

## Paradise in peach-scented smoke & warm arms

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/31723543) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/31723543>.

Rating:	<a href="#">General Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">M/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">K-pop</a> , <a href="#">NCT (Band)</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Lee Donghyuck   Haechan &amp; Mark Lee</a> , <a href="#">Lee Jeno/Na Jaemin</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Mark Lee (NCT)</a> , <a href="#">Lee Donghyuck   Haechan</a> , <a href="#">Na Jaemin</a> , <a href="#">Lee Jeno</a> , <a href="#">Huang Ren Jun</a> , <a href="#">Zhong Chen Le</a> , <a href="#">Park Jisung (NCT)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Slow Burn</a> , <a href="#">Slow Romance</a> , <a href="#">Unrequited Love</a> , <a href="#">Unrequited Crush</a> , <a href="#">Temporarily Unrequited Love</a> , <a href="#">Heartbreak</a> , <a href="#">Heartbreaking</a> , <a href="#">Heartache</a> , <a href="#">friends to strangers</a> , <a href="#">Friends to Lovers</a> , <a href="#">References to Depression</a> , <a href="#">friends to strangers to lovers</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Emotional Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Angst and Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Fluff and Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Fluff and Angst</a> , <a href="#">Angst and Feels</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Recreational Drug Use</a> , <a href="#">markhyuck</a> , <a href="#">referenced nomin</a> , <a href="#">Lee Donghyuck   Haechan &amp; Mark Lee Are Best Friends</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - College/University</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - Not K-Pop Idols</a> , <a href="#">Sweet Mark Lee (NCT)</a> , <a href="#">Mentioned Park Jisung (NCT)</a> , <a href="#">Mentioned Huang Ren Jun</a> , <a href="#">Mentioned Zhong Chen Le</a> , <a href="#">Established Lee Jeno/Na Jaemin</a> , <a href="#">Lee Donghyuck   Haechan is a Little Shit</a> , <a href="#">Summer Vacation</a> , <a href="#">Beach Volleyball</a> , <a href="#">Donghyuck is a big clown and runs the circus here</a> , <a href="#">pspspspspsps happy birthday tricia</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-06-08 Words: 8,733 Chapters: 1/1

# Paradise in peach-scented smoke & warm arms

by [milkisbubu](#)

## Summary

The dreamies friend group split up after high school but reunite the first summer after freshman year at university for a beach house vacation. Only problem with the plan is Donghyuck didn't consider that Mark would be there. Mark confessed to Donghyuck at their high school graduation and Donghyuck rejected him. Feeling too awkward about the exchange, Donghyuck distanced himself from Mark after that and hasn't spoken to his former friend in a year. Now they are brought together with this reunion and Donghyuck doesn't know how to feel.

## Notes

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

"When you said we would be getting together for a reunion, I was expecting something more like a weekend hangout at a rental house or a paintball tournament for a few hours, not us moving in with each other for the *entire* summer."

Donghyuck picks his phone up from where it had been resting on top of his unpacked suitcase, Turning his FaceTime camera on to give Renjun a pensive stare. His best friend only beams a wide smile at him, the kind that makes it impossible to stay mad.

"To be fair, I thought the same thing but things happen and plans change. Jeno and Jaemin were the ones to come up with the new idea of a summer-long beach house getaway, and then we just planned further from there. This is what you get for ignoring the group chat, Hyuck."

Donghyuck snorts at the remark, "Don't try to put this on me. You guys know I'm bad at replying to messages," He tosses his phone onto his bed and starts packing while Renjun fusses at him through his earbuds.

"You don't have an excuse for not checking your messages. You're never doing anything in your free time other than playing overwatch. We are your best friends. We are more important than your silly video games!"

"That's debatable."

Renjun wants to reach through the phone to smack his best friend for the response he gave. Unfortunately, that isn't possible so instead, he decides to ignore the comment and continue informing Donghyuck of all the details he's missing about the trip.

"Anyways, as I was saying," Renjun clears his throat for dramatic effect before continuing, "We're going to spend the whole summer together because we haven't seen each other in a whole year and we need to catch up. Jaemin's aunt is going to let us use her beach house while she's away for the summer."

The audio goes out for a moment and then Donghyuck hears shuffling. He is about to ask Renjun if there's something wrong with his internet before the other male resumes speaking.

"You, Jisung, Chenle, and I are going to carpool there together since we all stay closer to each other. We'll meet up with the others at the beach house. They'll get there before us because they stay closer to the area the beach house is located in."

Donghyuck lets out an exasperated sigh as he tosses a stack of unfolded t-shirts into his open suitcase. Packing won't take long considering he only owns seven interchangeable outfits at best and two pairs of shoes.

"You mean I get to spend hours on the road, stuck in a hot car with you, Chenle, *and* Jisung?" Donghyuck gasps in mock admiration, "Wow, I can't think of anything more fun than that."

"Oh shut up, you love us."

"That's debatable."

Donghyuck doesn't have to look at his phone to know Renjun is rolling his eyes at him. He can practically feel his friend's playful annoyed expression through the phone and it reminds him of how happy he is to reunite with his friends again — despite what he says — because he misses being surrounded by people that know what he's thinking before he knows what he's thinking.

"I'm getting a call from Jisung, I'll text you later. Finish packing and be ready to go on Saturday. We'll be there to pick you up at 5:00 AM sharp; got to beat the morning traffic."

Donghyuck opens his mouth to protest the early time but is cut off by the line cutting off when Renjun hangs up on him. He looks over to his phone and scrunches his face up at it, even though Renjun can't see him.

