

dreamland

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by [forbiddenquill](#)

Summary

"What a strange sensation it is—to feel like you've been through several lifetimes and then to come back home. To see how different it could've all been, how it all might've turned out in the end. To know what you had in one life and to lose it in the next. It makes her realize how fortunate—how goddamn lucky she is—to still hold everything that matters to her in the cusp of her palm, despite having watched it slip past her grip so many times already."

(or, alternatively, Jeongyeon keeps waking up in parallel universes where Nayeon isn't hers.)

Notes

I read a younglegends fic and was never the same again.

I seriously gave this fic some thought and even matched a couple of songs with each scene so it would mean the world to me if you could also check out the Spotify playlist, entitled dreamland: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/55ZR0NCF69Bd5vU72IG874>. But to better match the pace of the fic, I inserted the Youtube links to the songs as well. Hehe.

This isn't a commission. I just wanted to write for 2yeon, which I've been dying to do for so long! And the younglegends fic was what inspired me to write this one. It has the same concept but I think it's 1000x better than mine so please read it too but only if you want to!

Thank you for all the people who beta-read this fic and gave me their thoughts along the way. It was very helpful!

Anyway, enjoy!

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

- Inspired by [you can't have it all](#) by [younglegends](#)

0 - you want everything live, you want things you can touch.

-

“Jeongyeon-ah,” Nayeon calls, “I need to tell you something.”

Jeongyeon stops clearing the table, looking over her shoulder to find the older girl standing by the doorway leading to the kitchen. It’s after midnight on Jihyo’s birthday. All nine of them decided to spend the birthday together at Jihyo’s apartment, watching movies, ordering take-out from five different restaurants, and playing games. The others are now passed out in the living room after a game of Mafia where they had to drink each time Jihyo lied straight to their faces or when Momo had to take care of something Boo-related.

Nayeon must’ve woken up somehow. Because she doesn’t look too good. Her short hair is all messed up, her eyes are shadowed and her lips are twisted in a frown that makes her look older than she is. Jeongyeon pauses, held in place by Nayeon’s gaze, and sets the dirty plates back on the table.

“What’s up?” she asks. She’s buzzed but not too much that she can’t clean up after the mess they made. Ants are annoying to deal with, after all. She can already see a line of them crawling up the table leg.

“I...” Nayeon bites her lower lip, looking unsure of herself. “I need to tell you something. I don’t think I should wait any longer than I should now.”

“Yeah, you already said that earlier, weirdo.” Jeongyeon approaches her quietly, not wanting to make too much noise to wake the others up. “You know you can tell me anything, right?”

It’s not to say that Nayeon is rarely unsure. She holds herself in a way that makes people think she’s always confident in her abilities to push through difficulties, that she can never do wrong because she always knows what to do. But Jeongyeon knows better. She has known Nayeon for ten years, after all.

“I want you to know,” Nayeon says, her words slurring at the edges; she’s drunk but the depths of her gaze are clear of confusion and her voice is certain; “I want you to know something, Yoo Jeongyeon.”

Jeongyeon’s lips twitch at the corners. Sometimes, Nayeon gets like this. When she’s drunk or sad or emotional, she’ll turn to Jeongyeon with her eyes shining so bright and whisper things she wouldn’t be caught dead saying at all if it had been another time or another place. So Jeongyeon already knows what to prepare for, how to react, when to stop laughing.

“What is it now, Im Nabongs?” Jeongyeon asks, leaning on the wall behind her.

Nayeon's eyes are shining. She steps forward. "I love you," she whispers.

The words aren't new. Jeongyeon has heard it before many times already. Nayeon has expressed it in many ways too. Like writing on a piece of paper, accompanied with *I'm sorry* or *I wish things were different* or *I'll be more understanding next time*. Like a blanket draped over Jeongyeon during schedules where her body just gives up or Nayeon showing up out of the blue to attempt and cook dinner and when that fails, ordering take-out in the end.

Im Nayeon is an enigma. She knows how to control a crowd, which words to say in an interview, what to add to a song to make it sound a little better than the original. The perfect idol. The designated center. Jeongyeon's best friend. But standing before Jeongyeon now, with her flushed cheeks and shaking fingers, Jeongyeon is reminded that Nayeon is also human. A girl thrust too deep into an industry where they are stripped of their humanity and treated as less and more at the same time.

"Nayeon," Jeongyeon says, growing serious, "Did you eat something weird today? Why are you being so sappy? Of course I know that you love me. You're my best friend."

But Nayeon is shaking her head and Jeongyeon realizes she has said the wrong thing.

"No, you don't understand," the older girl says, stepping closer, "That's not—that's not how I—how I want you to understand that." She doesn't sound drunk but her words are tinged with a kind of desperation that makes Jeongyeon think of shaking fingernails clutching deep on the cliffside. A moment too long and they'll let go.

Jeongyeon says the wrong thing again, "How much did you drink, Nayeon-ah?" She reaches out, places a palm on the side of the older girl's cheek. "You look like you're coming down with something."

Nayeon scowls, pushing her hand away but keeping a firm grip on it nonetheless. "Maybe if you listened to me, for *once*—"

"I am listening," Jeongyeon interjects, "but you're the one who isn't making any sense right now."

The harsh, impatient look on Nayeon's face softens. She lets go of Jeongyeon's hand. "Okay." She takes a deep breath. "I love you, Jeong." Before Jeongyeon can interrupt, Nayeon raises a long finger. Her gaze speaks volumes. "And I don't mean it like you think I do."

Jeongyeon's mouth goes dry. A million different thoughts are racing through her mind. She doesn't stop to pick one out, certain that it will show her the wrong answer. Because surely, Nayeon doesn't mean what she's saying, right? And yet, Nayeon continues to stare at her, looking as if she hasn't let out a single breath since this entire conversation began.

"How do you mean it then?" Jeongyeon quietly asks, letting her guard down. It feels like she's just thrown a stone across a lake, watching the ripples disturb the peace she's gotten so used to.

Nayeon releases a slow breath, her gaze never leaving Jeongyeon's. "Like this," she says and steps forward to place her warm, trembling lips against the other girl's. The kiss is slow and patient like Nayeon has been waiting for it to happen for a very long time now. Jeongyeon realizes, as she feels her mouth open to inhale Nayeon in, that she too has been waiting for this.

Nayeon tastes of the cheap alcohol they ordered earlier. And yet underneath it, the sharp flavor of grapefruit lip balm lands lightly on Jeongyeon's tongue. Her eyes flutter close. Her hand comes up, carves itself against Nayeon's cheek, and pulls her in deeper. The two of them kiss for a few more minutes—caught up in the moment, lulled into comfort by the silence the night brings. Her entire chest is warm, lit on fire by the weight of Nayeon's mouth on hers. For a split second, she forgets where they are and more importantly, *who* they are.

Jeongyeon is the first to pull away. "Nayeon," the name comes out as a breathless whisper, "Nayeon, Nayeon." In a devastatingly still moment, she says, "We can't do this."

The bliss and happiness written all over Nayeon's face cracks like fine glass. She sobers up completely. It is a heartbreaking sight to see but Jeongyeon pushes through the pounding in her ears and the grapefruit on her lips, knowing that with every decision they make, there are consequences to face. She doesn't know when Nayeon has started feeling *more* for her nor can she begin to untangle her own feelings for the older girl. What she cannot deny, however, is the dread lining her stomach.

"We can't do this," Jeongyeon repeats, reaching up to firmly grip Nayeon's face and brushing her thumb under her bottom lip, "You know we can't."

Jeongyeon knows Nayeon understands, sees the defeat lining her shoulders, pities her trembling lips. If it was anything else, like the last piece of meat on the dinner table or a *Time To Twice* prize just waiting to be claimed, Nayeon would've fought harder, would've unleashed her competitive side, wouldn't have given up at the sound of regret in Jeongyeon's voice. But this is different. This is their entire career on the line. If there is anybody besides Jihyo who understands the weight of TWICE on their shoulders, it is Nayeon.

"Is it because we're girls?" Nayeon asks, pulling her face away from Jeongyeon's grip. She steps back and the distance between them feels like an ocean away. Even if Jeongyeon reaches out once again to hold her, it won't mean anything.

To hear that question voiced out loud twists Jeongyeon's insides. The fact that Nayeon felt the need to *ask*—it breaks her heart.

"No," Jeongyeon quietly says, watching in defeat as Nayeon curls into herself, withdrawing from the moment, almost as if she's been burned and all she can do now is lick the pain away, "it's because we're idols."

The look in Nayeon's eyes is enough to haunt Jeongyeon for the rest of her life.

"Okay, I understand." Nayeon licks her lips, as if savoring the only time she ever got to kiss Jeongyeon. For a split second, Jeongyeon wonders if she'll ask if they can kiss again—one more time. To make it last. She wonders what her own answer would be.

But Nayeon doesn't ask and Jeongyeon feels the bitter taste of disappointment in the back of her throat.

"We should sleep," Nayeon says, wiping at her eyes. To rub off the sleep or to wipe away the tears? Jeongyeon has a feeling she knows the answer.

"Yeah," Jeongyeon says, hearing her own voice as if it's coming from underneath water. She looks away, focusing her gaze on the stack of plates she left on the table. The ants have gotten to it now.

Nayeon helps her clean up a bit, the aftermath of their kiss akin to an elephant in the room. Jeongyeon tries to catch the older girl's gaze but Nayeon seems adamant on doing the opposite. The silence is unbearable, like the elephant itself has placed one of its heavy legs on top of Jeongyeon's chest. But there's nothing that can be said now. Nayeon is hurt, as she has every right to be. Jeongyeon, on the other hand, is still reeling with her choice. *Was it the right one?* she asks herself, wiping the table clean off ants. Her brain tells her that she did make the right decision. After all, if people *knew*, there would be a heavy price to pay. It isn't just about her and Nayeon. They have the others to think of too. This isn't just *their* career on the line—it affects Jihyo, Momo, Sana, Mina, Dahyun, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu.

Jeongyeon cannot be selfish. She cannot risk her family. Even if it means taking a bit of Nayeon's happiness and throwing it back to her face.

Sometimes, she wishes she wasn't an idol. Things would be easier too. She wouldn't have to worry about anyone else. Maybe, for the first time, she might even put herself first.

Once the dishes have been cleared and the kitchen is neat enough for Jeongyeon's standards, the two eldest members head back to the living room. Jeongyeon's heart warms at the sight of her members—haphazardly laid across the floor on top of the mattresses they had dragged from the bedrooms. Momo is lying next to Boo, her hand curled around his head. Sana is sleeping next to Tzuyu, her head lying on top of the younger one's shoulder, while the maknae lies eerily still. Jeongyeon would be worried if she didn't see the steady rise and fall of her chest, indicating that she is indeed asleep. Meanwhile, Jihyo has sole ownership of the couch, having claimed it as her own since it's her birthday. She lies on her back, mouth hanging slightly open. Dahyun and Chaeyoung are facing each other, heads touching, almost like they were talking in hushed tones before succumbing to exhaustion. And lastly, Mina is curled up on the only other chair in the living room, earphones plugged in and phone still clutched in her hand.

"Goodnight, Jeongyeon," Nayeon tells her, walking past her to take the empty spot behind Sana. Her voice is devoid of emotion. Neutral. Indifferent.

Jeongyeon realizes her hands are shaking as she raises one to rub at her eyes. "Goodnight, unnie," she mumbles. Then she takes the space next to Dahyun, the furthest from Nayeon.

The silence drags on. Jeongyeon can hear a clock ticking somewhere. It takes her a while to realize that it's coming from Dahyun's watch. The dull *tick tick tick* sound is enough to drag her to sleep, rendering her eyelids heavy. Similar to a mother's caress against her cheek.

Jeongyeon shifts her weight, trying to get comfortable. She's slipping, falling deeper and deeper into unconsciousness.

