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Butterfly Effect

by i.n

1.- *Super Strong*

2.- *Butterfly Effect*

Super Strong

After handing in my letter of resignation at my old job, I tried something a little different, out of character even.

It was busy at the studio today. I never really got why, we were just taking pictures. The makeup artist brushed over my face while I was on standby and kept fixing my clothes, although they looked perfect to me. I've also never had my hair so uniform either. Luckily, today I was wearing something casual, I quite liked denim. I think we were covering a lifestyle magazine.

The director asked me to come forward, I noticed there was a guy sat on a white box, he was taking some photos before I came in. I stopped and stood just next to him, looking at him then back at my manager.

"Ah, this is Han! you'll be shooting the cover with him" she explained

"oh I see" I replied, I knew he was someone important, but they didn't tell me, so I felt like an extra huge rookie.

I just stood there smiling at him awkwardly, with my hands behind my back. I really had no idea what to do. They already started taking pictures, he glanced at me occasionally and I looked at my manager with difficulty, while holding a smile.

"Wow this looks awkward" she said looking into the monitor and the director stopped to adjust the camera.

"Let's all take five" everyone started moving around again.

"Your name" the guy beside me spoke "you didn't say so" he said now glancing at me. Looking at him closer, he's really muscular, like above average. His arms and chest were large and heavy, his build was really amazing.

"It's Hide" I answered

"how about you take the lead?" he asked "I don't do these much" he admitted, modestly

"really?" I said surprised

"it's not really my thing" he replied with a light smile and subtle consciousness. So, I walked behind him and sat on the floor just in front of where he was sat, scooting back a little and placing my head on his knee. He looked down at me, caught off guard.

"Is it okay?" I asked, he paused a little then nodded. So I pulled his arm down to my shoulder, and held his wrist.

"Oh that's it!" my manager turned around excited. Han looked up.

"Everyone back in positions" the director instructed. "That's it look here!".

Han became comfortable quickly, he was posing naturally and taking the lead now. The director was happy so it ended pretty quickly.

A while later after the cover was chosen and released, I got Han's work address so I could thank him. I was only a rookie but the cover gained lots of attention. My manager said I'll be a lot busier now. She can hope.

As I entered the building, I wondered if I had the wrong address. I mean I didn't know exactly where he worked but, as I entered a main room with flowers in my hands, I saw him and smiled.

"Han it's been a-" there was a loud thud which made me jump nearly dropping the flowers. He started hitting a punching bag intensely.. was he a professional boxer?

Everyone was watching him fight, I was sat on a bench facing the ring. There was this kid sat next to me that started talking to me.

"You were the one in the picture with Han" the boy proclaimed, it was definitely not this Han.

"Maybe it was" I didn't deny, and the kid pulled out the magazine page, so he just keeps it in his pocket at all times apparently.

"It is you!" he said pointing, oh they used the first shot we took.. my manager said they were really into that one because it'll make the sports fans talk. Especially now knowing Han does boxing it makes him appear more asserting. I'm rolling my eyes thinking about why they chose me now.

There was an older mentor sat beside me on the other side immersed in the sparring.

"Hey kid quit it and watch" he scolded the boy, I mean I couldn't really bring myself to watch either. Watching him fight was making me feel uneasy, I know it's just practice but the sound of his fists touching skin was chilling.

"Alright that's enough" the mentor stood up "everyone leave, we have one to one training alone now" the other students were disappointed but everyone got up ruggedly and left. I stood up hastily too.

"Not you" I paused "you can stay" Han said while adjusting his gloves.

"Are you quite sure?" his mentor asked, he nodded. There was sweat dripping down his body while he drank water. I sat down again to watch him.

The kids tried watching through the cracks of the door, murmuring "Han never lets any of us watch" "he always insists he can only practise alone".

He was truly sparring like crazy, he had serious focus and intense energy. I was getting tired just watching him, but he wasn't even near getting fatigued.

After, he took a break sitting in the corner of the ring, I came up to the ropes and he was breathing heavily, his chest moved up and down slowly. Sweat was running down his forehead.

"Every single one of those muscles has its use then" I said before climbing through the ropes.

"Now you know" he politely informed me

"just don't ask me to recreate the photo" I voiced, standing in front of him.

"Why? scared?" he said curtly, and I shoved the flowers onto him

"something more than that" I said, looking around the ring

"it's a good photo" he pointed out

"right, it really poises the act of asserting someone" I evaluated, looking back at him "during boxing" I said, sticking to the subject.

"And you chose it without much thought" he convened "natural instincts.. was it?" oh so he thinks..

"It's not easy for everyone I'm guessing" I returned "seeing how you tensed up.. I guess touch isn't that natural to you" I said before climbing out through the ropes again.

"You shouldn't tense those muscles up so much, it's pretty obvious, since you have so many" I prodded him with my finger "see? hard as a rock" the kids outside started laughing.

Han

A few weeks had passed, the flowers didn't die, I touched and felt the petals. I was waiting for them to die, but they wouldn't. How strange.

I really don't get why I'm invited to stuff like this. I do boxing, but I guess people want to keep me in their good graces by inviting me to their fancy gatherings. I was talking to some important people, but gosh did there need to be photographers taking pictures here too? we're just talking or do we need to pose when doing that too?

"You're an amazing fighter, we're thrilled to meet you finally" one of the men commented "see it's rare to have someone be so popular among men and women" —"usually only men enjoy watching boxing but you seem to attract both—" I noticed something on the other side of the room, then I turned my head to get a better look. Man I nearly dropped my drink.

Now you see, the most naked a man could be is shirtless, but you wouldn't expect something like that here at a press party. But for some reason maybe being shirtless would've been more proper.

The shirt, if I could even call it that, was short leaving the entire abdomen visible, there was a large gap down the middle of the chest, showing the area off unimaginably. With just enough to cover the seductive area on both sides, but that's about all it was covering. The sleeves went down to the wrists, and the entire thing had a black metallic finish anyone would love to take a feel of.

"Han" someone said, and I was pulled back into the conversation.

"I look forward to working together" I said, speaking for the sake of speaking. This drink isn't strong enough.

As we were taking more pictures, someone walked by us, his golden hair was unmistakable. "Ah, it's lovely meeting you here!" our investor said jovially, going in for a hug, not letting go of Hide's arm after pulling away.

"I'm glad to finally meet you" Hide conversed courteously

"oh you must know Han, we're excited to see you both together" our investor continued "please come, the photographers have been waiting" we had no time to greet each other, it felt like the first time again.

"Great! now just a little closer" Hide looked at me for a moment before stepping closer, and without thinking twice my hand touched his waist. Just as they finished, he turned to me to say something but was pulled away by another member of staff.

A while passed, and man was I getting tired, how on Earth do I shake these people off. I started walking around on my own, purposefully ignoring people. I put my hands in my pockets, trying to look unapproachable. I was on the lookout for somewhere quiet until something clung onto my arm.

Hide was holding onto me, I don't think we've ever been close outside of taking photos so I don't know what struck him.

"I'm sorry, I'm with someone" he said turning around talking to someone behind us "see I found him" I guess these two people were following him.

"We're just trying to talk, don't be like that" one of them expressed, going to grab his arm but I took a step back, moving him away.

"Hey" I said, quietly warning them, but Hide was pulling me to walk away, so I let him.

He was still clinging onto me as we walked.

“You must be tired too then” I glanced at his exhausted face
“this place is just full of people wanting hugs” he said tirelessly, I could understand his annoyance, but must pay respects to every fallen soldier caught slipping up.
“This is rather boring” I concluded, glancing around the hall “do you want to go somewhere else?” I said striking up a proposal.

We went through the cloak room and I took off my blazer and loosened my tie, accidentally stealing a few glances at him.

“What are you doing?” he asked, I chuckled while unbuttoning my shirt “changing”

“wanna swap?” he suggested

“I rather hear *you* complain about people wanting to hug you” I informed “shows you’re a bit of an airhead”

“oh?” he said as I picked up someone’s sweater and put it on

“wearing that?” I brought to his attention, of course people want to hug you buddy. He scratched his head awkwardly and my eyes looked again. How did he manage to even fit in it.. gosh, his stylist must have a crush on him.

I had to forcefully pull my eyes up and make eye contact with him again. Without warning—he hit me across the face with my own blazer.

“You can’t fight your urges despite being a fighter?” he said discontentedly putting the blazer on. Everyone let this be a lesson: be respectful to pretty people, especially if they’re wearing something you like.

We were walking downtown, it was so much more lively and colourful. I hadn’t been here in so long.

“This place brings back memories” I said more spirited

“you know this place?” he asked

“I’d come here a lot growing up, it’s a lot more relaxed” there was music and abundant night life, everything was still bustling despite it being late.

We came to the entrance of one of the local outdoor night festivals and I turned back to him, he was still wearing that blazer.

“I didn’t mean to be rude” I apologised for my behaviour, but he put his hand over his mouth and couldn’t stop laughing, that was seriously my bad.

I slid the blazer off his shoulders, meanwhile from afar I noticed a group of my old long-time friends. “Hey isn’t that Han” “Han?” “HAN!” “he’s with someone”.

Hide held onto my arm but let go as soon as he noticed them.

“Han!!” “oh my gosh you’re here” “it’s been years, you never come anymore” they badgered me incessantly. I knew everyone from my teen years, we all used to hang out all the time, I was pretty different back then, less grounded.

“I’ve been busy” I aimed to answer all their questions with one sentence

“don’t be ridiculous, you stopped coming here after you started boxing” they went on, everyone was in beachwear, so I’m sure Hide didn’t feel like he stuck out as much. But they all subconsciously oogled at him.

“A guy is somehow prettier than me” they muttered, he looked like he saw a ghost.

“You know Han, if you started dressing like him, girls might actually be interested in you” that’s not happening.

“I’ve got stuff to show Hide, c’mon” I said, nearly having to pull him away because he was murmuring something to them — “he’s too bitter to take your advice” “you guys are really cute, I’ll see you later” so he does flirt..

As we walked to the bar, I poked my arm out in front of him while still having my hands in my pocket.

“Why’d you let go”

“my bad, I’ll remember you like when guys grab you” he said taking my arm again.

I guess at the press party people were a little more conservative with the way they stole glances at him, here it was like, stop and stare.

“You’re pretty popular here” he poorly deduced

“mm” I falsely agreed with him, take a hint.

At the bar, I lied saying I’d get him something light.

“Hey I don’t really drink” he tried warning me

“you don’t say” I responded, spinning his swivel chair around and handed him a drink. He tasted it and looked at me like I poisoned him.

“No way, that’s disgusting”

“you already drank some” I urged him, while holding his hair up with my hand as he drank it.

“I feel.. like throwing up” he really is so young.

“I’ll get another” I swiftly got up.

In that short time I left he managed to disappear, getting sick off one drink is pretty heinous. I let him escape for a bit and decided to go towards the lake to catch up with everyone.

“Heyyy Han, where’s your friend?” Florez asked pretty drunk

“you haven’t even met him”

“oh come on you’re finally here and you haven’t changed one bit”

“come sit, let’s play a drinking game while we wait” the girls ushered me.

Hide

While on the hunt for the bathroom I saw this really cool car parked by the sand “hey that’s pretty neat” I said to myself and a guy came by.

“Hey there, like it?” he asked as he sat on the hood.

“A little less now” I replied and his friends came by after

“you’re so lame” they mocked him, and then paused and looked at me for a few moments.

One of them held out his hand “nice to meet you” and I shook it — pretty nice — - except he tugged me so I came closer.

“Sorry you were a little far”

“I actually need the bathroom, I’m gonna go” I made my exit but he grabbed my hand and spun me in the other direction.

“You’re going the wrong way” he interfered, all this pulling made me somehow out of breath.

“So I actually had a drink and I might throw up on you” “but actually maybe I’d like that”

“one drink?” I humoured them, they all started laughing.

“Well if you feel sick then you need to keep drinking” one of the guys handed me a can of something.

“if you don’t like it then go ahead and throw up on him” “huh?” “be quiet”.

I ended up drinking the entire can they gave me. I didn't feel like throwing up anymore but my head felt worse.