He finishes packing and collapses onto his bed to scribble out a list of things he needs to get from the store before Friday: board shorts, more t-shirts, sunscreen, sunglasses, a hat, and a travel water bottle. Once he buys everything on the list, he will officially be all set to go.

His phone buzzes with a notification and he unlocks it to reveal a text message from Renjun.

\_\_\_\_\_(4 new messages)\_\_\_\_\_

Renjun: Can't wait to see you on Friday!!!

Renjun: Gonna give you the biggest hug you've ever received in your life!!!!

Renjun: I can't wait for us all to be together again! A year has felt like forever omg!!!!

Renjun: [Image Attached]

\_\_\_\_\_

Donghyuck smiles as he reads the messages, clicking on the photo attached and only smiling bigger. It's a group photo they took a month before their high school graduation a year ago. They were all piled together between two beds in a motel room, celebrating their upcoming graduation with a movie night sleepover in a motel room they'd rented together.

The whole squad was in the photo: Renjun, Jeno, Jisung, Chenle, Jaemin, and — Donghyuck's eyes freeze on the photo — Mark.

Donghyuck isn't smiling anymore, his expression deadpan as stares down at where he and Mark are together in the photo, in a cuddled up position with identical peace signs thrown up for the camera. He can vividly remember everything about that night; Disney's Frozen playing on the TV, their off-key karaoke whenever songs came up in the movie, peach-scented smoke swirling around the room, Mark's warm hand caressing his sides, the soft material of Mark's sweater against his face, the comfortable vibes. These are the memories he wants to keep forever, but the joyous memories of that night are tainted by his most dreadful memory.

The confession.

Before his mind can even go back down that path, Donghyuck closes Renjun's message and throws his phone, sending it flying from his hands as if it had burned him. He doesn't take time to register that throwing a device with a non-shatterproof screen onto a wooden floor isn't the best idea. His heart races as if he's just run a marathon, beating wildly with the threat of leaping out of his chest.

Before the panic can become too much, Donghyuck closes his eyes and takes slow breaths in and out, stomping down the guilt and anger that tries to rise with the bad memory from that night. For a minute, he thinks he's going to cry — to completely break down and sob the pain away. But then just like that, his conscience clears and he's okay again.

The photo is locked away in a dark closed-off part of his mind and he allows himself to pretend he never saw it — to pretend nothing ever happened. He reminds himself that things are fine now, that the situation is behind him and he will never have to worry about it again.

Donghyuck remains in his spot, body half-curved up with his back against the wall. His room feels extra lonely suddenly. Too quiet. Too cold.

He pulls a throw blanket over himself, tugging it up over his shoulders as he closes his eyes. The silence in his dorm room is unsettling and he contemplates putting music on before remembering he threw it across the room. His breaths are the only sound he can distinctly make out in the otherwise dead silence of his room.

It's hard to say how much time passes — how long Donghyuck lays in deafening silence trying to find an escape from the situation. His escape eventually comes in the form of a nap, putting his thoughts to rest as everything worrisome gets pushed to the back of his mind.

Friday comes in the form of three sets of fists banging on Donghyuck's dorm door. It's not that he forgot his friends were going to be coming today — It's just that he isn't a morning person. Everyone knows this already, so it doesn't come as a surprise that when his friends arrive at his dorm; Donghyuck's door is locked with no sign of lights being on inside.

Twenty minutes.

For twenty minutes, Donghyuck successfully drowns out the sounds of knocking and yelling outside his door. The noise doesn't stop. Instead, his friends become louder and louder, leaving him no choice but to get out of bed and answer if he doesn't want the resident adviser showing up.

His eyelids droop with exhaustion and his limbs are weighted, but Donghyuck drags himself out of bed and answers the door anyway. Upon opening the door, Donghyuck is immediately tackled to the floor by three of his best friends.

"Not awake or dressed, typical Hyuck," Chenle teasingly scolds before freeing Donghyuck from his hold.

Jisung pulls away from the attack group hug next, throwing himself onto Donghyuck's bed and touching everything on his nightstand.

"Do you have any snacks in here? I'm starving. Renjun wouldn't let us stop to grab anything because he was so determined to come to pick you up first," Jisung opens one of the side table's drawers, looking inside for snacks before closing it when he finds none, "and look at you, not even ready to go."

Renjun is the only one that hasn't freed Donghyuck from the surprise hug, keeping him trapped in a vice-like grip.

"I missed you, Hyuck. Why did you have to pick a school so far away?" Renjun pouts up at him while proceeding to squeeze him in his arms like a snake does its prey. "Transfer to my school so we can be roommates and spend every day together."

"Sounds like hell."

Renjun lets go of Donghyuck to smack him in the shoulder for his remark.

"Rude."

Chenle laughs from where he has joined Jisung on Donghyuck's bed, staring at him expectantly. "Get dressed, Hyuck. We don't have all day."

Donghyuck lets a loud, tired groan escape as he stretches out his limbs before getting back on his feet and grabbing a shirt from his closet. It's a white t-shirt with the phrase 'I'm not saying I'm always right, but I'm never wrong' printed across the front in bold letters. He pulls the t-shirt on, replacing his nightshirt, and decides to keep on the sweatpants he's wearing because they're comfortable, and he can't be bothered to change them.

"Ok, I'm ready."

Chenle is already out the door, rolling Donghyuck's suitcase outside and waving for him to follow.

"Come on, let's go. I'm ready to get this show on the road," Chenle cheers before disappearing around the corner.

"Hyuck, can I borrow this?" Jisung holds a bucket hat in his hands — one of his personal favorites — all black with a white alien patch stitched on the front.

He doesn't give Donghyuck a chance to reply before he pulls the hat on his head and runs after Chenle, shouting over his shoulder, "Thanks! You're the best, Hyuck!"