The last thing she hears before being swallowed by the darkness is the sound of Nayeon's muffled crying.

1 - for you, i would ruin my self a million little times.

When Jeongyeon opens her eyes, she finds herself staring at a digital clock on the bedside table, its red numbers blinking at her. 8:32 AM. Rays of morning sun shine through a crack in the window, the light catching her right on her face. She groans, raising a hand, and turns to the other side of the bed—

—only to come face to face with a woman she's never seen before sleeping next to her.

"What the *fuck*," she says.

Then she realizes she only has her shirt on and nothing underneath.

"What the *fuck*," she says again, louder this time.

The woman stirs awake, awoken by the sound of cursing early in the morning. Long, dark hair, monolid eyes, a small, soft face. *Pretty*, is what Jeongyeon would think if she wasn't having a panic attack. The woman, too, is only wearing a shirt. Jeongyeon doesn't have to look to know there's nothing underneath as well.

"Good morning, sweetie," the woman says, smiling sharply at her as she slowly sits up.

Jeongyeon stares at her long enough that the smile on the woman's face falters.

"What's wrong?" the woman—this goddamn *stranger*—asks like Jeongyeon is the crazy one and not *her*. "Did you get enough sleep last night? You did seem a bit tired after... you know." A proud grin crosses her features and Jeongyeon feels like she's going to pass out any second.

This isn't real, she thinks to herself, I'm just dreaming. I'm only dreaming. A second from now, I'm going to wake up and Sana would've already burned the kitchen down because she was trying to make breakfast. Yes. That's it. One, two, three—

The woman slips out of bed then, grabbing her clothes from the floor. Jeongyeon looks away, too ashamed and shell-shocked to admire the physique of a woman she doesn't even remember sleeping with. But the woman seems to be in a teasing mood because after she gets dressed, she comes back to bed to press the softest of kisses against the corner of Jeongyeon's mouth.

She doesn't taste like grapefruit.

Jeongyeon wants to sob.

"Come on, sleepyhead," the woman says, pulling back with concern lining the curve of her brow, "We still have to send the wedding invitations, remember? We're already behind schedule as it is."

Wedding invitations?

The woman leaves to shower soon after. It is only then that Jeongyeon sees the engagement ring on her finger, glinting brightly under the sunlight peeking through the window. A huge diamond ring.

"What the *fuck*," she says for the third time that morning.

-

"There's been some kind of mistake," Jeongyeon begins, "I'm—I—I don't—I don't remember *any* of this happening to me."

It is now 10:12 AM. The woman—*Sooyoung* , based on one of the wedding invitations Jeongyeon saw taped on the bathroom mirror—is sitting across Jeongyeon at the dining table, staring at her in confusion. Two cups of coffee sit between them. Jeongyeon is clutching her own with shaking fingers. Her heart is pounding painfully inside her ribcage. *This is not real*, she keeps telling herself, *this is not real*.

"What are you talking about?" Sooyoung asks, frowning, "What do you mean you don't remember any of it? Did you hit your head or something?"

Jeongyeon takes a quick sip of her coffee, hoping to calm her nerves, and stops halfway through. It is exactly how she makes it. *How did Sooyoung—?* No, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter that there are pictures depicting Jeongyeon and Sooyoung sharing a life together all over the walls, that the coffee is proof that this stranger sitting across her knows how she likes her drink made, that there is an engagement ring wrapped around Jeongyeon's finger—holding her place, keeping her hostage, telling her that this is *real*. None of it matters.

Because this isn't her life.

A mistake, she tells herself, despite feeling like she's losing a battle the more Sooyoung stares at her.

"I didn't hit my head," Jeongyeon says, sounding confused even to her own ears, "At least I don't think so."

"Why don't you start from the beginning," Sooyoung suggests helpfully and Jeongyeon clutches at the idea with a kind of desperation that reminds her of fingernails digging deep on the side of a cliff, holding on and refusing to let go.

But Jeongyeon doesn't know where to start. Instead, she says, "TWICE."

Sooyoung tilts her head to the side. "Your old girl group?" she asks.

"What happened to them—to *us*?" Jeongyeon asks desperately, hearing the whine in her own voice. She *has* to know. Last night, she was *just* with them. Momo, Sana, Jihyo, Mina, Dahyun, Chaeyoung, Tzuyu—Jeongyeon had seen them with her own eyes right before she slept.

And Nayeon—

Jeongyeon remembers the last thing she heard before she fell asleep. Her gut twists on itself, guilt swirling in its depths. The urge to throw up has never felt so strong before.

"You disbanded." Sooyoung closes her eyes, like she's remembering something. "Two years ago, I think. The others are still doing solo activities. Acting, modeling, the usual. Sana-unnie visited the other day after coming back from Japan, don't you remember?"

Solo activities. Of course. That's what idol groups are supposed to do after their run ends. Jeongyeon knows this—has known this for a very long time now. It still doesn't sting any less. *Nine or none*, she thinks to herself, staring down at the ring on her finger. A hollow feeling has opened in her chest. It feels like the world has caved in.

"What about Nayeon?" she finds herself asking, looking up to meet Sooyoung's hesitant gaze.

"She's still out there," the stranger—her supposed *fiancé*—answers, "You point her out when you see her on the subway ads. But as far as I know, you guys haven't talked much. Of course, Im Nayeon is booked and busy. Her latest drama just came out last night."

Before Jeongyeon can fully comprehend the reality of the situation, Sooyoung is already leaning forward to grab her hand. "Honey," she says, her voice soft, "I think we should have you checked up. You don't look too good. You're worrying about things that have already happened."

Jeongyeon stares so hard at their intertwined hands that Sooyoung has no choice but to let go.

"It hasn't happened yet," Jeongyeon mumbles, "Not to me." This is nothing more than a bad dream. It *can't* be real. She can't be engaged to a gorgeous woman, preparing wedding invitations, settling down while the rest of her members are out there—and Jeongyeon has no fucking clue what happened to them.

Not to mention, *Nayeon*—Nayeon who told her she loved her last night, who kissed her like she'd been waiting for it, who cried when she thought that Jeongyeon wouldn't hear—what happened next? Was that it? Did they never speak of it again? Did it just end right there and then? Jeongyeon's stomach twists on itself.

I cannot live without Yoo Jeongyeon.

And yet, it seems that she already has.

Jeongyeon realizes she's crying, tears slipping past her eyes to fall on her lap. She wipes them away hastily. Sooyoung stares at her, frozen, unsure of what to do. What *can* you do in this kind of situation? Jeongyeon cannot imagine being in her shoes right now. How would you feel when you woke up one day and realized that the love of your life—the one who was promised to you—started talking about the past, like she still lived there? Like the present no longer mattered? Looking for somebody else and not you?

“Jeongyeonnie,” Sooyoung says, her voice shaking, “you’re my fiancé. I love you. You love me. We’re supposed to get married in May. That’s a couple of months away. You can’t break my heart like this.”

You can't break my heart like this.

Jeongyeon remembers the heartbreak on Nayeon's face, her happiness crackling like glass. Like fault lines along the equator. *We can't do this—you know we can't.* If there is one thing that Jeongyeon is sure of right now, it is that she only remembers breaking Nayeon's heart instead of anyone else's.

"I think I need to lie down," Jeongyeon mutters, shaking her head. She stumbles on the way back to the bedroom, waving away any kind of help from Sooyoung. Maybe this is all just a bad dream, she thinks. Who knows? Once she wakes up, she'll be lying next to Dahyun on the floor of Jihyo's apartment again.

This is the last thought on her mind as she collapses on the bed and drifts off to sleep.

[2 - my girl, we've got nothing to lose.](#)

When Jeongyeon opens her eyes, there is a child peering down at her from where she is perched on her chest. A girl who looks to be about five or six. She reaches down and squishes Jeongyeon's cheeks, her own lips splitting with a fond grin.

"Hi," Jeongyeon mumbles, thinking that this is nothing more than a bad dream.

"Eomma," the child says, pouting, "I'm hungry. What's for breakfast?"

What the fuck.

The child's name is Haeun. Yoo Haeun. According to her *wife*—a woman called Jiyeon who Jeongyeon has never seen before—it was her who even decided on the name. The thought is too mind-boggling to even consider. First, she was with a fiancé named Sooyoung. Now, she has an entire *family*. A wife she doesn't remember marrying, a daughter she doesn't remember holding in her arms, a whole life she doesn't remember building from the ground up. It feels like a practical joke. Somebody twisting her arm behind her back. Like she's been picked out from a crowd and given a prize she doesn't even want in the first place. *Congratulations! You've just won a trip to the Bahamas. But to go, you'll have to give up your right arm and left leg! Ready?* She feels nauseous just thinking about it.

She wishes she didn't know the child's name, cannot imagine naming a baby and not getting to know her. It makes her stomach churn with guilt—one that she is familiar with. The kind of guilt you feel when you make a promise and cannot pull through.

Jeongyeon has always wanted a family, wanted to lay down the foundations for a human being and support them throughout the years—the same way her own parents and sisters have for her, the same way her members slowly did too. She just didn't expect to be plucked out from her life and dropped unceremoniously into another one. It feels like she's just been shoved into the limelight without a script in hand and no idea what the play is supposed to be, what to say and how to act it all out.

Jeongyeon ends up acting it all out anyway—playing the role of a faithful wife with an adoring daughter. She heads to the kitchen, makes breakfast, laughs with her daughter, tries to catch up to a conversation with her wife regarding people she doesn't know, and forces the queasy feeling down her throat when Jiyeon leans up to kiss her.

She swears she can still taste Nayeon's grapefruit lip balm on her tongue. Like a ghost haunting her every move. *Where are you now?* Jeongyeon thinks despairingly, staring down at the wedding band on her finger.

She doesn't ask about TWICE. She doesn't want to know.

As the day goes on, Jeongyeon tries to come up with an explanation about her current predicament. A bad joke the universe is pulling on her. A hallucination. Maybe there was something laced in Jihyo's birthday cake. Or maybe it really is just a dream and soon, she'll wake up with her members on the floor once more. But it seems *so* real. She feels real enough, feels corporeal enough. And when her daughter suddenly runs towards her from across the room and flings her arms around her neck, Jeongyeon can *feel* her too. A breath near her ear, heart pounding against hers, body warmth mingling with her own. This is her flesh and blood. Her daughter, whom she named herself. Yoo Haeun.

It is all too much.

When the day ends, Jeongyeon falls asleep, unsure if she wants to wake up the next day.

[3 - i've heard of a love that comes once in a lifetime, and i'm pretty sure you are that love of mine.](#)

The next time she wakes, she is alone.

This is somehow a relief and a burden. She turns in her bed—made for a single person only with no added family members in sight—and looks for her phone. She finds the oldest iPhone model in her hand, which she uses to look up TWICE in the Naver search bar:

TWICE (트와이스) is a girl group consisting of 7 members: JIHYO (leader), NAYEON, SANA, MINA, DAHYUN, CHAEYOUNG, and TZUYU. The band debuted on October 20, 2015, through the survival show Sixteen, under JYP Entertainment. As of February 2020, JYPE is partnering with Republic Records to help promote TWICE worldwide.

Jeongyeon freezes, her eyes catching on the 7. It's bad enough not seeing her name on the list. But her stomach plummets unpleasantly at the realization that Momo isn't listed as well.

She's woken up in another nightmare.

There's a rapid knock on the door. Jeongyeon drops her phone in shock, certain that she would be alone this time. The person on the other side must be impatient though because half a second later, the door swings open, and a familiar voice flits through the air—

"Jeongyeon-ah, you're going to be late for your interview!"

Hearing that voice, Jeongyeon scrambles to her feet and stands face-to-face with Momo, whose hair is wrapped in a towel and whose toothbrush is in her hand.

