

creeping in your heart

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/27712214) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/27712214>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	SuperM (Korea Band) , NCT (Band) , EXO (Band)
Relationship:	Kim Jongin Kai/Lee Taeyong
Characters:	Lee Taeyong , Kim Jongin Kai , Mark Lee (NCT) , Byun Baekhyun , Chittaphon Leechaiyapornkul Ten , Wong Yuk Hei Lucas , Lee Taemin
Additional Tags:	Mentioned SuperM Ensemble , Alternate Universe - College/University , How Do I Tag , Mark Lee & Lee Taeyong & Ten , Lee Taeyong & Chittaphon Leechaiyapornkul Ten Are Best Friends , Bad Boy Kim Jongin Kai , Kim Jongin Kai is a Little Shit , Best Friends Kim Jongin Kai & Lee Taemin , Best Friends Byun Baekhyun & Kim Jongin Kai , Slow Burn , Slow Build , Kinda , Developing Relationship , Implied Relationships , Slow Romance , Other Ships Not Mentioned in Tags , Other Additional Tags to Be Added , To Be Edited , Jongin is a college delinquent , Taeyong doesn't want to have anything to do with Jongin, but eventually they get involved with each other , Taeyong unintentionally becomes Jongin's personal caretaker, and inevitably falls for him , Eventual Fluff , Eventual Relationships
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Creeping, Creeping, Creeping
Stats:	Published: 2020-11-25 Updated: 2021-08-07 Words: 20,769 Chapters: 5/?

creeping in your heart

by [maniacarian](#)

Summary

Now, Taeyong's a good guy. He goes to college, attends his classes, and lives his life in a relatively peaceful way. He also tries his hardest to stay out of trouble, but trouble seems to look for him instead. He knows who Jongin is, everyone knows too. That's why he never wants to cross path with the older male, wanting to have peaceful years of college. But one night changes it all, and Taeyong has to deal with the fact that he's slowly falling. He tries not to.

Notes

or how Jongin unintentionally ends up at Taeyong's apartment one night after a fight only to do the same thing next time, and next time after that—and this time intentionally. that's the plot. there you go.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Taeyong doesn't have any bad feelings that day, everything goes as planned from the moment he wakes up in the morning and attends his class at 9. Even his usually fussy professor just let him enter her room and told him to *just put your assignment on my table* without her usual interrogation on what topic he chose, why he chose the said topic, etc., etc., when he came at 11.30 to submit his paper.

Or maybe that should be a sign enough that something's going terribly wrong soon, or later, but Taeyong is too happy that he doesn't have to spend another 30 minutes inside *that* room, which the student's dubbed as the execution room, to let his overthinking side of mind ruin his happiness. Who knows that Mrs. Kwon is just being exceptionally nice that day, and he isn't going to try to ask any question related to his paper if he isn't being asked first just to ruin her mood—god knows what she can do whenever she has a foul mood.

Finals sucks, the amount of papers and studying are ridiculous and he always dreads it even after enduring it three times before. Going home to his apartment quite early in the afternoon after having lunch with his two best friends is a nice change from the afternoons spent poring over books and notes over assignments in the library.

He welcomes any kind of relaxation at this point, and the long sigh he lets out when he remembers that this day is their scheduled movie night after two consecutive times being postponed seems like necessary to let out some tension when he was always over the edge this past week. The desire to sue his university for giving the students so many unnecessary tasks is so prominent but he also needs them to get his GPA. And to get whatever kind of job the world has to offer. He's sure that he'll get all the opportunities once he finishes his literature degree later.

Taeyong's possibly vibrating from the anticipation and excitement as he waits for the two to come so they could eat together before deciding what movie they should watch. If they'd even watch any movies, considering they also have so much to catch up since the busy days always keep them from any meeting longer than occasional lunch at their faculty cafeteria. Even then it's not always the three of them. Sometimes one of them is missing in favor of finishing their assignment on time (*or just a little bit late, they'll survive anyway*).

After finishing their meal, courtesy of Taeyong's cooking, they settle down on the couch, the TV running merely for a background noise as the three of them relish the once more slow pace of their student life. Mark munching noisily on the watermelon he bought on the way there, much to Ten's disgust. That's what he feels during their trip to buy groceries before and now, as Mark keeps his precious watermelon close to them.

Ten tries his hardest to ignore him while slurping on a hearty strawberry smoothie, handed by Taeyong earlier, thank you very much. And the latter finally joins them after bringing his own snack for dessert, a caramel pudding he often keeps stacks in the fridge and half a glass of strawberry smoothie also.

“I almost forgot how your cooking tastes like, hyung!” Mark exaggerates, pointing his fork of watermelon to Taeyong, almost poking Ten who unfortunately sits in the middle with it in the process.

“Keep your goddamn watermelon away from me, Mark!” Ten hisses, plastering his body onto the back of the couch to avoid watermelon attack.

Taeyong rolls his eyes, gesturing for Ten to move aside so he can sit between the two to avoid any food war.

“You’re being dramatic, Mark. If you don’t remember two days ago I made lunch for you,” Taeyong pointedly says. He, while scolding Mark along the way, brought lunch special just for the younger after he whined for not eating decent meals for three days because he’s *that* kid who overworks himself to the point of not eating properly. “Mom’s going to kill me for real if she ever heard of you talking about not being fed enough by me.”

Mark pouts petulantly at the scolding he receives from the eldest of the group, stabbing his last watermelon half-heartedly. “If I’m not mistaken you also pulled an all-nighter and Ten almost passed out at the dance studio in the middle of a rehearsal,” he mumbles under his breath.

Taeyong opens his mouth to argue but Ten beats him to it.

“Excuse me!” Ten raises his left hand indignantly. “If it was not because of *the* Kim Jongin who decided to be a tyrannical asshole when it comes to dancing and performance I would’ve been fine. Perfectionist motherfucker.” He finishes with another hiss. But he has to admit that their successful performance was thanks to the man who’s completely merciless in his dedication of performing. Solo or not.

Taeyong raised his brows. “Kim Jongin as in *that* Kim Jongin? The one who is also friends with Lee Taemin?” he looks at Ten who nods reluctantly. “Isn’t he also close to Baekhyun-sunbae?” this time he stares at Mark who’s just snatched his *half a glass* of smoothie. Taeyong scowls.

“Mhm, who else.” Mark acquiesces. “And also with another kid from one of my classes. That tall, handsome boy from the exchange program.” He pretends he doesn’t sense the curious stare from his two friends.

“Even Taemin-hyung, who’s also a perfectionist performer isn’t like that, at least not to *that* extent. I really am curious what’s going on inside that head.” Ten muttered conspiratorially. The other two give him a side glance, but he continues. “I mean, he’s quite a genius. He *is* a genius when it comes to his passion and talent in dancing. But why does he have to be a bad guy?”

Mark snickers. “I start to think you have a love-hate feelings toward him, Ten.”

“And,” Taeyong interrupts before Ten could voice his complaint, “I don’t think just being like that counts as a bad guy too.” He ignores the noise of complaints coming out of Mark as he settles his own mind that *no, he couldn’t be that bad*, even though Taeyong himself knows

the guy's reputation. Yes, he's not so oblivious that he doesn't know what goes around the campus and the fact that Kim Jongin is someone he should avoid— *needs* to avoid.

"Taeyooong," Ten whines. "Why are you being so kind to someone you don't even know? This is Kim *freaking* Jongin we're talking about if you're not aware, who always gets involved in any kinds of trouble!" he adds adamantly.

"No, I'm not. If I was so kind I wouldn't have dumped Yuta like that, or even get involved with him that far in the first place—"

"He dated you for a bet, hyung! A fucking bet, just for his and his friend's fun! If anything it was the right thing to do!" Mark fumes, which Taeyong promptly ignores, along with Ten's '*damn right!*'.

"—and if the same Kim Jongin really is a bad guy, he won't be friends with Baekhyun and Taemin sunbaenim, right?" Taeyong finishes.

"That doesn't immediately make him a good guy either," Ten mumbles.

Mark snorts, "That's another mystery I often still ask Baekhyun-hyung but he always answers cryptically."

Taeyong frowns. As far as he knows, the three of them—Jongin, Baekhyun, and Taemin—have always been friends since the beginning. Lately the exchange student Mark's been talking about, who's seemingly attached to Baekhyun, has been added to the group. The said boy gains quite a reputation himself after that, his handsome face attracting many girls and boys alike, like moths into a flame. And he sure is enjoying the attention, from what's been occurring since he started studying there.

That aside, Baekhyun and Taemin seem *normal* compared to the hurricane that is Kim Jongin himself. Well, that's what the rumors have said, and Taeyong has never seen the two involved in a fight like Jongin often did— *does* . And this year the occurrence escalates quite significantly. Well, it's not his concern though.

Ten stares at Taeyong for a moment, almost like contemplating what he is about to say before opening his mouth to talk. "I mean, if you think that way and assume that Taemin-hyung is a good guy, I'm not really sure then. His boyfriend is Choi Minho, right?"

"Which is associated with Yuta." Mark adds, before Taeyong can say anything.

"Right!" Snapping his fingers, Ten narrows his eyes to Taeyong. "They are in the same circle, being in the soccer team and all."

They're full on gossiping at this point, movie night completely forgotten.

Taeyong's frown deepens. "Technically, he's not in the soccer team anymore right? He is pursuing a master's degree now." He recalls the said senior has just graduated last year.

Albeit he remembers vividly each person sat at the same table with Yuta that time when he got to know the true nature of his relationship with the said male and Minho was one of them,

he's never met the guy in person anyway, either Jongin or Minho, so it's not really his place to judge. But for Minho, he has had this unexplainable feeling of dislike toward him since then.

"Still, it's not really our place to judge no matter what kind of people they're associated with." Taeyong says as much, despite the voice in his head, to *just trust what you see* , and *don't get involved with him* .

Ten sighs resignedly, "You and your positive way of looking at people, even the delinquents like that Nakamoto kid. And this time Kim Jongin." He shakes his head for added dramatics.

"He's older than you, Ten." Taeyong says pointedly.

" *That's* not my point and I don't care!" Ten put his empty glass on the coffee table in front of them harshly, as if to emphasize his words. Taeyong glances at the glass and Ten back and forth, the latter grins sheepishly at the silent protest.

They launch into a lively banter about their upperclassmen after that, those who revolve around them, and whether or not they're involved in a gang. It is a thought they humored until the suggestions they throw starts to get more ridiculous the longer it goes. They even think that Taeyong's ex is a yakuza, which sends Mark into one of his hiccupy, uncontrollable laugh.

"No fucking way, Ten! That's ridiculous!" Mark almost falls off the couch if not for Taeyong pulling him up at the right moment.

Their raucous laughter (*more like Ten and Mark's*) is interrupted with a sound of a key being entered into the wrong hole. The three sit in silence as the insistent jiggle continues, staring at each other in confusion and waiting if it was just them hearing things.

When the second time the sound filters through the door, Taeyong frowns, while Mark stares at the door warily. Ten stares at Taeyong with a question in his eyes.

"Are you expecting someone, hyung?" Mark almost whispers. Taeyong shakes his head.

It's not like they're waiting for food delivery either, since they have just finished their dinner. And if it's indeed food delivery, usually they would knock or call him when they arrive, not trying to just barge in the apartment.

Ten frowns, "Is there anyone who has your key other than us, Yongie?"

"No," Taeyong shakes his head for the second time. "I'll just see it myself. Maybe it's just someone getting the wrong door."

Ten lifts his left brow skeptically. "Sure, if that's what you think."

"Wait—hyung, you sure? What if it's a drunk person??"

Taeyong just waves off Mark's words as he walks through the hallway to open the door. Only to stare incredulously at the person in front of him, wide-eyed, confusion and questions make

their way inside his head.

Jongin, the very same man that's been the topic of his conversation with Mark and Ten that evening, miraculously appears in front of his apartment door, battered and on the verge of passing out. Slightly drunk, if the swaying in his stance is anything to go by, looking so lost and confused at the same time but isn't able to explain as he passed out first. And not so gracefully.

"Fuck!" Taeyong blurts. "Ten! Mark! Help! Quick!"

The thundering steps from the other two come to an abrupt halt as they get their eyes on the person Taeyong's trying so hard to drag inside. What can he say, Jongin's clearly bigger than him and thus heavier.

"Taeyong what the fuck?"

"Hyung—what?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The morning after, Taeyong got a pleasant surprise and much more.

Chapter Notes

yay chapter two~ *does a happy dance*

this is slightly longer than the first one but I feel no regret. also, this is unbetaed and do bear in mind that english is not my first language but hopefully there will be minimum grammatical error. enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The first time it happens Taeyong is so surprised that he can't do anything other than just stare as the man in front of him collapses before he is yelling for help to Mark and Ten who immediately rush to him, concern written all over their face. And the cautious glance they send in his direction after realizing who the hell it is that just *faints* in front of their best friend's door doesn't help Taeyong's panicked state at all. He guesses it is, indeed, too soon to say it was going to be the best day in a week after the tons of assignments he has to endure the previous days.