"You're not getting that back," Renjun laughs as he grabs Donghyuck's keys off the wall before pushing him out the door.



"I don't think I'm going to make it through a long car ride with all three of you. I'm tired just thinking about it," Donghyuck complains as he's pushed outside.

"Cry about it in the car, you big baby."

Renjun stops pushing him when they reach Renjun's parked car. It's a brown, wood-sided, 1984 Chrysler minivan that seats six. It's an old car — gifted to him by his dad as a graduation gift, and Renjun adores it.

"We're all ready to go," Jisung calls out.

Chenle lays Donghyuck's bag in the car's back row seats along with everyone else's bag before taking a seat in the middle row with Jisung and pulling a pair of headphones over his ears.

"Great. Hyuck, you're in the front with me." Renjun pats him on the shoulder before getting in and starting the car up.

Donghyuck makes his way around the car to the passenger side, getting in and making himself comfortable after clicking his seatbelt. If he weren't still half asleep, he'd be awed at how they saved the passenger seat for him, knowing it's his favorite spot in the car. Right now, he's too tired for that, so he closes his eyes and listens to Jisung and Renjun go back and forth in a game of 'I Spy' with other cars on the road.

The remaining portion of the road trip following Donghyuck's nap was very *lively*, to say the least. A snack run to the gas station was followed by two hours of karaoke and a short pit stop at a burger joint that gave you bottomless fries with any order. After putting back two strawberry milkshakes and endless trays of fries, Donghyuck was feeling more like himself — more alive.

"I'm Stuffed," Jisung announces after collapsing back into the car and stretching out so that his body takes up the entire row.

"Hi stuffed, I'm Chenle, now scoot over."

Donghyuck turns in the passenger seat to watch Chenle wrestle Jisung into an upright position so that he can get his spot back.

"Go away, I'm comfortable," Jisung whines like a child being forced to wake up for school as Chenle successfully shoves him over.

"You're so annoying," Chenle huffs as Jisung stretches out his legs so that they're over his lap.

"Your face is annoying," Jisung bites back, immediately dodging when Chenle aims to smack him.

"You're both annoying, case closed. Now shut up so I can hear my music."

Renjun effectively stops the bickering in the backseat by turning up his BlueTooth speaker, earning groans from everyone in the car — including Donghyuck — as his *'sad boy hours'* playlist starts.

"Oh my god, Renjun, give someone else access to the speaker."

Jisung complains from the backseat, reaching forward to grab the speaker only to be met with Renjun slapping his hand away.

"My car, my playlist."

Jisung groans loudly in protest, turning to Chenle for backup and giving up when realizing Chenle put his headphones on to drown out everyone in the car — especially Jisung.

"Fine, but when we make it to the beach house and everyone is crying, you're going to hear it from Jaemin."

Renjun ignores Jisung, turning the volume of his speaker up to its maximum volume. Emotional words of pain and heartbreak fill the car and everyone is silent, except for Renjun who softly sings along with the lyrics under his breath.

Donghyuck turns his head to stare out the window, letting his head rest against the warmed glass as he watches trees, shops, and other cars pass by. The emotional lyrics of the songs playing begin to reach into his mind, reaching farther until grasping his heart and *squeezing* with every pained word.

Three songs in, Donghyuck's eyes burn and the view outside his window becomes bleary. He isn't sure when the songs went from just being words to being relatable, but there was no going back now. His eyes sting from a combination of the tears welling up there and his refusal to blink. If he blinks — the tears will fall — and they won't stop.

*"But you didn't have to cut me off*

*Make out like it never happened and that we were nothing*

*And I don't even need your love*

*But you treat me like a stranger and that feels so rough"*

The lyrics of the current song playing feels like a slap across the face. Donghyuck blinks — stunned — and the first tear falls. The song feels like an attack, not because he can relate to the artist singing, but because he can relate to the person that the music artist is singing to.

Another tear falls.

*'I cut him off.'*

Another tear follows.

*'I acted as if nothing happened, and we became nothing.'*

The tears begin spilling over uncontrollably and it's like a dam has burst behind Donghyuck's eyes as his thoughts continue to torment him of the things he's done — the horrible, unforgivable things. Guilt and pain mix as sobs claw at his throat, desperately trying to escape.

*'I treated him like a stranger. After everything he did for me, I treated him — my best friend — like nothing more than a stranger.'*

Donghyuck can't help it when a sob escapes. He can't help it when his shoulders begin to shake with the weight of his guilt. And he definitely can't help it when he completely breaks down right there in the passenger seat of Renjun's car.

He doesn't notice when the music stops. Nor does he realize that the car has pulled over to the side. Not until Renjun is opening his door and hugging him. The embarrassment of the situation only makes him cry harder, but his friends are there comforting him.

Renjun is hugging him tight in his arms. Jisung's hand is smoothing down his hair comfortingly. Chenle is rubbing his back in soothing circles.

No one speaks. No one asks Donghyuck why he's crying, knowing that would only worsen things. Instead, they all continue to comfort him while pulled over at another gas station.

Donghyuck isn't sure how long he's crying for before his sobs are reduced to light sniffles. His eyes still sting, but tears are no longer flowing. Previous tears streak his cheeks, leaving dried lines in their wake. He's far from okay, but he can't say that without having to explain why.

None of his other friends know about what happened. At least, he doesn't think any of them do. He never opened up to anyone about the situation. How could he? Looking back at it, he made such a prick move and can't bear the judgment he would get for that.