"What did you give him?" one of them murmured to the other

"..you know I don't.. feel sick anymore" I said despite feeling weary, I stepped to walk away but one of the guys pulled me back AGAIN.

"You can't even walk straight, stay here for a bit".

Han

Everyone kept complaining about where Hide went, sending me to go find him. By the sand some of my old friends always parked their cars there, just so happened they still did that.

Until I noticed one of my friends was holding onto Hide's arm.

"Hide?" I said approaching them, he turned around and wrapped his hands around my neck.

"Hannn" embracing me, he sounded.. not himself.

"What are you guys doing?" I asked confused

"do my eyes deceive me, is that Han?" Diaz recognised me "you know this guy?"

"yeah, he's with me" I cleared up and they all looked at each other funny.

"That's kind of crazy" Cal tried to play it off, acting like nothing happened. I looked at Hide again and he wasn't focusing, he was really out of it.

"Did something happen?" I asked him

"no.. I nearly threw up so they gave me a drink" he explained but not really paying attention

"see we were just being nice"

"Hide could you go stand over there for a few minutes?"

"I know you guys don't help people just to be nice" I started, as if I didn't know them for years

"it was Cal that started it" Diaz framed him "he kept on eyeing him when the he was just looking at the car"

"wowww" Cal replied with disbelief from being exposed, "I thought he was a girl!"

"you know if you're hanging out with him as just friends" Diaz explained "..no one's believing that one bud" he plainly stated

"I mean look at him.." I mean, I didn't have to but I turned around anyways.

"He's tipsy now, so he'll be a lot of fun" Cal remarked mischievously. Out of nowhere, Hide clung onto my arm again, tugging on my fleece to expose my shoulder and grazed it with his lips. I glanced at him stood behind me, he was right.

As we walked back to the lake, his lips were still pressed on my shoulder.

"You enjoying that?"

"yeah I'm.. putting your muscles to good use" his hands wrapped around my biceps. I didn't really mind his fondling, maturity is letting things happen. Watching him makes me want to teach him something too.

We got back and everyone was lively. "It's time to play our favourite drinking game!" Yua gathered us all around the table. We put our hands in the middle and two people chose each other at random.

"Oh I got Han" Saena clapped, leaning in and kissing me beneath my ear, we both had to take a shot after. It's less embarrassing the more you drink.

Hide kept getting drawn by girls. He always touched their lip but kissed their cheek. Everyone who had a turn with him well.. not even the drinks could make you feel better about it.

“How come you guys are so red? you weren’t like that before when I kissed you” Saint asked in disbelief.

“Shut up!” Yua screamed

“now thinking about it, you don’t seem flustered at all Hide, even Han was agitated when Saena kissed him— because it was so mundane”

“what?!” Saena shouted, looking at me shocked.

“He’s lying..” I said not very convincingly

“Hide, be honest, are you not into them?” Florez asked the right questions

“huh?”

“shut up Florez!!” Yua was not having it.

I noticed the guys were glancing at Hide now. But he’s.. had his hand up the back of my shirt for a while now. I glanced at him a few times when I felt the tips of his fingers inside the back of my trousers. Every time he leaned in to kiss someone, he stood up with his body right in front of me to pull my attention to..

We all put our hands in the middle and it was Shuo that was holding Hide’s hand this time. All the girls gasped. Shuo just laughed, despite the guys tugging his shirt in chaos. He went and sat next to Hide, instead of doing it from across the table. He muttered something into Hide’s ear which made him slightly agitated. All the girls were excited.

“Will he be flustered?” Saint instigated like it was a challenge.

Hide’s neck and collarbone were already covered in lipstick from the girls, so Shuo slowly moved the hair from the back of Hide’s neck, finding a place no one else touched. It wasn’t a peck, but extensive. His kiss sucked on his skin more than a few times, it lasted that long.

“.. Any day now” Florez voiced our thoughts. Hide was moving further away from him, of course Shuo didn’t get the message.

“You keep moving” Shuo smiled, pulling away but quickly leant to kiss the other side of his neck.

“AHHHH” “what is he DOING?”

Hide pushed him away quickly and Shuo immediately started pleading.

“Ah come on I’m sorry— I didn’t mean to, I got carried away” he was clearly pulling Hide’s leg.

“You bastard, you’re banned” Saint shouted, but they were all laughing hazardously.

“I’m good I don’t need to play anymore after that” Shuo said making his delighted exit, Hide rubbed his neck annoyed.

He was still agitated, folding his arms. I caressed the side of his neck beneath his hair where Shuo kissed.

“Are you tired?” I asked, but he didn’t answer, still annoyed, pulling my arm off him.

It was getting late now and we decided to play one more round. “I might pass out” “please not me” “me neither”.

I was surprised Hide still played, it looked like he could bite someone. So, it had to be my hand he was holding. Everyone was already half-passed out, I was glad about it.

He stood up picking up one of the two shot glasses, climbing over my legs and standing in-between them while sitting just on the table in front of me.

“You felt my fingers right?” he spoke candidly, oh god.. sipping the shot glass in his hand. His eyes were all different looking right at me. He moved the end of my tank top near my belt with the tips of his fingers.

“Here..” his fingers then wrapped around my waist under my shirt

“and.. here” his mouth curled into a smile. He put his fingers in his mouth and some of the liquid spilt out onto my chest.

He straightened up and a cold expression appeared on his face, gazing down at my body.

“I thought..” he started, I watched his eyes travel “..you” all the way until he reached my face again

“wanted me”.

Oh.. that was impolite, I thought he was more well-behaved than that.

“You thought that?” I replied

“.. but then another guy kissed me and you didn’t mind” he continued .. “absolutely.. no fucking spirit, ..I really did put those muscles to good use” he sighed, grabbing my face “somebody had to if you weren’t going to”.

If another guy questioned my ability as a man, I’d think he wants to fight. But I’m much bigger than him, but still, he doesn’t care about touching me, making advances.. and assuming.. I like.. —oh the absolute balls on this tiny ass blonde guy. I looked him dead in the eyes.

“You’re the one that wanted me” “it’s pretty obvious”

I know when I said that something in him snapped. He grabbed the other shot glass on the table and started sipping it

“Oh right, you still haven’t drank yet” he said, parting my lips with his thumb, he better not. The shot started spilling out of his mouth, pouring into mine. Trickling down to my neck and chest. He wiped his mouth with a distasteful look, stepping over me and leaving.

Butterfly Effect

It had been a couple of months, Cheeraen and Roch were sat at my shoot for moral support or something. I was lucky to have made more close friends, I'm grateful to them. Despite this industry consistently making me feel surrounded by ungentle people, they were some of the only decent caring human beings.

"Hide.. why don't you want to wear it?" the stylists kept pestering me, "we couldn't shoot last week either.." one of them explained

"I don't want to" I said getting up in frustration, my manager tried to get me to wait

"Hide.. ! is something wrong?" she asked

"I already said I'm not wearing anything like that anymore" I repeated, before making my way out of the studio.

"He's really not taking it anymore" Roch muttered

"it's been weeks but they keep bugging him about it, he's not going to do it" Cheeraen replied, they were both sat and watching it unfold.

"Your little boycott might actually work" Roch mentioned agreeably, as we walked down a street.

"I thought maybe they'd fire me, but my contract doesn't expire for another 5 months" I deliberated

"well they really can't force you to do anything" Cheeraen advised

—"hey there's Janey" she noticed

"Cheeraen! and is that my evil twin?" Janey called out, hugging me as she came over.

We were both quite similar since we both had blonde hair, except hers was really long.

"Greet me too" Roch said unsurprised

"I already saw you earlier" she returned, hugging him too

"I found a place to shoot, they're letting me use it for free" Cheeraen proudly disclosed

"do you know the guy?" Janey questioned

"No.." Cheeraen replied weakly and we all looked at her dissatisfied

"you'll.. find out—I have a class now, see you guys tomorrow night" she ran off excitedly before we could ask anything else.

"Don't forget your equipment Roch!" she yelled from across the street. She goes to a fashion academy so she's always running around like a headless chicken.

"I should catch up with her" Janey said as she watched Cheeraen still running,

"I need to make sure she brings the right sizes" she looked unimpressed before seeing us off.

"Finally it's just us" Roch tediously pat my shoulder "come with me to test the lighting"

"riiight" I replied grabbing his waist as we walked.

Roch used to work at the universities photography department and he still goes there regularly. I sat as he adjusted the lighting on my face in one of the class studios, students walked by and watched curiously.

"Guys I know my lighting skills are exquisite, you can sit and watch and maybe hope to become like me" he said nonchalantly, playing with his little gadgets.

"Excuse me.. could we take a picture of you?" someone asked me and Roch glanced up

"oh, sure" I answered. He suddenly noticed how full the class had gotten from people lingering and watching.

After a while, he kept giving me dirty looks for accepting pictures

"come on now's our chance to leave" he whispered to me as we were finishing up. I thanked everyone as we left, they all seemed disappointed. We stepped outside and he leaned on the

wall giving me a look. I slowly made a heart with my hand, putting it to my cheek blankly and he smacked me “get out”.

The day after, at the studio my manager was busy talking to someone that I don't think works here.

“We're really stuck.. we can't do anything and our clients keep asking where he is..” my manager explained with concern for me

“these days he's difficult.. we haven't shot anything in a month because he refuses” she confided in the person as they looked at their watch “he's late” they said meticulously.

I walked into the studio and it was quiet, I wondered if we were doing another day of nothing.

“Ah Hide, I'd like you to meet Le-rui” my manager said noticing me arrive, a man stood beside her. He had grey hair that went down to his back and reading glasses, he was extremely elegant and stoic.

“He's a very experienced stylist that's worked with many major studios and models in the past” she continued “we wanted to consider your feelings and try something new, we're glad he has decided to work with us” my manager ended hopefully.

He glanced at her “this is him?”

“oh- ah yes, this is Hide” she replied nervously, I noticed he was studying me, his eyes moved from my hair down to my legs.

“Take off your clothes”

“what?” I asked

“your clothes, take them off” he repeated, the entire studio crew were there, I glanced around and everyone was just as startled as I was.

“You're a model right?” he logically stated

“I can't see your body properly like that” just as cold as he looked, my manager looked like she signed off mentally.

“You seem like one too” I counter-argued “how about you take yours off as well?” and suddenly he pulled off his tie and undid each of his buttons, slipping his shirt off completely. It startled the hell out of me. As he was undoing his belt everyone looked mortified, I quickly stopped him — “alright I'll do it.. but not here” embarrassed walking past him.

In the dressing room, I sat down crossing my legs watching him come in while fixing his clothes. He stopped and looked at me.

“I'm not actually, I was lying” I said plainly fooling him, but he gave me this cut the bullshit look, he carried himself sophisticatedly, his presence was very strong.

“You're lucky your studio favourites like you this much” he said evidently

“you were a model right?” I asked, he didn't answer

“back in the day, they would've just moved on to the next model if you were this difficult” he carried on

“they should” I said throwing a scrunched up paper ball on the floor.

“I've seen your covers” he heeded “it's true, you look very different”

“enough that you didn't recognise me at first right?” my tone was half-hearted, he placed my covers on the table he was leaning against and looked at them.

I scoffed at him before I got up and placed my hands on the table

“you prefer this, don't you?” I challenged, he didn't answer again but held my gaze. There was a moment before I said “there's more to me than what I wear” before leaving.

It was dark now, we were waiting outside the address Cheeraen gave us. I mean it totally seemed like a run-down pub, there were these red neon signs just outside it, but it felt homely nonetheless. She finally arrived
“wait where’s Janey?” she asked
“she’s not here yet” Roch replied
“Janeyyyy” she complained, stomping her feet
“you can stomp your feet inside, it’s cold out here” I said nagging her, she got a key out and unlocked a back shutter and we walked upstairs to a spare room.

Roch was getting set up while Che continued groaning super loudly
“how can we start without her?” she exasperated
“I’m probably going to start falling asleep before she gets here” she continued, I sat next to her on the couch and yawned “me too”.
She pat my head then stared at me like she just had an epiphany.
“Hide” —“you could stand in for Janey” she became overexcited “you’re basically the same”
“yeah make yourself useful” Roch poked fun at the idea, I grimaced but I’d do it for her.