"Taeyong, that's Kim Jongin."

"Yes, Ten, thank you for telling me. Now will you please help me lift him up and Mark! You too!"

"But—he's—"

"He's Kim Jongin and he's fucking unconscious he won't bite you," Taeyong deadpans.

"Okay," Mark scurries over. "Okay."

"Yongie, don't get me wrong, but what are you going to do?" Ten wheezes as they lay Jongin on the couch they previously occupied. The couch is just long enough to keep the man's feet from dangling uncomfortably from the edge of it. "I mean, you sure about this?"

Taeyong looks up to both of his companions, seeing uncertainty in their eyes alongside with reluctance and apprehension especially from Mark. While Taeyong simply chooses to avoid Jongin, the kid's downright terrified of the unconscious man before them and *always* trying

to steer clear from his presence on a daily basis. Taeyong doesn't blame him though since the man just looks intimidating in more ways than one.

The brunet sighs, "Then what am I supposed to do? Letting him lay unconscious, outside, like some heartless person?"

Mark rubs his neck nervously. "Um," he starts, "I mean, yeah, nothing's wrong with helping him but, you know who he is, hyung."

"Yeah, just look at his bruises, Yong. I bet he and the others are just fresh out of a fight. At a party or a bar, maybe," Ten crosses his arms as he appraises Jongin's appearance, nudging the man's foot with his knee for emphasis.

The others, as in Taemin and Baekhyun. And maybe Lucas. They never really knew what the foreigner's actually doing with this bunch of seniors other than being attached to Baekhyun since the first day in the new college. Sure they hang out a lot, even though Lucas is two years younger than all of them, but even Taeyong's not sure that the boy's involved with any kind of fighting Jongin often does.

Anyways, Taeyong focuses on the man in front of him—looking at the bruise starting to form on his left cheek, the corner of his right eyes that already swells and the small tear on his lower lip. He glances at the raw knuckles covered in slight dirt that seems to fleck the sleeves of his jacket too, like the owner of those hands just had a full brawl on someone's lawn. Maybe not to that extent but it's still a plausible thing. Simply said, Jongin is a mess. And Taeyong decides that he would take care of this mess, which is ridiculous and quite an act of bravery in Ten and Mark's eyes.

Now, Taeyong is a good guy. He goes to college, attends his classes, and doesn't join any club other than dance club, even that's just the second string—if it even could be called that, since there you don't need to bother with competitions unlike the first string, unlike Ten. Honestly it's just the way they often refer to the naturally formed groups, as the first string mostly consisted of the dance major, only few of them are not, while the second string is the more laid back, dancing for fun and hobby kind of group consisting of those other than dance major. Doesn't mean they're not serious though.

And because he's a good guy, he'd never leave a guy passed out just right outside his door and do nothing. No, it's not in his Principles of Life™ and even though he's not a saint it won't hurt to help. As long as he can do something, he'd do something. As long as it's not dangerous (*well it's arguable because Jongin here, isn't someone you'd casually label as 'not dangerous' to be perfectly honest*), he will lend a hand. So sue him. Hopefully the said person won't have enough energy to even try to hurt him later or at any given time.

"Ten, can you please check on the door and see if we or he drops something earlier?" Taeyong asks, to which Ten concedes with a shrug.

"And Mark, please bring me water from the faucet. Also I'll need both of your help taking off his jacket and see if there's any other bruises."

The youngest quickly goes to the kitchen to do what he's told as his hyung goes to the bathroom. Probably to fetch the first aid kit Mark knows Taeyong always had and some towels. Sometimes Mark cannot comprehend what's going on in his cousin's head. If it was up to him, he'd pretend that he didn't know the man who fell unconscious at his front door. But then again, even Taeyong would help someone he doesn't even know if it is possible. In his eyes Taeyong is a normal guy, not an overly kind one who helps everybody in need but sometimes he's just like this. A tad bit too kind for someone that might not be as deserving. But who is he to say?

"I found this," Ten comes to Taeyong's side who has been wiping some dirt and a little of blood that's beginning to dry in the corner of Jongin's lips.

Taeyong glances to see... a chain? A necklace? With a key as the pendant, dangling from his friend's hand.

"Maybe it's the key he used earlier?" Mark offers.

"Possibly," Ten put the said key on the table.

"Come help me get rid of this," Taeyong gets his hands around Jongin's shoulder and tries to sit him up with the help of the other two. They pause for a moment when the man lets out a faint grunt, eyes wide in anticipation. When nothing happened, they quickly got rid of the denim jacket and laid him back.

"You really sure about this?" Ten whispers urgently. "What if he's actually awake and just pretending to be unconscious to avoid the embarrassment??"

Mark has to slap a hand to his mouth to prevent himself from laughing out loud. Trust their friend to come up with the weirdest thought at a moment like this. Well at least he lessens the tense atmosphere a little. Even Taeyong huffs a small laugh at that.

"Even if he's actually awake I don't think he has enough energy to do anything right now. You're just being paranoid," the eldest squeezes the water from the small towel and wipes Jongin's knuckles for the last time before applying ointment for the various bruises.

Ten scoffs. "Not my fault he's trouble personified."

Jongin (*and his circle of friends*) is notorious for getting into troubles. Well mostly it is Jongin who frequently get himself involved in a fight—the guy fights like he does scheduled work out, and it's not a foreign sight to see him going around campus with bruises—while Baekhyun, occasionally involved in a fight with Jongin, and Taemin are not as bad as the rumours make Jongin to be. Somehow they lead different stories of trouble each of their own—Baekhyun is known for his tendency to skip classes while Taemin's more like the seemingly innocent but not really since he often lets people flirt with him and creates enough trouble by doing that. His boyfriend who's ready to fight with whoever is trying to go near him being his proof.

Taeyong knows that, his two best friends know that too. The only difference is that Taeyong chooses to avoid all of them, doesn't even try to go near them the least bit, while Ten and

Mark somehow manage to befriend Taemin and Baekhyun, respectfully, despite swearing to not get involved with them at all.

It's true that they want nothing to do with Jongin but Ten is closer than just an acquaintance but not as much of a friend with Taemin—being in the same dance team does that. And Mark knows Baekhyun from some of his classes as the senior is minoring on music, seemingly special enough to catch the said male's attention and doing a project with him but no more than that. The boy's too nervous to initiate things with the older male, and he's totally not crushing on him like what Ten and Taeyong often tease him.

At least they all tried to avoid those seniors with a foreign student attached to the pack. But here, Taeyong chooses to tend to Jongin's bruises like it's his personal duty instead.

"Hyung, don't you think we need to ice him?" Mark points at the nasty bruise on Jongin's left arm.

"Why not also check his whole body while you're at it?" Ten quips with a sass.

Taeyong blinks, "Oh, right. Let's check if he has another bruise."

"Taeyong, really?"

"Ten, you said the wrong thing," Mark snickers.

"Who's gonna take his shirt off tho?" Taeyong says dumbly.

"Just lift his shirt to check his abdomen—I'm not doing that!" Ten cuts off indignantly when Taeyong and Mark glance at him at the same time. "Just don't drool all over him."

There's an accompanying silence after that. Taeyong looks at his best friend as if he's grown a second head. If there's a slight pink hue on Mark's face no one says anything about that.

"What?" Ten blinks, before he realizes what he said before. "It's not like that! I mean, all people seem to drool over him despite his attitude, so."

"For someone who claims to hate him you sure don't really act like one," Taeyong teases.

Mark is on the beanbag trying to somewhat muffle his laugh, "I really start to think you secretly have a crush on him."

"Gosh I hate you!" Ten's groan could tell that he's so done with the cousins. He squeezes his way in the same beanbag as Mark despite the latter's protest. Serve him right.

The two choose to only watch as Taeyong lifts the hem of Jongin's sleeveless shirt to reveal another bruise near his lower ribs. He gives them a dirty glare when neither of them get up to fetch ice bags and just stare innocently (*Taeyong bet you they're not*) when he trudges to the fridge.

"Thanks for helping me, guys. It means a lot."

The two grin in response.

It's the morning after that Taeyong wakes with a start. He woke up normally at first, no rush since it is Saturday and he has nothing to do other than his part time job at the bookstore which doubled as a café, later in the afternoon. But the memory from last night makes him almost stumble over his blanket as he tries to get up from his bed. Yanking his bedroom door he found no one in sight. Not a single person occupies the couch. Even Jongin's jacket which he decided to wash, since it's quite dirty, last night after Mark and Ten left is nowhere to be seen. So does Jongin. Only the glass previously full of water now stands empty on the coffee table where he put the jacket before. Along with the bottle of advil.

So Jongin decided to take on the offer after all. Last night before retiring to his room Taeyong contemplates whether or not to provide advil seeing Jongin's quite drunk when he came. In the end he placed the medication on the kitchen counter with a glass of water after glancing at the male.

Taeyong walks cautiously, scanning the room and listening carefully if Jongin's still somewhere in his house, like bathroom maybe. But he hears nothing and lets out the breath he unconsciously held in a slow exhale. Ten and Mark decided to leave since they really don't want to get involved with Jongin.

"It's nice knowing you, Taeyong. May God bless your soul and see you in the afterlife," was Ten's way of saying goodbye as he walked out of the apartment last night.

Mark followed him with an '*I need to work on my project since Baekhyun-hyung threatened to bail out on me if I haven't got the half of it by the next meeting*' as an excuse. Mark cannot have that since this project is very important to someone majoring in music like him. More so with Baekhyun treating it very business-like, being a business management major that he is.

Taeyong *knows* that they don't want to deal with the aftermath of this Jongin condition they were in last night. So much for being the best friends Taeyong asks. Well, at least he doesn't need to actually deal with the person himself now seeing that Jongin's gone. It'll be much easier to forget that last night happened at all when he doesn't have the real person to confront him in the morning and make it less *real* in a way.

The brunet returns to his room to get his phone off of the charger that he forgot doing so earlier in his rush to check on the supposed to be there Jongin. Walking back outside, he checks the messages mainly from Mark and Ten asking if he's okay and alive. Only to almost drop his phone in surprise when he reaches the kitchen and finds something he would've thought as a miracle—he didn't pay much attention from the shock of not finding Jongin before.

There's a stack of pancakes right in front of him, a jar of strawberry jam and caramel syrup beside the plate, and a paper with slightly scratchy handwriting beneath the syrup bottle. Taeyong's jaw drops uncharacteristically low.

A short '*don't worry I won't bite when I'm sober either, thanks*', written on the small yellow post it paper makes him grow pale before blushing a bright shade of red. He just knows it

from how hot his face feels right now. That only means Jongin heard their conversation last night when they thought he was unconscious.

“Fuck,” Taeyong drops his head on the counter with a thump. He feels embarrassment with a slight tinge of dread in his stomach and could only hope that he will not encounter the older male after this, ever.

After sending his friends something along *pray for my life* to Mark and Ten, Taeyong prays to the gods above that he’ll live after this before he takes a bite of the pancake—not before he pokes it and smells it first though, making sure that it is edible. He goes on with his merry way of breakfast after that.

“He made me pancake before he left. And it’s surprisingly delicious,” Taeyong tells his two companion later in the afternoon when they visit him at the café. After Baekhyun left from his short meeting with Mark, of course, and Ten decided to join them later.

“It’s rich, coming from you, hyung,” Mark says after a few moments of shock and bewilderment. For Mark, Taeyong is the best cook he’s ever met after their mom. Hearing him praising another person and the stupidity of the situation slightly messed up with his brain, right after an intense discussion about lyrics with Baekhyun nonetheless.

“And you’re still alive?” Ten looks him up and down like he’s trying to decide if Taeyong’s real or not.

Taeyong nods, unfolding a paper from his pocket. “Surprise, right? Considering he left this with those pancakes.”

“You mean he was alive?!” Ten blinks rapidly after he and Mark read the short messages from Jongin.

“Ten!” Taeyong snickers.

“I mean—he heard everything I said last night?!” the Thai pales as he gets a brief flashback of whatever he said the night before.

Taeyong shrugs this time. He’s not sure either if Jongin was actually awake all the time or just at the beginning before he fell unconscious after that.

“Oh, fuck me,” Ten groans.

That makes the three of us, technically, Taeyong thinks but doesn’t have the heart to say out loud. Mark’s terrified enough as it is, he doesn’t need the kid to ditch classes altogether just to avoid Jongin or anyone related to him.

Mark offers him a smile which looks more like a grimace and gives a sympathetic pat on his shoulder. “Praying for you, dude, really.”

And if Ten suddenly gets more parts in the dance routine with the first string team the following week or has the urge to flee the premise whenever there’s Jongin in the room with

less than ten people inside it, he crosses his fingers that he'll come out alive after the next dance showcase. Hopefully Taeyong and his cooking will see him through that.

Chapter End Notes

umm I think I abused the comma button. or sign.

thank you again for reading! have a nice day <3

-riri

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Once is an accident, twice is coincidence. Or so Taeyong believes.