"What? You told me to wake you up for this," Momo says when Jeongyeon continues to stare at her. She looks exactly like the last time they saw each other—short dark hair in a bob cut but this time, her bangs are swept to the side. A sight for sore eyes.

"You—" Jeongyeon sucks in a deep breath, tries to gather her thoughts. She doesn't want to sound like a crazy person, like the first time she did when she woke up to this strange, awful world, so she clears her throat and asks, "Uh, interview?"

Momo nods seriously, eyebrows furrowed. "Yes, you have an interview at that call center agency, remember?"

Jeongyeon feels like she's been punched in the throat. *Out of all the places to apply for*—she shakes her head, fixes Momo with a searching gaze, and asks, "Hey, what about you?"

"What about me?" The toothpaste is slowly melting off Momo's brush, the more she stands there.

"Where do you work again?" It's a stupid question, Jeongyeon knows. In this nightmare, they seem to be roommates. It seems fitting enough. They've *always* been roommates.

Momo makes a non-committal sound in the back of her throat, apparently not minding the strange question. "I'm still working as a dance instructor," she tells her, "Jeez, Jeongie, are you that stressed about this interview that you've forgotten basic facts about my life? Some

friend you are." Her tone is light and playful but Jeongyeon can hear the gentle concern underneath it.

"Right. Yeah, I'm just stressed out." Jeongyeon's mind is racing. She places a hand on Momo's arm, resisting the urge to pull her in for a hug. "Hey, Momoring. I'm glad you're here."

Momo must sense the urgency in the way the words were said because her eyes soften. She offers Jeongyeon a smile. "I'm glad that you're here too."

The two of them go about their morning in the tiny cramped apartment that's two months behind on rent. Despite the fact that there's barely enough space for Jeongyeon to stretch, she finds comfort in the organized mess. Because even though they're not part of TWICE, she's signing up for a dead beat desk job to take in calls, and Momo is teaching kids to dance instead of performing on stage, Jeongyeon is glad that her friend is here in a home they've made for themselves. At least this time, she isn't alone.

After lunch, they head off to the train station since both their workplaces are on the other side of the city. Jeongyeon is egged on by Momo to pay for her fare this time because apparently, it was her who paid for them both last time. When Jeongyeon checks her wallet, she is disheartened to see the scarce bills she has on hand. It seems they'll have to scrape by for dinner later.

Momo must sense what she's thinking because she says, "Hey, hey, don't worry about it. Once you get this job, you'll have one less thing to worry about."

The interview must be really important. Not just for her but for Momo too. Jeongyeon hopes she won't screw it up. "Yeah," she mutters, putting her wallet away, "Guess you're right about that."

Before entering the train station, Jeongyeon spots something that makes her stop dead in her tracks. Momo, walking next to her, stops when she realizes that Jeongyeon has as well. Then she angles her gaze towards a building, seeing what Jeongyeon is seeing: Im Nayeon as the cover girl for this month's *Vogue*, posing for the camera like she's born for it. And she is, Jeongyeon knows. She's seen it in person, after all.

"Nayeon," Jeongyeon whispers under her breath. She cannot forget their last encounter, even if it feels like years have already passed since then. The silence in the kitchen, the breathy whisper of Nayeon's confession, the press of their lips against each other's.

Was it only a few nights ago? Ever since this nightmare began, Jeongyeon isn't sure what's real and what's not anymore. Perhaps this is her *real* life and her being part of TWICE is nothing more than a figment of her imagination.

She pushes the thought away, not wanting to entertain it.

"Oh, she's your bias, right?" Momo comments, stepping close.

"Huh?" Jeongyeon blinks, looking back at her friend.

"Im Nayeon?" Momo asks. It doesn't sound right, coming from her. Like she's talking about someone she doesn't know. Jeongyeon's chest aches. "You mentioned you liked her better than the others."

"I—" Jeongyeon rubs her temple. "What about you? Who do you like?"

Momo cracks a grin, raising her hands to mimic the infamous *shy shy shy* move that swept the nation. Jeongyeon snorts, thinks *of course you would choose Sana*, and wonders if, in another life, Nayeon would choose her too.

Ten minutes later, in the cramped train compartment hurtling towards the middle of Seoul, Jeongyeon's head drops against Momo's shoulder and the rest of her body succumbs to sleep, lulled by the rhythm of the train and the soft chatter of the crowd.

[4 - my first wish is for you and i to be happy, like we were today.](#)

"Hey, hey, we're here!"

Someone's shaking her shoulder. Jeongyeon opens her eyes, her vision clearing. Her entire body aches from having fallen asleep while sitting up. She's inside the train compartment, which means that Momo must be with her still. The relief she feels is tangled with dread. The nightmare continues and she has to live through it. It's not over until it's over. At least she's not alone.

But then Jeongyeon looks up, expecting to see Momo, only to come face to face with an excited Dahyun.

Her confusion slices through her thoughts like a sharp knife. "What—?"

"Come on!" Dahyun grabs her hand, pulls her up to her feet. "I'm freaking starving, unnie!"

Jeongyeon is literally dragged out of the train station, past the bustling crowd of commuters, and right into the streets of Seoul. Under the soft moonlight, Dahyun looks younger—eighteen, nineteen, maybe? Her face is rounder too, less stressed, softer now that she seems to be a college student instead of a rising idol. It occurs to Jeongyeon just how much the maknae line of TWICE sacrificed to debut with them. At least Jeongyeon and Nayeon got to go to school consecutively without worrying about clashing schedules. Dahyun, Chaeyoung and Tzuyu didn't have that kind of luxury.

"Where are we going again?" Jeongyeon asks, following after the younger girl.

Dahyun gives her a pointed look. "Weren't you the one who told me about this new noodle shop opening up around here?"

Oh, she must've. Jeongyeon just can't remember it. Or maybe it was another Jeongyeon, not her, who told Dahyun about the new noodle shop. She still can't wrap her mind around what's

going on—why she keeps hopping from one place to another, why it seems like there's always a script to follow, why time isn't fixed or linear or just completely random at this point.

Dahyun points to a shining new noodle shop tucked into one corner of the street. "There!" she says with a bright grin before she grabs Jeongyeon's hand in hers and drags her inside.

The shop itself is warm and inviting but smaller than Jeongyeon expects. They take their seats near the window, Dahyun insisting that Jeongyeon snap a picture of her for her Instagram feed. When it's time to order, the older girl knows that she'll be paying for them both so she encourages Dahyun to order anything extravagant while keeping her own order simple.

They talk about college mostly. Jeongyeon learns that Dahyun is taking up Korean Literature, wanting to learn more about culture and history and everything that Jeongyeon had completely zoned out on back in her high school days. And when the younger girl asks how her classes have been, Jeongyeon makes sure to keep her answers simple and vague. She doesn't even know what she's majoring in, much less how the courses are. Thankfully, Dahyun doesn't pry too much.

"How are you and your girl, by the way?" Dahyun asks, clapping her hands excitedly when their orders arrive; "You seemed pretty excited when I asked last time."

Jeongyeon glances sharply at her. "What girl?"

"Huh? Your girlfriend, duh."

"*Right.* My girlfriend." Suddenly, Jeongyeon finds herself wishing that Dahyun is talking about Nayeon. At the thought, the guilt returns—stronger than ever. She has to remind herself that it was her who pushed Nayeon away and broke her heart.

"Yeah, Jiyeon? Remember?" Dahyun laughs. "What, did you pull an all-nighter again? You only get like this when you're stressed out about something, unnie."

The despair Jeongyeon feels in the pit of her stomach is almost enough to make her push her bowl of noodles away, feeling like her appetite has gone along with her hope of finding Nayeon in this nightmare. Of course. Another life without Im Nayeon. She's starting to wonder if this is what this is all about. Punishment. Absolution. Maybe she died the night of Jihyo's birthday and this is just purgatory messing with her. It wouldn't be too far-fetched.

"Let's just eat," Jeongyeon says, forcing a smile and pointedly ignoring another concerned look sent her way.

The noodle bowl is, as expected, delicious. The broth is flavorful and stomach-filling, the slices of beef soft and tender, and the chopped vegetables providing the right crunch to add to the overall texture. Jeongyeon is quick to finish her bowl, slurping it all down in one go—the way Mina taught her back in the dorms. *In Japanese culture, slurping down noodles is a way of complimenting the chef.* From the corner of her eye, she notices Dahyun giving her another weird look. This is probably the fourth time tonight.

"Sorry," Jeongyeon says after she's cleaned out her bowl, "I'm just really hungry."

"No kidding." Dahyun lets out a satisfied hum after tasting the broth. "This is really good though. Kind of reminds me of what my mom used to make back home."

Jeongyeon nods, setting aside her chopsticks on top of the bowl, having already finished her dinner. Then she turns to look at the younger girl, waiting for an opening: "Hey, Dahyun-ah. Let me ask you something. Are you happy?"

The question seems to take Dahyun by surprise. "Huh? Why so serious, unnie?" Her eyebrows twist in confusion.

"I just want to know," Jeongyeon says truthfully.

Dahyun considers the question, slurping the rest of her soup into her mouth. Then she picks up a piece of beef and shoves it in as well. The sight is so Chaeyoung-like that Jeongyeon half-expects the other girl to pop out of nowhere, claiming her excitement at bumping into them. When nothing happens, Jeongyeon tries not to feel too disappointed. She's just not used to this. After all, it's strange to see one rapper without the other, even if Dahyun isn't technically a rapper in this nightmare.

"Yeah, of course I'm happy," the younger girl answers after a beat's pause, "I'm eating good food with a good friend. I consider that a good night, right?" Then she cracks a wide smile, cheeks puffing up like tofu. "You don't have to be so serious all the time, Jeongyeon-unnie."

"That's great." Jeongyeon forces a smile, plays with a piece of lint on her black sweater, tries to think of another question that could justify why Kim Dahyun is a college student in community college and not one of the best idols in South Korea. "What are you planning to do after you finish school?"

Dahyun continues to eat, humming to herself. "I was thinking of pursuing a Master's Degree," she says, swallowing the rest of her food down, "D'you think I should do that?"

"You can do whatever you want to do, Dahyun-ah." Jeongyeon lets the silence stew for a bit, watching the flicker of a smile cross the younger girl's face. Then she clears her throat, tries to sound nonchalant: "Who knows? Maybe you'd want to be an idol too. Have you ever thought of that?"

At once, Dahyun bursts out laughing, waving her off with her left hand. Thankfully, she's already swallowed down her food. "Please, unnie," she says, grinning, "Why the hell would I want to be an idol?"

A prickle of discomfort crawls up Jeongyeon's spine. It's strange for Dahyun to be so dismissive of something so important to them—well, the *other* them. The ones who've shed blood, sweat and tears just to reach the top. After all, it's Dahyun who thinks of their fans the most, even if it's not that obvious to some. It is Dahyun who seems *perfect* for the job, able to keep her professional and private life separate, something that many of them fail to do. Jeongyeon finds it strange that there could be another Kim Dahyun living out here, enjoying

her life, pursuing a Master's Degree, and not worrying about what millions of fans think of her. It must be a relief for her.

Jeongyeon's throat tightens. Is it a relief for her too?

It's because we're idols.

She thinks of what she told Nayeon the last night everything was normal and recalls her decision. The reason why Jeongyeon had broken her heart wasn't because they were both girls. Jeongyeon doesn't care about that minor detail. But it's Nayeon's unabashed optimism that has given her a fatal oversight.

They're idols. Public figures. Epitomes of perfection. People who can do no wrong. They've lived with that pressure and expectation for so long that Jeongyeon has completely forgotten what it's like to be... *free*.

And yet, here it is. Her chance. She's not an idol in this nightmare—this *life*. But for some reason, like some kind of cosmic joke, she and Nayeon still aren't together.

