by language.

"I forgive you," Those eyes seemed to say.

The pouring rain outside seemed to have me drenched from top to toe, from my arms to my legs, soaking me with moisture all too thoroughly. He gazed at me, just like the tree outside which was dripping with water; his eyes seeming to say, *do not be upset, this isn't your fault.*

My tears started streaming down uncontrollably; I gently kissed his eyebrows, his nose, his lips, allowing the salty liquid to flow through the tips of our tongues... He leaned against the hard cool, responding to my kisses gently, with all the gentleness he could muster. I could not see his face, and neither could I see my own; this was the blind spot in my memory - being unable to find any form of language corroboration, my brain burning into ashes, the dust blowing. Something seemed to have fallen from the edge of my heart.

We stumbled on the way as we squeezed into the bathroom. Holding him against the wall, I caressed and combed his hair gently downwards. We were silent; only our breathing was heard. He shut his eyes and held his forehead against mine.

Smashing the mirror up against the sink forcefully, I picked up one of the broken shards. I pinned his hands behind his back, his head tilted to the side. We breathed heavily into each other's ears, I lowered my head and started kissing him all too passionately, he shut his eyes and responded to me with all his effort, right at that instant when I slashed his wrist.

Everything preceded in silence. He lifted his left hand to wipe away my tears, then dropped

to the ground feebly, his warm blood flowing all over the floor. Subconsciously, I wanted to stop the wound from bleeding with some clothes, but I had forgotten, that cut was slashed by me.

As a tear was shed, he said, "I want to go home."

I lifted him up and carried him into the bedroom, in there, a glow of light passed through the french windows, coincidentally facing the east. I grabbed a chair and sat him on it, tidying up his hair and clothes, he revealed a smile, and with some unbeatable exhaustion, he spoke, "I'll sleep for awhile."

Then, he closed his eyes.

I kept watching those pair of eyes, but they never opened again.

Sitting in front of the window, I froze for a long time, not knowing if minutes or hours had passed.

In that distant East, there was no place I could call home, but if he were to make it there in the future, I would want to, and that was if I could.

Chapter 21

"He has drifted to sleep." Emerging from the monitor room, I said to Mike, "give him a little more time ... I think he is probably tired." I said.

Mike was not as lively as before, clutching the documents David had handed him, he lifted his rather dreadful eyes to look at Kris. What were hidden in those eyes, I could not tell.

"My mission is over." I smiled, sending David a pat on his shoulders.

He smiled, wanting to say something but ceased. With some hesitation, he picked up the case file, "your job is done, however I'm saying, you should probably know these." He passed me a role of documents, "see for yourself."

An hour later, strolling past the already empty federal bureau corridors, my footsteps seemed extraordinarily lonely.

Regarding the subsequent matters I figured I would not say it. Removing the shell layer by layer to reveal the badly mutilated skin and flesh, you see, everyone had to leave a few final things for themselves, isn't it.

In probably less than one hour left on the countdown board which was also one hour after Yixing's death, he smashed a chair against the window, the chair broke, but nothing else

happened.

Next, he tried tampering with the door's passcode lock, only to meet with 3 consecutive failures despite the chaotic tries, nothing happened.

Then, he picked up the saucepan once used by Park Chanyeol and attempted to smash the rooftop window, the one he kept Chanyeol from destroying. The window broke, but nothing happened.

In the midst of frenzy, he madly destroyed the living room, kicking the couch and tea table repetitively and even destroying the walls. In a stumble, he approached the dance revolution machine only to see the text from Luhan's victory that everyone failed to observe: surprise.

He placed his trembling hands on it, the wall and the game rules gradually disappeared like a nightmare, a few red words projected, in Korean, "Two years anniversary!" As though vaguely aware of something yet unpredictable. Everyone else had awoken, this was one nightmare of his.

A few days later, I visited the federal bureau to clear up a few documents related to the case, before I left, I went to visit this special patient.