I got into the clothes Che made which wasn’t all that bad, she designed a white dress that was a little shorter on me because I was taller than Janey.
“We’ll just have you sit down anyways” she said working around it and we started taking pictures.
“Woah it’s perfect!”
“you’re a pretty good body double aside from having no other uses” Roch bullied me
“shut up, hiding my muscles isn’t easy” I credited
“what muscles?” he replied and I grabbed him by his hair “OWW” he agonised in pain.
“Stop! you’ll look all tense on the camera!” Che tried to separate us but suddenly one of the lights went out, she looked at Roch.
“It’s 12am..” he started “I’ll just charge the light while we take a break..” he reasoned and that’s exactly what we did. We all fell asleep on the couch and about two hours had passed. I woke but they were still asleep.
“I wonder if the place downstairs is still open —I’m pretty thirsty” I said to myself, I couldn’t find my shoes because it was too dark to see, so I went without. I made my way through the building, it felt like one of those old nineties buildings with a hundred year old carpets. But when I got downstairs, the whole pub was empty, like a ghost town. I guess the place wasn’t that popular. It was really cosy though, with dim but warm lights and a red carpet.

I got a drink and wondered how the place stayed open if it had no customers. The straps of the dress kept falling off my shoulders which was bothersome, I guess it would help if I was a girl and had a chest. I decided to head back up, although I noticed that there was an alternate room on another floor that had these glowing lights and muffled music playing, except I couldn’t see inside. Felt sketchy and I wasn’t about to get curious.

Le-rui

I was waiting in a dimly lit corridor, this place really felt un-alluring to the common passer-by, that’s when I noticed someone walk by me. I turned my head as they passed, they weren’t wearing shoes or pants, but a little white dress. It was simple and flowy at the bottom, they had long legs but the dress was just barely long enough.. the little string straps were falling off their shoulders. I noticed the blonde hair and then it hit me, it was a guy, it was the young model from earlier. But he didn’t notice me as he passed.

Hide

Suddenly I jolted awake, still on that couch, it was 9am and I was running late to work. I quickly scurried to put my jacket and pants on and grabbed my shoes.

"Hide..? what time is it" Che asked hazily

"I have to run! I'll return the dress I promise!" I said tripping over a few things as I rushed out.

We weren't at the studio today, but on a set. I made it, panting.

"I'm sorry-" "I-" I tried to speak out of breath

"quick get dressed, the client isn't ready yet so you have half an hour" my manager said hurriedly. I jogged to the dressing room but Le-rui wasn't there. I sat down and took a breather in front of the mirror. I might be stubborn but I really didn't want to make a bad impression on him.

Not long later, he came in with a hanger covered in a black cloak and leaned on the table in front of me, ushering me to look at it. I took a glance inside and sighed about to get up. He held my shoulder and pulled me down to sit again.

"No" I said and he put the cloak down, it was silent for a moment.

"What are you wearing underneath that?" he asked and I continued looking at him, he took the zipper, undoing my jacket and revealed the dress beneath it.

I was about to get up again but he pulled me down holding my shoulder

"isn't this you?" his words were more empathetic "the person on the cover and who you are right now are similar" he persisted "even if you try to make it seem otherwise".

I stayed quiet and furrowed my brows, the room became silent again

"they're sexualising me and you know it" I blurted out before looking the other way.

I looked at his hand on my shoulder, the strap had fallen again but I just ignored it, not pushing him off.

He broke the silence "if someone else wore the same exact things, would you treat them differently?"

".." "no" I replied quietly

"when you see a woman on the street, wearing something similar, would you say she's being too sexual?" he asked unhitched

"no.." I said again

"and if it was a man?"

"I wouldn't.." my answers never changing, there was silence again before he said "I know you don't hate wearing it, stuff happens regardless of what you wear" he rationalised much more sensitively "wearing what you want shows who you can trust and who you can't. If you run away, nothing changes".

He let go of my shoulder but leaned closer to my face

"so.. are you going to run away?" his long hair fell off his shoulders as he waited for me to answer.

He unzipped my trousers as I pulled the dress off, I tripped on the table as he pulled the trousers through my ankles, "fuck ow" I pained as I hit my waist on the corner, suddenly he grabbed my face.

"I'll strip you naked if you're late again"

I didn't move in shock as he held my face, "nod" he commended, I nodded.

Everyone was waiting for me to get to set, my manager stood nervously beside Le-rui, then I came and walked in front of the camera.

"What did you say to him..?" my manager whispered in bewilderment
"just some words I would've told myself when I was his age" Le-rui answered.

The focal point of what I was wearing was the thick black boots that went all the way up to the upper thigh, leaving a gap to highlight the skin between the dress and boots. The producer was doing a lighting check before we started. I was taking pictures with Kkun, an actress, she wore sunglasses watching me from the side. Her short boyish hair accentuated her cool presence.

I glanced at her and she came over. She was really tall and leaned in to whisper near my ear "I hope you don't mind me.. touching you" and I felt her hand grazing mine, I nodded and our fingers intertwined, "we'll start" she informed the crew.

"Close your eyes" she whispered, directing me, then she walked behind me and I felt her hand on my lower stomach, it slowly moved up to my chest, pulling both my arms up and holding my wrists behind my head with her hand, it surprised me. My chest extended as I breathed but the producer told me to stay still. I felt her other hand lingering sensitively on my chest, my head turned out of reflex, looking at her behind me when I realised. She took off her glasses and put them over my eyes.

They were monitoring the pictures after we took them, the crew gathered around the screen. "The position... so sensual and sexy.." mesmerised by the outcome. As we were wrapping up I made my way back to the dressing room and ran into her. She stopped me by leaning against the wall with her shoulder. She looked at my eyes but didn't say anything. She just held my gaze finally saying "it's a shame we finished by the first position" I'm guessing she's really into women because I haven't said a word to her yet. Her hand touched my cheek, I tilted my head from her touch,
"I hope we don't run into each other again.. or you'll be in trouble" she quietly exchanged before allowing me to walk past her.

There were loud gunshots, we were at a shooting range, the guy— Volken, we were supposed to be shooting with was being kind of.. "I told you, I don't take pictures, why did you bring all these people?" he had a nice foreign accent and dismissed everyone. But he was talented at what he did.. shooting his rifle without paying attention.

"I shoot guns, I'm not trying to take a picture for a pretty magazine" he showed no sign of interest. His manager sighed, he was stressed.

"It's no use" he said

"can I go home?" I asked leaning back on my chair, resting my legs on the table. Our team was sat at the other end of the pavilion watching from afar. I looked around and the place was full of foreign men playing with their little guns and conversing over drinks. I guess shooting ranges was one way of socialising.

"Just give it an hour.. I'll convince him" his manager tried to keep us patient, I scoffed blowing my hair out my face before standing up.

Everything I wore today was black leather, except, the shorts I wore were more like briefs, but the thigh boots from before covered a lot of it, I also had a leather jacket on top. I walked

into the area where the tables of men drinking and smoking were before pushing past some guys and ending up at where the guy and his rifle were. I walked right up to the shooting bar and stood right next to him, placing my finger on his rifle and he stopped. I lowered the tip, before turning around and picking up a gun myself from the table in front of him. I picked up a pistol and loaded it, glancing at him as he watched. I pulled out his in-ear pieces by the wire so he could hear the gunshot loud and clear, before I aimed and fired.

The bullet shot and grazed the corner of the targets head, I turned around and glanced at him again.

“I guess that’s why you like it so much.. it’s not so hard” I plainly stated, really not aiming to offend him. I dropped the pistol carelessly and sat on the little balcony. He looked at me, slowly pushing his tinted sunglasses up before turning his head to glance the other way, the corners of his mouth tinged with intention “stay there” he directed.

Before I could say anything, the tip of his rifle grazed the skin of my abdomen. I leaned back unevenly sucking the air out of my stomach. I glanced at my manager who was already pulling people for help.

“Take a picture” he instructed the crew, looking into my eyes as if I was a helpless animal. The director rushed to get the shot. I looked the other way trying to stay calm, but I suddenly felt the urge to shove his shoulder. Except, instantly he grabbed my arm and strapped me down.

“You want them to get the little photo right..?” he constrained, I felt myself slipping while sat on the balcony. He held my hip to stop me so I couldn’t move, I tugged his wrist tightly to no avail, looking at the staff again for help. Naturally the shot was more important, but I was about to *get* shot if he didn’t watch his fingers. I know his expression was coming up perfect on camera, my expression was..

As soon as they took the picture, he let me shove him away. I breathed heavily messing up my hair—

“Now you guys got your little picture, all of you leave” he glanced at me lighting a cigarette “except you”.

A while passed and everyone really did leave, it was getting late. I really don’t get what he wanted. I leaned against a little partition in the pavilion that separated the sections, and he came and stood in front of me. He took off his glove with his teeth and moved my jacket a little with his finger to look inside.

“.. Exhaustive” he muttered, before sliding my feet apart with his foot with ease and knelt before me.

I looked down at him, “what?”, he took off his tinted glasses, eyes sullen

“I want to do something for you” he said in a quiet, melting way. He kissed my thigh near my crotch and I looked behind me shocked at the people still around.

“What are you doing?? there’s people around” I said alarmed

“they won’t see..” he dismissed

“hey-” I felt his hands and mouth through the leather, my breath hitched watching him, I tried to pull his head away but I got a glimpse of his closed eyes, mouth pressing and lack of restraint. My eyes widened as he continued, as if getting high off the gesture. He opened his eyes just a crack, feverishly “..don’t make a sound”.

2

There was loud music and lights strobing in colours, yet an abundance of darkness.

“Have you seen Tren??” Janey yelled to Roch

“WHAT?” he yelled back, unable to decipher anything from the music

“NEVERMIND” she replied

“where’s HIDE??” he asked her and she glanced around

“ZONING OUT” pointing over with her glass.

Everyone was dancing, but it all sounded muffled to me. I stood in the crowd closing my eyes and looking up at the ceiling, there was no sky, just lights, muffled music, nothing else.

“Isn’t it weird he’s out with us?” Roch wondered, still yelling into Janey’s ear

“what are you his dad?” she pushed his nose away, Tren came over to them with a cigarette in his mouth.

“Who’s dad?” he interrupted

“where were you?” Janey asked and he held up a drink, answering her question, she went to grab it but he moved it away and kissed her, then handed it to her

“ahh don’t do that when you’re smoking” she bugged him, he chuckled

“what’re you guys talking about?” he noticed they were glancing over at me “what’s up with him?” he snickered

“Hideee!” Janey practically started screaming

“HIDE”

“he’s not listening”

“where’s he going?”

“why’s he stumbling like that he didn’t even drink anything”

“oh now he’s bumping into people”

Tren continued laughing, stopping Roch from going to help me.

“Wait- wait don’t go over there” he exasperated manically because my sweater got caught on a girls belt.

“Wow.. what is he doing..” Janey peevd, my sweater had a bunch of holes in it, it was knitted. I just tugged on it, then realised the girl was staring at me. So I went closer and undid it from her belt, scratching my head and walking away.

“...” they watched in silence

“she’s still looking at him” Tren covered his mouth

“what an airhead..” Janey said agitated.

I was walking through the crowd to get to a hall where there was fewer people. I was seriously sluggish, I bumped into the wall with my shoulder a few times and people started staring at me. I noticed Cheeraen dancing, she was smiling then she glanced my way.

“HIDE WHERE’S JANEY??” she screamed into my eardrums

“why do you look LIKE THAT?” she became discerned

“is there something on me? I noticed they were laughing at me” I asked obliviously

“what the hell??” she became worked up, it’s best I left her so I kept walking through the crowd “HIDE—” “hey-“ she called out to me.

My head was really thumping, but I did everything but leave. I accidentally bumped into this guy’s shoulder, but I just kept walking.

