

Friend from the wild side

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Friend from the wild side

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Summary

Can a rich young master soften the heart of a street gang leader who doesn't want love?

Chapter 1



“I told you to stop coming here.” Pete shuffled uncomfortably at the sound of those words. He hated hearing them. “I know, I heard you.” “Then go home! This isn’t a place for you.” The man sat beside him, bumping into Pete’s shoulder. Pete knew it; a street gang’s hide out with violent men and motorcycles was no place for a preppy rich kid like him, but he couldn’t help himself. He wanted to see Ae, even if it meant he’d be in danger. Pete fell in love with the man the minute he saved his life, and he wanted him by his side.

~a week ago~

“Come on, we’re friends, remember? We used to hang out all the time in middle school!” Trump wrapped his arm around Pete’s shoulder and squeezed him tightly. Pete could smell the alcohol on his breath and his stomach immediately turned. He felt nauseated just by being

in Trump's presence as the memories of his middle school days were just awful. There was no hanging out as friends. Trump bullied Pete for lunch, for money, for things and favours, making his school days miserable, until he found himself a group of like minded friends and they turned violent. Pete started spending breaks hidden behind the lockers or in janitor's closet in hopes to avoid his tormentors.

"I have to go home." Pete muttered quietly as he tried to move away, but Trump was holding him tight as his other friends snickered around. "We're kinda hungry, how about you buy us some snacks? For old times sake." Trump harshly pinched his cheek. Pete flinched. "No, I really have to go home, mom is waiting for me and-" "Lend me some money, I know you have it. I'll pay you back." Trump lied as he opened his palm in a 'gimme' gesture, nudging Pete in the ribs. Pete started to tremble and finally managed to wiggle himself free and he started backing off. "Come on, let's have some fun. Don't you like this? Having boys around you? Come here you little faggot!" Trump's fake smile disappeared and he charged after Pete who stumbled as he tried to run.

Unfamiliar with the area Pete rushed between the buildings until he got stopped by a railing and a good ten metre drop beneath it. There was nowhere else to run as the group approached him and he saw a flash of silver in Trump's hand. That bastard had a knife and a sinister grin on his face as he inched closer, making Pete hug the railing. He quickly looked down, knowing if he jumped he'd probably die and he started to tear up. A roar of a motorcycle made the group turn around in shock and Pete watched as the biker turned around, charging straight at them. It seemed like chaos when he was suddenly grabbed by the arm and tossed at the backseat of the motorcycle by a stranger that didn't seem to care for helmets. Pete grabbed the man's waist just in time as he quickly sped up and drove off with him, his open jacket slapping Pete in the face.

After what seemed to be at least ten minutes the motorcycle slowed down and came to a full stop in front of a bus station. "Hey kid, you alright? Oi!" The man jerked his shoulder and Pete finally realised just how tightly he held on, his tears soaking up in the denim jacket in front of him. He quickly let go and wiped his snotty face into his own sleeve. "Yeah uhm... thank you." He hiccuped. "Don't thank me, just get off already." He tapped Pete's leg and the boy stepped off, finally getting a good look at his saviour's face. The guy was definitely older than him and looked kinda ragged, but Pete couldn't stop thinking how handsome that stranger was, with his thick brows and messy hair. His denim jacket had several cuts and safety pins as well as ironed on patches and messy handwritten lettering on the sleeves. His jeans were equally as ripped and his steel toed biker boots hugged his calves.

As Pete's eyes fell on the blood covered baseball bat attached to the guy's leg, another motorcycle parked just besides them with a guy who was definitely of the same bunch. "Where the fuck did you go Ae?! Have you forgotten that- who the hell is this kid?" The guy shouted. Pete's saviour, the man the other guy called Ae, clicked his tongue. "No one. Hey kid, take a bus and go home. There's bad guys lurking around." His friend snickered at that remark and kicked Ae's front wheel. "Let's go already." "Alright alright. Such a nag." He kicked off the stand of his motorcycle and the engine roared to life. A cloud of dust and dirt followed them as they drove off and Pete stared as they disappeared in the distance. He wanted to talk to the guy, thank him, but he was gone. As Pete got on the bus home, he leaned his face against a window and absentmindedly stared at his surroundings. For a brief

second he noticed several motorcycles parked by the entrance of an abandoned building, and one of them, was Ae's.

"I just wanted to see you." Pete sighed. The building was shabby with many broken windows boarded from the inside and several motorcycles parked just by the entrance. Pete never walked inside, but he could hear the voices and drunken laughter of at least ten people, and he saw a few of them as they walked outside for a smoke. They all gave Pete the stink eye whenever he appeared and sat on the ground in front of the building, hoping to catch a glimpse of the gang's charismatic young leader that stole his heart. It was on day 3 of his lurking around that Ae finally talked to him, and he was angry. He didn't shout but showed a clear displeasure of seeing Pete and shooed him away.

"Pete, seriously, just go home. I don't know what you're searching for, but it isn't here." Ae said as he cracked open a can of beer and took a big gulp. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and cursed quietly as he spilled some beer onto a patch on his jacket. With a little struggle he managed to rip the damaged thing off and tossed it in the bushes before using a lighter to seal the loose threads sticking out. "I'm not searching for anything. I just want to talk to you." Pete said as he pulled his knees closer and rested his chin on them. "About what? Besides, if any of my boys want to hurt you, I won't stop them and I won't protect you. You're not supposed to be here." "You saved my life, you're my hero." "Listen kid-" "Stop calling me kid!" Pete frowned. "I'm not a kid, I'm 17."

Ae scoffed. "That's still a kid, and you're still in your school uniform. Go. Home. Now." "No." "Damn it, Pete! What do you want from me?" Ae raised his voice slightly. Pete shrugged. "I don't know. I just... I can't stop thinking about you. I want to get to know you, and be by your side all the time. I don't care even if you're 30." He sighed. That last remark made Ae actually choke on his beer and he smacked Pete to the back of his head. "Hey, I'm not that old, I'm 21." "Ow! Sorry sorry." Pete rubbed his head; that slap hurt. He watched as a motorcycle parked besides the others and the rider took off the helmet. It was a girl, tall and blonde, and Pete gulped nervously as she started approaching them. He noticed how Ae smiled when she stopped just a few feet in front of them. It was then that Pete took a proper look on her face and saw a giant scar decorating a good half of it, as if some wild animal ripped her face. She was still beautiful even with the scar, and clearly Ae thought so too as he quickly stood up and tossed away the empty beer can.

She looked at Pete and raised a slashed eyebrow. "Who's the kid?" "Oh, he's just... it doesn't matter. Someone who's following me around." Ae smiled as he gave her a very tight hug and kiss on a cheek. She took his arm and they walked into the building, but not before Ae turned around and spoke to Pete one last time. "Go home, and stop coming here. If I see you again, I can't guarantee you'll walk out of here alive. I am no hero. I grabbed you on a whim." He frowned before he disappeared inside and Pete heard more commotion. Without hesitation Pete reached into the bush, searching for the fabric patch with the light of his phone until he found it and put it in the pocket before promptly running off towards the bus stop.