A heavy blanket of silence hangs over the four of them as they wait for Donghyuck to calm down. When his sniffles fade to soft, uneven breaths and his body stops shaking, he chances a glance up at his friends. He's met with three sets of concerned eyes that all seem to swim with relief upon seeing Donghyuck has calmed down.

Renjun is the first to speak.

"How about we all go into the gas station for a quick bathroom break and snack spree to carry us over for the rest of the ride? Does that sound good?"

Everyone nods at the proposition before hopping out of the car. Donghyuck knows that the offer to take a bathroom break is posed mainly at him so that he can freshen up by washing his face. And he does just that.

The water from the bathroom sink is cold, but it's just what he needs to calm the puffy redness around his eyes and wash away his tears. After patting his face dry with a paper towel, he feels admittedly a little better — and looks better too. He would have hated to pull up at the beach house looking like a trainwreck, so he's thankful for the pit stop.

When he steps out of the bathroom, Jisung grabs his attention by waving around an unnecessarily large bag of gummy bears.

"Hyuck! Look! Look what I found!"

Donghyuck couldn't help but laugh at his friend making a scene over a bag of candy.

"Who needs *that many* gummy bears?"

Jisung beamed at him, holding the bag out to him with two arms and replying, "you do."

If it weren't for the fact that he already cried all his tears out in the car, Donghyuck would shed a tear right now. He accepts the three-pound bag of gummy bears, shaking his head at it with a small smile.

"Thanks, Sungie. I'll think about you at my next dentist appointment after eating all of this."

Jisung's smile grows impossibly wide as if the thought of that delights him.

"Good. Now come on, we've got a beach to get to."

He lets Jisung drag him back to the car where Renjun and Chenle are already waiting. Chenle is halfway through a sprite and working on a sandwich, his headphones back on, eyes on his phone. Renjun is sipping an energy drink, smiling at Donghyuck when he settles back into the passenger seat.

"In half an hour, we'll be living it up on the beach. It's a straight shot from here. Say it with me guys, Beach vacation! Beach vacation! Beach vacation!"

Jisung and Chenle join in, chanting, "*Beach vacation!*" from the backseat. Now everyone's looking at him, eyes urging him to join in as their excited chanting continues. And well, Donghyuck can't leave his friends hanging on a group chant. So he joins in, adding a fist pump after each chant.

"Beach vacation! Beach vacation! Beach vacation!!"

Donghyuck's mood lifts as the ride continues with Jisung and Chenle playing rock paper scissors over some undoubtedly stupid bet in the backseat, and Renjun drumming his hands on the wheel to the beat of classical rock hits. Any possible remaining sourness in his mood is completely thrown out the metaphorical window of his mind when they finally arrive at the beach house.

Calling the house awaiting them 'beautiful' would be an understatement. No words in Donghyuck's vocabulary come even close to being able to describe the structure before his

eyes. It's not particularly a high-end luxury status residence, but it's nicer than any place he's ever stayed.

The house has two stories and is mounted on a base with two slots for parking underneath, one slot already taken by what Donghyuck recognizes as Jaemin's yellow, soft top Jeep Wrangler. The exterior of the beach house is painted an aqua queen with a white roof and detailing. The windows are big and look like they let a lot of light in.

After stepping out of the car, Donghyuck notices that straight back from the house is the beach. If they were to walk out the back door, It would be a straight shot to the warm sand and salty ocean. A wooden gazebo, painted white, sits not too far off from the house's side, furnished with an outdoor table set complete with wicker chairs and cushions that match the aqua green color of the house.

Chenle insists on grabbing Donghyuck's bag, leaving him to walk empty-handed. When they climb the stairs to reach the door, they find the front door already open with only the screen door between them. Since his hands are empty, Donghyuck tries the screen door and pulls it open when he finds it unlocked, keeping it held open for the three males to walk in before him.

When he does step inside, he finds his jaw falling so low that he worries it might detach and fall to the floor. The inside of the beach house is even more stunning than the outside, the decor maintaining the same aqua green and white color palette.

"Wow, this place is... wow."

Donghyuck can't form any more advanced thoughts, speaking to no one in particular as he looks around. The furniture has a very modern, beachy kind of charm. Starfish, anchors, netting, and sea creature wall-hangings and prints grace the walls and indoor furnishings. It leaves Donghyuck wondering what the rooms are like.

Before Donghyuck can slip further into curiosity, a loud, excited screech is breaking him from his thoughts. He catches two figures quickly descending the steps that lead to the second floor out of his peripheral vision.

“My babieeeeeeeeees!!”

Donghyuck knows that voice anywhere, but he catches on too late and falls right into the trap that is Lee Jen0’s arms. He can hardly breathe through the constricting hug and heaves a breath when he is released. He doesn’t turn away in time to avoid his face being grabbed in Jen0’s hands, kisses being pressed onto his forehead and cheeks, the way an aunt you haven’t seen in a while would do.

“Jenooooooooo, stoppppppppp.” Donghyuck whines, ripping himself out of Jen0’s loving clutch. “Now I have to wash my face, thanks a lot.”

“Shut up, I missed you.” Jen0 turns his attention towards Renjun who immediately breaks into a run to avoid the affectionate greeting of their loving mom friend, Jen0.

“Stay away, Jen0! You won’t get me this time!”

Renjun runs, followed by Chenle and Jisung who also want to avoid the routine Jen0 greeting. They scatter like ants and Jen0 runs after Renjun first.

“Get back here, you three! Don’t you run from your mother!”

Donghyuck watches Jen0 chase Renjun around the sofa for a while before looking towards Jaemin who’d come down the stairs with Jen0.

“Good to see you, Hyuck.” Jaemin gives him a sweet smile and Donghyuck happily returns it.