“Hey Hide~” someone spoke out

“he’s not listening”— “blondie” “hey” I stopped and noticed Tren calling me

“hey come here” he called again
“hurry up”
“who’s he?” one of his friends asked
“Janey’s friend” Tren answered
“are you sure that *ain’t* Janey?” his friend was perplexed, I went up to them asking where she was.
“You just missed her” Tren said mysteriously “so I heard you filled in for her at Cheeraen’s shoot” he switched topics
“while she was busy with you” I retorted
“they came out well, you looked exactly like her, if she breaks up with me it won’t be a problem” he had a devious laugh. I went to walk away but Janey suddenly stopped me by grabbing my arm
“there you are” she pulled me back
“you really are similar” his friends feigned as Janey and I stood next to each other, she hugged me and pressed her cheek on mine all smiley. Something possessed Tren to hold both of our faces together with his hand
“It’s pretty terrible..” he squished our faces together, my cheek was all smushed by his fingers, Janey looked surprised
“why are you holding his face too..??” she yelled
“because there’s one dumb blonde” he poked my nose “and my pretty girlfriend” cupping her face with both his hands and kissing her. She pulled away fighting —
“we’re both *blonde*” they kept bickering and I made my swift exit, boy why was she dating him.

I found Roch and gave him a great big hug, letting my knees buckle
“Woah WOah” he said caught off-guard and grasped me properly so I didn’t fall. All I remember was blacking out, I worked non-stop these days, being outside and around everyone was out of character, but it made sure I didn’t have a second to think.

I woke up and was right back at work, getting a long piece of fabric draped around me. I could barely keep my arms up, the stylist had to hold them up for me several times. She pinned the fabric and made me face the mirror, Le-rui was sitting and reading a magazine in the same room. She draped it carefully, I shut my eyes a couple of times almost nodding off, Le-rui looked at the stylist and she left. I turned my head to glance at him, but he didn’t look up. It was silent and he turned a page
“do you remember what I said about being late?” he asked, I moved my glance to look out the window
“come here” he said and I walked and sat beside him, laying my arms on the windowsill with my head resting on it. My eyes were droopy, I felt like dozing off again. I felt his hand moving hair strands off my face. His grey hair looked soft in the light. I sensed his hand wrap around both of my cheeks, gently covering my nose and mouth. Then, he tightened his grip, and I realised I couldn’t breathe.

I was so tired that my hands were weak, I tried to move and turn my body slightly to face him but he kept my head against the window sill. He stood up and I watched him in a daze. I felt my voice whimpering and constantly averted my eyes, unable to look at him. He pulled my head trying to make me look at him. I tried holding his wrist to make him stop jolting me around so harshly. I got the courage to look up and my brows quivered from the strain, my eyes began to water. It was no use, I was about to pass out.

Just as my eyes lost focus he let go. I watched his hand slowly lift from my mouth and nose and my chest was heavy. I shut my eyes trying to catch my breath, his thumb was still on my cheek, I waited for him to remove it. He walked away, holding a glass of water with lots of ice in it, he held it over me, and slowly poured it all over my body. I covered my mouth with my arm, breathing out as the cold water splashed onto me. It made the fabric all wet, becoming stuck to my skin and coming undone around my waist. He placed his hand sliding the ice on me, like rubbing salt in a wound. My breathing was shaky, I looked at my torso that was moving in a stir. I blinked at the water dripping from my skin. "Hurry up and change" he said monotone, but I didn't move a muscle. I panted in silence waiting for him to leave.

The water glistened in the pool, I sat by the edge looking down at it. The night air was warm, and I was out again. The music was relaxing, it was sombre and matched the weather. I then noticed something emerging from the water. A familiar face surfaced, it was the first time I saw her again, this is awkward. I wasn't wearing a shirt. She stopped and ran her hands through her hair when she looked at me, sultry and small glimpses of a smile appeared on her lips. I felt her hands holding my ankles in the water.

"You know what they say about you?" she asked, gently looking up at me, I shook my head. The reflection of the water reflected off my shoulders and collar bone, she opened her mouth as to tell me the answer, then airily whispered "good boy" near my ear.

"Kkun are you coming?" a girl called out to her, she glanced over, not moving her head, then glanced back at me, letting go of my ankles in the water. I noticed a girl with long brunette hair was waiting for her. Kkun put a shirt over her bathing suit and placed her hand on the girl's waist as they walked.

I looked around the condo and decided to go up the stairs to the second floor where I found a small dark room, definitely what I needed. Without much thought I climb into the bed — I rarely stayed home so this was one of my chances to sleep without overthinking. I was so exhausted.. no thoughts.. could...

Without realising I fell asleep, I'm not sure for how long, someone came into the room as I slept. They started getting changed, but when they turned around — they paused, noticing me on the bed. I was still asleep. They put their clothes on quietly now and sat on the bed looking at me, gently moving the hair over my eyes, I breathed slowly, unaware in my sleep. Their finger stroked down to my cheek and I moved a little, sleeping on my back now from my side. Their thumb moved softly on my skin, drawing circles on my chest. It was slow and sensual, I didn't move a muscle, so their index finger started stroking more boldly. Not noticing my eyes open hazily still half-asleep, unable to make out their face. They slowed down for a moment, I felt their other hand cup my cheek, caressing me comfortably to go back to sleep, not being able to keep my eyes open, I fell asleep again.

They used both their thumbs now on each side, slowly touching and watching me. I turned to sleep on my stomach, but their hands followed my body as I rotated my waist. Their hands lingered on my side, pressing deeply, massaging my back with their thumbs. It released the tension in my muscles, I was completely unconscious. After, their hands moved touching down to my spine, holding my waist, placing a single kiss on my lower back. Someone outside called out to them.

I don't know how much time passed but I woke up in a daze, that was the deepest sleep I've ever had. My muscles were tingling. I got up, going down the stairs

“oh is sleeping beauty awake?” the host grabbed my arm, pulling me into a hug with a drink in his hand

“where’ve you been?” he asked sarcastically

“I wasn’t I wasn’t” I didn’t bother to make it sound convincing

“oh? you’re a pretty sleeper” he coddled and I looked at him confused but noticed Kkun over his shoulder.

She was sat on a stool, her pretty brunette friend stood between her legs. Kkun held her chin up with her finger, giving her an intense look that you give someone before kissing them— what interested me more was she had a blazer right on top of her swim suit now, contemporary as hell of her.

“Your hair isn’t even an ounce wet” he said picking up strands of my hair, some girls wrapped their arms around my waist and arms and I looked at them shocked not to be rude pushing them off. They were pulling me to come outside, where I noticed some guys had a picture on their phone. I looked closer over their shoulders and noticed it was a picture of me and snatched the phone.

“Is that me—?” I said aloud and they started laughing, the guy tried to grab his phone back but I was busy trying to get a good look at it.

“It’s a good photo” he started “I wonder if there’s more..” coyly

“why do you have this?” I began questioning the guy, he chuckled putting his hands up

“the photos are in safe hands, I won’t share it” he bartered “but you totally offended him by sleeping at his party” he snickered, I looked back at the host and he was laughing his head off at me from inside. I was about to go back in but the girls held onto me again

“no can do~ it’s all yours, if you get in the water” they explained

except, the guys in the water were taunting me

“oh sleeping beauty — we don’t bite” one of them called out, throwing a beach ball around. I sat on the ground not moving an inch, the girls tried their best to convince me.

“Come on, you hurt his feelings” meanwhile the guy continued passing his phone around.

“Woahhh how did you get that?”

“is that you??”

“that’s him?”

I gave each of them a dirty look.

“Hey before you fall asleep again—” some guys in the pool came up to the edge

“wanna tell us who took the picture?”

“you weren’t sleeping there alone, that’s for sure” they grinned, waiting for an answer. That’s when I noticed Kkun leaning on the door frame behind us with a soft smile. Her hands were in the pockets of her blazer

“with someone?” she asked, walking slowly in front of me, I looked up at her

“who?” she wondered, I didn’t know what to say.

“Charliene!” a guy from the pool called out, I glanced behind me and it was the pretty brunette Kkun was with. When I looked back at Kkun, she was still focused on me.

“I have the drinks” Charliene got her attention, Kkun walked past stroking her arm

“meet me inside” she told her gently before going in. I noticed Charliene glancing at me then back at Kkun as she left.

“What are you guys doing?” Charliene asked, not looking at me

“waiting for sleeping beauty to get in the water” the guys answered

“you guys are so mean” she laughed

“c’mere”

“nooo way” she refused
“come on” and she came closer but they splashed water on her legs, she yelled taking a step back
“no way anyone’s getting in the water with you guys in there!” then she almost consciously ignored the fact that I was sat behind her and dropped both drinks from her hands. One stained me red, and the other went into my eyes.

The girls gasped, “oh my gosh I’m so sorry” she began
“I’ll get you towels!” covering her mouth almost insincerely. I picked up the glasses since they didn’t break and got up to hand them to her
“don’t worry I’ll wash it off” I said rubbing my eyes, they were burning, I went inside quickly.

Through a dark hallway, I tried to find somewhere to wash off. The smell was sticking to my skin like glue, it was so strong. I noticed someone walking towards me, they stopped just in front of me. I tried to get past but they stopped me.

“What? did they make you get into the water?” she asked lifting strands of my wet hair chuckling lightly

“something like that” I answered trying to get past but she leaned on the wall, like the first time we met.

Kkun looked at me up and down and took the hand that I was gripping my shoulder with, and licked my collar bone

“wait- -” I said startled, taking a step back and covered where she licked

“what are you—-“

“tastes like red wine, my favourite” she smiled, about to do it again, I took another step back.

“H-hey” I repeated and she laughed quietly.

She held the shower hose and rinsed me off, I watched her as she did. Her hands brushed over the skin on my waist and arms. Her touch felt familiar. As she finished, I was practically a fish out of water, she looked at my shorts stained red “I think you’d better change..”

I sat on the bed watching her using an ice-cream machine also placed conveniently inside the room. She started rummaging through the dresser passing me her ice-cream to hold for her. I did lick it a few times when she looked away. It started melting, trickling down my fingers.
“Try these on” she said handing me something and I put whatever she gave me on, too busy watching the ice-cream melting.

I sat down again looking at what I was wearing. Some sort of black sleeveless compression shirt, but it was like a swimsuit? luckily I wore loose black trousers over it. She made me get up again and pulled the trousers down a little to show the skin at the hips of the swim suit. The tips of her fingers rimmed the edge of the swimsuit by my hips, following it around.

“It was you, in the room, right?” I said

she stepped forward a little, making me step back to sit on the bed and grabbed my wrist that was holding the ice-cream.

“Did you take the picture?” I asked again.

Not answering, she licked the ice-cream trickling down my hand, it startled me so much I dropped it.

“Kkun -..” I tugged my hand away but she bent down, still holding onto my wrist and licked my palm.

She sat on my lap and smiled inexplicably from my reaction

“you handle my touch so well.. even in your sleep..” she reminisced “you tolerate it all.. ” pulling me down slowly as she started unzipping my trousers. I grabbed her waist with one hand, trying to pull her off

“what about-“ I tried to speak, but she interrupted

“I used to think you were cute enough to sleep with once or twice” she started “but you’re way too.. fucking hot for just.. that” her words were breathless, she placed her body onto my pelvis, the pressure made my thoughts disoriented. Her words made me embarrassed.

“Why.. I’m a guy..” I struggled, averting my eyes back and forth from hers. She chuckled lightly tangling our fingers together against the bed.

“I know..” she became infatuated, I tried to move but she let out a breath

“.. don’t move” she sighed just from the skin-ship alone. My heart pounded. What was she going to do..?

3

I waited for Le-rui, he finally came into the waiting room, but he looked different from usual. His top buttons were undone, his perfume was different, fragrant and floral. I’ve never seen him so impromptu. He did his buttons up then glanced at me, tucking his shirt into his trousers.

“You’re not dressed” he pointed out, I was wearing my own clothes, he rarely lets me wear my own clothes when we had castings.

“It’s okay, let’s go” he disregarded, he was being seemingly more lenient today.

“This is my good friend, he’s the casting director of Black Quarterly” Le-rui explained, introducing me to the man. It was a prestigious fashion label, kind of like what Broadway is to theatre.

“Le-rui suggested we consider you, that’s of great praise” the casting director honored, I noticed loads of other models already dressed in all black attire.

“We’re currently shortlisting” he continued, walking us through the set, it was busy and hectic, people carried around lights and clothing racks.

“Since Le-rui suggested you last minute, we’re hoping the clothes fit fine” he explained.