There's only one explanation. It isn't meant to be. Maybe this is the universe's way of telling her that they're not meant to be together. Perhaps it's telling Jeongyeon that she made the right decision that night. None of it would've mattered anyway, even if they had tried their best to make it work. Because they're not meant to be.

"What's this talk about my future anyway?" Dahyun asks, breaking Jeongyeon's train of thought, "I'm only a freshman, unnie. Why are you so worried? You're acting like my *eomma*."

Jeongyeon's heart swells with fondness. She reaches out, ruffles Dahyun's hair to the point that the younger girl whines, and offers her a smile that she hopes will convey all the love and affection she has for her. "Just eat your food," Jeongyeon says, "you're still a growing kid."

They finish eating at the noodle shop and try to walk all the way back to their dorms. But since they got there by train, it takes longer than expected. Finally, after what seems like a lot of bickering on their side, Dahyun ends up flagging a taxi down, insisting that she'll pay.

With a warm, full stomach, Jeongyeon smiles at her younger friend, leans her head on the window, and closes her eyes.

5 - cause you remind me everyday i'm not enough but i still stay.

The smell of coffee is what wakes Jeongyeon up the next day. She stirs, turning her cheek to the other side of the table in an effort to get more comfortable, and releases a soft sigh when the scent of crushed coffee beans intensifies. Vaguely, she can make out voices talking all

around her, growing louder as the rest of her body catches up to her already awake brain. After a minute, she finally raises her head and looks around.

This time, she's right in the middle of a coffee shop. Several college students occupy the rest of the tables, hunched over stacks of paper or squinting at their laptop screen. Others have already consumed more than three cups of strong coffee and are furiously scribbling on their notebooks, taking in as much as information as they can right before an exam or just as their paper is due. Jeongyeon doesn't pity them. She'd rather memorize a choreography than be forced to shove three books' worth of content into her brain.

"Unnie? You okay?"

Jeongyeon blinks, realizing that she's not alone at her table. Mina and Tzuyu are both seated next to her, their own Macbooks propped open in front of them. The sight of her two younger members is such a relief that Jeongyeon is too choked up to even utter a single word. All she can do is stare at them and hope to fucking God that they're happy in this nightmare too, the same way Dahyun was.

Mina smiles, amused. "The reason why we brought you here with us is so that you can get *rid* of your hangover, not just fall asleep on the table." She sounds exactly the same, as if it's another day back at the dorms, and she's looking out for her members again. *Oh, Jeongyeon-unnie, have you eaten already? You don't look so good.*

Tzuyu presses forward, giving Jeongyeon a curious look. "Was the party as crazy as the others are saying?" she asks.

Jeongyeon swallows, which is hard to do when her mouth is so dry. She doesn't feel like she's hungover. But that doesn't really tell her anything. She doesn't know the rules set in place for this whole thing—what she inherits when she wakes up and finds herself in a new nightmare. What about the real Jeongyeon? Not *her*, but the one who belongs here. The one Mina and Tzuyu invited out in the first place. The one who went to a crazy party last night. Where is she now? Is she waking up next to Dahyun on the floor of Jihyo's apartment? Can she taste Nayeon's grapefruit lipbalm on her lips?

Because Jeongyeon can still taste it too, even if it's no longer there.

"I can't remember," she answers hastily. Thank God it's the truth because she has always hated lying to her members.

"That must've been some party," Tzuyu comments with pursed lips. Then she sighs, shakes her head, similar to her training days when she looked blankly at Hangul characters and said, as clear as glass, *I can't read Korean*; "I don't get the point of parties, though," she goes on, "I mean—isn't it such a hassle on your part? You have to get dressed up but at the end of it, you're too drunk to even remember what you looked like when you came in."

Mina laughs, gummy smile peeking out. "You think too much, Tzuyu-yah," is all that she says before she goes back to studying.

Jeongyeon watches the interaction, tucking it away into the back of her mind. Even if it's not real or not part of *her* reality, at least she can enjoy this—Myoui Mina and Chou Tzuyu, sitting in the middle of a coffee shop, not having to worry about Dispatch, and studying to pursue their dreams. At least there's a world out there where this can exist. And for that, Jeongyeon is grateful.

Behind her, she hears the sound of the bell ringing, signalling the entrance of another customer. She doesn't turn, focusing instead on the slice of red velvet cake Tzuyu ordered for herself. Would it be too rude to take a bite? Can she do that? Is she close enough with the younger girl to not be given a strange look? Because in her reality, Jeongyeon can do whatever she wants and Tzuyu wouldn't mind at all.

But this isn't her reality. Jeongyeon is starting to wonder if this is even a dream.

"Mina-ssi!"

Jeongyeon stills at the sound of that voice, feeling as if a bucket of ice cold water has been thrown straight into her face. Her heart starts pounding, adrenaline flowing freely through her veins. Fight-or-flight instinct. A small part of her wants to run away, unable to bear the pain and guilt of seeing *her* once again. But the larger part wins out, grabbing her by the throat and pinning her to the nearest wall. *Don't you see?* she asks herself, *all of this started with her.*

Im Nayeon.

She's here—she's *finally* here. The one person Jeongyeon has been chasing through smoke, seeing only glimpses of across these parallel universes, desperately aching for after being the one to break her heart in the first place. Here it is. The climax. The highest crescendo. What she's been waiting for.

Jeongyeon looks over her shoulder and *there* she is—Im Nayeon, standing before her, looking as if not a single day has passed since the last time they saw each other back in Jihyo's kitchen. Her hair is still short, curling around her shoulders. Her eyes are still bright, still expressive, still the warmest shade of brown that Jeongyeon has ever seen. And when she smiles, it is like coming home after a long trip overseas and seeing your room unchanged but not unkept.

"Mina-ssi," Nayeon says, pulling out a book from her bag, "Thank you *so* much for this. It really helped me out in my essay."

Mina nods, accepts the offered book. "No problem, unnie. I'm glad I could help."

The conversation is strange for Jeongyeon to witness. It is as if they are acquaintances and not friends. Even Tzuyu doesn't seem to acknowledge Nayeon other than a quick, barely-there nod. The realization takes its time sinking in, only digging its claws deep once Nayeon turns to look at Jeongyeon, eyebrows raised, and asks, "Oh, have we met before?"

It is in that moment that Jeongyeon accepts the truth that this isn't a dream. Because if it was, the words wouldn't have stung so much. It wouldn't have struck a chord deep in her chest and

pulled the strings apart. No type of dream or nightmare or even hallucination could conjure the absolute heartbreak Nayeon has inflicted on her—as clear and transparent as glass. She wonders if this is how *her* Nayeon felt when Jeongyeon told her they couldn't be together. Because if so, then there aren't enough words in her vocabulary to express how sorry she truly is to both be the judge who gave the sentence and the executioner who struck her down.

Yes, Jeongyeon wants to say, we have. The last time we saw each other, you told me you loved me. You do, right? Surely, some part of you does. Because I do. I love you. Even if I'm not from here, I still love you too.

But the words are held there—locked in place by the genuine question in Nayeon's eyes. This is not *her* Nayeon. Jeongyeon has to accept that. This is not her place, her time, her friends. She is only a visitor. It is as if the universe has pulled her out from her world and allowed her to peek into another one. *See?* It seems to be saying: *None of it matters. You'll never be together.*

So even though it pains her, Jeongyeon swallows back her confession and says, "No, you don't know me."

Nayeon frowns. "Hmm," she says, watching her carefully, "That's a shame. I could've sworn I've seen you somewhere before. Maybe you know my boyfriend, Namhyuk?"

It is another punch to the gut. Jeongyeon can't breathe. "No." She shakes her head, wishes she can get away already. It is all too much. "I'm sorry."

Then she turns to look at Mina and Tzuyu, forcing a smile she hopes is believable but knows isn't. "I have to go," she says in an apologetic tone, "I have to, uh, be somewhere else. It was nice seeing you guys." She moves to stand, grabbing her fallen jacket off the floor, and quickly leaves the premises. Against her better judgment, she looks over her shoulder to find Nayeon watching her leave.

Finally alone in the warm, sunny afternoon outside the coffee shop where the love of her life is, Jeongyeon feels the building pressure behind the back of her eyes explode and she crumbles, succumbing to tears. She doesn't think she can take it anymore—jumping from one reality to another, being forced to act it all out, reading from a nonexistent script, being expected to be the Yoo Jeongyeon people know, even though she isn't.

She thinks about everything she's witnessed, how there always seems to be something holding them back, a reason to keep them separate. They can never seem to meet in the middle. The only time they did was in Jeongyeon's original timeline—when Nayeon confessed her love and kissed her in the middle of Jihyo's kitchen. And yet, Jeongyeon had walked away. She didn't know she wanted Nayeon in that moment but she did. And *yet*—like some stupid cosmic joke, the universe is putting her into all these other realities and shoving the truth at her face: *you make the same choice every single time, without fail. You are destined to break Im Nayeon's heart. She will never be yours.*

It works the other way too. Nayeon breaks her heart as well. Without fail, without hesitation. Even without trying.

Jeongyeon finds a bench to sit on at the nearest bus stop and decides to rest for the time being. Her entire body feels stretched too thin, like a rubber band on the tip of its breaking point. She thinks she left behind a piece of herself each time she came and left for another universe. And now, the exhaustion is pulling at her bones. She wants to go home and she longs to see her members again. Even though she's already met some of them scattered across the other realities, they aren't *her* members. Not really.

The Momo she met in here isn't the same one who held her in her sleep each time she had nightmares. The Dahyun she ate with at the noodle shop isn't the same one who practically glows every time Jeongyeon brings her choco pie. The Mina and Tzuyu in this universe aren't the same soft-hearted, gentle members who never fail to make her feel appreciated. And most of all, the Im Nayeon of this reality—the one who doesn't seem to be friends with any of them, the one who looked at her like she didn't know her, the one who has a goddamn *boyfriend*, for crying out loud—isn't the same Nayeon Jeongyeon realized a bit too late that she loved all along.

She wants the nightmare to end already. So, when a bus rolls to a stop in front of her, Jeongyeon jumps to her feet. Stubbornly erasing all evidence of her tears, she goes inside, chooses the seat at the very back, and forces herself to sleep, not caring where the bus will take her or what nightmare she'll wake up to this time, as long as it'll take her far away from this one.

[6 - when you sleep, will it be with me?](#)

"Unnie?"

Jeongyeon opens her eyes and sees Chaeyoung looking down at her with an amused curl to her lip. Upon glancing around, she finds herself in an unfamiliar room. Bare walls, white sheets, an unopened bottle of champagne sitting on the sink. It takes her a while to realize that she's slumped over the kitchen counter and wearing clothes that reek of alcohol.

"Hi," Jeongyeon says, rubbing at her face and straightening her back, "Where are we again?"

Chaeyoung stifles back a laugh. "Jeez, you must be really out of it, huh?" She looks older somewhat, with short dark hair tucked under a pretentious-looking beret and a new tattoo peeking out from underneath the collar of her shirt. In her hands is a glass of water and a few Aspirin tablets. "Quick recap," Chaeyoung says, offering the older girl the water, "you're in a hotel room in Las Vegas. Last night, I told you that I was getting married so we went out to celebrate. You drank like half your weight in alcohol and collapsed on the way out of the bar. So I had to drag you back here. You're welcome, by the way."

Jeongyeon's brain short-circuits. She even chokes on her water. "You're getting *married*?" she yells.

"Unnie, we've already been through this last night—"

"How—?" This is probably one of the worst types of realities—ones where a huge bucket load of information is dumped right over her head and she's expected to react to it *normally*. After all, the Chaeyoung she knows back home is only 21. She was—*is*—still at the height of her career. How the fuck is she getting married so soon?

Chaeyoung raises her eyebrows. "How?" she repeats, "I asked Tzuyu to marry me. Simple as that. You even told me that *of course* she'd say yes, considering we've been together for three years now. Unnie, are you really okay?"