Oh, and cookies. Many of them.

Chapter Notes

I have two stories with chapters but I'm already brewing the spin offs. my mind's so chaotic I like it there but also hate it at the same time. sometimes. well, here you go chapter 3, after letting it sit for a while since I cannot find the perfect start for this chapter.

And also, prepare yourself for a long ass ride.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The second time it happens, nearing the end of the month almost two weeks from the first time around, Taeyong is no less surprised though he's still letting him in.

“Wha—oh,” his words fall into a stutter as he takes in the figure before himself.

He is not sure if this is real or not, but his worrisome and pure, pure soul doesn't sit well with letting someone he knows (*not really but then again, who didn't know Kim Jongin?*) outside looking like he's going to pass out for the second time in a month. He wonders what did the other do to be in such a bad condition. College brawl couldn't be that serious, could it? However when he opens the door and facing Jongin himself, no better than last time but thankfully doesn't fall unconscious because Taeyong wouldn't know what to do if he does, he supposes it could be worse than he initially thought.

Taeyong can only stare in shock and bewilderment at the male standing in front of him, looking up and down briefly to gauge his condition while Jongin's there looking back at him, a hand on the outer door frame, bruised and bleeding but still standing nonetheless. He doesn't have a choice other than pulling the door further to let the older male inside wordlessly after his shock fades into worry, curiosity and slight anxiety. He closes the door slowly after checking the hallway outside, as if he could get in trouble if people know he's housing *the* Kim Jongin for the second time.

Walking through the short hallway to the open living area, Taeyong tells himself to expect nothing. Yet he's still somewhat surprised to see Jongin has made himself comfortable on the couch, shoulders sagging into the backrest with his head propped on top of it. Taeyong watches carefully as Jongin has his eyes closed, checking what he'd possibly need to tend to his bruises.

Taeyong rubs his arm nervously. "Um, would you like to drink?" he says, ever the polite human being that he is.

He waits in a bated breath as Jongin slowly opens his eyes to give him an unreadable stare. "Water's fine," he says hoarsely.

"Sure, okay."

Taeyong walks to his kitchen, shaking his head to himself and thinking why on earth he gets so nervous. This is his own place for crying out loud, he has the authority to kick Jongin out of here if he wants. Glancing briefly at his knife sets, he dismisses the absurd idea of forcing the senior out with threats since it wouldn't be funny if Jongin can disarm him and he'd just humiliate himself in front of the older.

He puts the glass of water on the table right in front of Jongin silently and goes to fetch the first aid kit with a blank mind. Now that Jongin's conscious and not out of this world like the last time he was here, Taeyong doesn't know what to talk to him. Doesn't know if Jongin would want to talk, doesn't know if he can make a small talk at all at this moment. His mind is a complete mess and Taeyong hates to admit that he's fucking blind in this situation. It's something quite out of the ordinary, since usually Taeyong would know what to say. And it's not helping when he cannot shake off the shock from the jarring situation of having Kim Jongin in his place for the second time.

But, as he starts to clean Jongin's bruises and wounds, Taeyong doesn't talk. Curious as he is, Taeyong doesn't ask. For asking will make everything more real, will make Jongin's presence and all his trouble outside his apartment door very much real. He's barely hanging on to the absurd reality of it all, he doesn't want to think too much about whatever happens outside their current predicament or the reason behind all of this.

Taeyong's brought out of his stupor when he feels a hand firmly grabbing his wrist. He looks at Jongin's hand, a tight grip near the heel of his palm and unyielding (*yep, definitely can easily disarm him judging from the strength of his hold alone*), before his eyes flicker to Jongin's face to see a minute expression on the previously stoic facade. The older looks like he's trying to stay unbothered when he feels the sting from the rubbing alcohol but the faint grimace on his face tells otherwise. Taeyong swallows nervously before dabbing the corner of his lips more carefully.

"Sorry," he mumbles, just shy over a whisper.

If Jongin doesn't let go of his hand after that until he moves to retrieve a small tube of heparin sodium, Taeyong chooses to not make a comment about it.

He dutifully applies the same ointment used for Jongin's bruises last time before putting necessary bandaids on the few scratches here and there. Looking to the side almost sheepishly when Jongin lifts a perfectly defined eyebrow at the bandaid over his left hand. A cute, white bandaid with *paw prints* all over.

The silent, barely there exchange is interrupted with a rumble from the direction of *Jongin's stomach*, a little bit too loud in the empty apartment aside from the two of them. The TV is off and Taeyong also doesn't have his two best friends over, nothing covering the sudden noise. Taeyong snaps his gaze from Jongin's admittedly quite amused eyes, looking at the clock while biting the inner side of his lips to keep himself from laughing.

It's a little over 10 p.m., and he's not sure if there's anything left in his fridge to fix a quick dinner from scratch. He already ate his personal takeout dinner barely half an hour before Jongin's arrival.

The boy clears his throat. "Um, do you want to eat?" Taeyong asks despite himself. "But—uh, I only have instant ramyun," he continues when Jongin lifts his brows at him this time.

"Why?"

Taeyong's slightly surprised with Jongin's unexpected question. Not the question itself but the fact that Jongin actually talks to him since he expected the male to answer with body gesture—Taeyong's fine with not having the older male talk to him if at all he doesn't want to.

"Um, I forgot to buy groceries?" his answer comes out like a question since he's not quite sure what to actually say.

Taeyong has to remind himself that this is *Kim Jongin* when he gives a faint smirk that makes him a little (*or a lot, if he's being honest*) more handsome than he already is as the said male lets out a quiet chuckle.

"No, you're offering me something to eat. Why?"

The younger blinks, not quite comprehending the reason behind this situation. "Because you're hungry..?" he states the obvious.

Jongin's right brow joins the left one, lifted up in a pair of perfect arches, staring at Taeyong in the same amusement as before. And Taeyong doesn't know what to do other than to fiddle with his hands before he moves, tidying the first aid kit. He feels like Jongin might imply something other than that apparent reason but Taeyong's trying so hard not to read too much into it.

"Don't worry about it," Jongin says finally with another chuckle.

Taeyong looks at the older skeptically before something crosses his mind.

"Oh, here, I still have these cookies from yesterday. Not much but.." he trails off with a shrug, placing a jar in front of the other. He flees to the direction of his bathroom to put back the first aid kit right after that.

The literature major huffs an exhale as he stands in front of the sink, blowing some stray bangs out of his eyes while staring at the rosy hue on his cheeks through the mirror. He feels so so stupid but in his defense he doesn't expect Jongin to come to his place let alone talk to him since he doesn't look like the type to talk that much. If someone told him that the distant, almost cold and unapproachable Kim Jongin would swing by his place and talk to him he'd laugh right in front of that person's face. His surprise is perfectly understandable for that matter.

Sighing, he exits the bathroom to see Jongin's in the process of wearing his denim jacket, there's no trace of fatigue like when he first arrived here. Taeyong only stares until the dance major looks at him with a small quirk on his lips.

"This is good," Jongin lifts his hand, holding a piece of chocolate almond cookie. Taeyong supposes it's the closest he gets for a *thank you* from him.

Taeyong doesn't know what to say, so he blurts out something that sounds very much like *I don't mind if you're staying*.

At that, Jongin levels him an unreadable gaze albeit there's still a little bit of amusement in his eyes. Taeyong quickly realizes his words and scrambles to explain.

"I—uh, I mean, if you don't mind you could, um, stay. It's late."

Fortunately Jongin doesn't make fun of it, whether the offer nor the stammer, doesn't even give a verbal response and takes *another three cookies* from the jar instead. Taeyong does nothing other than stare, wide eyed, trying to not melt out of embarrassment when he remembers that Jongin mistakenly went to *Taeyong's apartment* last time instead of his own and tries to ignore the implication that the older male possibly lives not that far from his place.

"Nah, I'm going," Jongin mutters a few moments later.

Taeyong follows the senior to the front door, masking his odd disappointment. It's weird, and inappropriate, *out of place* in this situation because he doesn't know Jongin. They don't even know each other but he was secretly hoping he'd get another surprise in the morning since it's not every time someone cooks for him. Usually it's almost always him cooking for someone with Ten's questionable way in the kitchen and Mark is not qualified enough to even touch the knives let alone turning the stove on to actually cook.

"Thanks, Taeyong," is what Jongin says as a farewell before he walks to the elevator.

Taeyong doesn't know if it'd go up or down, he's far too surprised to properly respond when he realizes that Jongin knows his name. His face flushes into a warm shade of pink when Jongin gives him a final smirk right before the elevator closes.

After stupidly blinking to the empty air, Taeyong closes the door, thumping his forehead to it with a groan of embarrassment. He cannot believe he said *everything* he said to Jongin. He's so stupid sometimes that he wants to disappear into thin air.

That's also what Ten said in their group chat later—after Taeyong's got enough time having a secondhand embarrassment from his own doing and asking how could he possibly know his name, after the panic dies down and after making sure that Taeyong's indeed fine. They're panicking the moment Taeyong finishes his story of the night, as the same Kim Jongin seemingly made an unexpected detour to their friend's place when Taeyong's alone. They go off with a sequence of *why would you do that*, *hyung* and *what if he hurt you*, Taeyong in any kind of structures possible.

But after the panic subsides, Ten answers the initial question which Taeyong chooses to highlight even when there's more pressing matter like the fact that Jongin repeated what he did before and he consciously walked there himself.

"Of course he knows, Taeyong. Everyone in the dance major *knows* who you are even if you're only in the second string," is what Ten says in his message.

Taeyong isn't even aware of the attention he gets from the first string dance team that he couldn't help but feel a sudden insecurity. That could only mean, *how long did Jongin know about him?*

It is weird since Taeyong doesn't really understand why he feels insecure. Taeyong also isn't sure if he wants to know the real answer of that question but one thing for sure he doesn't want to get in real trouble for trying to get close to Jongin. Dating Yuta was a trouble magnet as it was, the soccer player got legion of his own fans, boys and girls included. He doesn't want to imagine what kind of trouble he'd get if he actually tries to approach Jongin. After all, it will only make his effort to have peaceful years of college trying to steer clear of any troubles go in vain. He still has another two years before he graduates and he wants it to be as peaceful as possible.

After deeming that it's not even worth the headache for constantly thinking about it, Taeyong bids his friends goodbye and goes to bed. He also decides he won't tell the two about him offering Jongin to stay after the flurry of messages a few minutes ago. He doesn't want them to blow his notification in the morning.

"Fuck my life," Ten groans as he reclines on Taeyong's couch a few days after Jongin incidentally turned up at his best friend's humble abode. It's a little after four in the afternoon when he finally finishes his dance practice and walks to Taeyong's apartment.

"Bad day?" Taeyong looks up from where he's washing the dishes from this morning.

Another groan leaves Ten's mouth. "It's like I've just finished a marathon. My body feels like it could break apart any moment. I swear Kim Jongin is such a satan's spawn."

"Ever so dramatic," Mark appears from the mini music studio beside Taeyong's bedroom.

After getting the apartment the year before, Taeyong decided the small room could use some makeover and turned it into a mini studio for Mark and him. Even though Taeyong's only minoring in music, he enjoys composing music too much, and it obviously helps Mark a lot since making music in a dorm room could be tricky sometimes. The three of them paid their

own small parts of rent and bills even though Mark and Ten currently live in the dorm, because the two frequently spend their time there especially on weekends they might as well move in already. But the two value solitude as much as they value their time together so they decided it is better this way.

Ten raises his head a little before letting it fall back to the couch cushion. “Just go back to your hermit hole, Mark.”

“Rude,” the bespectacled boy snickers before disappearing once again behind the studio door bringing a bottle of water from the small fridge, narrowly avoids a cushion thrown at him. The poor thing makes contact with the door with a sad thump before promptly falling.

“Let’s order a take out. Your pick.” Taeyong dries his hand before walking to the couch, picking his phone from the table as he sits down.

“I want Chinese food.”

Taeyong nods, “Sure, go shower in the meantime. You’re sweating buckets and the couch is gonna get drenched if you stay any longer.”

The dance major gives his best friend a stink eye, grumbling even as he sluggishly moves, retrieving another sweat drenched shirt from his bag to wash later.

“Do I get to pick a movie? We accidentally cancelled the last time’s movie night cause, you know,” Mark emerges from the mini studio, this time bringing his bag along with him. That could only mean he’s finished for the day.

“Kim Jongin ruins everything, huh?” Ten says from the laundry room beside the kitchen. “Today he also fucked me and it’s not even in a good way!” the boy continues.

Mark scrunches his nose in mock disgust. “Ew, Ten. Get your desperate ass away from here!”

“Do you want to tho?” Taeyong interrupts without missing a beat, left brow quirking up in a tease. “Getting fucked in a good way? By him?”

Ten’s disgusted face brings Mark to laugh with a yell of, “Hyung what the fuck!”

“Not a chance, not even dreaming of it!” The bathroom door slams shut behind Ten’s figure louder than necessary.