I got changed without Le-rui, he sat in the proofing area, when I got dressed, the staff lead me straight to be proofed by the director. I glanced at Le-rui, he was usually a perfectionist so I knew he probably hated the way they fit me. All the models were waiting for their turn, all gathered watching as every person got checked, but the director wanted to see me right away.

I stood in front of him, he looked at me for a moment then signalled me to come closer. He touched the hem of the shorts, noticing the looseness. He held my hips to turn me around and I felt his fingers tracing the hem all the way to the back and I glanced at him. The shorts were attached to a micro-rhinestone skirt, it was short enough that you could see a few centimetres of the shorts beneath. He started checking the corset, feeling the gaps, he stood behind me, pulling the corset down from the front, as his head peeked over my shoulder.

“It looks good on you” he examined “hm.. doesn’t fit in certain places but” patting me down, muttering

“you’ve got a good body though” he knelt again and placed my foot on his thigh and adjusted the shoe. He gave me a doting smile which startled me. I was losing my balance, but he grabbed me with one hand

“I’ve got you, we’ll get you refitted” he smiled again unnecessarily and stroked my arch with his thumb. I just nodded, putting my foot down and walked away. I glanced back when he

checked the next models and he took the proofs like normal, barely touching them. It made me uncomfortable doing that in front of all those people. I walked past Le-rui but didn't stop, he looked up at me and grabbed my arm but I kept walking.

I stood in the fitting room distressed, I was getting really angry.

"Hide" Le-rui said coming in

"why would you introduce me to him?" I turned around annoyed

"what's wrong?" he asked

"he- why was he.." stopping myself not able to say, turning around again. The stylist came in, but Le-rui told her he would fit me instead and she left quickly closing the door.

He came closer to touch my shoulder but I just moved away.

"No.. I won't" I refused

"we have to" he said softly

"are you doing him a favour or am I?" I snapped, putting my hand on my head stressed.

"He-.. what did you sa-" I stopped

"tell him to not touch me like that again" I said explicitly, facing away from him.

"Hide" he said again

"just tell him" I made clear, stroking my temple "I'm tir—" he grabbed me, standing in front of me, placing his head against mine, closing his eyes. I looked at him surprised.

"It's okay" he said slowly, he opened his eyes "I'll speak to him"

"is everything alright-" my manager came in all worried

"I'll be back, make sure those stylists don't touch anything" Le-rui informed her as he was leaving

"roger" she answered, and he left.

Some time passed, my manager looked at me all worried. She handed me mini-chocolates "make sure to eat them, you need sugar" she whispered, hiding them away in my hands. Le-rui came in again and she jumped. He stood behind me moving my hair to the back of my neck, I felt his hand lingering on my chin.

"Can we have a moment?" he asked, my manager hurriedly left

"I'll be back in a few minutes" she noted, I felt his hand on my cheek slowly wrapping around my jaw about to cover my mouth

"Leru-" I said, shocked at what he was about to do.

A while after she came back and stood in front of me all tense

"are you sure you're alright?" she asked as I was out of breath and I kept drinking water. Le-rui was pulling and re-adjusting the laces of the corset behind me.

"Maybe it's too tight" she asked Le-rui worriedly

"don't worry, it's not his size, in fact it's much too loose" showing her the looseness of the corset on my chest.

"see?"

"hey- -" I pushed his hand away, out of breath, waiting for him to finish patiently.

At the review, I sat beside him, the director was talking to us about his vision, I stroked my Adam's apple a couple of times to keep from coughing. At the end a journalist wanted to ask him some questions.

"Le-rui it's an honour to meet you, we're excited to see you again" she began

"it's great you're collaborating with Black Quarterly, we're curious about your new muse, could we ask a couple of questions?"

"go ahead" he replied and I chuckled awkwardly

“should I go?” I asked, wanting to take my exit

“no- no please stay, we’d like you to answer as well” the journalist insisted.

“So how do you find working with Le-rui?” she queried

“he’s..” I started, clearing my throat suddenly, facing the other way, dodging the question, she laughed

“it must be a secret”

“and what about you Le-rui?” she asked him next

“he doesn’t listen, usually high-handed, a little arrogant” he answered rather dishonestly, I sensed him placing his hand on my thigh, able to wrap around it. Suddenly he looked down at it and I glanced at him.

“What did you say?” I asked him

“arrogant” he informed me

“only arrogant people call others arrogant” I told the journalist and she laughed again, finishing up the interview.

I got up but Le-rui stopped me. He wrapped his hand around my thigh again

“it’s not as full anymore” he was perplexed, prodding the skin on the side

“you used to be more..” he stopped for a moment, looking up at me and I didn’t know what to say.

“... Don’t you think you’ve been working him too hard..?” my manager discussed quietly

“he hides it well.. but.. I can’t get him to eat, he has trouble swallowing food.. he just drinks water” she had an anxious look

“don’t worry, it’s normal” Le-rui said calmly, not worried by it.

4

Side B
Han

“What have you been doing these days?” Karson asked me
“adult things, like homework” I answered, watching him lounge on the couch upside down, as kids do.
“No you don’t” he started fidgeting, really wanting to know. I glanced at my phone, going through it—
“HEY gimme that” he snatched it away from me
“you’re supposed to be doing my homework” he ordered me
“am I?” I asked
“WHAT THE HELL” he suddenly yelled
“this list is endless, how many girls message you exactly???” he stared at the phone screen outraged. It was too early for him to be interested in stuff like that.
“Come on, your math homework awaits” I pointed my finger at the table
“never mind that” he said carelessly “tell me about this” as he shook my phone frantically in my face
“well..” I pondered, actually thinking hard about it.

“You really don’t have to help ..” Kelly said as I was mopping, I put my head on the handle and gave her a small smile.
“Why?” I asked, she just turned around and continued sweeping
“.. I feel bad” she answered timidly
“I think it’s worse you’re cleaning alone” I told her for the hundredth time “you shouldn’t let people walk all over you” I said genuinely worried about her, she glanced over but avoided eye contact with me.
“How come you’re.. here anyways” she asked quietly
“let’s finish up” I said, realising I made her nervous.

Other times well.. I waited by the water at night, the sound of a motorbike passed, I looked up from my phone as it stopped. This other girl I knew was like a malevolent entity. She wore this shiny suit that fit like a glove, her eyes were always smoky. She moved forward a little from where she sat on the bike and glanced at me.

“Ride with me” she asked luringly

I sat behind her — and she pulled me closer by the waist before putting her hands back on the handles.

I felt the wind through my coat, she drove with ease, like waves building up, anticipating to crash against the shore. After a while, she slowed down, we both looked at the destination out in the middle of nowhere. I glanced at her leaning my arms on the back of the bike

“don’t get spooked, strong.. man” slow on the last part, as she stood up.

I watched her as she walked, dark jet black hair, almost purple in the moonlight, but maybe that was just my imagination. Dorn had this intense aura, her smile felt dangerous, like she always knew something you didn’t. She glanced back to make sure I was following her. The

place was decrepit, the remains of an abandoned building covered in forestry. She gripped my wrist, demanding me to follow in her direction.

She pulled us to hide behind a wall, and slowly put her finger over her lips as to tell me to be quiet as she disappeared into the darkness. I continued looking around for her, walking up the stairs. I saw candles laid out in a circle, sort of ritualistic and sinister, she laid in the middle of them, on the floor, still and unchaste, the yellow of the candles reflected on her body.

I walked right past the candles and stood right above her

“what are you doing?” I said smiling now fully, she ran her hands through her hair, laid out across the floor, looking at me without any expression.

“You really don’t scare” she voiced dully, hitting my leg before sitting up near the open edge of the building.

“Who’ve you scared doing that?” I asked, sitting beside her

“it usually works every time” she admitted “I’m gonna need to try harder with you..” taking a glimpse of me

“what’ve you got in mind?” I led on, she grabbed the collar of my jacket, pulling me towards her and looked at my mouth “find out..” the words fell off her lips as she tapped my chest with her hand, before smiling. Her dark indigo lipstick caught my attention.

“..Wow, so she was really pretty?” Karson pondered

“sinister and pretty aren’t the same, you need to practice your English” I lectured

“and what happened next?!” he asked obsessively, I closed his textbook, he wasn’t sat upside down anymore.

“Well I’m about to find out” I said, standing up and ruffling his hair with both hands.

“Your mums not going to be happy” I smiled

“why?” he asked, and I knelt down whispering

“it’s Halloween, let’s go buy some candy” and he lit up.

“You like that one?” I asked

“how about this?” he said, picking up anything he saw at the store, then he ran over to the newspapers. He was in no means interested in anything I suggested. I reorganised the shelves he made a mess of, noticing a magazine and I froze.

Gun on the chest, an expression of satisfaction and the other of animosity. There was another cover next to it, I couldn’t argue at all. The control he allowed someone to have over him was profane. I know these don’t just sell.. he disappears for months and— I lowered my gaze, keeping my thoughts to myself, my expression was emotionless as I walked away.

After dropping Karson back home, I relaxed for a while after getting back to my apartment. I laid on the couch, it was turning 11pm and I heard my front door open and I lifted my head up.

“Hey” I said, it was Kelly, she set down her things

“how’s Karson?” she asked

“I told him about you” I replied, and she rolled her eyes. I may have made her seem a little different in my story..

“What did you say?” she sounded uninterested

“you got flustered when I came to help you at work” I tried not to grin

“what a loser” she said washing her face in the bathroom. She used to help out at the gym a while back, until she got tired of me, she’s been sparse with me ever since.

“Is it not right?” I sarcastically continued

“you told him I had long pretty hair and shy personality too” as she poked her head out of the bathroom and I nodded smiling. She was the exact opposite, but the thing I said about people walking over her was true.

After, she came over and grabbed my face while rustling through her make-up brushes

“I knew you would actually come if I asked you this favour” I said happily

“be serious” she wasn’t into my jokes and made me sit up properly and stay still. She started brushing over my face, fixated on the clown makeup, silent the whole time, I made eye contact with her and suddenly she slapped me across the face. There was a moment of silence, I glanced at her but she just pulled my face and continued remorseless.

She finished and picked up her things, putting her shoes on again.

“You don’t have to run away you know” I said looking at my phone, clown make-up on, she let out a breath.

“Have fun” she sounded tired

“you should come after you finish” I suggested

“I can’t”

“all you do is work”

“..I’m covering for someone” she always said that, stopping, putting her bag on her shoulder and leaving abruptly.

“You don’t smile much for a clown” Dorn pointed out, smiling at me like a Cheshire cat. I always seemed to only see her when its dark, she was walking backwards in front of me

“are you sure this is the right place?” I asked, it was a creaky old house, like the ones from those kids movies. She opened the front door walking in as if she would disappear if I closed my eyes.

She had a dark black cloak, stepping carefully around me in a circle taking a good look at me.

“I need your help” as her nail traced my jaw

“only a big.. strong guy.. can do this” she was a pretty convincing talker, I’d probably do it regardless of what it was. She walked delicately to a pile of barrels in the middle of the room, I was fixated on her movements, she sat on top of the pile of barrels like it was a wooden horse. She tapped on it to grab my attention, I came closer and touched it

“what is it?” I asked, she laughed.

We got to work, I carried and fixed the barrels to each side of her bike, while she was busy painting it with the glowing fluid encapsulated inside. She opened the drip lid of one of the barrels and the fluid gushed out. She glanced at me about to cause some mischief.

She slid my coat off from behind me, her fingertips lightly stroked over my biceps. She painted me with her hands, going over my upper arm down to my forearm.

“Everyone’ll know where I touched you” she was having fun from the sound of her voice, she knelt down and I leaned back on the bike softly gazing at her. She touched my hips up to my stomach, running her fingers under my shirt only a little.

“Oops looks like I made a mess” she said leaning into me, with both her hands on the bike beside me. While she was immersed, I wrapped my own hand covered in paint around her neck, her smile paled looking into my eyes.

We drove quickly, letting the barrels leak the fluorescent liquid, leaving a trail in our path. Dorn became thrilled, it was her mysterious charm.