It's another bucket of information thrown straight at Jeongyeon's face. "You and Tzuyu?" she croaks.

Now Chaeyoung is starting to look worried, her eyebrows drawing together in concern. "Yeah," she says slowly, like it will make more sense, "Me and Tzuyu. We got together since we disbanded."

Since we disbanded. Jeongyeon forces herself to keep upright, despite feeling like she's going to fall over any second now. Chaeyoung and Tzuyu. Of course a part of her had suspected. There was no way Tzuyu felt anything other than friendship towards her fellow member. And yet, to have Jeongyeon's suspicions confirmed in what feels like years into the future is still jarring. She rubs at her eyes, feeling a headache starting to seep in, and reaches for the water again.

"Sorry," she says, "Guess I got short-term amnesia there."

"Right." The concern on Chaeyoung's face vanishes. She leans her weight on the kitchen counter, arms crossed and gaze considering. Then she casually drops another bomb on Jeongyeon: "So, is it okay if I invite Nayeon-unnie to the after-party?"

The words are spoken carefully, as if Chaeyoung is gauging her reaction. Jeongyeon stills, feeling her heart jump painfully up her throat at the mention of Nayeon. She still can't forget the last time she saw her. *Have we met before?* It feels like a rusty knife has stabbed her right into a still-healing flesh wound.

"Why wouldn't it be okay?" Jeongyeon asks, hating the way her words stumble over each other.

Chaeyoung gives her an unimpressed look. "Well, you *did* break up over a year ago. From what you told me, it didn't end well." She clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth, looking disappointed. "It's really a shame."

Jeongyeon's chest tightens—the same way it does when you're holding your breath under water and the surface isn't close enough. She looks down at the glass in her hand, stares at her distorted reflection, sees the tousled hair and the shadows under her eyes. The weight of Chaeyoung's words take its time settling in but once it does, she cannot uproot it from the deepest recess of her mind.

In this life, Jeongyeon loved Nayeon. They took a chance. They were together. *It didn't end well.* That answers the familiar alcohol she can still taste in the back of her throat, even

though she doesn't remember drinking any. A way to forget, a way to numb the pain.

"Why—?" She tries to find a way to ask questions without sounding like a stranger in her own body. "Have you heard from her recently?" she asks instead, her tongue heavy on her tongue.

Chaeyoung nods. "Yeah, we still call each other."

Jeongyeon wonders if Nayeon's number is still the same in this reality. What would happen if she called her now? What would she even say? Jeongyeon doesn't know. She's never known a time or place where Nayeon isn't with her in some way—a presence next to her, a voice in her ear, or a text message in her phone.

She cannot help but pity the Jeongyeon in this world. Oh, to live a life without Im Nayeon. She cannot imagine a worse punishment.

"Is she..." Jeongyeon clears her throat. "Is she happy?"

Chaeyoung's eyes soften. "She's better," is what she answers. Then a pause, like she's considering if she should add more. "Happier, too." And it's the answer that Jeongyeon is looking for, even though it's one she particularly doesn't want to hear.

After Chaeyoung leaves with a threat that Jeongyeon should join her and Tzuyu at this popular Gordon Ramsay restaurant later, the older girl takes a cold shower, changes into some comfortable clothes and stares at Nayeon's face on her phone. Her gallery is mostly empty, except for a few saved pictures of her members. It's unlike her. She always keeps pictures. Maybe the Jeongyeon of this world is different. So she has no choice but to zoom in on one of them just to catch a glimpse of Nayeon. She chooses the one taken during their fifth anniversary party.

In the picture, Nayeon and Jeongyeon are standing together, holding each other's waist. The others are doing similar goofy poses. Momo is draped all over Tzuyu, Mina and Chaeyoung are copying each other's expressions, Dahyun poses as if she's the epitome of swag while Sana is hugging Jihyo from behind. It's a happy memory, one that she can still remember, one that she holds dear in her heart. Every memory she has of her members, she cherishes deeply. Especially now, even if it isn't really her own.

She closes the photo and heads to her contacts lists. Nayeon's name, as she suspected, is still there. But she's only listed as IM NAYEON. Not *Nabongs* or *Pabo* or *The Annoying Unnie* or even a bunch of cute emojis Nayeon would've picked herself. Only Im Nayeon. Nothing more, nothing less.

God, it hurts.

Jeongyeon's thumb hovers over the call option hesitantly, wondering if there's still a place in this life where she can call her best friend and say, *hey Im Nabongs! You said that your plan included me! So why are you giving up on us?* She can already imagine Nayeon's response, the shrillness of her voice, the exasperation and relief in her tone: *Jeongyeon-ah, you fucking idiot. Why did you even let me go in the first place?*

It's a valid question. If Jeongyeon loved her—and she knows she does with every beat of her heart—then why did she turn away when Nayeon kissed her? Why didn't she try harder? Why did she give up? Who lets the love of their life walk away from their grasp, when she was already right *there*?

Jeongyeon stares down at Nayeon's name, her hand still hovering over it. Then she shakes her head and shuts off her phone. This isn't her life, her place, her burden to carry if the consequences prove too dire. Most importantly, this isn't her Nayeon. Jeongyeon thinks, very briefly, that if this was *her* Nayeon, she wouldn't let her go.

Even if she already did.

So, with a heavy heart, Jeongyeon puts away her phone, returns to the comfort of her bed, and closes her eyes.

[7 - when half of me is gone, how can i live as one?](#)

“*Jeongyeon-ah!*” An impatient voice, the click of static, the soft press of a pillow pressed against her cheek. Jeongyeon wakes up to the sight of Sana glaring at her from a phone screen. Upon looking around, she realizes she must've fallen asleep on the couch while talking to Sana. Outside, the skies are darkening, the afternoon shifting to evening. She looks at her watch. It's almost six.

"I'm here," she mutters, rubbing at her bleary eyes, "What—what were you saying again?"

Sana gives her an unimpressed look. “As I was *saying* before somebody fell asleep right in front of my salad, I was just in this grocery store trying to pick out what I should cook for dinner that night when this random girl walks up to me with the most serious expression on her face and goes—in *English*, Jeongyeon!— *hey, are you Minatozaki Sana from the Kpop girl group TWICE* and I just look blankly at her and nod. Then the most amazing thing happens. She starts *crying!*”

Jeongyeon raises her eyebrows in surprise. “What did you do after?”

She half-listens to Sana going on about how she comforted the girl (who had apparently been an avid fan since debut days) and looks around the living room to what seems to be her lavish apartment. It follows a minimalist theme with spots of color brightening up the overall black-and-white look. She spots a few picture frames on the television set, consisting mainly of her members and family. Then her gaze slides around, trying to find evidence that she might not be living alone in this life, that there could be somebody else waltzing in any second *now*—

“Jeong, are you listening?” Sana half-demands, half-whines.

“Sorry.” Jeongyeon squeezes her knee, tries to tell herself that she's real, that this is just another pit stop before she has to go back home. She forces a smile she hopes is convincing

enough for Sana. “Guess I’m a little bit out of it today. Hey. What year is it again?”

On the phone screen, Sana gives her an incredulous look. “Jeongyeon-ah,” she says, “Don’t tell me you’re getting old on me. You’re still at the prime of your years! God, you’re not even married yet.”

Jeongyeon feels calmer at those words. Okay. No Sooyoung. No Jiyeon. No Yoo Haeun. She can breathe a little easier, knowing that those other people from those other universes aren’t going to be here. A laugh bubbles out of her throat. God, this is just so *fucked up*. She can’t help but feel bad that she thinks of them as *others*, knowing how much they might mean to the other versions of herself.

“Yeah,” she says nervously, hoping that Sana can’t hear the relief in her voice, “Right. But seriously, what year is it again?”

“It’s like 2028.” Sana’s look of incredulity is replaced with concern. Jeongyeon is starting to get tired of seeing that look on her members’ faces. “Do you need to rest for a bit? I’m sorry for calling out of the blue. If I had known that you were tired, we could’ve talked another time.”

“No, no, it’s fine.” Jeongyeon reaches up to rub at her throat. Eight years. Eight years have passed in this timeline. She owns an expensive-looking apartment. TWICE seems to have already disbanded. She and Sana are still friends. There is no ring on her finger. Among the answers she’s discovered within the half hour she’s just woken up, she can’t help but ask a question in return: *Where does Nayeon fit in all of this?*

Jeongyeon fixes her gaze back on Sana again, focusing on her this time. The other girl looks the same, slightly older, with her hair its natural brown color. Judging from her background, she seems to be in bed, just enjoying some chit chat with a friend. It’s good to know that some things haven’t changed. At least, not drastically.

“Maybe you should call Nayeon-unnie,” Sana says suddenly, watching her carefully, “She’s coming over, right? You can ask her to buy you some meds.”

It feels like she’s been shot with electricity. Jeongyeon’s spine straightens. “She’s coming over?” she repeats, awe and wonder evident in her voice. Is this her chance?

“Yeah. You mentioned that earlier.”

“Did I say why?”

Sana shrugs. “I don’t know. It’s been a while since we last talked, Jeongie.”

There is no mistaking the sadness in Sana’s tone—a knife in her gut. Jeongyeon pauses, forces her brain to stop moving so fast. “We should catch up soon,” she says, a bit too loudly even for her own ears, “Tomorrow, maybe!”

Sana laughs. “Jeongyeon, I’m in *Vancouver* right now.”

“When you come back home then,” Jeongyeon says quickly, making up for the lack of information. Her heart soars when Sana’s eyes lift up in happiness at the word *home*. After all, home has always been with her members, no matter how far away they are.

“Are you serious?” Sana asks, her lips spreading into a wide smile, “I mean, don’t you have an upcoming drama to film?”

Jeongyeon’s eyebrows shoot up in surprise. Another question answered. After disbandment, she pursued an acting career. It doesn’t sound like her. All she ever wants out of her life is to make music with the right people. “Oh,” she mutters before she shakes her head and adds, “I can make time for you. I will, don’t you forget that, okay? You’re more important than some drama.”

Sana claps her hands in glee, positively glowing at Jeongyeon’s words. In the back of her mind, Jeongyeon imagines slapping the Jeongyeon who belongs in this timeline across the face. *There, you jackass*, she hears herself say, *I did you a favor. Don’t mess it up*. And even though the future she’s glimpsed has told her that TWICE won’t always be forever, she knows their bond will never break over distance or time.

“I’ll hold you to that, Yoo Jeongyeon,” Sana declares, still smiling brightly. Jeongyeon can’t remember a time where she wasn’t smiling. It’s a comfort to see.

Jeongyeon places a hand on her chest, right over her heart. “You have my word.”

Then, behind her, the doorbell rings.

“Oh, that must be Nayeon-unnie, right?” Sana asks, “Tell her I said hi, okay?”

Jeongyeon is quick to assume the worst. “You don’t want to talk to her?”

Sana waves her off. “We talk all the time! Plus, it’s a really important night for her, I don’t want to keep her there. Tell me how it goes, okay?” There is a knowing tilt to her voice, like she knows something Jeongyeon doesn’t. It’s not surprising. After all, Jeongyeon is nothing more than a visitor in this world, a stranger in her own body. There are many things she doesn’t know in this life.

After saying goodbye to Sana, Jeongyeon stands up and moves to the door. Her heart is racing painfully in her chest. This will be the second time she’ll be close to Nayeon. In the back of her mind, she wonders what the universe will do this time to break her heart. And if it doesn’t break her heart, then maybe she can take her chance. Maybe this time, it will all work out.

She reaches out and pulls the door open. On the other side, Nayeon’s smiling face greets her. For a split second, Jeongyeon lets herself *hope*. Here they are, years after their careers have ended. No more expectations to exceed, no more standards to set, no more hearts to break. They can try again. It might be eight years too late but it’s better late than never, right?