"I didn't think you'd come, Lisa. It's been a month. Is Jin not treating you well? Want me to beat him up?" Ae let her sit on his folded up jacket. He didn't even have to shoot a warning

glare towards the other guys as they all knew very well not to cross him when it comes to Lisa. They were not allowed to touch her, hit on her, or be inappropriate in any way. She was his sister after all, and Ae's fists defended her every single time. No one dared to go against their leader. Lisa shook her head. "No, he's absolutely wonderful. I just came to tell you the news. I'm pregnant!" She grinned. Ae pulled her into a hug but quickly retracted himself so he wouldn't press on her stomach. "Don't worry, I'm just two months, I'm still okay with your hugs. Now, tell me who that kid was."

Ae sighed as his excitement from her pregnancy faded when she asked about Pete. Ae shrugged. "I really don't know. A week ago he was bullied by some guys so I just tossed him on my bike and drove him away from the place. Then the next day he showed up here and comes every day just to see me, but I don't talk to him. You've seen him, you can tell what kind of a preppy posh rich kid he is. I can't be friends with that kind of person. It's not safe for him here, and I haven't really done anything heroic like he thinks. Young master like him doesn't belong to our world." Ae sighed, looking around. Everyone here was ragged, half crazy, violent and just generally not a good person. Still, those eight men and one woman stick together and protected one another without hesitation.

Lisa ruffled his hair, just like Ae has done to her when they were younger. "Aw, you are a hero. You might not realise but even now you're already protecting him by pushing him away so he wouldn't get hurt. Ae, even with all the shit you do, you're still a good person at heart. It wouldn't be bad for you to find someone..." Lisa looked around at the ruffians around them. "Someone nice. Next time perhaps don't push him away. If he wants to talk to you, then talk. Get to know each other. Besides, I can already tell he's your type when it comes to looks, isn't he?" She nudged Ae in the ribs and the young man felt his ears get warm. "Whatever. Next time I see him, I'll shoo him away just the same." Ae shook his head. But that was a lie. When the following day came and Pete paced around in front of the building, Ae felt a smile tickling his lip. He was glad to see him.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

How long has it been since Pete was genuinely excited about coming home? Definitely weeks, if not months or years. His parents were always too busy with work and their own lives that he barely saw them let alone talk to them, but there was one day of the year where they actually sat down with him at the dinner table and talked, and it was his birthday. Pete was trying to remember when was the last time he had a full conversation with his parents that consisted of more than just a greeting. Probably a month ago when they asked him what car he would like, as the one he had was apparently ‘outdated and uncool’ as his father called it. “Good evening, mom, dad.” Pete clasped his hands together in a polite way before kissing his mother on the cheek and giving his father a hug.

“We thought long and hard what to give you honey, and we decided this would be the most perfect present.” His mother smiled with the most vapid expression on her face as she gave him a small gift box. She clapped excitedly as he opened it only to be greeted by new car keys with the Audi logo in gold. “Isn’t it amazing? I know you said you’re okay with your current car, but this model is just so much better!” Pete put on a smile. If he was to ask how much better the car is, he knew his mother would just say something amongst the lines of ‘if it’s more expensive it must be better’. “And this is from me; I haven’t forgotten about you son.” Pete turned to his father who just nonchalantly handed him a plain birthday card with a platinum credit card tucked in its corner with his name on it.

“I checked your grades in school. Your mother and I are very pleased that you’re in the top of the class, so it’s only natural that you deserve a little treat.” His father smiled. Pete tapped the card, trying not to sigh. Expensive car and unlimited money in his account. Did his parents know what his hobbies were? What his favourite colour was? What he was doing every day besides school? He gulped and smiled even wider, nodding. “Thank you so much, I’m very happy.” That fake smile seemed to satisfy his parents even more and Pete listened as his mother sang a very out of tune happy birthday while the maid brought a fancy cake and he enjoyed a slice. He didn’t even finish it before his parents got up and left the house for some business again, leaving him by the table alone and miserable.

“Young master, would you like me to-“ Pete didn’t let the maid finish before wrapping a big portion into handkerchief and rushing to the garage to see his new car. He knew where to drive, he knew who he wanted to be with, and he knew his parents wouldn’t even look for him. He tried to drive safely and parked couple of blocks from the place he really shouldn’t be at just in case. His new black Audi wasn’t as noticeable as the previous white Benz after

all, but he still wasn't risking it by driving to that place. After all, the man warned him not to come. But they talked, they talked yesterday, and Pete could swear he saw Ae smile a little.

As he got out Pete looked over his shoulder every few steps, but wasn't sure what he would even do if someone attacked him. Cry, probably. He finally reached those few broken up benches in front of an old abandoned factory and sat down, staring at the motorcycles parked at its entrance. Ae's wasn't one of them, but Pete decided to wait, quietly and patiently, until the day turned into night and he felt drowsy. A sound of motorcycle roaring woke him up and he perked up as he saw it was the person he wanted to see the most. Pete's jaw dropped when he noticed Ae unstrapping the baseball bat off and holding it above a flaming barrel, the fire licking the wood for a moment. It was as if he had eyes at the back of his head, Ae turned around, his face turning into a scowl.

He quickly greeted the men inside before stomping over to the silhouette crouched on a bench and tapping his foot impatiently in front of Pete. He was still holding the bat, and Pete noticed it wasn't wood. It was metal, and suddenly the fire made sense. He was disinfecting it from blood. "Ae..." "Stop. Coming. Here." Pete sighed as he held a cloth wrapped cube in front of him. "I brought you a cake." "Wha...?" "Can Ae sit with me? Just for a moment? Please?" Pete glanced to the spot beside him. Ae did a quick look around before hesitantly sitting down beside him and accepting the package. It was slightly smushed but it was still delicious when a smear of cream got on his fingers and he licked it off. He was still mad that this kid followed him again, but for the day he was tired of arguing and shouting. "Why the cake?" Ae asked cautiously, picking at the sweet treat and stuffing little bites into his mouth.

"I'm 17." "You already told me that." "No, I mean today. It's my birthday; I'm 17." Pete shrugged. Ae tossed away the empty cloth before remembering he should have asked if Pete wants it back, but the boy didn't seem to care as the fabric hit the dirty ground. "Your parents will be worried about you if you're here. It's late." "My parents don't care." Pete sighed. "They gave me a car and money because they're too occupied with their own lives to even take any interest in their own son. I once stayed at my friend's house for a week, and they didn't even notice. They don't care about me. No one ever does." As Pete spoke his voice got progressively quieter until the last words came out as a mumble Ae could barely understand. "What about some friends? Or other family members?"