The masked party was baroque and everyone dressed in ridiculous costumes. Dorn slipped off her cloak and disappeared as she does. She likes being looked for. I took it upon myself to

admire costumes. Oh Alex Turner, MJ, classic, hey there's Baymax, Karson loves him—woah that's a really good goblin king, just needs a Sarah.. wonder if she's here tonight. Dorn came out of hiding and pulled me to dance, I don't do dancing but I was far more open to it than the goblin king. Several guys came up to him, offering their hand, but he just glanced at them, emotionless under his mask with his arms folded, as if looking for a reason to leave.

"Next time you should dress up as Nightwing" Dorn suggested, entertained.

"Oh really?" I asked

"since I'm already Starfire" with her hands around my neck.

"I told Karson about you" I intrigued

"who's that?"

"my sisters son" I replied

"another man in your life is important.." she said looking at my lips, I glanced at the goblin king but he was gone.

"He asked if you were pretty" I said pulling my eyes back to her, that creepy smile started to form on her lips. I gazed around for him again, he was walking through the crowd, guys grabbed his hand but he didn't stop for them. Without warning someone who was adamant, pulled hi-

Dorn pat my chest with her fist to get my attention "what did you tell him?"

"wouldn't you like to know?" I smiled attentively, pulling her arms off my neck

"who else have you told him about?" she looked at my hands holding hers, before reading my eyes, then she stepped away "aren't you going to drink at all tonight?"

"Where'd you learn to drink like that?" I said, stopping her from downing the whole bottle,

"the guys I'm used to make sure we were so drunk, we couldn't feel a thing" she explained

"like Jimmy over there" pointing at this super stoned guy, all tatted, definitely creepy.

"But you.. well you haven't drank a drop of alcohol and treat me like I'm some sort of flower" she admitted

I just smiled slowly gazing at her —"could I get another bottle" she quickly asked the bartender.

The truth was watching all the liquids in the cups.. reminded me of the liquid pouring into my mouth, dripping from my lips, trickling down to my throat, it never tasted worse. I left Dorn for a while after her friends came over, making sure she didn't drink too much. I don't think I could stomach any alcohol.

I walked around for as long as I could. I noticed some guys glancing at something, I knew that look well, it's lust. A guy had pushed someone up against the wall, kissing their ear and neck with no remorse. He was shameless. I noticed the mask and took a better look— it was the goblin king he was kissing erratically. The guy put his arm against the wall, yet the goblin king showed no emotions, he just let out breaths, periodically trying to push him away. But that's exactly what gets a guy riled up. The guy was crazed in desire, suddenly kissing his chest through the silk shirt, holding onto his waist, he'd gone mad. The whole scene was arousing and private, I felt my cheeks turn red only taking a peek. The guys watching were certainly goblins.. I averted my eyes embarrassed and scurried away.

"Why are your cheeks all red? you look flustered" Dorn bumped into me "did you have something to drinkkk?" she asked as I was running away, she was obviously drunk which was good. She looked at something behind me and furrowed her brows.

"Hold on" she said walking off. I followed after her, she left out towards the entrance, I noticed many guys looking around, some were the goblins from before. I left through the

entrance as well, to an expensive high-street outside the pavilion, she noticed a guy following someone, overhearing their conversation.

“What are you shocked?” he provoked “you’re a really fun party favour, I know that’s hard to hear” he kept going, following him even though he wasn’t listening.

“I’ll just follow you” he didn’t stop “we’ll end up alone—” a large paint bucket rammed into the guy’s head, knocking him out cold completely, he didn’t know what hit him. Dorn peered at him in disgust, the goblin king turned around looking at her, she smiled relieved and he smiled back, before he continued walking and left.

“Don’t even think about it” she yelled at the other guys waiting at the top of the stairs, I noticed and came towards her.

“Are you okay?” I asked, she pointed at the paint spilt all over the street and smirked at me. I huffed, shocked that it came to use. I glanced at the guy knocked out cold, it was the same guy from before, then I glanced back at Dorn. I really am just a useless man, hugging her.

“Hey- Han — what are you—”.

I was watching tv with Karson while making food, he turned to me from the sofa

“my mums really angry at you” he said bluntly

“I know, she told me” I answered

“so did you finish the story?” he was still curious

“I did.. and it got me in a lot more trouble”

“with who?” — “wait, you told her about me right?” he was getting a little overexcited

“WHAT DID DORN SAY?” shouting now

“you’re not going to like this but.. she eats kids for lunch” I whispered the last part.

“WHAT???” he shouted in fear

“shhh watch tv, she’ll be angry if she finds out I told you, got it?” I hushed him and he sat uncomfortably turning back to the tv. I listened to it faintly as I cooked

“.. how stunning!”

“I’m sure we can all guess who you’re dressed as — Sarah, played by Jennifer Connelly isn’t it?” the interviewer asked. I glanced up from the coincidence, just the other night I was looking for her.

When I laid eyes on the tv, I stopped chopping vegetables and came and sat next to Karson. An unfamiliar man held his waist gracefully. He was dressed in an almost exact elegant white dress, like from the film.

“We’re excited you’re a part of the quarterly this season”

“it’s all thanks to Le-rui” he spoke easefully, the man beside him gazed gently.

“And the hair, it’s fantastic, the homage is heart-warming” the interviewer beseeched, it had these beautiful long curls, covered in embellishments exactly like the original.

“Please give us a spin” she asked and he did, turning slowly, looking into the camera, the rhinestones around his eyes sparkled like tears.

“That’s more than pretty right?” Karson said aloud, I cleared my throat

“mhm” averting my gaze.

His eyes were so innocent, I hoped no one would take a picture and sell it on a magazine. He glanced at the camera a few times as the interviewer spoke and it felt like he was looking right at me. My breathing became unsteady, I got up and went back to cooking hastily. Still overhearing the tv in the background.

“..That necklace, Le-rui isn’t it the one you wore when you were a model too?”

“it is”

“how lovely..”.

The goblin king from the other night, it couldn't be. It's not possible, he couldn't possibly show this level of innocence if something like that happened to him just the other.. and the guilt.. would eat at me because.. I just let it happen .. again.

5

I took Karson to the park, he's kind of like a dog that gets the zoomies. He ran off somewhere without me noticing, I looked around but he was nowhere to be seen

"what are you doing?" Kelly stood in front of me, popping up out of nowhere

"—you scared me, are you following me or something?" I asked

"you're asking me that? the gym wasn't enough for you so you started playing on the kids jungle jim?" she guessed, looking behind me

"I'm here with Karson" as a matter of fact

"oh yeah where is he?" she implored

"I lost him..".

Karson ran around the park like a madman, pulling peoples coats, chasing dogs and barking at the birds. He bumped into one stranger in particular that gave him a nasty look, he scurried off frightened, bumping into another stranger beside him.

"Are you okay?" the stranger asked

"AHHH HE'S LOOKING AT ME" trying to protect himself behind the stranger

"would you stop that?" the stranger asked the evil faced man "it's okay, are you lost?" the stranger kneeled to Karson's height

"I'm not" Karson replied, upset

"can we go?" the evil faced man asked the kind stranger

"don't be so dense, I'm going to help this cutie" the kind stranger replied, holding Karson's hand.

"You seem like a nice kiddo, I'm not sure why all these people are glaring at you" the stranger said as they walked through the park.

"I am, adults are just big headed" Karson remarked, swaying his hand with the strangers.

Kelly and I looked around, not really knowing what to do.

"Do you see your parents?" the stranger asked Karson,

".. oh! over there" he saw us, I noticed Karson, then the person who was holding his hand and I became flushed.

Hide was holding his hand, he glanced at me emotionless. I blinked at him shocked, Kelly had the same reaction, it was silent. He let go of Karson's hand and walked away without saying anything. I picked Karson up and continued glancing at him, Kelly watched too, neither of us said anything.

Don't think about it. I left Karson with Kelly and went into a local cafe to buy him hot chocolate to say sorry. Don't think about it. I glanced around the cafe to get my mind off things but saw that same grey haired man from on tv flipping through a magazine.. and on the other side of the table was..

I turned my head not wanting to be noticed but I couldn't help glancing over. Hide cut the toast on the plate in front of him, putting it in his mouth, but he had a look of discomfort, unable to swallow it.

“You won’t eat?” the man asked, not glancing up from his magazine, Hide put the knife and fork down. The man got up promptly and leaned by the edge of the table beside Hide. “I think you’re ready” he explained, picking up a small teaspoon of cream and opening Hide’s mouth, caressing his Adam’s apple with his finger, forcing him to swallow it. “There’s something I want you to try” the man coerced “it should loosen the tightness” his words were gentle but felt controlling. I felt chills down my spine.

Hide

I held a pillow on my lap sitting on the couch in Le-rui’s living room. Everyone had been texting me asking where I was. I haven’t been replying to texts for a while. Le-rui pulled his turtleneck off as he walked between rooms.

“Are you going somewhere?” I asked looking up from my phone, he didn’t answer. I got up and walked towards a few picture frames on his shelf, there was a picture of him when he was my age, he looked so happy. I wonder if he sees himself in me.

“What are you thinking about?” he observed rolling up his sleeves while adjusting his cuffs

“what did you want me to try?” I asked looking at the picture

“next time, I’ll take you another night” he answered, a few buttons on his shirt were undone, not wearing his glasses as usual, belt looser around his waist, it was not his usual respectable image. I’ve only seen him like this once before.

He walked towards me, glancing at what captured my interest.

“The necklace” I said turning my head to him “it was really yours?” while touching the necklace on my neck

“The man who took me under his wing gave it to me, and I’m giving it to you” he returned, I glanced back at the photo, at the man beside him holding his shoulder. I felt Le-rui touching the back of my neck, it was silent, he just gazed at me, but I didn’t say anything.

“You should go home” he said and I paused a moment, before putting the picture down and leaving.

Han

It was hot like a furnace, I was sweating. Although it was silent in my head — the arena was deafening. I was used to tournaments, but my focus was somewhere else. In the corner of my eyes I noticed hints of blonde hair, I turned my head to get a better look, but it was just a stranger walking by. In that split second I was punched directly in the jaw. Even so, my eyes lingered to someone else in the arena, realising it was just another stranger. I lost my balance dodging an attack from my opponent and my trainer was already long gone from shouting. “What’s the matter? am I too boring you won’t focus on the fight?” my hot headed rival wanted attention, unfortunately someone already took it.

During the intermission the first aid was checking my arm. I think I might’ve over exerted my muscle, it was stinging.

“What were you doing out there Han? you need to be here” my trainer disciplined me “focus on what’s happening right now” he held my shoulders trying to get me to take this seriously. I removed the towel from my head

“I need some air”

—“hey- you can’t leave mid fight” “HEY”.

I stood by a balcony in the parking lot, exhaling deeply, my bruises were aching. The sound of two people arguing behind me caught my attention.

“Where are you going?” one started

“why are we here? I’m not working today” the other replied, as he walked back to the car sounding frustrated. He got into the passenger seat and the other guy opened the driver’s door to talk

“we’re just seeing a friend of mine” the guy began “he’s been wanting to meet you”

“you’re making me work on the weekend?” the guy in the passenger refuted back “I’m not even supposed to see you outside of work without my manager” he folded his arms.

“Why are you acting like this?” the guy by the driver’s seat asked, the other guy glanced at him

“I don’t want to go near those fucking boxing shitheads” he said sharply, there was silence, oh shit.. okay.

The guy closed the driver’s seat door and walked around the front of the car to the other side, opening the passenger seat door —

“what are you doing—” without letting him finish his sentence, the guy climbed right into the car shutting the door behind him. The other guy backed up over the hand break and gearstick.

I couldn’t hear them anymore, but the guy that climbed into the car was getting closer to the other, even though he tried pushing him away several times. The guy pulled him closer by his thigh, making him hit his head against the steering wheel. The guy edged him, he looked scared, then, slowly he wrapped his palm over his mouth and nose. Suffocating him.

I felt my heart race, I took a step closer, and it hit me like a car crash. The guy in the car was Hide, and he was being choked. The blood in my veins was about to burst, my anger went from one to one hundred. I bolted, my arm was stinging, I clenched my teeth, but a staff member ran and grabbed me.

“Han! hurry up you’re about to be forfeited in the fight you’ve been gone for so long” she hurriedly said “you’ll automatically lose” it took her and another guy to hold me back.