Clad in an oversized prisoner uniform, he seemed abnormally skinny. His hair had yet to be cut short, staying in its disheveled state as usual, his pretty fingers were placed casually on his thighs and his face paled a little unusually.

With the occasional coughs coming from him, I questioned his health situation, he gently nodded to express he was fine.

I was too afraid to picture his imprisonment. Even if he was just wearing the prisoner's uniform with no makeup at all, he still looked overwhelming pretty. Even if he were to step into a homosexual bar, I would have been fearing for his safety, not to even mention in the prison and the fact that he was an Asian.

"If I'm saying in the future," I rubbed the edge of my nose, scrutinizing my choice of words, "during your prison term, if there is anything you are uncomfortable with Feel free to contact me, I have a load of lawyer acquaintances." I handed him my business card, "You might not be able to take this with you, but remember my name, many of the police know me." I said with friendliness. If my patient had chosen the route of death, it would pose as a doubt towards my job, however this was ultimately something I could not prevent."

He took over my business card and looked at me with a smile as though having seen through what I meant, "I will not commit suicide, don't worry.

"That's good." I looked at him.

"I will live," he said with his head bent downwards, "and accept all the punishment, and in addition to that" he said with a smile, "I would work hard to live, to prolong this punishment."

I stared at the boy, and just like the first time I saw him, he was exuding that extreme self-presence.

"In here, there are many pyramids stacked and crimping," he smiled and pointed to his chest, "with every punishment, it would feel like a boulder being moved, perhaps if I stay here a few hundred years, I would finally be able to breathe freely." He continued with a smile.

I sat in silence, perhaps, opposing to my perception, not everyone required a psychiatrist.

Everyone has that pain which cannot be salvaged, and as they won't disappear, it would follow them along to their demise.

In the evening two weeks later, the news was filled with catastrophes around the world, and under the insignificant report of a local car accident, I read about Mr Zheng who had unfortunately died in that incident.

Perhaps some things were never meant to be spread.

No one knew, Kim Junmyeon who fell against the mirror had uttered those words, "there are noises coming from the basement."

No one knew, in the last escapade, Kris had lowered his head and whispered to me, "actually, I displaced that trampoline by just a tiny bit."

No one knew, the German jeweller Wellendorf had produced an extravagantly priced limited edition ring, splitted into 3 sections revolving on the surface which could easily be fixed into an illustration in which when done, depicted a really simple cursive german word: *Liebe*.

Furthermore, no one knew, that in winter 2010, Zhang Yixing finally bought that Tissot black and white styled watch he had been eyeing for so long, which on the back wrote:

It only stops when you fall in love.

Epilogue

Kris' Point of View:

That day, we were at the backstage after concluding our Tokyo concert. Yixing bowed to every staff whether they are acquaints or not; Chanyeol was laughing with his husky loud

voice, picking at the golden confetti from his head onto my hair, Luhan and Sehun were already discussing a new mobile game; Jongin gave Baekhyun a triangular box neatly wrapped, the latter hugged Jongin smiling and skipping upon opening the box, holding a eyeliner.

“Leader, I slipped a little when I performing martial arts, they couldn’t notice could they?” Tao said worryingly.

“They couldn’t, don’t worry.” Luhan interrupted, not minding the game. “There were so many people, so chaotic, no one could have seen you”

“I am very tall and noticeable alright.” Tao pointed at his own nose.

“Fine, you’re the tallest” Yixing came around patted his shoulder, then pulled my arm and whispered to my ear, “I just saw Boss who didn’t have his pant’s zipper done properly.”

Baekhyun hopped his way to Chanyeol, Chanyeol grabbed him from behind, Jongin squatted down and picked Baekhyun up from his knees, walked around holding Baekhyun while the said person protested noisily. Chanyeol followed after them hitting Baekhyun’s butt and laughing away delightfully.