Pete shook his head and suddenly Ae understood. He understood why the boy got so fixated on him. He had no one by his side. But was coming here really a solution? It certainly wasn't safe. Ae tapped the bat against his steel toed boot. "I just beat someone up so badly he won't be able to walk or use his hands for the rest of his life. Do you still think I'm the one you should get close to?" He raised an eyebrow, but Pete didn't flinch. "You must have had a valid reason to do that." He muttered as he stared at the bat. "What if I hit you with it?" "You wouldn't." "How would you know?" "Because you saved me. And I think...I think whoever

you hurt, deserved it. He probably did some bad thing. I'm not saying it's legal or that it's right thing to do, but if it's justified, it's quite...understandable."

This time it was Ae who sighed. He dropped the bat to the ground and leaned back on the bench, hiding his surprise about how spot on Pete's deduction was. The guy he and his buddies just roughed up molested two little girls and got away from legal justice by faking mental illness while simultaneously bragging about it to his pub friends. It was there that Techno heard it on accident and told Ae about it. "You should go home, Pete. Go finish up your cake and-" "Please don't chase me away. Please...I want to be with you." "Why?" "I...I don't know." "You must have a reason!" "I don't know!" Pete raised his voice, trying not to cry. "I don't know why. I know I shouldn't be here, I know people here aren't the best bunch, I know! But I just...there's something about you that I can't explain. I can't stop thinking about you. And I got you something..."

Ae watched as Pete reached into his pocket and pulled out an expensive wallet with several credit cards and a stack of highly marked bank notes. It wasn't money he reached for though. It was the ornate fabric patch with the design of a swallow bird and a little spool of thread with needle that matched the colour of Ae's jacket. He looked at the place where he ripped away the old patch few days ago and then at the swallow patch; its size was just perfect even though the threads in it were a little frayed and not exactly neat. "Did you make this yourself?" He asked. Pete bashfully nodded before reaching for the jacket and holding the needle. "Can I?"

Chapter End Notes

My own mom forgot about my birthday yesterday. Neat.

Chapter 3

Whack! Pete hissed when a ruler hit his fingers and he straightened up, peeling his face off of the desk. The professor frowned at him and tapped her foot with arms folded. "Is my lecture so boring for you young man? Would you rather I sang you a lullaby? This is a place of higher education, not a slumber party in your kindergarten!" "I'm sor-" "Don't let me catch you sleeping again!" Pete rubbed his cheek, forcing himself to stop the yawn until the professor turned around and walked back to her desk. Tin nudged him with an elbow. "You okay?" "Yea." Pete nodded as he looked down at his now reddened fingers. "I haven't slept much last night. Can I see your notes?" Tin shuffled his notebook between them and waited until Pete finished scribbling his notes down before taking it back. By the time he took it, the bell rang and Pete groaned, letting his face hit the desk again.

"Oi, wake up, let's go get lunch." Tin managed to drag his friend out of the classroom and into the cafeteria where they silently ate as Pete wasn't in the mood for their usual chit chat. Since he started college he and Tin stuck to each other like glue, complaining about their families and generally ignoring anyone who wasn't on the same level academically as them, and what they had in each other was the closest thing to a best friend. If you even can have a best friend who's almost identical to you. "So what happened?" Tin wiped his mouth and pushed aside their empty plates before handing Pete a little roll on stick.

"Nothing much. I just didn't go home last night so I just drove around until I got tired and then slept like two hours in my car." The boy admitted as he rolled the cooling gel underneath his eyes to reduce puffiness. "Not that anyone would notice anyway; mom and dad went for business to Hawaii. Thanks." Pete tapped the product gently into the skin. "Why were you out anyway? You don't like night life." Tin pocketed the roll on again and pulled out his phone to play a game. "You know you can tell me, I won't spill." He muttered without looking up. Pete knew that very well; the two shared several secrets that would cause a very big trouble if they got out and agreed never to spill any of them or the other would do the same. Pete nodded, knowing he could trust Tin.

"I like this one guy but he's kind of a...I don't even know who he is to be honest. I know his name and age and that he rides a motorcycle, but that's it. He's criminal I think, possibly homeless too." Pete said as he picked on his watch. "I've been going to the spot where he and his fellows hang out but he doesn't really want me around. I just really want to see him all the time, it's annoying when he's the only thing I can think about these days. I don't think there's anything great about him besides the fact that he saved my life. Shit." A knob popped off of Pete's watch and he cursed before leaning under the table and searching for the piece. As he leaned down Tin gently kicked him in the chin and chuckled as the boy sat back up. "What was that for?" "For your stupidity. Don't you remember what this is called?" "Eh?" "Suspension bridge effect. You mistook the rush of fear and excitement for affection because your heart was beating fast, but not because you like him. More likely it was because you were in some sticky situation that got him to rescue you, right?"

“Aren’t you glad he stopped coming? I thought you didn’t want the kid to follow you around.” Pond raised an eyebrow. It’s been a week since that kid came and gave Ae some cake. Pond was just going out for a smoke when he saw his best friend and a leader holding hands with some neatly combed boy. Or at least he thought they held hands until he approached the duo and saw the boy stitching something to Ae’s jacket. He got spooked when Pond got close and accidentally jabbed the needle to Ae’s wrist, earning himself a quick scolding. He then muttered a quiet ‘see you tomorrow’ and run off, not to be seen again. Not the next day, not the following one, not even week later.

Pond noticed Ae often stretching his neck to peek out of the window and check if anyone is sitting here, but the bench remained empty and broken just as it was before. Ae brought the cigarette to his lips and sighed deeply as the smoke escaped his mouth. He kept telling Pete to stop coming, to leave him alone, but now that the clingy puppy was gone, Ae actually started to miss him a little. Certainly there was something cute and fresh about Pete that Ae didn’t really experience in his day to day life. His days were usually filled with beating up someone, speeding on his motorcycle, getting drunk and not caring about anyone’s feelings for that matter. “Hey Pond...” Ae played with the bird patch on his sleeve. “Wanna ride to the cliffside?” Pond chuckled and nodded. Cliffside meant an emotional talk on the beach with no one else around; a place and time where they could share private things without the gang listening.

Chapter 4

“Hey. I know you. You’re that kid that follows my brother around.” Pete nearly jumped out of his skin when a young woman approached him in the store, her hands holding a single jar of some sauce. She was really pretty, tall and blonde, and Pete instantly recognised her from the big gash on her face. In the daylight the scar looked so much more prominent, but it didn’t diminish her beauty at all. She didn’t seem to care how some people stared at her, and she smiled at the confused boy. “Uhm, your brother is...” “Ae. We’ve met briefly, remember? You sat outside of the pit.” “The pit...?” “That stinking hang out place. What are you doing here? I’ve been watching you for the past ten minutes just staring at this shelf. You okay?” She laughed, flinging her blonde hair over her shoulder. Pete had to admit the dye job on it was very good, it looked so natural.