“Same to you. You have no idea how much I’ve missed you guys.”

A loud thud momentarily grabs their attention. Jen0 successfully manages to grab hold of Renjun and tackles him to the floor. Donghyuck looks away, leaving Renjun to meet his



affection-filled fate.

“We’ve missed you guys too. I especially miss you all here to balance out Jeno’s fussy, smothering, mom-like behavior. When we’re all together, he gets to use his mom-friend abilities to their full extent.”

Donghyuck nods, understanding that. Jeno further proves Jaemin’s point when he successfully scoops Chenle up next.

“Anything new with you two?” Donghyuck is referring to Jaemin and Jeno with his question. Indirectly questioning how their relationship is progressing.

“Not much out of the ordinary, just our normal dynamic going on. We got a puppy together, but it’s back at our place with a sitter.” Jaemin pauses to watch Jeno wrestle with Jisung before continuing, “Other than that, nothing new. I guess none of us have changed much at all since we were last together.”

“Very nice.”

“Want to see pictures?” Jaemin already starts unlocking his phone, anticipating Donghyuck’s nod. He opens an album dedicated to photos of him and Jeno with said new puppy. The photos are all cute, very wholesome.

Donghyuck spaces out, nodding at the explanations Jaemin gives about the photos, but not fully listening. As he stares at the cute couple-y photos, his mind wanders. He still remembers the day that Jeno and Jaemin shared the news to the group chat that they were officially dating. It was about two months into their first college semester. The feedback from everyone was so positive.

He felt like a clown that day. That was the day all of his ‘*what if...*’ thoughts started. He was stupid to turn away the opportunity to date his best friend, especially when two of their friends came out as a couple not long after. It proved that their friend group was accepting and not judgemental. Donghyuck should have known that already, but he was, is, and will

probably continue to be — a clown. Their friend group is a safe place, but he caused unnecessary hostility between himself and his best friend.

Jaemin is still talking about the pictures, but all Donghyuck hears is circus music playing on a loop in his head as he reflects on his past actions. He snaps himself out of his mini trance by reminding himself that it's all behind him now. He ruined things and it's too late to try fixing them. Donghyuck hasn't seen *him* in a year and is pretty sure that after their last interaction, he won't be seeing *him* ever again.

“So what do you think, Hyuck? Adorable, right?”

Donghyuck nods, suddenly remembering he was supposed to be looking at pictures of his friends' couple-y pet. “Yeah, super adorable. Might have to get one of my own.”

Jaemin gives him another sweet smile at that, putting his phone away before turning to where Renjun, Chenle, and Jisung are sprawled out on the floor from Jen0's prior attack.

“Ok everyone, I'm going to show you to your room. Since you guys came later, us early arrivals got the first pick. There are three bedrooms, all spacious, and all upstairs. One room is already occupied by Jen0 and me, and the other two are open for more additions. There will be two rooms of two and one room of three since there is an odd number of us.”

After Jaemin finished his explanation, Jen0 came by with a cup of popsicle sticks and took up speaking, “Everyone will draw a stick to decide which room arrangement you're getting. If you draw the red stick, you'll be added to the room for two. Everyone who doesn't draw the red stick will be put together in the room for three.”

Everyone nods and Renjun starts, drawing a stick and holding it up to reveal it is plain. He looks at Donghyuck and crosses his fingers, chanting, “Please let me be roomed with Hyuck, Please let me be roomed with Hyuck!”

Jisung draws a stick slowly for dramatic effect, holding the stick up proudly. There's no sign of red.

“Yay, I’m gonna room with Renjun! Hyuck please draw the other blank one so the three of us can room together, pleaseeeeeee!”

“Yeah, please draw the blank one so I don’t have to be in a room with those two,” Chenle playfully groans as if in agony.

Donghyuck shakes his head and laughs before crossing his fingers, on one hand, reaching into the cup with the other when Jeno brings it over. At first, he thinks it’s plain, but then he turns the stick upside down to reveal the tip is painted red. It had been hidden by the darkness of the cup.

“That means you don’t even need to draw, Chenle. You’re with us, ha!” Jisung teases Chenle while pulling him closer to him and Renjun.

“Alright guys, grab your bags and follow me upstairs,” Jaemin speaks over his shoulder as he ascends the steps, the rest of them following behind with Jeno closing the line.

There are three different doors. Jaemin points to one in the middle, “ This one is Jeno and I’s room, so you can find us if you need anything.” He then steered them all to the door on the right side, opening it to reveal a room with a double bed and a single one.

“Beds will have to be shared. Usually when my aunt rents this place out, not that much space is needed. We’ve all piled up between just two beds before though, so this is no biggie. The beds have lots of space. You guys will just have to decide amongst yourselves who’s gonna take which —”

Before Jaemin can finish, Chenle is diving for the single bed. “Dibs!”

“Jokes on you, me and Sungie like to cuddle anyway!” Renjun points back as he and Jisung dive onto the double bed, lightly bouncing,

Donghyuck feels a little bummed for a minute, kind of wishing he would have drawn a plain stick. Being in a room alone sounded lonely when compared to this sight.

“Your turn, Hyuck. To your new room for the summer.” Jaemin pulls him along and Donghyuck steals a glance back at the room the other three males are in.

“Can’t one of them stay in this room with me? I’m sure Chenle would love to. I don’t want a room all by myself.”

Jaemin lets go of his hand before raising an eyebrow at him, “What are you talking about? No one is by themselves. I told you, two in two rooms, and three in one room.”