Under the backstage lights, everyone’s styled-up faces were slightly reddened, slightly sweating. However, I could tell that everyone was very happy; probably just like what I thought, that day they also think, we really had become popular. I turned around to see the splendid stage under the lights, mixed with golden confetti floating in the sky with the drizzle, I wondered if this could count as a termination in life.

“Let’s take a photo together” Suho suggested.

“Let’s go!” It’s always Chanyeol who’d echoed along first, he pulled Baekhyun, Jongin and Kyungsoo to stand at the edge of the stage, Luhan also dragged Sehun who’s still playing games to walk over, Tao ran over to call Jongdae and Xiumin. I walked over slowly draping over Yixing’s shoulder.

I thought that was a road that would never end, but I became alone inadvertently. The place beside my shoulder is emptied, the person, those people, who you have been walking with, you’d never know when they have walked out of your life.

Never doubt, the best moment of your life you were experiencing.
You just don’t know it.

---- The End.

Final parse (author’s perspective)

Nearly 60,000 words, 48 hours, everyone has their own Hamlet in their hearts, how does

yours look like?

Yes, everything you've read is true, no illusions, no mental malfunctions, no intentional discrepancies. The surprise party was true, the two people who were forced to go into hiding was also true, as regards to whether they are still alive, or whether the trampoline had initially been displaced, ask the deceased Mr Zheng.

In the mastermind's point of view, this was a perfect ending, successfully using the party to escape law, justice and to have someone take the rap, in addition to the fact that all 12 had been captured.

The highest realm of killing was murder by having a scapegoat or killing the living with a dead man; after all, the first person to die would have no way of exposing any secrets.

Right at the start of the toppling of the dominos was a warm and sweet party, however with the abrupt change in direction halfway through, and without the leveraging between the members, the final outcome would not have gone this far.

But wait, don't forget, only you and me would know of this information; Kris in the story had been totally kept in the dark; he would remain like that for as long as he lives, always thinking that this was all a joke.

There were no members with extremely high intelligence.

Kim Junmyeon who wore a hat simply wanted to reduce the possibility of getting found out by the camera, which had just been his imagination, when he heard the sounds in the basement. Upon hearing Baekhyun's screams, he had least expected himself to appear as harmful with the effects from the torch while putting the tip of the screwdriver before his lips in attempt to hush Baekhyun.

Baekhyun was unable to deduce his thoughts; if you were to walk towards the toilet only to see a person wearing a hat and holding a lit up torch standing right beside the fridge, you would have desperately wanted to flee through the doors. However, don't forget, the doors were locked, and in the basement, lay two dead people.

Baekhyun was peculiar wasn't he, applying the eyeliner that Kim Jongin had given him right in the middle of the night. Are you claiming it's peculiar only because the first hander, Kris, felt that way?

To the people who found this reaction odd and strange, after getting involved in all the mutual suspicions in the villa, would you behave like Kris, who walked out of the toilet silently even when he knew that Baekhyun was going to die?

You are wrong, he precisely was the easiest and stupidest person in the game, stupid to the extent whereby he put friendship before the rules of the game.

He's a person who would give away his company's trade secrets the moment an old friend pats his shoulder casually to ask for it. Even if the entire company thinks that he's a spy, even if the entire world thinks that he had been bribed to give away the trade secret, he'll think that the only negative impact of giving away that company secret would be that he'll lose his job in a month.

Do you have a Kim Jongin by your side?

He has done lots of brainless things, constantly provoking Huang Zitao whom he couldn't defeat, insulting Luhan, the member of the highest intellectuals, and even killing members of the same group. Apart from that, he had made the decision which changed the fates of everyone - skipping Baekhyun and choosing Luhan.

All of these acts and decisions had him survive till the very end. You are wrong if you thought that it was because he loved fights; it was because he instinctively understood that chaos offered him a prolonged chance of survival as compared to living in order. When only three Chinese people were left, when all the chaos had concluded, his time was over.

Humans are complex beings, humans are multi-faced, and both you and I have experienced self contradictory times, not leaving out Luhan.