“I’m hungry, but...I don’t know what any of this stuff is.” Pete admitted. The girl looked at him for a second, amused, until his expression told her he wasn’t joking. That boy was serious and she didn’t know if she should laugh or pity him. “Hey, do you like spaghetti? I’m about to cook lunch.” “Uhm...” “It’s fine, you can trust me. Just come.” She smiled and Pete couldn’t even protest as she dragged him away. The apartment they ended up in was quite nice though a bit small, almost the size of Pete’s bedroom. “Your name is Pete, right? Ae told me.” “Yes. And you are..?” “Lisa.” She smiled. “Come here, help me make the meatballs.” Lisa beckoned Pete into the kitchen where he stared at the bowl with minced meat, curious and confused. Pete rolled his sleeves up and hesitantly poked the meat with a spoon. “How?” “You’ve never made meatballs?” Lisa chuckled. “Wow, Ae was right. You’re totally a rich kid, hm?”

“We have a Michelin chef as a cook and maids. I never made myself so much as a sandwich.” Pete admitted as Lisa showed him how to form the little meatballs. After the little demonstration Pete finally plunged his hands into the meat mixture and squished it around, making many severely deformed meatballs. “Must be nice, growing up in a rich household. I haven’t had my own bed until I was 14 and Ae...” “You two don’t really look alike.” Lisa smiled as she gently fixed the meatballs into a nicer shape and tossed them into a pan to sear. “We’re not actual siblings. We grew up in the same neighbourhood and known each other since we were 3. You know this?” Lisa gestured towards her scarred face. “He helped me.”

Pete bit his lip. “Can I ask?” She paused briefly but nodded. “When I was 12, my mom remarried, and my stepdad was...just awful. Things escalated quickly and the bastard started beating me. One day he slammed my face against a burning stove. It just so happened that Ae came to hang out and saw what’s going on. Can you imagine? A little 15 year old, beating the shit out of a fat middle aged dude. That jerk now has a feeding tube and only two fingers. Careful!” Lisa jumped to the pan to lower the flame as the oil started spitting out and Pete quickly moved away, scared of the sound. “Look, now you put in the onions and garlic..and the sauce. And cover it.” It all felt strange and foreign to Pete; the cooking, the eating together, the talk about personal stuff. Lisa was very nice and even listened to Pete’s rambling about Ae, even though Ae has already told her the circumstances of their meeting.

“Relax, I’m no stickler for etiquette.” Lisa laughed when Pete ate so slowly and cautiously while his stomach rumbled so loudly it sounded like thunder. Pete hesitated for a second before getting a reassuring nod from Lisa, and he ended up gobbling up half of his plate in a flash. “Good?” “Yeah. Very good.” Pete nodded eagerly as he slowed down but still managed to stuff big spoonfuls into his mouth. “I’m surprised you were hungry; I’d think young master like you would have fridge full of food. Probably even have that maid to cook for you.” “We have a chef.” Lisa snorted. “Seriously? I thought you were kidding about that.” “Mhm. But... I wanted something different, you know? My parents aren’t home so I wanted to try instant noodles, but I had no idea which ones are what...or how to make them. Pathetic, huh...” Pete sighed as he ate the last spoonful.

“No, I think it’s quite normal, not being familiar with things that you haven’t grown up with. Let me pack you some and bring it to Ae for me.” Lisa smiled as she loaded a big portion to a plastic lunchbox. “Actually...I haven’t been there for a while.” Pete admitted when Lisa thrust the bag into his hands. “He doesn’t want me around, he always nags me.” “Oh baby boy.” Lisa laughed and ruffled his hair. “Ae only nags people he cares about. If he didn’t care, he would send the dogs on you. The other guys in the gang I mean. Ae is kind but the rest...be careful of them Pete. They don’t listen to anyone or anything except for Ae, and they don’t care for law. Now go, give that dumbass some food and don’t give up.” Lisa’s expression saddened a little. “Actually I...I really want him to have someone who’s a good person.”

As hard it was for Pete to not come for a week, actually coming back was even harder. He walked to the place on foot instead of going back for his car, making the fatal mistake of getting caught in the rain. He arrived to the hideout soaked and cold, trembling as he crouched on the bench outside while the rain poured over him. He saw Ae’s motorcycle parked amongst the others, but was too terrified to walk inside, especially after what Lisa has told him. Someone walked out of the entrance briefly but Pete wasn’t sure if that man even noticed him until he disappeared and another person came out. Ae. Pete could swear he saw that man smile for a second before he stormed over, shielding his face from the rain.

“What the f-“ “I brought you food.” Pete held out the big lunchbox in front of him, his hands shaking. “Miss Lisa made it. She cooked me dinner and-“ Pete gasped when Ae grabbed his wrist harshly and dragged him into the run down building. As Pete stumbled behind him he kept his eyes on the ground, avoiding the stares of those ragged looking guys at all cost. “Scram.” Ae barked at two men sitting by the fire pit before pushing Pete onto a stone bench and sitting beside him, opening the lunchbox. “How did you and my sister got to know each other?” He asked, digging a fork to the lukewarm meal. “Accidental meeting in the store. You told her about me, didn’t you? The one time I’ve seen her was only a few seconds...can’t believe she remembered me.”

Ae nodded, chewing slowly as he stared into the flames that warmed them up. “You didn’t come for eight days...” He muttered, finally looking at Pete who was leaning over the fire pit to keep warm. He was shivering and his wet shirt stuck to his chest, making him feel even more uncomfortable than the intense stares of Ae’s gang. Pete straightened up. “I didn’t think you wanted me to, considering...” Pete looked around. All the men around them seemed quite young, with the delinquent style giving them a few extra years. They were all definitely

younger than what they looked. Four of them played cards by a wobbly table in the corner and three were scattered around. The place was messy, with guitar leaned against the wall, something that faintly resembled a mattress by the opposite corner, some sleeping bags, and a crazy amount of alcohol bottles all around.

“Me not wanting you here hasn’t stopped you before, so..why didn’t you come?” Ae asked quietly. Pete sighed. “I wanted to confirm something. My friend said...that my feelings for you are just a suspension bridge effect. I thought he might be right, but...I don’t think he is. I like you...I’m in love with you. I don’t know why, I just am. I think about you all the time.” He said so only Ae could hear him, his voice still trembling. Ae stood up without a word, leaving Pete alone for a moment until he returned with a thin blanket. He draped it over the boy’s shoulders and added a compressed briquette into the fire, making the flames go higher and warming them up more. “Are you free tomorrow? Wanna go for a ride with me?” Ae pointed at his motorcycle. “You mean...just the two of us?” “Yeah...just the two of us.”