Donghyuck furrows his brows in confusion. He heard Jaemin say that earlier, but he doesn’t understand how Jaemin is getting seven out of six. “But if you and Jen0 are rooming together, and they all just went into a room together, who —”

Donghyuck’s question dies in his throat and he freezes in his spot like a deer in headlights. He’s staring straight ahead, unblinking at the form laying on the double bed placed in the room.

“Try to keep it down, he pulled an all-nighter before our trip down here and then couldn’t sleep in the car so he’s napping. He’s been out for a little while now though, so he should be up soon and then you can hang out,” Jen0 says in a hushed voice.

Donghyuck is carefully ushered into the room by Jen0. He wants to turn around and *run* — wants to *beg* one of the others to switch rooms with him. But he can’t do that. He would have to explain his actions if he did that, and he doesn’t want to explain that situation to anyone. *Ever* .

Jen0 and Jaemin shut the door behind Donghyuck, “ *To keep any outside noise from waking him* ” , before retreating to their room.

He wants to convince himself that this isn't *real* — that this isn't happening. But it is real. All the way down to the last detail. The scent of peaches confirms the *realness* of the male lying asleep in front of him. It's Mark's favorite vape flavor, Donghyuck remembers.

The most real part of this all is Mark laying on the bed. Dressed in one of his signature comfortable-looking sweaters and dark jeans. He's laying on top of all the blankets, one arm wrapped around his pillow, hair messy. Donghyuck realizes with every passing second that this is for real. Mark, the last person he expected to see... ever again — is now napping right in front of him.

As if sharing a room isn't bad enough, they have to share a bed. Donghyuck wants to bang his head on the wall at the thought. Angry, flashing red sirens and alarms are going off in his head. This is all very dangerous, but he doesn't know what to do about it.

And so, he does the only thing he can think to do. He begins unpacking the very few things he brought, unloading clothes into the dresser drawers quietly. It takes all of ten minutes for him to finish unpacking completely. And then, he's right back to not knowing what he's supposed to do.

Twenty-five minutes in, Donghyuck feels like a creep after just standing in place watching Mark sleep. It probably shouldn't have taken him this long to feel creepy, but it can't be helped. Even though he'll never admit it if asked — He misses Mark. *So bad.*

He doesn't even want to admit it to himself, but he misses his former best friend so much. Staring at Mark's sleeping form makes Donghyuck remember the great cuddles that Mark always gave him. All he wants to do is crawl into bed beside the sleeping male and put himself into his arms. But he can't do that. No. No. No. He definitely can't do such a thing.

So instead, Donghyuck turns to open their room door and does what he does best — *runs from his problems.*

He runs to Renjun, Jisung, and Chenle's shared room only to find the three males passed out. Renjun and Jisung are a tangle of limbs on their bed, snuggled up to one another and snoring. Chenle is fast asleep in his bed, laid out on his stomach with an arm under his head instead of the pillow and headphones over his ears. It makes sense for them to be tired after the drive, especially Renjun since he did all the driving.

Donghyuck suddenly regrets sleeping through half of the ride, because maybe then he could be napping with them. They look too comfortable to bother, so he goes next door to Jeno and Jaemin's door, hesitating to knock. He doesn't want to disturb them, but he needs a distraction, so he knocks.

There is no answer at first, so he knocks again.

Nothing.

He figures they are probably sleeping too and heaves a sigh as he makes his way downstairs, opting for sitting in the living room to watch tv. Upon reaching the end of the steps, he sees that he isn't the only one with that idea.

Jaemin is relaxing on the sofa with a pillow under his arms, turning his head at the sound of Donghyuck's footsteps.

"Oh, Hey Hyuck. Didn't think any of you would be up for a while."

"I napped in the car."

Jaemin hums as if to say "*that makes sense*" while sitting up slightly.

"Where's Jeno?" Donghyuck questions, noticing a lack of the other male at Jaemin's side.

"At the grocery store. We're going to do burgers for dinner and go down to the beach after."

Donghyuck nods. The idea sounds wonderful until he realizes what "we" includes Mark. The fact that Mark won't be asleep forever hits him full force and suddenly, he's not feeling so great.

“Want to talk about it?”

Donghyuck looks up at that, being met with a knowing look. Jaemin may be the most chill and quietest one out of the friend group, but he is also the most observant. Nothing gets past him. He always knows what’s going on even if he doesn’t say it.

Donghyuck hesitates. On one hand, he doesn’t want to share what happened with anyone. But on the other hand, Jaemin is the best at giving advice and Donghyuck needs to get things off his chest.

With a sigh, he finally caves, “Yeah, I do.”

Jaemin and Donghyuck end up in the gazebo beside the house, slouching in the wicker chairs there with two glasses of strawberry lemonade as Donghyuck lets everything out.

He tells Jaemin everything.

It pains Donghyuck to share the personal story, but he doesn’t leave anything out. He tells Jaemin about what happened when he and Mark stepped outside that night for a “smoke break.” He explains how he and Mark went for a short walk away from the rented motel room for privacy, how Mark confessed to him under a poorly lit street lamp.

He mentions how he’d never seen Mark look so conflicted, so nervous, so *hesitant* with him before. He even tells Jaemin about how he assured Mark that he could tell him *anything*, only to push him away for what he said. He tells Jaemin about how he rejected Mark, how he told him that he’d ruined things between them. He finishes off the story by explaining why Mark left their fun motel sleepover that night — explained how he left Mark under that dull street lamp and told him to *stay the fuck away* from him.

When Donghyuck finishes, he looks up to meet Jaemin’s face. He’s prepared for the judgemental looks he fears so much but is surprised that he is met with a different expression. Something unreadable.