The larger dose of heart disease pills were indeed acts of his; he had Tao hid in the toilet on the first floor, that too was true; shielding Kim Jongin from Kris, that too, was true. In fact, he who had Zhang Yixing and Kris separated, holding a lighter and trapping Kris, was true as well.

However, the person who froze and dumped away the lighter, the one who wasn't unable to watch Zhang Yixing die right before his eyes, and even the person who made a death sacrifice, was also him.

He did not lose to anyone but himself; and that instant where he had admitted defeat is probably not of any significance anymore.

Luhan would never have thought of suicide; even towards the dead end, he still resorted to a last try. He had not thought much of controlling and arranging Oh Sehun's death - he was ordinary like you and me, equally panicking 5 seconds after a death, and he was still thinking 10 hours after facing an inevitable death.

Is Zhang Yixing foolish?

He didn't do anything towards anyone; he never killed a single person from start to end - he did not plan to. He did not possess a high IQ or EQ, but he was simply following his instincts and anything within his capabilities, but in the end, he survived all the way to be the second last person.

Tao protected him from consuming that cup of poisoned wine; Kris protected him from entering Baekhyun's death scene; Luhan sacrificed himself in order to protect him. Why did these people do that?

Looking back at what he did, he reminded Tao to avoid going hard on Kim Jongin; he had told Luhan where the sandwiches were; he solved the situation when Kris remained hot-headed and he even saved Kris when Luhan had the lighter right in front of him. Everything had in the end reflected back towards him, who was both isolated and protected by the surrounding environment at the same.

That was something that Luhan, the person who had the highest EQ, had not done. Using the most sensible way to fight till the end was nothing much less than true emotions.

Kris survived, but was the person who ultimately had been defeated the most thoroughly.

He killed Park Chanyeol, Kim Jongin and even Zhang Yixing; these acts had never been moves to help or relief anyone else. His murders only had one reason behind it, that being survival. Is it selfish? Take a look at the soldiers and successful businessmen living in this world, did they live to the end because of the narcissism?

Although he had finally completed everything, when those nerves of steel of his had stretched to their limits, he killed Zhang Yixing's by slashing his wrist while fate would now spend a lifetime cutting him slowly into pieces; this world isn't simply just a mathematical question with the right and wrong answers as the blind obedience towards the rules many at times do not promise results.

When the rope tying the lives of three people kept flashing in his mind, when he recalled the reasons for not giving up the rope to Luhan, these scenes would probably be and constantly be reappearing in his dreams: that meaningless countdown board which indicated a 4 and himself brooding right in front of the lighter; as he emptied the lighter of it's oil drop by drop, was he wanting to ask Luhan, *without Zhang Yixing's presence, would you have burnt me to death?* Luhan shook his head when he had decided the answers to his own questions.

This became a critical issue but he had attained the wrong answer.

This text in fact does not harbour any intention to summon anything, and neither the calling of any explanation, it simply displays the choices made by 12 all too ordinary people under the influence of rules. You may be one of them and I may be one of them, but they are afterall just ordinary people. With their daily practise and sweat shed, and your constant chase and revisions in preparations for exams, they do know to dance and sing, but believe me, you would learn many things they would not have known of in a lifetime.

Their friendship might similarly be as true as those we have with our friends, but it can also not be as sturdy and invincible, so no need for the extreme murder games and perhaps it can be attributed to the minor gains, that they leave one by one. This does not explain anything but the fact that people united as fate calls, when you have realised this point, you would probably have gone through and matured through the countless partings and reunions, but maturing comes with a price of youth, it is the same for these people, and as you accompany them while growing, you might just gradually understand; experience and

memory is ultimately more important than the results, be it good or bad.

Therefore, if if your feelings right now are intoxicated because of their friendships, why not take a look at the people around you, this, is the final parse.

This story ends here.

I'm absolutely thankful to everyone who has contributed to the passionate discussions and commitments, it is my honor to have achieved your recognition, the author simple hopes, that this is a story which you will occasionally be reminded of.