They hear the sound of running water not long after that and continue on ordering their food. Mark is munching on a chocochip cookies from a small container Ten brought with him to the practice. They’re so lucky they have Taeyong who makes snacks every time. Sadly he couldn’t bring himself his own share or risked getting kicked out from the music room. His professor’s so adamant for not letting his students bring any kind of food inside the room full of musical instruments. Ten finishes his shower shortly after their food arrives roughly twenty minutes later.

“How’s rehearsal?” Taeyong asks the dancer when they finally settle with their food from the chinese eatery they frequent around the block. Unlike him who already finished with

anything related to finals, the dance team still has one duty for the next dance showcase before the Christmas holiday leading to the next semester. His own team doesn't really get the rush since they're not the dance majors.

Ten swallows his food with a sigh. "It's hell. I really start to think that the devil himself joins in Jongin's personal vendetta against me. It's only a week and we still have another week to go before the showcase."

Taeyong snickers, almost choking up on his noodle in the process.

"I wonder how he still has the energy to fight," Mark then grins sheepishly when Taeyong gives him a pointed look for speaking and chewing at the same time.

"I told you he's a Satan's spawn!" Ten insists before he whines pitifully. "Yongie if you didn't help him I won't be like this!"

"Please Ten, it's your dance showcase. You know it'd turn into hell at some point the closer it gets to the date, no matter if I helped him or not," Taeyong points out. Ten only pouts despite knowing that himself.

"And you know what! He robbed me of my cookie, again! My cookie!" Ten piques.

"But you still have a few of them tho, what's the matter?" the youngest says intentionally missing the point, ignoring the glare thrown at him.

"He still does that?" Taeyong frowns.

This is the third time it has happened. Since the week started, Ten always brings a small plastic container full of Taeyong's cookies. The latter being an angel and made them for him, knowing that it could give some energy boost during the arduous routine of the dance practice. But on the previous Wednesday, Taeyong forgot to bring the usual package with him to give it to Ten so he texted Mark, who's been staying over the night before to do that instead. The boy's got an afternoon class and Taeyong was already at his part time job, so it would be easier if Mark's the one doing that. And starting from that day, Jongin's been doing what he does to Ten—snatching his cookies right from his hand.

"You sure he doesn't have a secret crush on you?" Mark's comment gets a deadly glare from the dancer.

"Have you asked Taemin-sunbae about this? You know, they're close," Taeyong said with a shrug.

"No, I think Jongin's taking revenge on me because he heard what I said when you helped him that night."

Mark snorts at Ten's words. "It's your own fault for not having your brain to mouth filter fixed when he's here."

Taeyong shakes his head as the two launch into another bickering session.

“But have you thought about this, hyung,” Mark swallows his food. “He went to your door with his own key, do you know what that means?”

Their talk suddenly veers from *Jongin snatching Ten's cookies like a kindergartener looking for attention* to a talk about Jongin himself. They've had enough talking about him and Taeyong really starts to have a headache whenever they start another discussion about the same person.

He only blinks with a face as neutral as he can get.

This time it's Ten shaking his head when he sees Taeyong only blinking in response. “I can't believe you could be this dumb, Yongie.”

“What do you mean?” Taeyong frowns as if he doesn't get what his friend's talking about, as if he really has no idea of *what* they're talking about.

Ten raises an eyebrow. “Don't you think he might be living in the same building?” there's that conspiratorial lilt in his voice again just like last time.

“I don't want to think about that,” Taeyong replies curtly.

He really doesn't want to think about the possibility of it all, and the chance of bumping into the said person here of all places. His mind is chaotic enough on the night Jongin appeared for the second time and managed to embarrass him at the same time. Another possibility of meeting Jongin in the same building and he's sure he'd turn into an even more chaotic mess in front of him.

Besides, honestly speaking, he also doesn't want to get anywhere near Jongin in fear of getting into trouble because of that. Even though he said himself not to judge him, a small part of him is not so sure about doing so and he's not interested in getting involved with the said person. He ignores his bugging curiosity about what makes Jongin seem to always have a fight or what floor could he possibly reside in. After all, he believes in *curiosity kills the cat* too much to spare another thought for that matter. Better be preparing himself for the winter break instead, where he has to spend on his own in his apartment because his parents are currently on a business trip.

"So," Taeyong starts as Ten prepares for another dance practice in the afternoon. "I heard about a rumor from the dance team yesterday."

"And?" Ten quirks an eyebrow, putting his *cookies for the day* container inside his backpack.

He knows where this is going already. It's Saturday, he'd get a break from the baseless, annoying rumor going around him for the one peaceful day tomorrow before it starts all over again on Monday. If his showcase is not as much of a lifeline during his college years, he'd be happy to ditch them. Screw the chaos that will ensue from him abandoning his crucial position and make them start with a different routine to accommodate his disappearance with a replacement.

"It's involving you and Jongin-sunbae," Taeyong tries his hardest not to laugh but he cannot keep it any longer.

"Fuck you," Ten says with a hiss as Taeyong shakes in uncontrollable laugh.

"No, thanks, please go fuck yourself," Taeyong says just to annoy his bestfriend.

The front door closes with a bang.

Truth to be told, Ten is not quite sure himself when the rumor started. One day he was peacefully cruising through his classes, the next thing he knew he didn't bring his usual share of cookies with him and had Mark delivered it to him. Then Jongin, out of the blue, acted like it was normal to snatch someone's cooking *right from their hand* and repeated that the following day. Then a couple days after that he heard some whispering from a few of the dance majors who were, *thankfully*, in different classes from him.

Rumors that say there's something going on between Jongin and him. What a blast.

But it's not Jongin if he cares about whatever is going around him, doesn't care if it's involving his name. As long as he doesn't actually get involved. And so Ten could only do the same. After all, what could he possibly do when the fire spreads faster on an open field full of dry bushes before he even get the chance to fetch some water? He just hopes none of Jongin's crazy fans take this rumor seriously or else it's gonna be over for him.

Ten continues his day like usual and soon it's another break from the dance practice. He and his closest thing he calls friend, Taemin, stretch their limbs in unison. His hand reaches for the container filled with Taeyong's delicious treat and proceeds to eat them, offering Taemin to have some of it. But like the usual occurrence these last few days, his cookie's got snatched away from his hand by none other than Jongin.

"He always does that! Ugh!" he exclaims indignantly.

Taemin's brows almost reach his hairline, amusement and a slight surprise in his eyes.
"Really? Since when?"

Ten looks at Taemin carefully, trying to find a lie in the other's expression but he finds nothing. But then again Taemin's never been there since the first time Jongin does that. In fact this seems to be the first time Taemin gets to know what the rumor is actually about. He might not know what it is about at all so Ten dismisses Taeyong's idea of asking Taemin about this.

"I don't know, a few days ago?" Ten offers.

"That's weird."

"Tell that friend of yours about it, hyung," Ten clicks his tongue, to which Taemin only laughs.

"Sure."

"No—hyung! I mean—don't," Ten panics because he just remembered the dynamics between Jongin and Taemin and he almost dig his own grave. Again.

Taemin cackles, "Relax, your secret is safe with me."

"That's not even a secret," the younger male grumbles. "But the weird thing is that he only started doing that after Mark gave this to me three days ago."

Taemin frowns. "Mark gives you that? He's the one who made the cookies?"

Ten imagines *Mark* of all people, doing something like baking or just generally being fully capable in the kitchen, and tries not to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

"No, it's Taeyong. I forgot to bring my share that day and he also forgot to give it earlier so Mark brought it to me instead," Ten says as he takes a bite of the chocochips cookie.

The younger dance major looks up from his phone when Taemin only hums. "Is something the matter hyung?"

Taemin shakes his head, taking another cookie. "Nothing."

The two sit in comfortable silence after that, but not so long.

"Actually, maybe a heads-up," Taemin says quite suddenly, getting the younger's attention. "Tell your friend to bring you a small packet of whatever you'd bring next time. Give it to Jongin if he looks like he's gonna snatch your cookie again."

"What? Why? Don't you hear about the rumor hyung?" he says incredulously.

He's already imagining the uproar it will create when the whole team gets a whiff of *him giving cookies to Jongin*. They know Ten's fervent dislike toward the dance leader so it'd be a juicy story to tell if that actually happens. Ten suppresses a shudder.

"Just do that," Taemin gives him an angelic smile which honestly makes Ten don't want to comply.

"Oh, and tell him it's from Taeyong. And this is good, by the way," Taemin adds.

"Yeah, I know," Ten says distractedly. "But, hyung, why? You sure about this? What are you trying to tell, honestly?"

"Trust me Ten, just do it." Taemin convinces him again.

But before he could ask any further, Jongin and their coach start to clap which means it's time to go again. And Taemin suddenly disappears before materializing right beside Jongin in a blink. Still wearing the same angelic smile that has Ten suppressing a shiver, still giving him a look that pins him down while mouthing an inaudible *do it*. Ten cannot bring himself to do anything other than nod and watch as a self satisfied smile replaces the previous one on his senior's face. He really doesn't want to think about what that could possibly mean.

Chapter End Notes

lol I wrote the better half of this chapter on my phone XD

I managed to connect my laptop to the internet but I got addicted to writing on my phone since I also have notes of my sudden influke of ideas there.

I'm slightly confused of the time order :/

Anyway, see you in the next chapter <3

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Ten gets some hints and have more questions than before. Chaos ensues.

Chapter Notes

First, sorry for the long wait to whoever waiting the continuation of this story. I've been swamped with tons of assignments and honestly couldn't come up with a good enough chapter to post QwQ

And second, I cannot guarantee the consistency of the updates, but you can poke me everytime you think I abandoned this for too long lmao.

Third, enjoy this dialogue heavy chapter ;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Taeyong's in the process of whipping a new batch of cookie dough on a bright Sunday morning, when Mark and Ten's bickering voices filter through the front hall of his apartment, followed by the sound of the door closing. The two stayed the night before and have just finished their morning run when the smell of freshly baked cookies wafts through the air. Unlike them, Taeyong doesn't always do his morning run, and prefers busying himself in the kitchen where his comfort lies in cooking and baking goods. He doesn't say anything when the two look alternatively at him and the speaker blazes some RnB songs loudly early in the morning.

"What is that, Yongie~" Ten greets in a sing-song voice as he rounds the corner from the hallway to the living area, eyeing the delicacies on the countertop.

"It's still hot!" Taeyong slaps Ten's hand that immediately reaches out to the almond butter cookies. "Besides, *you* wash your dirty hands first after your run."

Ten complies with a pout, shoving Mark from the sink out of pettiness as the boy snickers at his attitude.

"Well, aren't you spoiling him too much, hyung?" Mark quips as he opens the fridge to retrieve the milk for his cereal.

"Excuse me, I helped buy the ingredients, mind you!" Ten takes the bait easily and defends himself with a hot come back.

Mark shrugs, “I also help pay the bills, if you’re really taking this into that direction.”

“I do that too if you forget!”

“I *am* the one who owns the place and if you both don’t shut up you can take your leave before I kick you out,” Taeyong says calmly whilst taking out a tray of freshly baked raisin oat cookies and entering a new tray into the oven. The kind of calm before a storm, which makes it ten times scarier because a silent-angry Taeyong is more lethal than the fuming-angry one.

Ten’s hands freeze under the running tap water as he shares an amused look with Mark who has his mouth turning into an ‘o’.

“So,” Ten speaks after a bout of silence. “What’s got your panties in a twist so early in the morning?”

Taeyong wipes his hands on a napkin with a long suffering sigh before slumping on a stool. “The couple next door decided to have a morning session right after you guys went out and ruined my mood to write for that one essay about Baroque arts,” he gripes sulkily.

Mark chokes on his cereal at the same time Ten throws his head back in a satisfied laughter. “That’s why the loud music and baking, huh,” he comments after the laughter dies.

Taeyong gives a noncommittal grunt as an answer. He reaches his phone on the kitchen counter and lowers the volume of the music, groaning when a notification from a group chat related with his group assignment pops up on the screen not a second later.

“I hate this day.”

“It’s barely eight, hyung,” Mark snickers at the rare occurrence of Taeyong being like this on a nice morning.

“It’s not like you at all to be all grumpy when the day just starts,” Ten adds, wiping his hands on a napkin before snatching the carton of milk from Mark’s hand after the boy finished pouring the milk for his second serve of cereal, pouring a glass for himself.

“Yeah hyung, it suits Ten more,” Mark says and promptly chokes for the second time when Ten smacks his back without mercy.

A small smile brightens Taeyong’s face, the only sign that his best friends’ bickering brings some source of amusement to him at least, distracting him from the foul mood. He starts to fill an empty jar with the almond butter cookies and doesn’t comment on how Ten keeps snatching away the ones still on the tray.

“You really have the guts to say that, huh,” Ten quips snidely before turning his attention to Taeyong who is still patiently and methodically stacking the sweets inside the clear jar.

A few minutes pass in a comfortable silence, the only noises being Taeyong’s stacked cookies and Mark’s spoon gently hitting against his bowl.