Jaemin is quiet for a minute, just staring at him. It's so quiet around them that Donghyuck can hear the ocean's breeze whispering at him from where he sits. He feels naked under Jaemin's silent, searching gaze.

Suddenly, Jaemin leans forward slightly, pushing his drink to the side.

“Are you disgusted by the idea of Jen0 and I dating?”

Donghyuck hurries to shake his head and even opens his mouth to protest, only to be silenced by more questions being fired at him.

“Does the idea of him and I being together make you upset? Do you hate us for it? Think we should be cast out of the friend group for having feelings for each other?”

Donghyuck shakes his head profusely. He would never think like that of his friends and feels hurt that Jaemin would even worry about these kinds of things.

“Well then, Is it the other way around? Do you think all of us are bad friends, Hyuck? Think we are a bunch of judgemental pricks that have no consideration for our friend's feelings?”

Donghyuck has heard enough. He's upset now. He slams his hands down on the table between them and frowns as he speaks, “Of course not! We're all best friends, why the hell do you think I would see you guys like that?!”

Jaemin leans back into his seat, looking satisfied with the point he has made.

“You tell me, Hyuck. Why the hell would *you* see us like that?”



Anger flares up inside Donghyuck, and he's ready to explode — then a wave of realization hits him.

Jaemin swears he can see a lightbulb flicker to life above Donghyuck's head when he finally gets the point that Jaemin was making.

"Oh," is all Donghyuck can say as he realizes where Jaemin was going with those questions. "*Oh,*" he repeats. And he already sees Jaemin's next question coming, yet he has no answer.

"So... If you don't think that way of us, then why act so harshly as if we would have put you down for your feelings? Why act as if we would judge? You didn't have to like Mark back, but why outcast him for being honest with you? You always told him he could tell you anything, but that wasn't very true was it?"

Donghyuck doesn't know what to say. He feels like a spotlight is being shone directly on him, and he can't escape it.

"I want you to ask yourself why you acted the way that you did, Donghyuck. Ask yourself what made you act so harshly towards someone that has never done wrong by you. Ask yourself what it is you are so afraid of."

Donghyuck stays quiet, listening. It's all he can do right now.

"And when you figure out the answers, I'm not the one you need to tell." Jaemin sips his lemonade after the statement, eyeing Donghyuck over the glass. "Talk to him, Donghyuck. You made a mistake, but mistakes can be fixed. Whether you choose to make that fix is up to you."

Donghyuck nods solemnly.

Jaemin's words bounce around in his head as he sips his lemonade. He sits in silence with Jaemin across from him, letting Donghyuck sort out his thoughts.

He continues to think to himself in silence even when Jaemin leaves him alone to go help Jen0 when he pulls up with the groceries. Donghyuck isn't sure how long he sits in that spot, but by the time he re-enters the house, the delicious smell of something cooking reaches his nose and he sneaks a peek into the kitchen at Jen0 and Jaemin.

Jen0 spots him and smiles at him, waving a spatula at him, "Don't even think about trying to sneak any taste tests. Burgers will be up and ready in a few."

Donghyuck returns a small smile and returns to his mission at hand, heading up the stairs. On any other occasion, he would have swiped something from Jen0's cooking spread, but he wasn't allowing himself to get side-tracked. Not now.

He walked towards the room he and Mark are sharing, holding his breath and bracing himself before turning the doorknob and entering. He expected Mark to be there, but still isn't prepared for the sight of Mark physically being there and it shows on his face.

Mark is awake and staring back at him, bringing his vape pen down from his lips and blowing a thick cloud of vapor up into the air. For the first time in his life, Mark says nothing to him. Not even a '*hey dude*' or '*what's up*'. The silence in the air is so thick, Donghyuck thinks he could cut it with a knife if he tried. He nearly chickens out, but then settles for just being blunt.

"Want to go for a walk?"

Donghyuck expects a hard *no* — deserves one, even. Instead, he gets a small nod and a small sliver of hope as Mark gets up from the bed and mutters, "lead the way."

It all feels very surreal, talking about "*the incident*" for the second time that day while sitting right at the beach's shoreline with Mark, their pants rolled up to their knees, the bare parts of their legs submerged in the salty ocean's water.

Donghyuck starts with the most important thing on his list of things to talk about. Making sure he looks Mark in the eyes — even though it fills him with guilt — he says what he should have said a long time ago.

“I’m sorry. Genuinely, I am *so so so sorry*. For the pain, I caused you, for the harshness, and most of all for being a bad friend. I’ve been thinking about why I acted the way I did, and I have come up with the realization that I have no valid reason. I had no reason to worry or freak out the way I did. I reacted stupidly because I am stupid. It’s not an excuse and my actions are not justified. I don’t blame you if you don’t want to accept my apology, but I want you to know that *I am* sorry.”

Mark looks away from Donghyuck when he finishes his apology, now staring at where their legs are visible through the blue waters. The silence is suffocating, but Mark doesn’t know what to say. This was the last thing he expected.

“When you rejected me, was it part of your stupid freaking out too, or do you just dislike me?”

Donghyuck isn’t prepared for Mark to speak and is even less prepared for the question that comes out of his mouth. He doesn’t know how to answer, so he just rambles from his mind as thoughts come to him.

“I do like you, I do. You’re great in every way, always have been. I was just... stupid. I promise I do like you, please believe me.”

“In what way, Donghyuck?”

Donghyuck is caught off guard by both the question and the fact that Mark used his whole name. Usually, Mark calls him ‘Hyuck’ like everyone else or uses a series of pet names. It should make sense though, Things are different between them now.