Chapter 5

Ae said to come at 7. He said they can meet by the broken benches as usual. He said he will be on time. Pete frowned at his phone; it was almost 8 and Ae was nowhere to be seen. There were motorcycles parked by the entrance, but neither one of them bore the dark blue and grey stripes that Ae had, and Pete wasn't about to waltz inside and ask about the man. He was still pretty terrified of the guys who seemed to stare daggers at him whenever he approached. Pete was nearly knocked over when a motorcycle passed by him, missing him by only just a few inches and then came to a full stop by his other side. "Oi. Get on."

Ae patted his backseat again when Pete just stared at him. "If you don't get on I'm leaving." The exhaust pipe grumbled and Pete quickly got on, his hand hesitantly touching Ae's jacket. "Hold on properly, or you'll fall." Ae said as he pulled Pete's arms around his waist and placed his hands onto his own stomach. The motorcycle roared and Ae sped off, causing Pete's hands to take a tight grip on his t-shirt as he held on for what seemed to be his dear life, with face hidden between Ae's shoulder blades. They zigzagged between buildings and Pete didn't dare to open his eyes until he felt the motorcycle going straight and slightly uphill. He hesitantly turned his head to the side only to be greeted by a view of lake with seemingly nothing except for nature around it.

The evening sun reflected on the water and almost sparkled, casting a glint to Pete's eye and making him squint. It looked absolutely beautiful, and even better up close when Ae turned the wheel onto the grass and circled the place. He parked the motorcycle under a cluster of trees that provided a nice privacy screen from outside. Pete slowly unclenched his hands and let go of Ae's shirt, feeling the hard muscle beneath the fabric just for a brief second before jumping off the bike. "Wow, this place is-oh my god, Ae! Your face!" Pete gasped in shock when he noticed a thin trail of blood trickling over Ae's eye from a slashed brow.

"It's fine." Ae waved his hand as he kicked the stand to keep his bike from tipping over. He then sat down onto a grassy ground and patted the spot beside him. Pete hurriedly joined him and stared at the bleeding wound. Up close it wasn't as big as he thought but the stream of blood still alarmed him as it now reached Ae's chin and he didn't seem to be worried about it at all. Pete reached over with his handkerchief, making Ae flinch under the unexpected touch. "I just wanna see...don't move." Pete gently wiped off all the blood that trickled down, rubbing slightly the bits where it dried off in Ae's eyebrow and getting the clearest view of the wound. It was only few millimetres long just above his brow and seemed to almost stop bleeding.

“Hang on, I think I have a plaster.” Pete reached into his pocket again, this time pulling out a strip of bandaids. “I don’t need that.” Ae resisted, still frowning even as Pete gently applied to colourful strip to his skin and touched his temple. Ae’s eyes fixed on Pete’s face as the boy got closer, the smell of cigarettes hitting Pete’s nose, but surprisingly it didn’t seem so unpleasant. Nothing about Ae seemed unpleasant to him. “Pete?” “Huh? Oh, sorry!” Pete barely registered that his hand was now touching Ae’s cheek and he quickly retracted his hand, awkwardly shuffling a couple inches away from Ae and hugging his knees.

“Aren’t you going to ask why was I late?” Ae asked after a moment silence. Pete sighed. “If you wanted me to know, I think you would have told me already. Probably doing something illegal again. I’d rather not know about it. Besides...you still came.” He smiled. Ae let his back drop and laid on the grass with arms behind his head, just staring at the sky. “Pete, I don’t date. I don’t have any time or space in my life for love and romance. I just want you to know that. I can only be your friend, and even that is dangerous for you. You seem like a really nice kid. Surely there must be someone in your life who-“

“There isn’t.” “You didn’t even let me finish the sentence.” “Because I know what you want to say.” Pete said as he laid besides Ae. “When I talked to miss Lisa she said you’re a really kind person. And I can feel it, even though you’re pushing me away. I’m not stupid, I know you do bad things, but that’s not the reason I’m drawn to you. Miss Lisa also said that...” Pete bit his lip. Should he say? Ae turned his face towards him and Pete felt at ease. Those eyes could pierce a hole through him and he wouldn’t mind. “Go on?” “She said you already care about me because you wouldn’t even talk to me if you didn’t. That you’re just pushing me away because you’re afraid of getting hurt again, even though I don’t fully understand what that means. Perhaps bad experience with love in the past, I don’t know. But Ae...I’m not pushing you into anything. I won’t make you date me or anything. I just want to be close to you, even if nothing happens between us.”

“My sister talks too much.” Ae sighed again. He moved closer only to flick Pete’s forehead and chuckle when the boy winced. “Didn’t you say you like me? That you’re inlove with me?” “I do, and I am. I told you because I wanted you to know, not because I expect anything. Just like this-“ Pete gestured to the space between them. “-is okay with me. Those few minutes when I get to talk to you infront of that place are like the only time I don’t feel invisible to the world. I feel like I can breathe freely, you know?” Ae couldn’t fight back the little smile creeping to his face, but hid it by pinching Pete’s nose and making him close eyes. Lisa was right about one thing; Pete was totally his type, and Ae felt his stomach flutter as the boy’s eyes opened again and they stared at each other with just an inch between their faces. Ae was the one who broke the eye contact first, as it was quite difficult to kiss someone with eyes open. And he kissed hard.

Chapter 6

“Next time pick a brighter spot; I couldn’t see you.” Pete was used to Ae’s scolding. In fact, he welcomed it and enjoyed it, as strange as it seemed. “Sorry.” Pete muttered as he sat behind Ae and hooked his arms around the man’s waist as usual. He squeezed him a little, pushing his own face between Ae’s shoulder blades, but something felt off. His suspicions got confirmed when Ae slapped his hands and moved them lower to hold his hips. “Ow, careful.” He hissed, but before Pete could ask what’s wrong, Ae kicked off the bike stand and drove away, forcing Pete to take a tight grip on his hips.

As soon as they parked Pete ambushed Ae and lifted his shirt, revealing a big purple bruise that covered majority of his abdomen. “What happened?” He gasped in shock. It looked incredibly painful, as if he got stomped on by an elephant. “It’s nothing, don’t worry about it Pete.” Ae rolled his shirt down. “I’ll be alright. Come, let’s get something to eat.” “But-“ Ae has grabbed Pete’s hand and dragged him towards the messy food stalls where he picked up a loaded tray of food. It smelled almost burnt and there was a layer of oil already seeping through the napkin, but Pete didn’t complain one bit. He loved when Ae bought him food, even though it wasn’t a five star restaurant quality.