“How’s the dance leader treating you, Tennie?” Taeyong glances up momentarily with an amused glint in his eyes.

Huffing in exasperation, Ten swallows the last chew in his mouth before replying. “Still annoying and stealing my food,” he complains, turning to glare at Mark before the younger has a chance to throw a tease. “Don’t you dare saying something about him having a crush on me,” he hisses with enough stress to make it clear that he’s not gonna like anything related to that notion.

Mark makes a gesture of zipping his lips despite the shaking of his shoulders in an effort of holding his laugh.

“And about that..” Ten continues haltingly to get the other two’s attention. “I want to experiment on something.”

Taeyong raises a brow at his best friend’s suspicious words, sparing Mark a glance to gauge the younger’s expression. The kid’s looking plainly curious about whatever Ten has in mind, and truthfully, Taeyong feels the same.

“What is it? You want to poison your dance leader?” Mark guesses innocently.

“No, but that’s a good idea, actually,” Ten smiles evilly.

“No one’s poisoning anyone,” Taeyong interrupts with a stern look as he pulls out another tray from the oven yet again—the last one. Even though he knows they’re just joking, he doesn’t put it past Ten to actually follow through with the absurd idea.

Ten gasps dramatically. “You really have that much faith in me, Yongie,” he complains.

“I do, and I’m being honest,” Taeyong replies without missing a beat. “Now what did you want to say earlier?” he turns off the oven and starts to tidy up everything he used before.

At the mischievous glint in the dance major’s eyes, Mark and Taeyong share a worried look for a brief second before giving their full attention to the said male.

“I want to give him a small package of your usual cookies when I bring them to practice,” Ten drops the bomb with this kind of cunning look which convinces Taeyong that his friend doesn’t do that out of mere crush.

But Mark doesn’t seem to have the same opinion as he laughs out loud at the revelation. Good thing he has finished his breakfast or he’ll choke for the third time this morning.

“You *do* have a crush on him, after all!” he accuses obnoxiously, instantly wiping the mischievous façade on Ten’s face.

Taeyong sighs tiredly, taking the bowl previously used by Mark before the kid accidentally smacks it off the counter top with his wild laughing spree.

“What’s wrong with your head, honestly, Mark?” Ten seethes with a frown.

“Wait, you really don’t?” Mark sobers up at the mix of exasperation and annoyed disbelief on the other’s face.

The oldest of the three cuts in before it’s too late. “Why?” Taeyong asks simply, rinsing the dishes already.

And the look of mischief is back to Ten’s face like it’s never gone from there at all.

“I just want to see his reaction,” he answers with a shrug, not giving any further explanation. He doesn’t want to tell the others about how Taemin *persuaded* him into doing this yesterday, the devil—at least, not yet. Not until he gets the answer to Taemin’s quizzical suggestion related to Jongin’s weird behavior, not until Taemin explains to him on whatever it is going on in the other dancer’s mind to suggest him to do something like this. But, if Ten is being honest, he’s also curious about Jongin and his questionable actions.

Before Taeyong can make a comment, Mark beats him to it with another teasing. “You sure it’s not because you want to know if he has a crush on you or not?”

The kick aimed at the stool where Mark’s sitting nearly sends the boy sprawling on the floor with another peal of laughter coming from his mouth. They youngest did stumble for a moment before righting his position on the same stool, snickering to himself at the obvious annoyance on the elder’s face.

“This kid, I swear to god!” Ten groans this time, clearly fed up with the thought of crush and Jongin in the same equation.

“Okay, chill,” Mark sniggers. “Any reason why you suddenly want to do that?”

Ten contemplates for a second. “I’m just curious, okay? What makes him do what he’s been doing? Why me? Why now? I’ve been bringing snacks since forever and obviously I’m not the only one doing that...?”

Taeyong hums, weighing options whether he should allow Ten to do that at all. He’s reminded of the last time Jongin came to his place and ate the cookies, and wondering what’s actually going on inside the dance leader’s mind when he’s doing what Ten has dramatically described as robbery. Food robbery. Cookie robbery, if that even makes sense.

“Whatever Ten, I don’t see any harm anyway,” Taeyong relents with a shrug. “Just don’t drag me along with you if things get weirder,” he adds with a snicker.

“Yeah, you’re the one who comes up with the idea after all,” Mark still teases.

Well, not mine, technically, Ten muses silently remembering it was Taemin’s idea all along. He doesn’t say anything, starting to make an assortment of cookies for him to bring the next day instead. It’s going to be the last week before the performance and he’d need the sugary boost if he wants to stay sane until the showcase.

“Thanks by the way, you guys help a lot,” Ten gives the two a saccharine sweet smile. “I’ll tell you about it when I get the answer.”

Ten ignores Mark's snickers as he puts some into a smaller plastic zip-bag for the previously mentioned plan. He just hopes Taemin doesn't aim on something weird because he's practically putting his faith blindly to the said senior about the whole thing. But then maybe, he shouldn't really do whatever he's asked by someone so close to Jongin himself after all.

Ten glances from his bag to see Mark stumble into the brightly lit kitchen on the fine Monday morning, blearily watching Ten going through final preparation to start his day. He just wakes up after this night's hard battle with his music composition with the neighbor going at it yet again like the morning before and Mark cranked his music so loud just to block the stupid noises. Now he's grumpy but seeing Ten frantically going around the living area and the open kitchen reminds him about yesterday's conversation. The older one eyed him suspiciously when there's a sudden smile gracing Mark's features.

"Oh, good luck with the quest of finding out Jongin-sunbae's interest, hyung."

Ten sends the younger a glare since the latter only calls him *hyung* whenever he wants to mock or tease him, and by the look of it, Mark doesn't look like he's going to drop this matter any moment. *Better to hurry and get going then*, Ten thinks absently as he zips his bag.

"Alright, I'm going, Markie. Don't blow the kitchen and burn the building when Yongie and I are not here to save your sorry ass," Ten says before he walks to the direction of the hallway, and doesn't bother to wait for Mark's morning brain to catch up.

By the time he hears Mark's indignant squawk he's already opening the door and closes it with a final click as he walks to his morning class. Taeyong has an urgent meeting with one of his professors related to his research paper and has left even earlier than Ten, leaving Mark alone now that he's gone too.

Time passes seemingly at a snail-pace when you're waiting for something and that's what Ten feels all this day leading to the dance practice. Never did he think there would come a day where he'd look forward to meeting *Jongin* of all people, now that he has his purpose directly related to the senior, he cannot wait to get it done as soon as possible.

He enters the dance studio pretending he doesn't sense Taemin's inquisitive stare from across the room and Jongin's constant presence right beside the pretty dancer. But taking a glance to the senior's direction, Ten gives the older an eye roll when the latter quirks an eyebrow in his direction. Taemin knows Ten's going to do what they've been talking about the previous Saturday afternoon and the pleased look on his face tells him so.

The first session ends when the team finally disperses from their designated position to take a twenty minutes break for their completed routine before they start from the beginning all over again. Ten drags his tired feet to the corner where he previously put his bag, secretly praying to all the gods above that the other members of the team are occupied enough to notice what he's about to do soon.

He feels the stare Jongin not so secretly directs at him the moment he pulls his zip-lock plastic bag from the front pocket of his backpack. Throwing a glance around him, Ten pulls the special package for Jongin when he sees, from the corner of his eyes, the said male

walking to him as soon as he did that. He thrusts the smaller plastic bag to the older before Jongin has the chance to snatch the one in his hand.

Jongin, surprisingly, accepts the offer without so much of a question except from the subtle raise of his brows. And Ten, remembering Taemin's words, reluctantly mumbles, "From Taeyong."

There's a spark of recognition in the taller's eyes after hearing what Ten said, leaving him gaping like a fish out of the water when the older dance major spins around to walk away *just like that*. It has to be one of the rarest moments of Jongin showing expression other than his perpetual scowl or his famous resting bitch face, that it awed him so much to the point of making Taemin snickers in amusement.

Ten snaps his eyes from Jongin's retreating figure, nonchalant (*or rather, uncaring*) to the curious looks directed at him from the other dancers in the room. Ten doesn't bother to check if the questioning stares now turned at him, opting to give his attention to Taemin instead. He takes a bite of the almond butter cookie in his hand and offers his senior the delicious treats while doing so.

"How did it go?" Taemin takes the raisin oat one.

"Honestly, hyung? What the actual fuck is going on? He looks strangely happy about it? I'm mad confused please give me some enlightenment," Ten goes off.

Taemin lets out a small laugh. "That's because it's from Taeyong," he says as if it answers everything.

"Gee, thanks hyung, I didn't know about that," Ten responds, rolling his eyes. He starts to question if it's really necessary for Jongin and his friends to talk in a mysterious (*more like cryptic*) way.

The older dancer only chuckles, "I asked him why he always did that last time after dance practice, the same day I asked you to bring another share for him."

"And...?" Ten stares in anticipation. He feels like he needs to fear whatever Taemin's going to say.

"Apparently he heard that it's from Taeyong when Mark came here to give it to you that one time and Jongin's simply curious about it."

"How does that fucking explain anything?" Ten finds that he's almost constantly swearing when it comes to Jongin.

Taemin shrugs, giving the younger an amused (*cryptic, Ten insists*) smile. "I don't know, Ten. Don't you think it looks like Jongin's crushing on your dear friend?"

Ten stares at Taemin like he grows a second head. "That's hella impossible hyung, don't scare me like that!" he whisper-shouts seconds later.

The older simply cackles at the sight of his shocked junior. “I can’t be sure, though I bet he’s somewhat interested.”

“Doesn’t mean it doesn’t sound ridiculously impossible, honestly,” Ten mumbles. He knows he said he’d tell Taeyong what happens after he gave the cookies to Jongin but suddenly he’s not so sure about it anymore. Not with Taemin’s deduction on the possibility behind it.

“Maybe you should ask your friend about that,” Taemin gives him *that* cryptic smile of his again, the one that makes him look mysteriously amused. The seemingly angelic expression makes him feel like there’s something clearly hidden behind it instead. And Ten is perfectly sure about that.

Watching Taemin approaches Jongin from the same spot and seeing the dance leader move away when Taemin makes a gesture to take his treat doesn’t really help Taemin’s vague suggestion. And the knowing look the older gives him from afar after that only manages to convince him that Taemin *knows* something more about the situation and Ten doesn’t want to guess even if he has a hunch.

Because there’s no way Jongin is interested in Taeyong when the two never crossed paths before the weird incident a few weeks ago.

“Hey, Yongie, I want to tell you something but don’t freak out, okay?” Ten begins the conversation when they’re eating dinner together the next day. He was so tired yesterday that he didn’t bother going to Taeyong’s place to tell whatever information he gained on the *Jongin situation* they have lately.

“Dude, that’s like telling him that whatever it is you’re going to say, it’s gonna make him freak out,” Mark interrupts without lifting his eyes from the food in his bowl.

“You mean if I tell *you* that, you’re going to freak out even before I tell you the actual problem,” Ten levels Mark with a deadpan look.

The younger grins sheepishly. “Most likely,” he says, shrugging.

Taeyong snorts, “So. What kind of problem do you want to tell me?”

Ten clicks his tongue in annoyance, “You remember about the cookies I asked to give to Jongin?”

“Don’t tell me he really has a crush on you?!” Mark hollers with an annoying laughter in Ten’s ears. “That would be *epic* , considering your animosity toward him all this time!”

“For god’s sake, Mark, stop interrupting me for a second, will you?!” Ten really wants to strangle the snickering first year college student in front of him right now.

“What about it?” Taeyong asks, noticing the murderous intent in Ten’s eyes.

The dancer of the group shifts his attention to the oldest. “What would you say about him having a crush on you?”

“That’s impossible,” Taeyong says flatly in a heartbeat.

“What’s the problem, tho?” Mark mumbles, which promptly makes Taeyong and Ten stares at him like he’s going on a tangent of weird thinking.

“Mark, you don’t think you spend too much of your time in Baekhyun-sunbae’s presence that you start to act weird?” Taeyong stares at the youngest with a mix of concern and wary. But the slight mischievous spark in those dark orbs tells Mark otherwise and elicits a groan from him.

“But really tho, what’s the problem? It’s just a crush if it’s indeed like that, unless he really starts to act on it…?”

“The problem is in your head, Mark,” Ten says straight-faced.

“Yeah, becausry that’s just ridiculous,” Taeyong adds.

“I know, right? There’s no way he wants to have a share of your cookies because he has a crush on you,” Ten agrees wholeheartedly.

Mark nods too. “Yeah, maybe he just wanted to mess with you because he’s really crushing on you instead,” he says, trying to maintain a poker face before he cannot take it anymore and bursts out laughing.

“What the fuck is your problem, ohmygosh!” Ten gives the youngest a kick under the table until Mark jolts in his laughter and hits his leg against his own chair. “Taeyong please give your unruly cousin a sedative because I’m tempted to commit homicide.”

“What gives you that idea anyway?” Mark asks normally at last.