“I don’t...” Donghyuck trails off, “I don’t know how to explain it, and I think that’s part of what I was so afraid of. Not knowing. I’ve never felt these kinds of feelings towards anyone

and it's scary, I don't understand what I feel, but I am done running from my scared feelings. I want to try to embrace my feelings and understand them instead of running away."

Mark is looking at him again and Donghyuck feels spurred on to continue.

"I know I don't deserve it, but if you are willing to give me another chance, I would like to figure out the answer to your question with you."

Mark stares at him and Donghyuck fills with panic at the unnerving silence. He feels his heartbeat jump to his throat as he waits patiently for Mark to speak.

"I would be willing to give you another chance If you're willing to give *us* a chance."

Donghyuck's entire body relaxes with a relieved sigh and he tries hard not to smile too big, but he fails and it's okay because Mark is smiling with him.

Everything feels surreal.

The way Mark pulls him in for a hug — the way they end up falling into the and wrestling — the way they both end up soaked from what started as innocent flicks of water in each others' direction.

When they return to the beach house, they're hand-in-hand and soaked from head to toe and have sand in places that no one wants sand to be.

Everyone is getting plates passed around when they step inside. No one questions them, everyone looking oddly relieved in a way. Donghyuck realizes that him cutting Mark off probably wasn't as discreet as he thought he was making it, and based on how unsurprised Jaemin seemed by his confessions earlier, he realizes maybe his friends already *knew*.

“You guys go shower and then come eat. Looks like you already had fun at the beach without us, but oh well, you’re coming back out after we eat so that we can all hang out.” Jeno scolds them from the kitchen, looking nowhere near threatening in his ‘Kiss The Cook’ apron.

Mark laughed and called out, “Okay mom,” before running upstairs to shower. Since no one else was in the showers right now, they were both able to take separate showers and be out quickly.

Everyone sat in the living room to eat, all wearing board shorts and varying t-shirts that looked like they never saw the light of day outside of this occasion. Jisung takes a bite out of Donghyuck’s burger and Mark steals a handful of his fries.

Donghyuck swats them away like flies but laughs, enjoying this familiar feeling. Like everything is right again. The lingering dark cloud that had been hanging over his mind for the past year is now more like a thin fog. Not all of his guilt has gone away, but a big burden has been lifted from his chest and he feels like he can *breathe* again.

After dinner, they’re all piling out of the back door like a wild herd, taking an inflatable beach ball to the volleyball net set up over a sandy playing area. It starts as a silly game, but competitiveness breaks out and suddenly there is a 2v2 tournament going on. Donghyuck finds himself sitting on a blanket with Mark next to him, watching Chenle and Renjun play a heated game of beach volleyball against Jeno and Jaemin. Jisung, on the other hand, wanders around picking up seashells and rocks, putting them into his pockets.

“I’m going to paint them,” he explains when Donghyuck gives him a questioning look.

It’s dark out and the breeze is just right, making the outing perfect. Donghyuck mentally takes a snapshot of the things going on around him, committing everything about this moment to memory.

“You know, I’m glad you came. Honestly, I worried you weren’t going to show up because of me being here, but I’m glad you did come because we all needed this. It may sound weird, but I feel like we are the best versions of ourselves when we are with each other, you know?” Mark’s voice is calm, soothing in a way as he exhales a thin trail of peach vapor into the air before passing his pen to Donghyuck.

Donghyuck knows exactly what he means and agrees as he accepts the vape pen, bringing it to his lips and taking in a sweet inhale before exhaling a less graceful cloud of vapor broken up by short coughs. It's been a minute since he last did this. A whole year to be exact, considering he only ever felt comfortable smoking with Mark.

"I get what you mean, and yeah, I'm glad I came too. And I'm glad that you came too. You could have easily decided to avoid coming for the same reason as me, but you didn't. Neither of us avoided coming, maybe that is even more of a sign that we are just meant to be together?"

Mark nods and Donghyuck passes his vape pen back to him.

"Yeah, maybe it was a sign from the universe. Maybe it's just fate."

It's 3:00 A.M. by the time they are all dragging themselves back into the house and calling dibs on shower rotations. Jisung excitedly suggests a movie night for after-shower rotations and everyone agrees. They compile a list of movie ideas and drag blankets to the living room floor.

Seven showers and four rounds of *rock paper scissors* later — 'Mulan' is playing on the tv, courtesy of Jisung winning. Watching a movie in the dark after eating good and playing on the beach turned out to be the perfect recipe for sleep, seeing as everyone was snoring not even twenty minutes into the movie.

Donghyuck could feel himself drifting off, reflexively scooting closer to Mark. For a second, he panics.

*'Mark probably doesn't want me this close to him. Sure he forgave me, but that doesn't mean I get to be so selfish.'*

He thinks this to himself and almost pulls away. As if reading his mind, Mark pulls Donghyuck in closer — a silent cue yelling at Donghyuck's mind to *shut up*.

Donghyuck doesn't pull away. Not this time. He snuggles in closer, burying his face into Mark's sweater the way he loved doing so much. The scent of peaches and a spicy soap fill his senses and Donghyuck absolutely melts into the warmth of Mark's arms.

If you'd told Donghyuck a month ago that he would be happily tucked into Mark's arms again, he would have dismissed the idea as impossible, laughed even. But right now, as he's being lulled to sleep by the sound of Mark's heartbeat — he can't help but wonder how he ever went without this.

Here, with all of his friends, he was ready to have the best possible summer vacation. But for Donghyuck, summer paradise isn't the beach house or even the beautiful beach outback. For him — paradise is in peach-scented smoke and warm arms. For him, Paradise is in Mark Lee.

## End Notes

Comments are always appreciated, I love to read them <3

Find me on twitter/send a cc @milkisbubu !!

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