“Hi,” Jeongyeon greets, wanting nothing more than to sweep Nayeon up in her arms and apologize for breaking her heart over and over again—across timeless universes and alternate

realities. *Don't worry*, she wants to say now, *I won't do it again, I promise*.

"Hey." Nayeon's gaze is bright, fond. A complete opposite to the last time Jeongyeon saw her. "Did you just wake up?"

Jeongyeon finally lets herself take in what Nayeon is wearing, her breath catching in her throat at the sight that bestows her. Because Nayeon is looking *gorgeous* in a single strap sparkling black dress that Jeongyeon can tell is from Louis Vuitton. Her hair has been styled to perfection, falling over her shoulders in gentle waves. Her make-up is light but brings out the color in her eyes. Her red lips are curled into a wide, happy smile.

Jeongyeon doesn't know when she fell in love with Im Nayeon exactly but standing here, in this very moment, she falls in love all over again.

"So, uh, what's the occasion?" she asks, feeling very underdressed in her pajamas.

Nayeon gives her a pointed look. "It's our anniversary, Jeong. Don't tell me you've forgotten."

The world tilts on its axis and Jeongyeon feels as if she's just fallen over, even though she's still standing upright. For *once*, did they get it right? Are she and Nayeon really together in this timeline? It seems too good to be true. And when she feels her lips splitting into a wide, happy grin, she can't help but think *finally*—

"Eomma!"

The voice of a child pierces through the air, striking Jeongyeon down. The two women turn to look down the hallway, where a toddler, who seems to be about two years old, is running straight towards Nayeon. He is followed by a tall, handsome man whom Jeongyeon has never seen before but waves at her as if they know each other.

"Took you long enough," Nayeon says, her gaze fond as the child collides against her legs. She bends down to pick him up, wrapping her arms tightly around him.

The man sidles up next to Nayeon, pressing a kiss on the corner of her mouth. Jeongyeon's stomach twists at the sight.

"Sorry I took a while," he says, "I had to find a parking spot." Then he angles his gaze towards Jeongyeon and smiles brightly. "Hi, Jeongyeon-noona. Thank you so much for agreeing to this."

"This—?" Jeongyeon feels like she can't breathe.

"Yeah, babysitting little Eunwoo here while we're off to our anniversary dinner," the man answers. At the perplexed expression on Jeongyeon's face, he laughs. "Don't tell me you've forgotten, noona! Maybe Nayeon is right. You girls *are* getting old."

Nayeon slaps him on the arm, glowering. "Never bring up a woman's age, Namhyuk!"

Namhyuk's alarmed expression is enough to make their son laugh. "Right, sorry, honey," he says sheepishly.

Jeongyeon is familiar with grief, having gone through it once or twice. When Bbosong died while she was working, it felt like the world had completely stopped turning. There was an empty space in her heart that had used to be so full to the brim. She always knew that one day it would tip over and empty out. She just didn't expect it to come so soon. She didn't expect not to be there when it happened.

The same, familiar feeling of despair grips her heart and shakes it dry. *This isn't your life*, she tries to tell herself, wanting to offer some kind of comfort that she knows will end up being in vain, *but that doesn't mean it still doesn't hurt*. Standing in front of Jeongyeon right now is Nayeon's *family* —a loving husband who seems to treat her right and a beautiful son who adores her, judging by the way he tightly clings to Nayeon's neck—and the realization that Jeongyeon isn't part of it makes her wish she was somewhere else far, far from here. Maybe at the bottom of a ditch or in a bar where she can drink her sorrows away.

"Anyway!" Nayeon says, turning to Jeongyeon again, "We have to go otherwise they'll wave off our reservation. Don't hesitate to call me if Eunwoo is being troublesome, okay? We'll pick him up tomorrow by eight."

"Sure," Jeongyeon says, hearing herself like she's on the far end of a tunnel, "No problem."

The two-year-old is passed into her arms and he wraps his own around her neck tightly. "Hi, noona," he says, looking as if he's going to fall asleep right there and then. The same toothy smile on his face that Jeongyeon is so used to receiving from Nayeon devastates her. She has to bite back the urge to cry.

Nayeon leans in and presses a kiss to Eunwoo's temple. She is close enough that Jeongyeon can smell the grapefruit perfume that clings to her skin. *In another life*, she thinks, *I was able to taste you*.

"Say goodbye to mommy, Eunwoo," Namhyuk says.

Jeongyeon watches the smile on Nayeon's face widen when Eunwoo mumbles a sleepy, "Bye-bye, *eomma*." How can something so small open a large chasm in her heart?

"Have fun," Jeongyeon hears herself say. Then, almost as if in slow motion, she watches Namhyuk take Nayeon's hand in his and lead her down the hallway. Their steps are tiny daggers that shoot into Jeongyeon's heart. The further Nayeon gets away from her, the wider the chasm in her heart grows.

“Noona?” Eunwoo calls sleepily after the cartoon they watched on the TV ends. Both of them are sitting on the couch. It’s past eight o’clock.

Jeongyeon turns to him. “What’s up, kid?”

Eunwoo looks up at her, hand raised to rub at his eye. “Do you love *eomma*?” he asks.

The question is blunt, curious. Jeongyeon’s heart skips a beat. “Why are you asking?” she asks. A few hours after Nayeon and Namhyuk left, Jeongyeon has resigned herself to babysitting their child. They seem to be good friends, judging by the countless pictures of Eunwoo that she has saved in her phone. Of course, it’s hard not to adore someone who looks so much like Im Nayeon. Acts like her too, with the way he likes to think about things he shouldn’t be worrying about.

“Because she told me that a long time ago, she loved you,” Eunwoo mumbles, taking his time with pronouncing the words right, “but she didn’t tell you. She was scared.”

Jeongyeon sucks in a breath, wondering if there are still any pieces of her heart that can still be shattered inside her chest. It feels like sawdust at this point. She looks at Eunwoo—Im Nayeon’s flesh and blood—and knows this is her final punishment. “Yes,” she answers, hearing the tremble in her voice, “I love your mom very much.”

Eunwoo nods, serious. “Did you tell her that?”

Jeongyeon thinks of *her* Nayeon—the heartbreak in her eyes, the resignation in her voice, the grief she held together in her shoulders when Jeongyeon said they couldn’t be together. She realizes now that she never said it back. She let Nayeon walk away without telling her that she loved her back. All she wants to do now is to get back and try again.

“No,” she tells the child, “I didn’t.”

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After Jeongyeon tucks Eunwoo in the guest bedroom, she can’t help but wonder... in another life, could this be her child too? This is the last thought on her mind before she heads to the couch, not wanting to feel the emptiness of her own bed, and closes her eyes as the exhaustion draws near. Surely, there’s nothing more painful than this. Maybe when she wakes up, things will be better again.

[8 - how could i know that one day, i'll wake up feeling more?](#)

The next time she comes to, Nayeon's face is the first thing she sees.

"Jeongyeon-ah!" the older girl greets, waving her freakishly large hand right in front of Jeongyeon's vision; "Hey! Did you honestly fall asleep? We're going to miss out on Jihyo if I have to wake you up later!"

Jeongyeon blinks and then grabs Nayeon by the wrist, keeping her there. "You—" she starts to say, her heart jumping up her throat. She is still unsure of her bearings, unable to tell where she's woken up to and what year she's been shoved into. But it becomes evident to her when her vision clears and she sees the logo to Apgujeong High School sewn on Nayeon's uniform.

This time, she has not traveled to the future or to an alternate reality. This time, she has found her way back to the past, right next to Im Nayeon in a moving bus, heading to God-knows-where. She has found her way back home.

She doesn't let go of Nayeon's wrist, cannot bear to see her walk away again. She won't make the same mistake anymore. "Hi," she greets, feeling her lips quickly curl into a sharp smile.

The older girl narrows her eyes, apparently suspicious. "Why are you looking at me like that?" she asks.

"Like what?"

Seventeen-year-old Nayeon frowns, trying to come up with the right answer. "Like you're happy to see me," is what she finally settles for.

"I am happy to see you," Jeongyeon answers truthfully. She loosens her grip on Nayeon's wrist. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"You were literally whining about wanting to go home five minutes ago," Nayeon points out.

"Well, that was five minutes ago."

"Right." Nayeon still doesn't look like she believes her. Instead, she turns to look out the bus window, checking to see if they're nearing their destination. Jeongyeon takes this time to look at what she's holding in her hand, the shock of the situation slowly melting away. She realizes she's holding a small, carefully wrapped present in her hand. A birthday gift. Scribbled on the front is her handwriting: *Happy birthday, Park Jihyo! We hope you're an inch taller than you were yesterday! - Love, Nayeon & Jeongyeon.*

Oh. She remembers this day. Not as clearly as she hopes. But she knows that it's Jihyo's sixteenth birthday. A year from now, their initial girl group 6MIX will fall through. Two years from now, they'll join SIXTEEN.

Nayeon is holding a box of chocolate cupcakes in her hand. She wouldn't have been able to afford the entire surprise alone, which is why Jeongyeon had gathered her measley allowance and chipped in. Remembering it now, Jeongyeon can't help but recognize that this was the calm before the storm. A life before TWICE. Days spent in the training room, practicing her vocals and trying to catch up with the dance steps. She knew of her other members back then but not as intimately as she knows them now. Before, Sana and Momo were joined at the hip.

Mina was still in Japan. Chaeyoung and Dahyun were in middle school. Tzuyu was still an island, alone in a foreign country. In fact, all of them were their own islands. But that would all change soon.

For now, it's just her, Nayeon and Jihyo. The three of them against the world. A tiny part of her heart longs to be back in this time, back in this small part of Seoul, back where she was just Yoo Jeongyeon and not TWICE's Jeongyeon.

"We're here!" Nayeon says, breaking Jeongyeon's reverie.

The bus stutters to a stop. Nayeon moves to stand up, ushering Jeongyeon along with her. They're holding hands now, their presents tucked under their arms. Nayeon's grip is warm and firm, making Jeongyeon's heart flutter. They join in with the crowd of passersby leaving the bus. Outside, the sky has darkened. When Jeongyeon checks her watch, she sees that it's six in the evening.

"According to my calculations," Nayeon begins, looking down at her phone, "Jihyo's house should be a couple blocks away."

Jeongyeon nods, understanding the script, remembering the plot, knowing what her lines are. The two of them start walking, their free hands brushing against each other in the middle. What Jeongyeon would give to reach out and intertwine their fingers together—the way she should've right from the very beginning. But she doesn't. This might be her life but it is still her past. There are invisible rules she needs to abide by, even though she can't read them.

Soon, Jihyo's house comes into view. By now, the night has fully enveloped them in its cold embrace. Jeongyeon sees Nayeon shiver and quietly peels off her jacket while still holding the gift. She hands it to the older girl, knowing that she did this before.

Nayeon gives her a strange look. "What's this?"

Jeongyeon shrugs, tries to play it off even though her heart is beating too fast for comfort. The act of offering her jacket feels significant somehow, like she's trying to make up for all the years of heartbreak and pain she put Nayeon through. *It's not much*, she wants to say, *but I hope it's enough*. "You looked cold," is what she says instead.

"Okay." Nayeon's frown deepens. "Who are you and what have you done to Yoo Jeongyeon?"

Jeongyeon scoffs. "Am I not allowed to be nice?"

Nayeon accepts the jacket and throws it across her shoulders, still wearing that dubious frown on her face. Jeongyeon wants nothing more than to reach out and smooth the crease between her eyebrows and kiss the skepticism away from her lips. She doesn't.

Instead, she turns towards Jihyo's house and takes a step forward. "Come on, we still have to surprise that little rascal."