“Yeah, Ten, there’s no way you’re suddenly interested in him when all this time you despised his existence,” Taeyong adds, his hiccupping laughter calms down after a while.

“Now *you* are being weird,” Ten accuses his best friend, which has Mark suppressing a snicker. “Taemin-hyung talked to me,” he says as a form of explanation.

“About this?” Taeyong frowns. Well, now *that’s* weird.

The dance major nods. “Actually, he’s the one who came up with the idea of bringing cookies for Jongin. And he also told me to say it’s from you when I gave that to him.”

Taeyong blinks in confusion at the explanation, “Huh? Why would he do that?”

“That’s what I thought but he just insisently told me to do so,” Ten shrugs, popping a fish ball into his mouth.

Mark raises his brows in slight disbelief, glancing at Taeyong only to see the same expression plastered on his face. “You mean you did what he said without knowing any solid reason behind it?” he asks incredulously.

Ten makes a face at that. “Not really, because I’m curious about the whole deal and I guess there’s nothing wrong about bringing another packet next time to see what’s gonna happen after that.”

Taeyong stares at his *currently grinning best friend* , with his lips pulled flat in a deadpan expression.

Mark clears his throat. “So, what happened after that, by the way?”

At this, a small frown makes a presence in the middle of Ten’s forehead as he mulls the answer to Mark’s question. “Jongin looks strangely pleased about that? The dude looks like he’s genuinely happy and when I asked Taemin-hyung about it he said it’s because of your cookies, Taeyong.”

“You sure you didn’t just make that up?” Taeyong narrows his eyes in a playfully suspicious manner despite the real curiosity in his words.

“No, Yongie. Jongin’s been snatching my food right from my own hand just because he heard Mark said it’s from you that day and he’s fucking curious about it, that’s *why* .”

Ten’s tone while telling them that shows he’s equally weirded out, as much as Taeyong does but Mark laughs at that instead, at the impossible but weird and *stupid* , amusing reason.

“There’s no way you’d believe that,” Taeyong’s looking at Ten skeptically.

The dancer purses his lips, “Well, not really, but now I’m really curious about the actual reason.”

“Please Ten, you’re going to look awfully stupid when you said you wanted nothing to do with them and then believed what Taemin-sunbae said just like that,” Mark, for once, gives a sound opinion according to Ten. He begrudgingly admits that.

Ten scowls at the boy nonetheless. “You don’t have to tell me that.”

“Maybe they’re just messing with you Ten, don’t think too much about it,” Taeyong reassures.

“Right, thinking doesn’t really suit you anyway,” Mark exclaims bluntly.

“Mark, I swear to god I’m going to choke you while you’re sleeping,” Ten glares daggers at the youngest of all three.

“Oh? What kind of development is this? I didn’t know you’re kinky like that,” Taeyong teases, sending Mark into another uncontrollable laughter.

“NOT YOU TOO!” Ten lets out a tired groan. “Oh my gosh sometimes I forgot you two are related by blood and have to be reminded in the worst way possible!”

Mark snickers annoyingly, “Now you’re just being dramatic.”

“Fucking *brat* !” Ten wrestles Mark into a chokehold while the latter asks for Taeyong’s help despite his giggling. Taeyong only chuckles at the chaos in front of him.

“But Ten, you know, maybe Jongin-sunbae does have a crush on you so he decided to mess around. You really should ask him about that someday,” Taeyong continues with his teasing.

“I hate you. I really do.” Ten confesses flatly.

“But my food says you don’t,” Taeyong smirks, looking at the now nonexistent tom yum soup he made for dinner and the last wonton between Ten’s chopsticks soon to be eaten by the said male.

Ten gives the eldest a sugary sweet smile, ignoring Mark’s coughing-slash-laughing beside him, “Sure, but I still hate you.”

Taeyong only laughs as he stands up to start collecting the dirty dishes. “Mark, you promised me you’d do the dishes today, come on.”

“Aaw, hyung, can’t I do that later?”

“No, because you’re just going to forget about it and not do that altogether in the end. *Now* .”

Ten snickers seeing Mark grumbles but rising from his seat in the end, and walks to the sink where Taeyong waits for him. When Mark starts washing, Taeyong chooses to occupy himself with the leftovers of the foods and puts them in the fridge to distract his mind. Because even if he told Ten to not think about what Taemin had said before, Taeyong finds himself thinking about that instead.

Then suddenly, he remembers something, a somewhat crucial part in the situation he has yet to tell the other two.

“Um, you guys remember the last time Jongin-sunbae was here?” he starts without turning from the open fridge, pretending to tidy some space inside the cooler.

“Yeah, what about it?” Ten asks around a spoonful of Taeyong’s favorite caramel pudding.

“Did he do something, hyung?” Mark glances briefly behind him where Taeyong now is leaning onto the fridge.

A beat of silence passes before Taeyong finally responds. “Maybe, it depends on how you look at it.”

“Now, can you not talk like Taemin-hyung,” Ten clicks his tongue. “Just spill.”

“I might have offered him to stay for food,” Taeyong raises a finger when Mark turns abruptly to look at him with shock written all over his face and Ten looks like he’s going to rant at any moment. “Because his stomach grumbles, okay?”

Ten shakes his head, “I didn’t remember I befriended a saint.”

“Shut up,” Taeyong rolls his eyes, walking to the stool at the kitchen counter on Mark’s right. “He refused—”

“That’s good then,” Ten cuts in. Mark hums in agreement.

“—but he ate some of the soft cookies from the leftovers of the previous baking.”

Taeyong watches as the other two blink, can see the gears turning inside their heads before finally the information sinks in and Ten gives him an expression of disbelief. He nods his head when there's no further reaction as if to convince that *yes, Jongin really did that* .

“Taeyong, what the fuck?” Ten puts the pudding on the table to stare intently at Taeyong. But there’s no trace of humor in that face as a sign that he’s just messing around.

“Oh my god,” Mark gapes stupidly, letting out a huff of breathless laughter. “Oh my goooood, *hyung* ! What—you really got the most notorious guy crushing on you!?” he grips the edge of the sink, smearing a handful of suds on the counter top around it. Taeyong looks disdainfully at that.

“Mark, wash properly,” he chastises and Mark shows his sheepish grin before continuing his task and wiping the suds off the counter. “And don't make a baseless assumption.”

“Holyshit, Yongie. What did you *do*?”

Taeyong groans, “I don’t know, Ten.”

Now Ten sees what Taemin's trying to say—that *maybe Jongin is somewhat interested* .

“Let’s pray he really is just messing around then.”

And Ten didn’t want to guess, yeah, but he had a hunch.

What now? Jongin crushing on Taeyong?

“Good luck, hyung,” Mark quips with a snicker.

Chapter End Notes

boom!!

finally it's going somewhere after I was stuck with not being able to stitch the rough draft together into a readable chapter *sighs*

feel free to hmu on twt I have the same @ with my pseud!

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Remember this saying—once is an accident, twice is coincidence, and three time is a pattern?

Yes, that one.

Chapter Notes

hey hey hey I'm back with this fic, a new chapter after what—two months? I'm sorryyyyyy :((

finally after I'm done with the college's previous semester and my mind has cleared a bit from the plague of some other ideas and wip that keep haunting me, I managed to work on perfecting and editing this chapter to finally post. looks like this one's lightly longer than the prev chapter.

here we go, and enjoy the ride!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Taeyong's life goes back into its somewhat normal direction. *Somewhat*, because there's a single factor that really makes it hard for his conscious mind to go back to how everything was before the recent development that involves a certain senior from the dance major. Because no matter how much he tried to ignore the fact that they've crossed paths, Taeyong just cannot simply *not* acknowledge that it happened at all. He's trying his best to not think about Jongin's questionable behavior and his reason behind it, and the fact that it happened twice in an almost consecutive pattern, but it's easier said than done.

He thinks when he holds onto this belief that if he doesn't try to ask, to engage, to know whatever problem Jongin was involved beyond his apartment door whenever the older male came to his place, it would really make their odd, unexpected interaction less of a reality. Taeyong has been reminded that it is a foolish way of reasoning when he often sees the senior in the campus even before that first time already, and now a mere sight of Jongin would directly bring his mind to a time tending to bruises and raw knuckles and unexpected visit. Even the presence of just anyone of his circle, that is, would instantly remind Taeyong of the exact person who commands trouble like it's his guard dog.

The events with Jongin slowly become an itch that bothers the back of his mind, to say the least. Something like a bug-bite—he can try to ignore it all he wants but when he sees the redness it left, he could still recall the moment when he was bitten.

Before, Taeyong would simply ignore Jongin's presence if they happen to run to each other in the hallway, or if he saw a glimpse of the older from afar. Both him and Jongin do not really bother to interact in more than a glance of acknowledgement—just knowing that they know each other just as far as their names go and no further. Their feet would automatically steer their walking direction away from each other, to put some distance, so as to not collide with one another, and Taeyong is content to stay that way, he respects Jongin enough with that *(and remember his plan to lay low for the rest of his college life, right? Taeyong really wants to stick to that, thank you very much)*.

But these few days, Taeyong makes an effort to avoid any possibility of running into Jongin at all cost, not even a simple less-than-a-second look *(not even eye contact)*, or worse, catching the senior's attention. If he happens to see a glimpse of Jongin from a peripheral vision, he would take it to himself to walk to another direction, to choose another route, or to wait until the vicinity is clear and safe for him to venture again. Somehow, Taeyong thinks to himself, it feels like playing hide and seek, just not as exciting.

Taeyong knows it's stupid, and even Ten told him the same thing at some point—saying he started to behave like Mark, who doesn't even want to take a glance to the older dance major as if he's allergic to him, just not as bad—but Ten's point still stands. Still it shows Taeyong the absurdity of the situation he chooses to take himself in, because there's no way now that he could forever avoid Jongin when their faculty buildings are near to each other, separated only by the central library of their university.

However, he's really adamant not to get involved with Jongin anymore than he already has ever since a few days ago he accidentally made eye contact with him, after their talk about Jongin having a crush on Ten. On the day he was meeting his friends for the group project, Taeyong had lunch with his best friend and Ten talked about wanting to change his hair color before the dance showcase. And through the last twenty minutes of his forty minutes meal with the younger, Jongin had been glancing to where he was sitting at every other minute in intervals.

It made Taeyong suddenly hyper-aware of Jongin's already demanding presence as it was, even among the throng of students swarming the cafeteria. Even when Jongin was surrounded by his three close friends, even when some of his other friends or fans constantly gravitated around him, even when *Oh Sehun*, Jongin's high-school friend came and sat awfully close to him *(rumor has it they used to be fuck buddies during their earlier years here and the recent gossips said they still do—frankly Taeyong doesn't know the truth and he can't be bothered to seek it out)*.

"Why are you suddenly so shifty like you've stolen Mrs. Kwon's million dollar purse?" Ten asked him then, when Taeyong kept biting on his nails. Ten sat with his back to Jongin's direction so he hadn't immediately noticed Taeyong's source of sudden stress.

Taeyong didn't even laugh at Ten's attempt to joke, dropping his hand like he was caught doing something he shouldn't. He just licked his lips, trying to play it cool, and said, "What

makes you think so? And how would you even know that her purse is a million dollars worth?"

Which, in hindsight, was not a very smart thing to do because nothing escaped his best friend's observant eyes. Looking at the slightly unnatural small upturn at the corner of Taeyong's lips and his shifty eyes, Ten knew that something really bothered the literature major. Because even when Taeyong didn't talk much, he never once suddenly became so quiet like he was too cautious to speak.

That something turned out to be *someone* when Ten finally noticed Jongin sitting a few tables behind him as he turned his head around to check—ignoring Taeyong's slightly distressed '*don't!*' in an attempt at holding him back from doing so. Taeyong only rolled his eyes at the amused quirk on Ten's left brow when he finally turned back to him only after he flicked a crumb of sweet potato chip to Ten's direction.

Taeyong couldn't even explain the relief when Jongin not even once looked in their direction the moment Ten was looking at him then, since he didn't want Jongin to get the idea that they had been talking about him (*when they were just practically doing that in the first place*). The senior looked like he had been focusing on whatever discussion with Taemin while occasionally munching on the cookies Ten gave him during their earlier practice of the day.

What a sight, Taeyong thought.

"Now you're suddenly wary of Jongin? After willingly helping him twice?" Ten raised his eyebrows at Taeyong, and continued with a teasing lilt in his voice. "What happened with the whole thing about giving the benefit of the doubt to him?"

Taeyong shrugs. "I just don't want to attract any attention from his fans if they notice the way he keeps looking at me and starting some gossip about it. Like what happened to a certain someone," he teased back, wriggling his brows at Ten whose expression instantly soured.

"It's absolutely stupid and I fucking hate it. Didn't they see how I never initiated any kind of interaction with Jongin other than during practice?" Ten fumed remembering the gossip around him that only became stronger the longer they kept practicing for the dance showcase. That also meant he still frequently gave Jongin the peace offerings™—even if he was incredibly reluctant for the whole time because he didn't think Jongin deserved Taeyong's cookies.