“What am I eating?” Pete asked, chewing a piece of some meat. It was really nicely seasoned and spicy, but the texture was something he hasn’t tried. “You don’t wanna know. Sloppy.” Ae wiped the corner of Pete’s mouth. His thumb brushed against those pillowy lips for a brief second, but it was enough for Pete to blush profusely. Ae licked his thumb. “Are your parents still away from home?” Pete nodded. “For another four days.” “Do they know you’re going out every night? Aren’t they worried?” “They wouldn’t notice even if I left right in front of them.” Pete sighed as he wiped his mouth and took a sip of the drink they shared. “You know, once I got kidnapped as a kid, and they haven’t noticed for eight days, until the kidnappers demanded ransom of a couple million. They paid it within a few minutes and when I got home, my mom asked if I’m okay and that’s it.” He shrugged. “So if you ever need some extra cash, just keep me for a few days and call them.”

Ae ruffled Pete’s hair. “I guess even rich kid can have it tough, huh?” “My dad is always busy with business, I speak to him face to face maybe once a month, and my mom is just his pretty wife who likes shopping and reality tv shows. She’s pretty and kind, but not much going on upstairs.” “You shouldn’t talk about your mother like that.” Ae scolded him. With the rough sleeve of his denim jacket he wiped the droplet of oil from Pete’s chin and pinched his nose. “I’m sure your parents love you. “They do, but...I just wish sometimes they showed it

in other way than just money, you know? Like watching a movie together, or just spending the day home in pyjamas. I'm..."

"Lonely?" Pete nodded. Ae pushed his head against his own shoulder, giving him a one arm hug. "Ae...will you ever tell me about your family?" Pete asked quietly. He didn't know how much of a personal question that would be, but he was curious, he wanted to know more. "There's nothing to tell...I grew up in foster care and got kicked out when I was 16. Stayed on a street for a while..." "Until...now?" "No, dummy. I have my own place." Ae pinched his nose again. Pete pulled away, only far enough to be able to look Ae in the face. "Huh? You have your own place?" "Did you think I was homeless?" The man laughed. "I guess it never came up. Do you live alone?" "Yeah." "Can I come over?"

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

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

“I think I’m gonna get a tattoo.” Tin harshly kicked Pete in the shin. “Ow! What was that for?” Pete yelped as he pushed his chair away from the table and rubbed his leg, trying to make the pain go away. “For having stupid ideas, that’s what. You’re not getting a tattoo.” Another day, another one of Pete’s silly ideas. First it was a piercing, then a motorcycle, now a tattoo. Tin had to talk him out of it. “You don’t even know what it would be, and where!” Pete tried to protest, but his friend shot him a warning glare snake smacked his head with rolled up textbook. “You’re not getting a tattoo because of that guy, okay? No tattoo salon here will ink you when you’re 17 without parental consent, and you’re certainly not getting it done in some shady place with safety pin and calligraphy ink; that’s how you get infections. I’m not having my best friend and future doctor die of sepsis before he can celebrate his 18th birthday. Not happening.”

Pete sighed. He really liked Ae’s piercing and tattoos; that bellybutton stud looked amazing, and the intricate patterns decorating his arms looked very artistic. Riding a motorcycle also seemed like a good idea at the time, until Tin hit him with ‘you won’t be able to hug him if you don’t ride his backseat anymore’ remark, and Pete dropped the idea. “Fine. Ugh, I haven’t seen him for over a week now. Maybe I should-“ “Damn.” Tin exhaled sharply. Not only him but a several other students who sat around the outdoor cafeteria turned around when a motorcycle roared through the road and a young man in ripped jeans stepped off of it, heading straight towards Pete. “Hey.” Ae said as he sat beside them and nudged Pete’s shoulder. “Ready to go?” “Uhm...what are you doing here?” Pete whispered. “You told me where you study, remember? I have something for you; come.”

“He’s not going anywhere with you.” Tin said firmly as he walked around the table and pulled Pete by the arm. “What are you, his bodyguard or something?” Ae raised an eyebrow, yawning widely. “I’m his friend; which is more than I can say about you.” “You don’t know what I am to him!” “And do you?” Tin asked. The past several weeks since Pete fell involve with this thug, he couldn’t tell Tin at all where the two of them stand. They kissed, therefore they are...what exactly? Pete sheepishly picked up his bag. “I still have another lecture.” “Then I will wait for you.” Tin pushed Pete behind himself, shielding him with his own body as he wasn’t that easily intimidated by someone shorter than him, even though the

man was older and had what looked like dried blood on his sleeve. "He is still not going anywhere with you."

"Look kid." Ae scowled. "I don't care what you think about me or what sort of relationship you think we might have. I care about Pete, and I'd never do anything to hurt him. If you so must know, I'm taking him for a drive to the beach because he likes it and he likes the burgers there." "Tin..." Pete tugged at his friend's shirt. He hasn't seen Ae for many days, and he really did love their drives to the beach. "I'll be alright. Ae always protects me.." "It would be better if you weren't near dangerous people, then you wouldn't need protection." "Tin..." Pete sighed before pulling out his secret weapon; the puppy eyes. Tin finally but reluctantly stepped aside, giving Ae one last pissed look before handing Pete his bag. "Just go, I'll answer the roll call for you and take notes. Call me when you get home."

Pete let himself get dragged to the motorcycle and quickly draped his leg over it before hugging Ae's waist as usual and inhaling that comforting smell of smoke and motor oil that made his stomach feel fuzzy. "I missed you..." He mumbled. "You weren't at the pit and miss Lisa didn't pick up my calls either. I was worried..." Ae patted Pete's knee. "Hold tight; I'll tell you when we get there." "Get where? Beach?" "No, it's... You'll see." Ae said as he kicked off the stand and started his motorcycle. At first Pete looked around, but when Ae sped up, his face instinctively buried between the man's shoulder blades and he hugged him even tighter. Before he met Ae, Pete thought girls grabbing guys from behind on the bike must have been just needy and desperate, but now his opinion changed. Now he didn't want to let go.

"You could have warn me beforehand." Pete hissed quietly as they left the hospital room of a sleeping patient and the door closed behind them. "Why?" Ae raised an eyebrow, his fingers fishing inside the jacket pocket for a cigarette. Pete immediately smacked it out of his hand and frowned. "You can't smoke in hospital!" He scolded the scary looking young man before picking up the smushed stick and threw it into a nearby bin. "If you told me miss Lisa is in a hospital, I would have stop somewhere to buy a care package." "Why?" "What do you mean why?" Ae shrugged. "Well why?" "Because that's what you do; you bring flowers, magazines, food... a care package." Pete explained before looking around the foyer. None of the shops in this place suggested any gift shop and pharmacy didn't seem like a place to get

roses and chocolates from. He sighed. “So what happened? Is this where you’ve been the past week?”