It happens the way she remembers it does. She knocks on the door, which is opened by Jihyo's mom. Then they're escorted to Jihyo's room, where the youngest of the three is still fast asleep after an exhausting day of school and vocal practice back at the company. Nayeon takes about five attempts to light up the candles on the cupcakes until Jeongyeon is forced to pry the matches from her and do it herself. Afterwards, Nayeon startles Jihyo awake with an obnoxiously loud rendition of a birthday song, complete with basic dance moves they learned at JYPE. Jeongyeon has to bite back her laugh at the sight of the genuine happiness in the younger girl's face.

"You guys didn't have to," Jihyo mutters after she's made her wish and they've taken their first bite of the cupcakes. And yet, she's smiling widely, cupcake crumbs stuck on the corner of her lips.

The age difference between them has always been a blurred line. Sometimes, Jeongyeon thinks it doesn't exist. But then she sees the tender way Nayeon reaches out to brush the crumbs from Jihyo's mouth, smiling proudly like the unnie she is, and she realizes it's not such a bad thing.

"And what? Miss out on the chance to see your room and make fun of you for it?" Nayeon looks around from her designated spot next to Jihyo on the bed, sees the countless posters of idols that have graced the stage plastered all over the walls of Jihyo's room, and doesn't make fun of it. She looks contemplative, eyebrows slightly furrowed together, like she's wondering if they'll be able to do the same thing.

Jeongyeon bites the inside of her cheek. She doesn't want to spoil the surprise. Sometimes, the journey matters more than the destination. Or whatever crap JYP would tell them each time the company pulled back their debut date. She finishes her cupcake and scoots closer to Jihyo on the bed, reaching out to wrap an arm around the first friend she made at the company.

"Happy birthday, Jihyo-yah," she says, as seriously as she can, "I hope all your dreams come true."

Jihyo scrunches her nose. "Well, I doubt *that*," she mutters, going quiet. Then she adds, her voice trying to make it seem like it's just a passing thought, even though Jeongyeon knows better, "Maybe I should just quit."

The reproach in Nayeon's voice is severe. "Jihyo-yah," she says, frowning, "Don't."

"What? It's not like I'm getting any younger, unnie." Jihyo brings her knees up to her chest, wrapping her arms around her legs and perching her chin on top of them. Jeongyeon stares at her, trying to match this tired, insecure teenager with the successful and proud leader she knows back home. It's not too hard. After all, Jeongyeon has seen the struggles Jihyo has gone through and how she overpowered them. This, too, will pass.

"This is half your life, Jihyo," Jeongyeon tells her, leaning back on her arms and noticing the way Jihyo's eyes shine under the right light, "You can't just give up."

"It's just..." Jihyo bites her lower lip, gaze flickering towards Jeongyeon. "I don't know. Sometimes, it doesn't seem worth it."

"It is," Jeongyeon says firmly, "It will be." Her tone leaves no room for argument.

Nayeon is staring at her as well. "What makes you so sure we're going to make it?" she asks.

Because I've seen it happen, Jeongyeon wants to say, one day, we'll go down in history. We'll break records and set new ones. We'll make music that will touch millions of people. And we'll be there for each other every step of the way.

"Just trust me," Jeongyeon says, holding Nayeon's inquisitive gaze while reaching up to pinch Jihyo's cheek.

"Not with my life," is all that Jihyo says but the sarcastic response is softened by the smile on her lips. Gentle. Warm. She leans into Jeongyeon's side, finishing the rest of her birthday cupcake.

Sitting here in Jihyo's bedroom, wearing their school uniform, with a box of pastries shared between them—it feels like *home*. For the fraction of a second, Jeongyeon feels sorry that the real Jeongyeon of this timeline can't witness this with her own two eyes or feel the steady thrum of her heartbeat quicken when Nayeon looks up at her and smiles. So she savors the moment, knowing that it won't last, and sinks her teeth into the next cupcake she steals from Jihyo's hand.

-

"You're not really Jeongyeon, are you?" Nayeon asks as they make their way back home.

Jeongyeon pauses, caught off guard in the middle of tying her shoelaces. Nayeon stands a few feet from her, leaning against a streetlight, arms crossed and head tilted to the side. The orange glow of the only artificial source of illumination they have waxes Nayeon's skin, making her look years older than she really is. Making her look like the Nayeon Jeongyeon knows back home.

After a moment, Jeongyeon straightens her back. "What do you mean?" she asks, keeping her voice light but uncertain if she succeeded.

"I'm trying to come up with an explanation," Nayeon goes on. Her expression is unreadable, eyebrows relaxed but heart-shaped lips turned down at the corners. "One: you were abducted by aliens. Two: you just woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Three: you're just feeling really sappy today. Because you're not the Yoo Jeongyeon I know."

"Well, it is Jihyo's birthday," Jeongyeon points out.

"Yeah, I guess." Nayeon shrugs, apparently letting go. "It's just... you're normally not this nice to me or Jihyo, you know."

Jeongyeon lets out a soft chuckle, approaching her dear friend. "Just because I make fun of you all the time doesn't mean I don't care about you," she says by way of explanation; Nayeon's lips twitch at her words.

"You're so cheesy, Yoo Jeongyeon." But the words are spoken fondly. Jeongyeon doesn't have to turn her head to see the smile on Nayeon's mouth.

The two of them start walking towards the bus stop again. Jeongyeon's jacket is still wrapped around Nayeon's shoulders. Even though it's cold, she doesn't ask for it back. The warmth in her heart and belly is enough to comfort her. She thinks she can light a fire just by the smile on Nayeon's face.

"What was all that talk about trusting you by the way?" Nayeon begins, kicking a pebble away from her path. "This isn't the first time Jihyo's expressed wanting to quit."

I know, Jeongyeon thinks sadly. She doesn't say anything though, too focused on following Nayeon with her eyes, trying to commit this moment to memory. She's already lived through this before but what she had was a simple sketch of the details. Now she wants to color in the lines, breathe life into what she has tucked away in the recesses of her mind. This is the first timeline or reality she's woken up to that has Nayeon so close in her grasp. She doesn't want to let go. And if she has to, then she wants to bring something with her too.

"You sounded so sure," Nayeon mumbles, hugging herself, "It made me want to believe you."

Jeongyeon clenches her right hand and then relaxes her fingers. She remembers her trainee days. The uncertainty. The pressure. The routine. Nothing was set in stone. Just because you would debut didn't mean you would succeed. It was this thought that had pushed Jeongyeon to draw back into herself, to lock the training rooms and practice her dancing until her muscles ached and she couldn't dance anymore, to listen to Rain on repeat and remind herself what she signed up for. What she looked up to. What she wanted for herself. Especially on days where the fear overclouded her dream and she forgot why she wanted to do this in the first place. Those were the days where she, too, felt like giving up.

It was only with Nayeon and Jihyo's support that she didn't.

It wasn't an easy journey but she wouldn't trade it for anything else in the world.

She stops walking, turning to face her companion. The night is young. *They* are young. Their world is at the tip of their fingertips. Soon, it will be theirs. "Im Nayeon," Jeongyeon begins, "you're going to do great things."

The surprise and confusion on Nayeon's face would've been hilarious to witness, if Jeongyeon wasn't being completely serious.

"Jeongyeon, what are you—?"

"Everything you want," Jeongyeon interrupts gently—her voice the complete opposite of her heart rattling inside her chest, "will be yours."

She takes a deep breath, glances down at her feet, tries to gather her thoughts. Everything Nayeon wants—to debut, to perform, to be *remembered*—will be hers. It's so close that Jeongyeon just wants to sit her down and tell her everything. *Do you remember those Japanese trainees who look like twins? Yeah, their names are Sana and Momo and they're going to be our best friends. And soon, Mina will be here too. Dahyun and Chaeyoung—those kids you love to baby a lot? They're going to be our little rappers. And I can't forget about Tzuyu. She's so pure you're gonna want to protect her at all costs—*

Instead, she reaches out and squeezes Nayeon's shoulder. "Do you know how I know?" she asks.

Nayeon decides to humor her. "How?"

"Because I believe in you."

As expected, Nayeon scoffs. "Come on now. Jeong—" She seems frazzled, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment. But her eyes are calculative. "You're not some kind of fortune teller—"

"I mean it, Nayeon." Jeongyeon has never said anything truer before in her entire life. She isn't good with words, prefers to let her actions speak louder, but now she wishes she has the same eloquence that Chaeyoung has, because she wants to tell Nayeon so many things—

I couldn't have done it without you. You're my best friend. I'm sorry for all the times we've argued or fought. I'm so proud of you. It's like you're the sun and I'm the moon chasing after you. Your opinion means the world to me. I want to be with you forever. I love you. I love you. I love you.

So she pulls Nayeon in for a hug, cradling the older girl's head in the palm of her hand. Nayeon makes a soft noise of surprise but she doesn't pull away. Instead, she melts in Jeongyeon's embrace, under the orange glow of the streetlight shining over them. The world stills. Everything feels right. For once since this whole chaos began, Jeongyeon feels at peace.

"You're so weird," Nayeon mutters but she brings her arms up and holds her close.

Jeongyeon laughs, tightening her embrace. "Yeah," she says. And for the first time, she wishes this would last.

Later that night, as they're riding the last bus back home, Nayeon falls asleep first, her head falling gently on Jeongyeon's shoulder. And this time, it is Jeongyeon who struggles to stay awake, who fights against the insistent need to fall asleep, to let go. But she doesn't want to go back. Not yet. She wants to stay. She wants to be with Nayeon for a moment longer, even if this isn't really *her* Nayeon.

Things were easier back then.

She thinks about what she told Nayeon earlier. *Everything you want will be yours.* It is the truth. Nayeon will reach for the stars and return with an entire galaxy. It is only now, as her eyes slip close and the edges of her consciousness start to blur, that Jeongyeon realizes her fatal mistake, the one glaring oversight to this entire situation—

I want you to know something, Yoo Jeongyeon.

—what Nayeon wants and doesn't have is *her*.

9 - i know i kissed you before but i didn't do it right, can i try again?

When Jeongyeon opens her eyes, she is met with darkness. But she isn't afraid. She knows, without having to turn her head, that she has finally come home. All around her, she can feel the presence of her members, warm bodies with steady heartbeats and a shared dream. She holds her breath, taking everything in. She's home. Back with her members once again. When she raises her hand to peer closely at it, it is without a doubt in her mind that she knows its *hers*.

What a strange sensation it is—to feel like you've been through several lifetimes and then to come back home. To see how different it could've all been, how it all might've turned out in the end. To know what you had in one life and to lose it in the next. It makes her realize how fortunate—how *goddamn* lucky she is—to still hold everything that matters to her in the cusp of her palm, despite having watched it slip past her grip so many times already.

She turns her head, eyes adjusting to the darkness. She can make out Dahyun's back turned towards her, the silhouette of Mina propped up on the chair, the way Jihyo's hand twitches on her stomach as she stirs on the couch. Maybe she's dreaming too. Maybe they had the same dream.

Jeongyeon looks across the space, squinting against the darkness and looking for the one person that has evaded her for so long. *There.* At the very edge of the room, with her body curled to fight off the chills, facing Sana's back, is Nayeon.

All those other lives and not a single one did she and Nayeon end up together.

Jeongyeon won't let it happen again.

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Three days later, Jeongyeon corners Nayeon in her apartment after dance practice.

“Im Nayeon,” she begins, echoing the serious way Nayeon had called her that one fateful night, “I need to tell you something.”

Nayeon’s gaze slides towards her, guarded. Neutral. *Scared* . Jeongyeon knows her better than anyone else, after all. As much as Nayeon tries to show how tough she is—deep down inside, her heart is soft. It’s the softest when it comes to her members. And in this moment now, Jeongyeon can see her trying to harden it against whatever might happen next.

“What is it?” Nayeon looks tired, her shoulder-length hair tied in a low ponytail, one side of her shirt falling off her shoulder. She is still the most beautiful woman Jeongyeon has ever set eyes on.