"Yeah, and the only interaction being *you* giving him a package of *cookies*, instead. Look at you being so sweet to your dance leader," Taeyong cooed playfully, earning a groan from the dancer sitting in front of him.

"It's *your* cookies, Taeyong, and you don't mind with that too."

"But no one knows and you were the one who came up with the idea," Taeyong had an amused smile on his face.

Ten narrowed his eyes—"Excuse me it's Taemin-hyung's and if not for Jongin who's constantly stealing mine I wouldn't even consider the stupid idea!"

Snickering on his seat, Taeyong said, "You just have to ignore him, right? Like, just don't give him anything?"

"Don't you think it would look ridiculous after giving him exactly that? Yongie, I fear they would only assume we're going on a lovers quarrel instead, if we look at the spreading gossip," Ten hissed back.

Taeyong raised a brow, a teasing smile on his lips, "So, does this mean that you finally admit to having a crush on him?"

Ten gaped, groaning as he banged his forehead on the surface of his books on the table. "You're fucking evil."

"And so are you," the literature major could only cackle on his seat at his friend's exasperation.

"If only I could tell them that it's you who made the cookies," Ten grumbled a few moments after.

"You could. But I doubt they'd believe it, maybe thinking you're just looking for attention instead," Taeyong responded with another shrug.

The dance major clicked his tongue in annoyance, "I hate that you're probably right about it."

"Of course I am. Don't worry, you only need to endure this until the showcase, Ten. Three days of practice left," Taeyong encouraged, only getting another groan in response.

Taeyong spent another minute waiting for Ten to finish his lunch before he had enough of Jongin's repetitive glances and decided that he needed to leave or else he'd really start worrying about his fans. Ten waved him goodbye, watching his best friend go as he still had another practice session in the afternoon.

And so, ever since then, Taeyong tries to readjust his daily life in the campus to make it stay on its previous course. He still wishes for a peaceful college life and his plan to stay under the radar will be compromised if Jongin suddenly starts to notice him for more than the occasional acknowledgement between them.

Taeyong fears for the attention it would bring, fearing the chaos that will make his plan to go unnoticed through his college years meeting its end, not the physical aspect of a confrontation if some fans would really be crazy enough to do that. He has his fair share of throwing punches of his own but if he were to choose he would always prefer avoiding any kind of violence. So if it comes down to physical, he's sure he can hold his own fight, but he knows he won't like the attention it would inevitably bring—not that he thinks he could use physical force if Jongin's female fans were the one who start getting *touchy*, it doesn't sit right with him.

The thing is, if Jongin's plethora of fans come to notice that Taeyong somehow manages to steal the older male's attention, even when it's unwanted if he's being honest and he isn't actually trying to do that, he's not even sure what he would get in exchange. Yuta's die hard

fans who didn't think he was *good enough for their soccer star* had been such a bother back when he was dating him. Aside from the gossipy whisper and dirty glance, there was verbal confrontation from a jealous admirer and few shenanigans (*hard shoulder bumps in the hallway, stupid notes on his locker door, and generally shitty behavior—not that Taeyong bothered to humor them anyway*). It honestly makes him think back sometimes, if it was really worth dating Yuta when in the end the soccer player turned out to be an asshole, no matter how he tried to put it.

And Taeyong obviously doesn't plan to find out what it would be like when the same thing happened with *Jongin* in the equation, and his fans were said to be crazier. Not to mention if it's not just fans but also his rival that comes for Taeyong's peaceful life. With Jongin's habit of getting stirred up into troubles and being involved in fights, it wouldn't be a surprise if he actually has a rivalling group in their university or even outside. Or maybe it's just Taeyong who watched too many crime dramas for his brain to come up with another absurd way of thinking when it's related to Jongin.

He doesn't really mind Ten giving Jongin cookies like that as long as he isn't directly involved with the man, but lately he also starts to rethink that decision. The talk about *crush and Jongin combined discourse* he had with Mark and Ten last weekend also doesn't help with the gnawing curiosity Taeyong develops. It slowly ruins his stronghold disposition about not wanting to know anything at all about Jongin, and Taeyong doesn't even understand *what* exactly he wants to know about the older male. Maybe not knowing anything is the best option indeed. And he hopes he doesn't come into contact with Jongin again after this.

Taeyong makes his way through the busy hallway with a determination to go through another day of trying to stay away from Jongin and his buddies, eyes scanning the area to see if there's *a certain someone whose name he shouldn't mention*, according to Mark. The campus is still buzzing from student's activity when Taeyong steps into the faculty building—some of them still aren't done with their exam, last assignment, or final project just like him. His finals are over, but he still has a paper to finish and one final group project that needs to be done within these final weeks for him to get the perfect grades.

Taeyong has just finished another meeting with his professor's at his faculty to consult about the paper he's been working on, and with another meeting on his group project being done earlier on the same day means he's free now. He walks to the dance practice room that's usually used by the second string dance team, the one that's not practically ruled by the dance major. He promised Ten they'd go over the dance routine for his solo performance after the latter is done with his team practice of the day, and help him go through his plan to dye his hair after that. Taeyong still has around thirty minutes until Ten is finished with his dance team and he plans to use the time to have an early start—he'll need longer time to warm up after being slightly inactive ever since final weeks started.

What he didn't expect, though, to find the practice room already occupied when it's usually not during final weeks like this because the second string doesn't need to prepare for any showcase and frankly the members of the team are busy with their exams. And the more surprised he is when he sees that it's *Jongin* going through a routine as he opens the door, his

movement doesn't even falter at the sound of the door opening and Taeyong wasn't actually trying to be careful in the first place.

Taeyong halts mid step into the room, right foot hovering slightly over the left one, before turning around to look at the sign outside over the door, to check whether he entered the wrong room when he found Jongin there instead of an empty room. But the sign says he's in the right place and he's still able to hear the rhythmic claps and shouts from the other practice room at the end of the hallway, just not as thunderous as usual as if it's not even half of the team. Because even though the whole team is divided into different parts or groups (*Ten always complained to him on how he got the luck to be in the same group as Jongin and Taemin, of all people*), they usually practice as a whole for the main routine.

So what's Jongin doing here if the first string practice isn't over yet? *So much for trying to avoid him*, Taeyong sighs.

By the time Taeyong turns around and peers back into the room, the music stops and Jongin is standing in the middle of the room, glancing at Taeyong's directions through the mirror when he feels the younger's eyes on him. Before Taeyong could utter any form of greeting due to his brain lagging from the unexpected encounter, Jongin walks to the audio section to retrieve his phone, disconnecting the device from the sound system. Taeyong shrugs to himself and decides *fuck it*, he also needs to use the room.

"Practicing?"

Taeyong snaps his head so fast in Jongin's direction that he's able to hear the clicks between his joints when he hears the word. He blinks owlishly at the taller man who doesn't even spare him a look, thinking he probably misheard the word because his brain is suddenly over-alert. Only then Jongin looks up from the screen of his phone, still standing near the sound system, to give Taeyong a proper look.

"You're practicing?"

This time Taeyong sees it with his own eyes that indeed Jongin's really talking to him, asking him that. This marks the first time Taeyong is actually interacting with the senior, outside his apartment and without the unusual circumstance of treating his bruises, directly talking with him and not just some eye contact or stolen glances.

"Oh," Taeyong pauses, slightly dumbfounded. "Yeah, something like that hyu—ah, I mean, sunbae," Taeyong wants to facepalm for stuttering like that.

Jongin raises an eyebrow in his direction and Taeyong makes an excuse to avoid that by going to the lockers lining the wall at the back of the room to put his bag away. Even then, Taeyong is still self-conscious of the eyes which he *knows* are directed at him. He can almost feel the other's stare boring onto his back.

"Um," Taeyong starts after he turns back, finding Jongin is still there (*he was secretly hoping the older male would just go*). "Is Ten—has the team practice finished yet, sunbae?"

"They're still on break," Jongin says—and that answers why the sound of their practicing wasn't as loud as it usually is, that must be some of them who need to work on some part by themselves.

Taeyong only nods because honestly he doesn't know what to talk to Jongin more than that. Fortunately Jongin is leaving soon, and Taeyong is gonna have the chance to enjoy the room by himself without the older male constantly watching him.

"We'll be done in the next hour. Maybe, after the last round," Jongin tells Taeyong on his way out without even looking back. "And don't call me sunbae."

"Ah, thank you, sun—*hyung*!" Taeyong quickly corrects himself, and Jongin is out of the room in seconds.

If Taeyong notices the subtle smirk from the last moment Jongin glances at him before he disappears behind the door, he chooses not to think about it. He doesn't need the distraction while he prepares for his own practice session with Ten later.

He and Ten have been working on a routine for the latter's solo performance using a song Taeyong composed for his music composition class some time ago. After it was added with his own lyrics, Ten asked him if he could use the songs for his performance and Taeyong happily agreed. Now, with the song playing through the audio, Taeyong starts warming up.

It's not even an hour later when the door to the room opens from outside and Ten's voice greets Taeyong's ears. The literature major immediately pauses the ongoing music and goes over to where his friend is sprawled near the door.

"Yongie, I think I just escaped hell.."

Taeyong chuckles, slightly breathless himself. "Who's the ruling king now?"

"It's obvious and you know *who*!" Ten snaps with so much passion.

Letting out a laugh, Taeyong observes Ten's state. "You sure you're still up to practicing your routine?" he asks skeptically.

"I am, just.." Ten lets out a long sigh, "Let me take a rest for a moment first."

"Sure, you're the captain."

Ten hums. "Also, I don't think I'll have the energy to go looking for hair dye later. I'm fucking beat and all I can think is warm bath at your place."

Taeyong shrugs, "There's always tomorrow anyway."

"Yeah, yeah. And we got the recovery period for three days so plenty of time," Ten retrieves his water bottle from his backpack.

"Hey, I think we don't have to do this now if you're too tired, y'know," Taeyong offers.

Ten hums from his place lying on the floor. Taeyong gives him another skeptical look before finally voicing his thoughts.

"Maybe we should go home for you to rest instead."

"No, it's okay, really. I just need to have a proper cooling down first or I'm going to be out of breath if we start right away," Ten convinces.

"If you say so," Taeyong only nods, clearly unconvinced. "By the way, three days recovery period? That's more than the usual," he raises his brows in wonder.

The recovery period, a term the members used for the time where the dance team takes a break, usually a day or two right before the showcase, and the members use it to take their much needed rest in their preparation of the performance. It also allows them to work on their individual project, perfecting the sub-group routine, or just practicing in general on their own volition, without the usual rigorous way of practicing. It's a way to prevent them from being overworked and to avoid injuring themselves from the almost nonstop practice.

At Taeyong's confusion, Ten nods, walking to the lockers as he states the reason for the prolonged period. "Yup. Some of the members are nursing minor injuries so the coaches and Jongin think it would be best to give more time to rest."

"Oh?" Taeyong blinks. "Sounds like he's quite the attentive *king of hell*, huh?"

"Taeyong, I love you for letting me use your song for this and helping me work on it but can we please not talk about him?" Ten whines. "I have enough and I don't want anything related to him for three days onward," Ten sounds so done if Taeyong really listens to him. *But...*

"But I want to tell you something," Taeyong pouts, earning a quirk of an eyebrow from the younger one in response. "I.. ran into Jongin-hyung here earlier when you guys were taking a break, and he was practicing by himself here," he says.

Ten stares at his companion for a moment before bursting into laughter. "Oh gosh, after *all* of the effort trying not to go anywhere near him..." he wheezes, which earns him a deadpan stare from Taeyong. "Did you two talk about anything at all, actually?"

At this, Taeyong shrugs. "Small talk. Just me asking if your practice had ended," he answers honestly.

"And was that a '*hyung*' I heard before?" Ten doesn't miss the change of honorific Taeyong used to call Jongin—the latter usually refers to Jongin as sunbae.

"He said not to call him '*sunbae*'," Taeyong replies almost too casually for Ten's taste.

"That's it? He didn't say anything about the cookies? Not even a proper '*thank you*'?"

Taeyong chuckles at his friend's heated expression. "Nah, it's not that important."

"And so is *him* for not wanting to be called '*sunbae*'—what's with you," Ten argues, but still comes near the sound system when Taeyong beckons him to. "You should just call him

'*samcheon*' instead. Or better, '*harabeoji*', just for the hell of it. He didn't really specify what you should call him anyway," he adds.

Taeyong snickers. "Would you really call him that, in front of his face, tho?" he asks, the lingering question of *would you really risk your safety by indirectly challenging him like that* stays unspoken. But Ten still catches it in the way Taeyong's right brow raised ever so slightly.

"I didn't say I'd actually call him that myself," Ten reasons, deceptively innocent but definitely not.

Taeyong just shoves Ten, his laughter rising in volume when Ten nearly trips on his own feet trying to balance himself.