“Stop it, someone over there is being attacked” I shouted

“we’ll go over there right away, but you need to head back right now” she negotiated, but as we were talking, the car had already driven off.

My skin was itching in unstable rage. I had not even the slightest clue what Hide had been going through. I’m a fighter, but he made me feel weak. Every time. I. just. fucking. watched. I was so pathetic. I stepped into the ring, I looked calm but I could kill anyone. I engaged without thought, my blows fuelled by the irritable motion. My punches were excessive, losing count, but nothing made it feel better. My rival held onto the ropes, about to pass out. Everything was silent, and it wasn’t just my head. At that point I should’ve stopped, but I kept going until my gloves were stained red.

The next day, I slept into the afternoon. “Hey softie” someone spoke, I was laid in bed still with the sheets over my body, my arm was over my eyes. The voice woke me up, it was Dorn.

“All bruised up, no tats required” she said, sitting on the other side of the bed smiling. I groaned, my body was aching all over.

“How did you get in?” I asked raspy and tired

“Kelly let me in” she smiled “is she your girlfriend?” grinning. I shut my eyes, breathing out deeply.

“Kidding, too tomboyish huh?” she enamoured, putting her fingers around my chin, turning my head to face her

“what’s the matter?” she asked resolute, I averted my eyes, there was a moment before I spoke.

“I ran into someone I know.. they’re in trouble”

“so this is about someone?” she let go of my chin “all these girls on your roster and you’re worried about one in particular?” she said waving my phone then dropping it.

“Just call and ask you big idiot” she suggested and I turned my head a little embarrassed

“I don’t have their number..” I replied, she raised a brow. I looked through my phone and stared at a picture of that grey haired man. Dorn leant down to look at my phone screen.

“I’ve seen this guy before” she remembered him

“you have? he’s famous” I said further

“really? I didn’t know, I’ve seen him someplace else though” she stated and we looked at each other.

We were outside this old pub in this run-down area, I looked up at it then glanced at her. We walked in and it had not a soul.

“On a Sunday, you’d like to think a pub at least has a few customers” she retorted, “hey Jack, got any new customers lately?” Dorn asked the bartender that kept himself sparse. He smirked not answering the question at all, he just continued wiping glasses with a rag.

“We’re gonna hang around, keep it on the low yeah?”

“What are we doing here?” I asked, as we were sat at a table towards the back of the pub, beside a window.

“there’s a small private club upstairs” she corroborated secretively

“how do you know?” I questioned

“I’ve been there once, with a guy I used to.. know” she said kind of awkwardly, I raised my brow

“it’s really sketchy” she summed up quickly

“shouldn’t we call the police?” I pointed out

“no softie, I’ve seen police officers go up there too” she continued “suspicious things in a suspicious area, isn’t all that suspicious”

“but there’s no one here?” I looked around

“we have to wait till dark, in the meantime let’s watch who comes in”.

Hide

I was drowsy, but not the normal kind. I could hear my own breath. I exhaled, trying to wake up, gazing above me, my eyes only opened just a crack.

“Good morning, last beauty” someone said, I covered my face rubbing my eyes, unable to make out who was talking. I could smell cigarettes, my eyes focused for a moment and I looked up again. I was lying on Le-rui’s lap, he was smoking, I’ve never seen him smoke before.

“Is this your apartment?” I asked sleepily, he glanced down at me while I held his knee to stretch a little, still laying on him, breathing tiredly.

“It’s not..” he smiled faintly

“why am I so tired..” trying to keep my eyes open

“I gave you something, to relax you” he said softly, I felt him playing with the strings of my shirt, his arm grazed the side of my face as I zoned out.

“Gave me something?” I sat up wobbly, trying to look around but there was two of everything.

“I’m sorry about yesterday, it was uncalled for” he apologised, I just kept looking down “you wanted to try that thing right?” he asked and my head turned a little.

Han

We waited there for hours, it wasn’t dark out yet and no one came in.

“Are you sure it’s not closed today?” I reiterated

“patience softie, nightfall is upon us” she said turning to look behind her.

“You’re not so scary during the day” I compelled, going off script, placing my head on my palm, watching her.

“I don’t think I could scare you” she replied a little timidly, glancing away. I think I made her shy.

“Do devils cry?” I pondered

“you think I’m a devil?” she answered actually wondering, “do you want an Angel ..softie?” she smiled wryly like a Cheshire cat without mistake. I looked back at her, returning a smile, not answering.

“Unfortunately.. “ she tilted her head coming closer to mine while looking at my lips

“I have a little.. bite .. .to my kiss” as she spoke I heard people come in.

“He hasn’t texted me in over a week..” they conversed

“did you go to his work?”

“yeah.. he’s been working like normal.. he’s just been ignoring us”

“where could Hide be?” and suddenly I turned my head to face the people talking.

“What is it?” Dorn turned her head to them “do you know them?”

“no.. I- “ I turned back the other way “I don’t”.

“Could we use the back room again tonight?” one of the girls asked Jack.

“Not tonight” he answered “I wouldn’t recommend you kids come by here anymore, just a word of advice” he told them the truth, they glanced at each other a little worried before deciding to leave.

“Oh and that kid with the sundress—“

“what?” the girl answered turning around.

“The kid wearing the white sundress the other time, tell em’ it looked good” Jack smiled

“Oh.. sure” and they left perplexed.

It was getting late, we didn’t see a soul come in. Dorn had been kicking my leg under the table for the past hour.

“Wait.. be quiet” she said ducking a little

“I wasn’t saying anything” and some young guys came in. She ushered me to get up.

There was mellow coloured lights and muffled music coming from the direction we saw the guys walking in. They made their way up these narrow stairs. For some reason the doorman was checking them out before letting them in. We followed after they went in. Dorn leant in the door frame, the guy let her through without a hitch, but he stopped me.

“Where have I seen you before?” the old usher croaked in an amused voice “yeah.. yeah! I’ve seen you before” jogging his memory, he was pretty old.

“That one magazine with that one kid” he remembered foggily, I glanced at him puzzled.

“Go on, I’m just messing with you” he cackled briskly.

Hide

A man grabbed my wrist, pulling my sleeve up and took a syringe out. Le-rui just kept smoking. I struggled but I didn't have enough strength. The man inserted the needle into my vein. I exasperated quickly from the feeling, as more and more went in, my breathing got slower. I leaned back on the sofa becoming still, he pulled it out slowly and my arm fell limp onto the arm rest.

I think I blacked out, I was just about conscious yet unable to move any part of my body. I opened my eyes just a little. My wrist felt torn up, and my body was spread across two men I didn't know. My pelvis was over one of their knees and my head on the others lap. I felt the guy lift his knee a little to arch my back. He laughed, "his ass is so dainty" "are you watching?" the other guy asked as he stroked my hair. I saw Le-rui's face, his expression of pleasure and a soft melted voice. He held someone's face near his lower body, they struggled with something in their mouth. I shut my eyes but the guy made me sit up on his lap. "You have to watch closely" he said, while the other guy made sure I didn't look away.

I tried to forcefully turn my head the other way, but they kept forcing me to look back. I prayed Le-rui wouldn't look at me, but he did. His eyes looked with intense lust. He pulled the persons head away, allowing them to breathe. Then pulled them up to sit on his lap. He wiped their lips and kissed them, holding eye contact with me as he did. I became overwhelmed, my face was burning up. The person willingly knelt back down and continued. My hair became messy over my face as I turned burnt red. "It looks like he wants you" the guy picked me up without warning, pushing me to kneel on the ground in front of Le-rui. I hesitated looking at the person next to me. I swear I had seen them before.. maybe passing by them during work.

Suddenly, Le-rui's stroked my cheek with his thumb. The person beside me coughed, wiping their mouth but they didn't stop. "You can hold your breath for longer than that, can't you?" Le-rui smiled at me and I was terrified. He pulled me up to sit next to him and kissed my cheek, putting his thumb between my lips, he breathed deeply in pleasure as his tongue licked my face, making my skin grow supple, he kept going.

Han

"What was he on about, you on a magazine?" Dorn entertained, but the atmosphere made me stuffy. I looked around the room, it had a really private atmosphere. There were people smoking and drinking. Dorn stopped walking. "Hey .." she whispered to me "I think they're all models and actors" "is this where you saw Le-rui?" I asked, she nodded. There were plenty of young actors, they seemed to be getting groomed by older men and women.

Hide

My skin was glistening in his saliva, "you're so well behaved" Le-rui said, before abruptly stuffing two of his fingers down my throat. He made me watch as he held the persons head. "You know about this don't you? Kkun and Volken tested your patience .. a little" he detailed, there was spit trickling from my mouth, he chuckled softly

“open your mouth.. “ while he used someone else, he imagined it was me in their place.

Han

I glanced at Dorn from across the room as we split up. I can't detail all that I saw, but there were older people touching others inappropriately. To the extent that I understood why it was so secretive. I couldn't imagine who this club belonged to. We thought this might've been a dead end, there were no signs leading us anywhere. I walked past a man stood by a curtain and glanced around the room, before hearing a few voices coming from behind the curtain. I watched quietly through the gap in the curtain, a person sat on the ground seemed to have something forcefully pushed into their throat. The guy was being pretty rough, pulling the person harshly by the hair. He dragged them away finally, pushing someone else to the ground and my eyes widened.

I noticed saliva dripping from his mouth, he couldn't even sit up straight. The guy pulled him by the head, his eyes became wide open in fear, red and welling up with tears. I couldn't even think, I punched the guy in front of the curtain trying to stop anyone from entering. Several guys got up,

“hey- you gotta wait your turn-“ I punched each and every one of them until my knuckles bled. Dorn came looking for me quickly, experiencing the same shock as I did at what was happening. She immediately threw her drink at the grey haired man's face. Watching the liquid drip from his hair, I kneeled grabbing Hide's shoulders. His eyes were rolling back. His state was inexplicable, exhausted and sick. I looked at his wrist, a cotton bud was taped over his vein. I stood up slowly looking at the man. He stood up unfazed but I struck a blow directly in his stomach. He coughed and grabbed his abdomen. I picked Hide up, wrapping his arms around me before looking back at the man bloodshot.

“Don't ever come near him.” I said merciless, the man looked up slowly, his eyes disturbed and a silent smile.

“He's mine now” his words were authoritative, they made me feel an intense blood rush but Dorn stopped me. I walked out holding Hide carefully.

Dorn

It was dark and in the corner of town. I tried calling a cab as we walked down an empty street, but noticed the person Han was holding gaining consciousness again. Their foot reached to touch the ground and Han stopped. Suddenly he pulled away pushing Han away. “What the fuck?” the person said, looking into Han's eyes then suddenly avoiding eye contact

“don't touch me” he backed up, keeping a distance between them. Then suddenly he turned around to walk away while running his hands through his hair, upset or angry, I couldn't tell. Han closed his eyes, exhaling, trying to keep calm. A few feet ahead of us, he became disoriented again, Han ran over to grab him just before he collapsed again.

I sat on the bed glancing at the pretty guy sleeping, Han sat on a chair beside me.

“What's wrong with him?” he asked worriedly

“overdose, maybe twice” I observed “looking at his wrist, he was injected more than a few times” his brows furrowed, like he was mad at himself.

“He should wake up soon on his own” I reassured him

“shouldn't we take him to the hospital?” he said with a sense of urgency

“no, give him time” I replied, he looked depressed, I smiled at him a little, nudging his leg with my foot.

“So this is your Angel?” I sprung onto him, he scoffed looking the other way

“what..” he said weakly, I startled him. I got up touching his ears with both my thumbs

“you should try talking to him” I reminded him

“shouldn’t I report it to the police?” he asked

“don’t do anything without his consent” I answered, he looked up at me kind of like a sad puppy. He became so earnest..

“you act like a softie around me” I insisted “but a tough guy for your little Angel” as I gazed at his lips, stroking them subtly.

“..I would’ve never found him on my own” he said gratefully “thank you, Dorn” I squished his cheeks with my fingers.

“You got this tough guy” I said before leaving them alone.

Han

I sat on the floor beside where he slept. When I carried him, he felt so much smaller. The unhealthy kind. He lost nearly all of his muscle mass, but I could only tell when I held him. What could have destroyed him like this? it.. made me.. ..I think I fell asleep. I felt a warm aura pass me.. I thought I heard a door shut. I woke up after a while and glanced back at the bed to see no one there.