Jeongyeon isn’t sure what to say at first, even though she’s spent the past three days trying to come up with the perfect confession. The two of them are standing in the hallway leading to Nayeon’s apartment. Ever since they hit their fourth anniversary as a group, they’ve been living separately in the same apartment complex but Sana still tends to sleep over at Momo’s place simply because she wants to while Mina and Jihyo are practically still roommates since they spend all their time together. But it’s Nayeon, just like Dahyun and Chaeyoung, who prefers to have her privacy, who likes to live alone, who gave Jeongyeon and only Jeongyeon a spare key to her door.

But this time, Jeongyeon wants to do this right. “Mind if I come inside?” she asks.

Nayeon raises an eyebrow. “You never ask,” she mutters.

Jeongyeon swallows. “Because I want you to decide,” she says haltingly.

The words are met with silence. Jeongyeon sees the turmoil in Nayeon’s eyes, wants to be the one to clear them. But she can’t do that if Nayeon won’t let her in, if she can’t bring herself to trust Jeongyeon once more. After all, it was only three days ago that Jeongyeon had broken her heart.

Jeongyeon needs to right all the wrongs she’s done, even though in another life, she knows they weren’t wrong. After all, another Jeongyeon made those decisions. They were hers to keep.

She doesn’t know what to do if in this life, Nayeon decides to walk away from her once again.

Her worries are for naught, however, when the tension leaves Nayeon’s shoulders and she smiles, quick and easy, the same way she used to before the night at Jihyo’s apartment happened, before Jeongyeon told her that they couldn’t be together. At the sight of that smile, Jeongyeon exhales a deep breath and feels her entire body relax.

“Of course, you weirdo,” Nayeon says, reaching out and unlocking the door to her apartment, “Are you staying over for the night?”

Jeongyeon reaches up, scratches at her throat. “If you let me,” she croaks.

Inside Nayeon's vast apartment, Jeongyeon sits down on the couch and tries to gather her thoughts while Nayeon takes a quick shower. Now that she's here, now that she's finally back home in her own body with the right version of the woman she fell in love with, she feels restless. As if this has been something she's been waiting for all along, wouldn't have minded waiting forever for. But now that she's here, she wants to get it over with as soon as possible. Not because it's an inconvenience on her part but simply because she cannot stand another second not being with Im Nayeon. The way they're supposed to be, the way they aren't in the other lives she's visited.

When Nayeon comes back, smelling of lemon and grapefruit combined together, Jeongyeon is so nervous her knees are practically shaking.

"Jeongyeon-ah," Nayeon says lightly, tilting her head to the side when she spots the younger girl vibrating on the couch, "What's going on? Why do you look like you're going to shit yourself? Well, you always look like you want to—"

"Three nights ago—" Jeongyeon rises to her feet, eyes focused on Nayeon and Nayeon alone, "—you told me you loved me."

Nayeon freezes, caught off guard. "We don't have to talk about that anymore," she mutters after the initial shock wears off. Her expression has shifted. Now, she looks like she regrets letting Jeongyeon in. "I got what you said the first time, Jeong. It's never going to happen between us. It might take me awhile to get over it—"

"What if—" Jeongyeon's heart is in her throat, beating like a hummingbird, "—what if I don't want you to get over it?"

The words take their time settling in. Slowly, Nayeon looks up at her, eyes wide, bright and... hopeful? It sets a fire in Jeongyeon's heart. Because this isn't like all the other lives she's been through. There is still a chance. She isn't too late. She knows Nayeon and Nayeon knows her. They love each other. That much—Jeongyeon knows. Without a shred of doubt in her mind. She knows that in this life, they can—they *will* make it.

"What are you talking about?" Nayeon asks, crossing her arms. A defense position. Some part of her, which Jeongyeon understands completely, is still hesitant. After all, she had taken the dive for Jeongyeon before. And in return, she was left drowning. She doesn't want to make the same mistake.

Jeongyeon understands because she doesn't want the same mistake to happen twice.

"I don't want you to get over it," she murmurs, "because I'm not over it either."

A beat passes.

Nayeon's voice is trembling slightly, "This isn't funny, Jeongyeon-ah."

"I'm serious." Jeongyeon takes a step closer and Nayeon steps back. "Nayeon-ah, this is the most serious I've ever been in my entire life."

“You *said* that we couldn’t be *together*,” Nayeon retorts, sounding upset; “You said that after you kissed me *back*—”

“But I never said I didn’t love you,” Jeongyeon quietly says, her heart thrashing wildly in her chest. She hopes—against all kinds of hope—that Nayeon will forgive her.

There’s a sharp intake of breath. Nayeon raises a hand and covers her mouth, her eyes fluttering close. After a few seconds, the tears slip out and stream down her cheeks. She looks away, lips trembling. It pains Jeongyeon to see her like this, to be the cause of the pain Nayeon has shouldered. How long, she wants to know, how long has Nayeon thought of her like this, and she never realized? How long have the words *I love you, Jeongyeon* been on the tip of Nayeon’s tongue and she bit it back? How much time have they wasted, thinking the other didn’t feel the same way, only to be proven wrong in the end?

“If you felt the same way,” Nayeon whispers, opening her eyes and looking at Jeongyeon with agony written all over her features, “why didn’t you tell me?”

Jeongyeon plops back down on the couch, her entire body sagging with relief and exhaustion. It feels like the weight of her journey—hopping from one dream to another, being transported in a different world each time she woke up—is finally getting to her. All she wants now is to rest with the girl she loves in her arms. But only if she’ll let her.

“Jeongyeon-ah,” Nayeon urges, tone desperate, “Please don’t break my heart again.”

Please don’t break my heart again.

“I gave it some thought,” Jeongyeon confesses, even though it’s more than that—she’s literally been on a life-changing experience, but she doesn’t want to freak Nayeon out anymore than she already has, “and I realized some things.”

Nayeon sits down on the opposite couch, facing Jeongyeon. “And what did you realize?” she asks, her voice level. She looks like she’s already composed herself, which is a skill born years out of being on the spotlight. Jeongyeon cannot help but feel proud, remembering the seventeen-year-old Nayeon who didn’t know if she would even make it in the first place. It’s a wonder to see how different your life has become and to not be resentful for it.

“When you told me you loved me,” Jeongyeon starts, leaning forward on the edge of her seat, “I knew that I felt the same way already.” Nayeon’s eyes widen at the confession but she doesn’t say anything, knowing there is more that Jeongyeon wants to say, which she does half a minute later; “But I told you that it wouldn’t work out between us because I was scared.”

Jeongyeon squeezes her knee, tells herself that this is real, she and Nayeon are *real*. This isn’t a dream. If she makes a mistake now, if Nayeon tells her that she can’t do this anymore, then there is no running away from this. This is her life. She will have to live with what happens next for the rest of it. And she’d be *damned* if she doesn’t seize the opportunity now and hold it close to her.

So she looks up, meets Nayeon’s wide-eyed stare, and tells her the words that she wasn’t able to say out loud in the other lifetimes, the same words she didn’t tell Nayeon three nights ago;

“Im Nayeon, I love you.” Then the dam breaks. Her own eyes fill with tears. An aching, stinging pain fills up her heart until it feels too much to bear. “You’re my best friend,” she goes on, her voice trembling, “I wouldn’t have been able to do this without you.” She inhales sharply, trying to get air into her lungs. She’s shaking so badly she can barely hold herself together.

“I don’t know when I started loving you,” she continues, looking away, “Maybe it was a long time ago. Maybe I always have and I just realized it when you told me you loved me. But I do love you, Nayeon. And I’m here right now because I—” She thinks of the other Jeongyeons, living a different life from hers, loving another person who isn’t Im Nayeon, and she cannot imagine that for herself. Her shoulders slump forward. “I don’t want to regret anything,” she whispers, “I don’t want to lose you.”

She closes her eyes, hangs her head. Waits for her sentence. This time, Nayeon will be the judge and the executioner. And this time, Jeongyeon surrenders herself.

Soft, padded footsteps on the rug beneath them. A soft exhale of relief. Hands curling around her cheeks, getting her to look up. When Jeongyeon’s eyes flutter open, she is met with the wide, grinning face of Im Nayeon. The sight is enough to make her smile as well.

“Yoo Jeongyeon,” Nayeon says, kneeling in front of the younger girl, “you can never lose me.” Then she laughs, tugs Jeongyeon close to wrap her arms around her neck, despite the awkward angle. “Don’t you remember what you said before? That I’m relentless? Did you really think I was going to let you go that easily?” The laughter waters down into tears of relief. “Jeongyeon-ah, you’re such an idiot. Why did you think you were going to lose me?”

Because I already have, Jeongyeon thinks, burying her face against Nayeon’s neck and thinking of all the other lives she’s seen up close, *and I don’t want it to happen again.*

“You have high standards, you know,” Jeongyeon mumbles, “Maybe some other guy was going to scoop you up away from me. I wouldn’t—” She remembers Namhyuk and Eunwoo and her heart starts bleeding. “I wouldn’t have been able to handle it,” she later adds.

“You’re such an idiot,” Nayeon repeats but her tone is fond, gentle. She pulls back, eyes shining with unshed tears. “My heart has always belonged to you.”

“You’re so cheesy, Im Nayeon.” Jeongyeon reaches up, places a shaking hand on Nayeon’s cheek, and pulls her close until their temples are touching. “Why did my heart choose you too?”

“*Why can’t my heart do what I want it to do?*” Nayeon harmonizes, giggling when Jeongyeon rolls her eyes, “*Why does it keep missing you?*” Then her face grows serious, eyes red around the edges, nose pink with all her sniffing. “You kept me waiting for so long, Jeongyeon-ah,” she whispers.

“I know.” Jeongyeon breathes in the scent of Nayeon’s grapefruit lipbalm. “I’m sorry.”

“Just don’t leave me ever again,” Nayeon says.

There is nowhere else Jeongyeon wants to be in than by Nayeon's side so she nods, her nose brushing against Nayeon's, and says, "I won't."

Even though they've already kissed before, Jeongyeon's heart skyrockets when Nayeon starts inching close. Like she won't be able to do it right once more. Perhaps that first kiss was a dream too and Jeongyeon didn't realize it then. But now, when Nayeon leans forward to press her mouth against hers, she knows this isn't the case. Because if this is truly their first kiss, then why does Jeongyeon feel like she's coming back home? Why does it feel like she's been through a long trip and Nayeon's lips against her is the one thing tethering her back to where she belongs, back to where it all started? Like a gentle reminder—

You will always have a home with me.

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Later, as the years go by, TWICE disbands. Their dream is over. Everything has been set in stone.

Before their final performance, Jeongyeon looks over at Nayeon, who is fixing her in-ear and staring at the millions of people who have arrived to watch them perform their final stage on the monitor. The show has yet to begin but it still feels like everything has already ended. The rest of the members are trying to hold in their emotions with difficulty. Sana has already succumbed to tears more than once. Momo and Dahyun are hugging each other. Mina and Chaeyoung are speaking in low tones. Jihyo is leaning her head on Tzuyu's shoulder, the two of them waiting for their cue to start the beginning of the end.

Jeongyeon steps next to Nayeon, waits to be acknowledged. "You know," she says, "I had the craziest dream before."

Nayeon chuckles, looking glad to be distracted from the high-strung emotional situation they knew would come but were never fully prepared for. "What was it about?" she asks, reaching out to intertwine their fingers together. Force of habit. Magnets connecting. A red string keeping them together.

Jeongyeon smiles, quick and easy. "It was about you," she answers.

Their eyes meet in the small space between them. Nayeon doesn't know, will never be able to comprehend, just how lucky they truly are to be in this moment. But then she returns the smile, her eyes crinkling around the corners, and Jeongyeon realizes something profound—you don't have to lose everything to appreciate what you already have.

In this moment, she has Nayeon.

And Nayeon has her.

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fin.

End Notes

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