"But honestly, Yongie, sometimes I'm just tired of seeing you playing the good Samaritan," the dance major shrugs this time. "It's like you didn't learn from what happened with that soccer player," Ten smirks when he sees the frown forming on Taeyong's perfect brows.

"Alright, let's begin with your routine. We shouldn't talk about unimportant things if we want this to end quickly," Taeyong walks into the middle of the room after pressing the play button on the song.

Ten laughs to himself when Taeyong stares stubbornly at his own reflection in the mirror before directing the glare at him, clearly doesn't want to entertain Ten to talk about a certain soccer team captain which happened to be his ex.

"I hate you, bestie," Taeyong hisses.

Ten winks in return, grinning in amusement. "Likewise, bestie."

And then Taeyong watches as Ten starts getting immersed into his dance, eyes following after every movement punctuated by the perfect beat, taking notes on which part they should put more work into.

The next day, Ten comes to Taeyong's apartment just a little after nine, once he gets plenty of sleep to make up for the loss after the gruelling finals coupled with the preparation for the showcase. They go to buy the hair dye together and after debating over a few different shades of blond and pink, they finally decide on a soft pink color. The latter didn't want to waste too much cost going to hairstylist just to dye his hair when he can do it himself with the help of *his dear best friend Taeyong who has the heart of gold* —but he got a flick on his forehead when he was sweet talking Taeyong into it days ago by saying the exact same thing. And after Taeyong's done with his laundry, they set their course on what they've agreed on to do the day before.

The process of dying Ten's hair itself is an uneventful affair except for the slight ruckus of Ten almost toppling the dye down and pouring its content all over Taeyong's bathroom floor with the culprit laughing nervously under Taeyong's glare. Taeyong has to tell his best friend to *just sit and enjoy* while he prepares everything. So with a pout, Ten sits on the stool

Taeyong brought from the kitchen right in front of the mirror at the sink, waiting patiently for Taeyong to get everything they need. As instructed, he doesn't touch the bowls with the dye and chooses to busying himself with his phone instead.

"Ayo, Ten, need some help? I can help you, bro," Mark appears out of nowhere, grinning. Ten didn't even hear the younger one coming.

"Fuck off, Mark, you're unwelcome here," Ten gives Taeyong's cousin a mean eyes.

"Woah, chill dude, no need to get so vicious," Mark cackles.

"Go away."

"Okay, okay, don't worry I'm not here to annoy you even though I really want to," Mark glances at the nearly forgotten hair dye. Noticing this, Ten swings his leg from where he sits in Mark's direction, the younger steps out of the way with a giggle. "I just need to work at the studio with Baekhyun-hyung," Mark continues.

Only then, Ten hears a voice other than Taeyong's faintly from the direction of the living area. *Baekhyun's* voice, to be exact, talking to an awkward-sounding Taeyong. Ten gapes at Mark who has the decency to look sheepish.

"Before we know it, one of us is gonna invite the whole gang, one way or another," the dance major deadpan.

Mark grins nervously. "Please don't. I mean, you said you hate your dance senior, so.." he shrugs, "Let's not think something like that alright."

The grin on Ten's lips has an evil edge around it that makes Mark suddenly feel wary. "Ooh, I almost forgot you're afraid of Jongin," Ten teases.

Mark groans, rolling his eyes, "Please, just don't. You're not actually planning to bring them for real, right?"

"Who knows," Ten shrugs, examining his newly painted nails, the playful grin still on his face. "Taeyong doesn't have any real animosity towards Jongin, tho. But then again he doesn't really hate *anyone*, the good boy."

"Taeyong-hyung has been trying to *avoid* him, Ten," Mark argues.

"Yeah, but not hate. At least not like *me* who wants to strangle him to death on an almost daily basis," Ten grumbles disdainfully.

Mark giggles, "But surely he won't like it if you suddenly bring them. And you don't really have a reason to, either."

Ten pretends to think with a hum.

"Oh, *come ooon*," Mark clicks his tongue, and it's the older's turn to laugh at him.

"What's the matter, Markie? Chill baby," Ten says mockingly in return. "And you're right, we don't have any excuse to invite them without sounding stupid *and* Taeyong's gonna mad about it for sure," he adds with a smile.

"Why am I gonna mad? What are you talking about?" Taeyong enters the bathroom with a pair of plastic gloves which he got from the kitchen and a comb.

"Nothing!" Mark grins weirdly when Taeyong stares at him suspiciously.

"He said he wanted to try helping dye my hair which I'm not sure he'll be able to do correctly and that we're only gonna make you mad," Ten says coolly and Mark shoots him a grateful look.

"Right, both of you are just gonna ruin it. Just go to your Baekhyun-hyung, Mark. He's at the studio already, *shoo*," Taeyong agrees.

"Boo, meanie," Mark pouts, but complying nonetheless. "And he's not *my* Baekhyun-hyung," he mutters as he steps out of there.

"Maybe you should make him, then," Ten calls after him, teasing relentlessly.

"Shut up, you evil witch!" Mark retaliates from somewhere farther.

Ten snickers, "You can ask for some potion from me!"

"Never!"—there's the sound of a door opening.

"Or apples, if you want!" Ten still plays into Mark calling him an evil witch.

They hear a door closing as an answer and Ten continues to snicker to himself as Taeyong shakes his head with a sigh.

"Sometimes I wonder why I put up with you two," Taeyong laments.

Ten stares at the older through the reflection in the mirror with a grin that looks too self-satisfied for Taeyong's liking. "You love us, darling," he chirps.

"Sadly, yes."

"Aw, you hurt me," Ten lets out a mock gasp, to which Taeyong only rolls his eyes in return.

"I'm going to start applying the dye," Taeyong says then.

"Okay, I'll be in your care then, Taeyong-hyung," Ten winks greasily.

"Shut up."

It takes them a couple of hours to go over to apply the dye evenly and wait it out before finally rinsing it off Ten's hair. They've been going through the bleaching process prior when the dancer told Taeyong about his wish to dye his hair anew some time ago, so they only need

to apply the coloring substance. Surprisingly they don't need to interact that much with Baekhyun during the entirety of the process like Taeyong had expected (*or worried, if he's being honest*) as the older is thankfully only there for Mark and their final project in song making.

It seems like Baekhyun himself also doesn't see the need to impose (*Ten's word, not Mark's or Taeyong's*) longer than necessary, only talking to them out of common politeness and staying enough time to not be considered as rude for just coming and going before he takes his leave. And Taeyong is thankful for that because honestly he doesn't quite know how to have a conversation with someone he's not familiar with if it's not a must. His situation with Jongin doesn't really help even though both Jongin and Baekhyun are somehow related and Taeyong doubts Jongin told Baekhyun about the whole deal. But then again Taemin from the same dance team as Ten didn't need Jongin to tell him to deduce what his friend was thinking, enough just by watching Jongin's weird behavior about *cookies*.

"What were you two doing anyway? Making out?" Ten blurts, not without teasing.

"*Ten!*" Mark hisses, red faced, and then turning to Taeyong. "Hyung, did he accidentally swallow some hair dye?"

"How should I know, he's not a kid so he should know what to not swallow," Taeyong shrugs, an amused smile on his face. He likes seeing Mark being all flustered when either him or Ten starts to tease him about Baekhyun.

Ten grins in his seat.

"We're just adding some vocals and making some corrections here and there," Mark says while looking pointedly at Ten.

"Sure, sure," the second oldest just smiles teasingly.

Mark huffs in annoyance, reaching for his bag on the couch. "By the way hyung, I don't think I can join for the usual movie night. I want to finish my final assignment so I have this weekend free."

"About that, me too, I think," Ten pipes up. "I still need to work on that solo performance and I don't think I'll be able to stay awake for long tonight."

"Sure, we can just have our movie night after everyone's done with their jobs," Taeyong agrees easily, before turning to Mark. "Remember we're gonna go watch Ten's performance on Monday."

"Don't wanna~" Mark responds in a playful manner as he prepares to go back to his dorm.

"Mark, don't be an asshole!" Ten quips back at the younger.

"No promises."

The front door opens and closes as Mark finally leaves.

Taeyong snickers to himself watching the other two's love/hate interaction.

"Don't worry, he's not gonna bail," Taeyong reassures his best friend.

"Nah, I'll drag him there myself if he even tries to," Ten waves his hand with a grin. He knows he'll need to prepare for the performance on Monday evening but dragging Mark there would surely give him another kind of satisfaction.

"Do you need any help with your dance?" Taeyong asks.

Ten contemplates the offer for a moment before answering. "Not this time. Maybe tomorrow? I think I want to practice by myself today."

"Okay then. Just call me if you need anything," Taeyong offers before going to his room to pick his wallet. He plans to go grocery shopping as Ten goes to practice later.

The younger hums, filling a small container full of Taeyong's signature chocochips cookies. *Again.*

Around half past one Taeyong locks his door and walks out of the building with Ten. They part ways as Ten takes the direction to where their university is located while Taeyong continues on his walk to the grocery store by himself.

Taeyong has just finished vacuuming the whole apartment and put away the machine inside the small closet in the laundry room. After storing all the things he bought to their designated place in the kitchen and eating his lunch earlier, Taeyong went back to reread and edit his paper and let it sit for another time before he's gonna submit it later or maybe tomorrow since he still has some time before the due date—and then he started to clean the house.

Finally Taeyong gets his time to relax, going through social media while thinking on whether he should cook or order for his dinner. He was too immersed in his cleaning spree and before he realized, it's almost dark outside and his stomach grumbles. Ten also has messaged him that he finally stops practicing for the day after Taeyong kept pestering him to *rest and not overwork yourself, goddamn it, Ten* and the younger relents, going back to his dorm which is closer to their university.

Taeyong decides to order out some gimbap and spicy wings then, suddenly craving slightly greasy foods as opposed to his usually healthy cooking courtesy of his mom's habit that he unconsciously adopts too. He switches on the TV to catch up on some dramas he had missed due to finals while waiting for the food to arrive.

Not even thirty minutes later, as Taeyong reaches the end of an episode, there's a knock on his front door. It surprises Taeyong because it's faster than usual, unlike when ordered around the same time nearly a week ago while he was struggling with his paper.

Well, that was quick, Taeyong thinks happily. He pauses the drama to prevent it from jumping into the next episode as he stands from his seat to answer the door.

However.

When Taeyong finally opens his door, he gets a real surprise, one that he didn't expect in the slightest. It's none other than Jongin who stands there looking just as uninterested as usual, like it's a normal occurrence for him to come here after a fight—which, if he were to look from Jongin's point of view, maybe it is. And Taeyong rears his head slightly out of surprised reflex, blinking at the senior who also blinks at him in return, all casual demeanor and unreadable stare.

As Taeyong continues to observe the older male, he notices the slight grimace behind the seemingly unperturbed mask Jongin has on his face. And talking about face, aside from the tear at the corner of Jongin's lips, which he tongues lazily while looking straight at Taeyong who's trying to distract himself by looking left and right into the empty hallway, there's no other noticeable bruise except for one on the right cheekbone. At least not one that a little concealer cannot hide, and also, a barely there scratch on the left temple nearing the hairline.

"...sunbae?" Taeyong tries hesitantly and the pair of brows above Jongin's eyes only turn deeper in a frown. "I mean, hyung," he immediately corrects himself with a cough once he realizes his mistake.

Jongin simply grunts.

"What.. brings you here?"

The older male stares at him almost like he's saying *'are you seriously asking me this?'*, as if this is not Taeyong's place and not *him* who's out of place. As if this is not a place that belongs to someone he never had any prior interaction with, where he suddenly has a habit of turning up randomly without notice.

"Do you have an ice pack?" Jongin asks then. As if he doesn't remember the first time coming here and Taeyong iced his bruise—but Taeyong then remembers that Jongin was out cold for the most of it during the time.

"For what?" Taeyong blurts out before he can stop himself because if he sees correctly, no thing's in dire need to be iced, seeing Jongin still manages to stand without threatening to collapse at any moment. It's only fair to question it.

Taeyong is snapped out of his confused state when Jongin, still looking at him now with the smallest quirk at one corner of his lips, reaches for the hem of his shirt to lift it up—

"Wait! Okay," a flustered Taeyong nearly shouts.

—and Taeyong quickly opens the door wider to let Jongin step into his apartment. Before anyone could see him doing what he was about to do and accuse him of public indecency. Jongin goes inside with an amused huff, smirk widening if only a little.

As Jongin turns at the corner of the hallway into the living area, Taeyong locks the door, pressing his forehead on its frame.

What did I do in my past life to deserve something like this? Taeyong asks himself with a long-suffering sigh.

Chapter End Notes

I need to reread the previous chapters to get into the vibe of this fic because the last few works and wips are totally different from the light, easy plot or theme from this one. yes I have an outline of the whole story and the main events but still, I need to reread to get into the feel so that I didn't accidentally mix them up and ruin the main accord of this story lmao

let's hope the next chapter comes earlier than this one, yeah?

take care everyone, and stay safe! xoxo~

End Notes

kudos and comment will be much appreciated xoxo

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!