Ae shortly nodded. The empty bench was very much inviting him to lay down on it and snooze, but just sitting down was enough to rest. It was then that the fluorescent lights illuminated Ae’s face and Pete noticed the enormous bags under his eyes. Has he not slept at all? Pete was lucky they didn’t crash the motorcycle on the way here if sleep deprived Ae dozed off. “Hmm. I was also making money...” Ae gestured to his scraped knuckles and the bloody sleeve. Paid illegal fights were his major income, but Pete probably wasn’t fully ready to hear the details of it. “You need sleep, Ae, before you collapse.” Pete said as he sat beside him, hand patting Ae’s knee. “I can’t, I have...well, I have some job to do later.” “If it’s money you need, I can-“

Ae smacked Pete to the back of his head. “No, I’m not taking your money. She’s my responsibility, I can pay for her hospital bills, okay?” Pete was opening his mouth to complain some more, hoping to persuade Ae, but the man shook his head. “If you want to be useful, go and buy some of that care package. I’ll wait here, okay? Bring me some food too.” Pete pouted. “Anything special?” “Nothing with tomatoes.” Begrudgingly Pete left the hospital, only to realise he couldn’t ride Ae’s motorcycle and his car was back at school. A quick ride in a cab to pick up his car haven’t made so much as a dip in his wallet and he went a little overboard with care package and food, arriving back in the hospital with two full bags and a gift basket.

“Ae, are you-oh. You’re awake!” Pete smiled when he saw Lisa sat in her hospital bed, stroking the hair of a man sleeping on the chair beside her. “And he is not. Alright. We came earlier and-“ Lisa nodded. “I know, Ae told me you came when I was asleep. I’m sorry to worry you. You must have been frightened when I didn’t pick up your calls, it’s just that this dummy wouldn’t return me my phone.” She chuckled, patting Ae’s head. “Miss Lisa, are you alright?” Pete asked quietly as he set the bags down and began unloading the things; toiletries, sweets, snacks, magazines, prenatal vitamins. Lisa nodded. “I’m okay now, I just fainted and hit my head a little so they kept me here in case I have a concussion. The doctor said I can go home tomorrow.” “I’m glad.” Pete let out a sigh of relief. Besides seeing Ae, his texts and occasional calls with Lisa was what’s been making him happy recently. “Uhm, mis Lisa...can we talk?”

Something heavy squished his stomach, pressing against his growling stomach. Ae could almost taste the acid in his mouth, he was desperate for food, but the warm and heavy embrace of a young boy was nearly impossible to leave. He located a takeaway container on his table, the box still faintly warm on the bottom, but Ae was too hungry and too impatient for the use of microwave, and instead just gobbled up the meal as it was, his tummy happily agreeing with the sustenance. He then yawned and dropped back onto the bed again. *'I have to thank Pete for this later.'* He thought as he licked his fingers. Pete. Ae in shock turned around, only to realise the warm embrace wasn't something his delirious mind made up. He was here, in flesh, in his bed. Pete quietly snored as his arm found Ae's body again and he cuddled closer when the warmth embraced him back.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long; I've been watching GMMTV Safe House and now that it ended I had to recover bc it made me weirdly emotional, knowing it's ended. I miss my boys ;-;

Chapter 8

At first, Ae couldn't believe his eyes. He thought he completely made up the sleeping boy by his side in a dream, but when he woke up again and saw the takeaway containers in his bin and the boy still snoozing next to him, he felt convinced. How much time has passed? When he woke up the first time and ate the food, Pete was wearing his white shirt, but now he was dressed in a patched up T-shirt Ae recognised as one of his own. Sky behind the windows was also different, it was dark with a hint of pink on a horizon, a sunrise. It was barely 6am when Ae left the bed, unable to fall asleep again as he gathered his thoughts. Upon realising he slept an entire day and night, Ae quickly woke himself up and left the room to shower and make some food. His stomach was painfully empty and there was no way something small as an apple would satisfy him.

"Are you awake now?" Ae asked when a wobbly figure appeared in the kitchen doorway. He chuckled; Pete looked cute in his shirt, with his hair all fluffed up and face puffy. Pete yawned. He had to blink several times to register what he was seeing. Ae by the stove, wearing nothing but an apron. As if the man knew what the boy's thoughts were, he turned around, pointing at his lower half. "I'm wearing shorts, I'm not naked." "Sorry, it just looked like it." Pete yawned again. He sniffed around, looking over Ae's shoulder into the pan. It smelled heavenly and his tummy did a happy flip, but his eyes couldn't comprehend what he was seeing. "Uhm...what is that?" "An omelette, can't you tell?" Ae frowned. Sure his cooking skills were not a Michelin chef standard, but as long as it tasted good he couldn't care less for its aesthetic presentation. "Just go sit down, breakfast will be done in a second." "Sit down..." Pete looked around the tiny kitchen that severely lacked any kind of chair or a table. "There, silly." Ae said, shoos him back to the main area.

Pete didn't know what to call this. With the little sofa and TV, it was more of a living room rather than a bedroom, despite Ae's bed in the corner. With a coffee table in the middle and a shelf case by the wall, the room wasn't empty, and Pete was surprised how clean and tidy everything looked. When yesterday Ae spent the day in bed, Pete used it as an opportunity to snoop around, looking for a sign of any other person living here, but couldn't find anything. He appreciated very much how spotlessly clean Ae's bathroom was and the way his closet smelled of freshly washed clothes. He couldn't imagine Ae doing laundry and even though it all smelled fresh, Pete still chose a t-shirt Ae draped over the sofa that still smelled like him. Pete sat down on the edge of the bed, but Ae promptly hushed him away with 'I don't eat in bed' and pointed at the sofa. He then promptly came with two plates of very chunky omelette draped over a mountain of rice and handed Pete a spoon while he grabbed himself a plastic fork.

As strange as the messy omelette looked, Pete couldn't stop himself from gobbling up the entire plate and happily smiling with full stomach. "Thank you...Uhm...are you feeling better? When you-" "I'll speak when I finish my meal." Ae said firmly. "We will have a talk, don't worry. Just go wash your plate." "But-" Ae shot him a warning glare that made Pete to promptly scurry into the kitchen to do that simple task. "So what happened after the hospital? I remember picking you up at the university and then we went to see Lisa...I think?" Ae scratched his nape as they sat side by side on his bed. He hated not remembering during hangovers, but this wasn't that case. Pete shrugged. "Nothing much. I left the hospital to get a care package, and when I came back you were passed out. Neither me nor miss Lisa could wake you up, so Jin carried you to my car and he drove us here and left. I ordered some food and left you some if you woke up, which you probably did, given that you finished it all, but yesterday you were fully asleep all day and...well I clearly stayed over. Are you mad?"