A day or so passed. “Hello, you’ve reached 82mode front desk”

“could you please give me the number of the modelling manager?”

“certainly, your call will go through now” and the phone kept ringing, but no one answered.

Hide

“Crap I think I left my phone at your apartment” I said shuffling around looking for it in my seat as Le-rui passed.

“It’s fine, pick it up later” he said, my manager stopped brushing over my face with a cotton pad. Her phone was buzzing but she was preoccupied looking at Le-rui, she waited for him to leave before speaking to me.

“Hide have you been meeting Le-rui outside of work?” she asked

“only when he asks” I replied

“even so, decline okay?” she reiterated, I nodded, she grabbed her phone just as the caller stopped ringing the number. She sighed “..I keep missing calls” before rushing to look for Le-rui.

I took off my shoes coming into his apartment. “Sorry about the other night” I said, I didn’t bother changing my clothes after the shoot earlier. Le-rui was reading a magazine as I sat beside him on the sofa, his arm was on the headrest behind me.

“Is your stomach okay?” I asked, he didn’t say anything, he just touched the tips of my hair with his fingers as he read,

“don’t worry, there’s always next time” he said softly, his gaze changed to what I was wearing.

I looked at him, then down at my clothes

“you don’t like it?”

“it’s nice, let me see it” he requested and I got up, taking off my leather jacket. It was just a red vintage dress that was a little lacey over my jeans.

“It’s pretty” he looked at it with a more unusual sense of interest “turn around”, I gave him a look before doing it. I peeked back at him while he was still looking
“you never have any compliments about what I’m wearing” I shook my head, about to sit down again but he pulled me to stay standing,
“well I’m the only one looking now”.

I tried to go and sit again but he kept holding my knees so I tripped grabbing his shoulders, “seriously— my feet hurt” I complained “I’ve been standing all day” using him to balance myself and take the pressure off. He just smiled, looking up at me as I kept fidgeting, I furrowed my brows
“would you stop, I’m here to get my phone” I said firmly
“it’s in the draw by the mirror” I looked around confused “where?” “in my room”. He let me go so I could get it. I walked into his room that was dim, there were a few draws so I opened each. I looked into the mirror in front of me and saw him sitting on the bed behind me. I froze for a moment, I could see the bandage on his stomach as he undid his shirt. I slowly opened the next draw, unable to find my phone.

I noticed his hand pull open a draw between my arms, “you missed it” he pointed out, picking it up for me. I glanced at him through the mirror as he stood behind me, he noticed, I quickly lowered my gaze.

“Did I leave it here last time?” I pondered, I felt his body coming closer from behind me, making me step forward a little closer to the dresser. I pressed up over it, my hands pushed against the counter.

“I put it there” he answered quietly, looking at my dress through the reflection. I looked startled at the mirror.

“you have such a huge.. mirror..” I realised

“it’s useful.. I can see you properly in all kinds of.. ways” his tone was distinct, my dress became loose around my shoulders, the sound of the zipper slowly coming undone filled the silence. I realised the bed was placed perfectly in the centre of the room, captured by the mirror entirely.

6

Han

It was dark out, I was getting bored waiting, I swear she always did this. I know she hated me but why does she hate herself also? I went inside

“she’s not working overtime to cover you Seth” I said abruptly, with no remorse, dragging her out of the bar.

Kelly kept walking, I walked behind her, she turned around annoyed

“I don’t text you, I don’t talk to you-“ she began telling me off

“you were literally at my apartment the other day” I recalled for her, she turned around still annoyed and kept walking.

“Stop following me”

“I’m not following you, I live that way” I reminded her and she sighed. I noticed there was a crew of people across the street, they were doing some sort of street photography or something.

“That girl, Dorn” she struck up
 “you look good together”
 “you only met her once” I withdrew, trying to base this conversation
 “still she’s intense and strong.. not needy” she continued
 “you’re strong” I highlighted
 “no I’m not”
 “if you can slap me, you can slap anybody” I proved, she scratched her head. I stopped walking and ruffled her hair, it was short and boyish, she was brazen to it at first, giving me a nasty exasperated look, but warmed up as I kept going.
 “..She’s a true woman that doesn’t need the likes of.. you” she hated, all upset that she let me pat her like a dog.
 “I’m not poisoning her, calm down” I comforted her
 “oh yeah, so who *have* you poisoned?”

I glanced up noticing two people crossing the street, fuck me.

He walked beside that fucking.. “get home quick Kel” I said quickly, touching her shoulders, she watched me quietly, glancing to where I was walking and noticed a familiar face she’s seen before.

I watched as they walked into a quiet alley. There was a puddle of water, reflecting blue. Hide stepped in the middle, placing his knees in the water spreading them apart, touching it with his fingers as to catch a ray of light. His smooth leather trousers stretched, the man watched at how Hide’s interest grew. He sat laying back in the still water, hair soaking up the colour, looking up at the sky. He wasn’t conscious of his beauty. Only a smile of satisfaction touched his lips, he held his hand behind his head. The sleeveless shirt he wore became translucent.

“You’re getting dirty” the man gazed, as if Hide’s freedom bothered him so. Hide’s hand stroked across the water. The alley was with dirt and debris, junk not forgotten and sediment lying at the bottom of the rain water. He lifted his knee closer to him, back arching like a bridge over a river. The back of his hand felt the side of his body, embracing the profanity, filth was the preface of impurity.
 “This is how you make me feel” Hide voiced, eyes hazy, looking at the moon and the moon only.

In an instant, the man pulled him up by force, backing him up against the wall. The water made him dirty. The man tried holding him several times, waist, arm, neck, but he slid out every time. To put an end to it, he pulled Hide’s face up, tilting it sideways, stroking down his jaw with his index and thumb.

“Hey..” the man said, staring at him a moment, Hide leaned his head back on the wall, a smile with a bite.
 “You’ve come down” the man began, feeling Hide’s arm subtly to his wrist
 “miss the feeling?” he asked, picking it up and kissing gently where the needles bruised his skin. Hide watched with sleepy eyes not answering.

The man undid the lid of a small bottle, holding it between his fingers and bringing it towards Hide’s face. The man breathed out with a smile as Hide glanced at it and into his eyes. He inhaled the fragrance emanating from the bottle out of curiosity.
 “It’ll make it easier for you” the man specified quietly

“what easier?”

“maybe tonight if you’re not so tired” the man didn’t explain further, waving the bottom of Hide’s shirt, letting air up blowing strands of his hair out of his face.

Hide looked a little blown, the man enjoyed his expression “don’t want to..?” he teased, now that’s just plain..

Some people were shouting Hide’s name

“anyone seen him?”

“Hide~ where did he go?” they turned to look in the direction of the sound

“I should go” Hide said, but the man pulled that goddamn necklace stopping him. The man stood right behind him, not letting him turn around. He pushed his fucking finger beneath it, making the necklace tighter around his neck, strangling him subtly.

Hide touched the necklace with shaky hands. The man lifted his shirt from behind, touching his midriff subtly, before pushing the little bottle inside the back of his trousers. Letting him go finally, he felt discomfort from the skin chaffing around the necklace as he walked through the alley. He turned the corner in front of me and I grabbed the bottle from behind him, pulling his wrist as I glanced at it. An inhalant..

“What the fuck are you doing?” I said throwing the bottle on the ground, breaking it. Ignoring me completely, he walked in the opposite direction he originally was.

He walked in several directions, trying to stop me from following him. He didn’t care about where he was going, after spotting a derelict building through twists and turns, without thinking, he walked in. It was empty, he walked down a passage, through a door to a room with no windows, and only a table.

“What the fuck do you want?!” he yelled at me, pushing me aggressively

“take that stupid necklace, off are you a dog?” I was annoyed, about to grab it

“get the fuck off-”

“are you serious?” I was shouting “why are you near that man that tried to choke you in a car? just the other night he made you overdose. You could have DIED.” I yelled without stopping

“you only care when I’m being hurt NOW?” he said mercilessly

“why are you letting him ABUSE you?” I argued, about to grab his shoulders but he shoved me away.

“Who’s faults that?” he replied in uncontrollable anger

“Three times” he started “it happened three times that night” the memories of the night he was talking about flooded back to me. He grabbed my neck digging his nails into my skin.

“Every time.. you did less and less” I felt the anger in his voice “by the third time you did nothing” as he pulled me down against the table, I tried to rip his fingers off, finally pushing him away.

I touched my neck and he blew hair out of his face.

“But you only care now right?” he muttered

“Hide ple-”

“I was so embarrassed” he laughed breathily “I was going to quit modelling after that, I hated everything about me” he walked closer to me and I edged back. He grabbed my jacket roughly

"I felt vulnerable, not knowing if I was right or wrong" I tugged his arms to make him let go but he punched me out of nowhere. I froze in shock.

"Everyone wanted something from me that night, but I only cared about you, that's why it hurt more" his hand grabbed my hair tightly, pulling it painfully at every word he said.

"I couldn't shake the feeling you looked down on me" he loathed, shoving me, making sure my head hit the side of the table.

"You saw me like an object, not a person.. that made me unattractive" his words cut deeply "to the point you found it ridiculous that I let them.. sexualise me".. "I felt so naive". I held the table struggling to get up.

"You fucking asshole.." he pulled my arm that was embracing my head and didn't stop.

"Le-rui was the only one that told me it wasn't my fault" his voice showed how vulnerable he felt

"..that someone shouldn't touch me.. no matter what"

"he.. he's doing the.. exact same thing now" I said aching "he's taking advantage of you.. can't you see.. that?" trying to stop him amidst him pushing me again.

"Why Hide, WHY do you let him?!" I yelled in pain, I wanted an answer. I felt so sick to my stomach but he didn't answer.

"Did he—" I started

"stop" he interrupted me, closing his eyes and running his hands through his hair.

"These past few days, did he—"

"so what if he does" he answered, walking away.

"So what?" I said in disbelief

"you don't owe it to him??" I tried to get it through his head "he's acting like any other person that's pursued you ..yet he's so much worse.."

"he.. choked you so much you couldn't even eat anymore" sick to my stomach just saying it out loud.

"He drugged you.. so heavily just to get you to.." I felt knots in my throat "he wouldn't have to.. if you *wanted* to" he glanced back at me not saying anything but kept walking.

"Don't go back to him"

"Hide." I repeated, but suddenly without thinking, I punched him in the stomach. Hard enough that he couldn't stand again. He coughed blood, collapsing. His hands were shaking clutching his body.

"I can't let you go" I said assertively, not asking for his opinion, I picked him up and his eyes shut in pain, while clenching his teeth as I did.

I think punching him hard got his shit straight. Knocked through all that bullshit. Mine included. All it took was a blonde guy half my size hitting the shit out of me.

"Your house.." I glanced at him

"it's far" he replied

"I'll call a ca—"

"walk" so I walked.

I placed him on the floor nearly dropping him. His eyes were much more subtle, quieter than how he started. I touched his necklace with my thumb, my fingers went around his neck, taking it off slowly. He looked into my eyes laying on the floor as I did. Our smiles were faint, until he chuckled softly touching his neck when it was finally off.

"We'll put some ice on it" I couldn't help laughing too.

After that, I think the words I'd told him slowly got through to him. He left his company, after telling them what happened, they felt the need to give him an option to terminate the contract if he wanted to. They also said they would support him if he spoke out. But a part of them knew that this would happen. Le-rui had a history of having a new protégé every few years after the previous one became worn out. There's only so much you can cut a diamond before you're left with nothing but shards of its former self.

Hide chose to keep the matter private, since it was so personal. Ultimately, never speaking about it publicly. We all respected that.

There were rumours circulating about Le-rui though. His failure to retain his crowd pleaser and staff anonymously shared how his relationship with Hide was a lot more extreme than his previous ones. It led people to believe Hide was the one that left — which in the fashion industry, was a big deal. He was going to be a part of the quarterly, from a lifestyle model to being casted for runway — just from one casting alone. He was being sought after and disappeared into thin air. Not to mention, Le-rui is extremely respected, if Hide spoke, it would have destroyed everything.

So he returned the necklace, making sure it ended with him or his career.