Ae had to think for a moment about his answer. Sure Pete asked before if he can come over, but he's never actually invited him here and now he was in Ae's apartment, in his bed, in his clothes. He felt his privacy violated but at the same time there was a big gratitude towards the boy he couldn't deny. "No." Ae shook his head. "What about Lisa? And my motorcycle?" "Miss Lisa is fine, they let her go home yesterday. As for your motorcycle, it's parked downstairs. Jin brought it." Pete pointed at the window. When Ae took a peek to make sure, he gave him a thumbs up. "Thanks." "Miss Lisa said you don't have to worry about the money." Pete said as he leaned against the wall. Ae didn't have to think twice as to what it meant. He knew what he earned in fights wasn't enough to cover Lisa's bill. "Did you pay for it?" Pete shuffled uncomfortably. "Did you or did you not?" Ae repeated the question that remained unanswered, even after the second time. He frowned and Pete panicked. "Only because she asked me to! She said if I offer you the money you will flip out and say you hate charity or something like that, so she asked me directly!"

"You could have refused!" Ae snapped. She was his sister, his responsibility, he would have earned enough money in a few extra days. "I didn't want to! Miss Lisa might be your sister but she's also my friend. And when friends need help, that's what you're supposed to do. She helped me before, so I helped back. Besides..." Pete bit his lip. Was it too much to reveal? She already told Pete not to say anything, but the boy was bad at lying. "Besides what?" Pete shook his head. He quickly stood up and tried to gather his clothes. "I think I should go, I have classes in the afternoon and-" "Besides what?!" Ae barked again, his voice growing more irritated. When Pete didn't answer, he quickly grabbed the boy's wrist and rather harshly pushed him into his bed, frowning. "Tell me what Lisa said. Now." Pete gasped. Ae was clearly mad, and even though Lisa warned him about this, Pete was still scared at the sudden change in his behaviour. "Let me go, I need to go to school. I missed a day yesterday and-" "Not until you tell me." Ae held Pete's arms down.

The boy could feel the tears forming in his eyes, and the way Ae had a firm grip on his arms he knew he'll end up with bruised skin. "Pete!" "Fine!" Pete yelled. "She hates the money

you make fighting and doing crimes! She doesn't want you to use violence all the time, she's scared one day you'll do something and there will be no coming back from that situation! Miss Lisa said she's scared you'll end up in prison and won't be able to see her baby..." Pete's voice cracked. He was no longer able to keep the eye contact and turned his head away from Ae who still steamed. The man finally let go of his wrists and Pete quickly pushed him aside, a suppressed sob finally escaping his lips as he zipped up his jacket. "I told you I'm not a good person." Ae swallowed. "If someone doesn't ask for help, it's fine with you, but if someone asks for a help directly, there's a problem? How does that make sense? Don't blame your pride on me." Pete said as he wiped his eyes and left the apartment, leaving Ae to calm down.

"Don't disrespect my boys like this again." Ae scowled as he twirled the bloodied baseball bat between his fingers and sighed. Who does this tweaked out twerp think he is? Coming into their territory and trying to raid the place for drugs? Not on his watch. The beat up man could barely crawl away, his friends who observed the situation hesitantly helped him to stand up, wobbling away between them. Ae scoffed, running the bat through fire to remove the blood stains. Pond elbowed him. "You alright man? You roughed him up more than usual." "I'm fine. You want one hit too?" The bat clanked against the wall. "Easy there tiger, I'm just asking. Everything okay with your little boyfriend? You've been on edge for days now. It's irritating." Pond shrugged before offering Ae a beer. The young gang leader sat down on one of the stone benches inside and stared into the fire pit before calmly standing up again and grabbing one of his men by the collar.

Cho struggled. "What the hell man?" He grasped at his collar, but Ae's grip on his neck was unbreakably strong. "Do you want to tell the story yourself would you rather I beat it out of you like I did to your little friend out there?" Ae asked. The other members of the gang stood and watched as he guided Cho's head closer to the fire pit. Knowing how much the man loved setting things on fire, it would seem like a poetic justice to hurt him with the thing he loved the most. "Ae...what are you talking about?" Pond hesitantly asked his friend as the others seemed too scared to interfere. Ae smiled. When Cho hasn't answered, he brought his face even closer to the fire before looking back at Pond. "Alright. If 'Inferno' here won't spill, I'll tell you. That little junkie we just caught? Not just some rando who stumbled upon this place. He knew exactly which place to snoop for to find a stash. And he came just as I left. Are you telling me that ten minute window of time I wasn't here was the time the dude came? I've seen him lurking outside earlier, I'm not blind or stupid. So, let me ask you again; is there anything you'd like to tell us?"

Cho clawed at Ae's fingers. The flames didn't touch his face yet he could already feel the scorching heat, smell the burnt hair that fell over his face. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry, he just, he paid a lot, he's some politician's son or whatever! He didn't want to do a deal outside where

people could recognise him, and here are no cameras, or public! Ow! Fuck, I'm sorry, okay?" Ae smiled again. "That wasn't so hard, was it? I don't like when people are lying to me. Find out where your loyalty lies, and quickly. I saved your pyromaniac ass from going to jail, but I can as well stick you in there. Or even better; your face might end up in here." Ae gestured towards the flames before finally letting go of Cho's neck. The man dropped to the ground just inches away from the burning coals and quickly gathered himself up, bowing apologetically. "It won't happen again, I promise." He said, quickly pulling out a wad of cash rolled up. Ae took it out of his trembling fingers and without hesitation threw it into the fire before he lit up a cigarette and lounged back again while Cho scurried. "Pond? Get rid of any drugs. And watch out for Inferno. I have a hunch he will cause some more trouble again."

Pete yawned. He rapidly scribbled all the notes into his textbooks, eyeing his watch every few seconds just to make sure he would finish copying these before the bell rings for another class. "I need you to cover for me this weekend." Tin tapped away on his phone. As usual he covered for Pete when he didn't show up for uni and let him copy his notes, but there had to be an equal exchange. Pete nodded, underlying a quote. "Sure. What's going on?" He asked, finally closing his textbook and cracking his knuckles. "I'm going to see my brother and I want to stay over, so just make up something." Tin sighed. He hated that his family disowned Tul for marrying a man, and would do the same if they found out that Tin was visiting him, as he was forbidden to do so. "Okay, have a nice time. Whew, thanks for the notes." Pete yawned again, pushing Tin's textbook towards him. "Hang on, what..." Tin frowned. He watched as Pete rolled up his sleeves a little, exposing the bruises on his forearms. "It's not what it looks like, I swear!" Pete shook his head, but the bell rang and he had to quiet down. "It was an accident, I swear!" He whispered. "Those are clearly hand prints! Please Pete, I'm begging you, don't go to that man anymore. Being handsome is probably his only good quality!" Tin pleaded. But Pete's mind was set. He had to see Ae, and soon.

Chapter 9

“Sit still, I’m almost finished.” Lisa frowned, kicking Ae in his side as he fidgeted. She sat on the sofa with her brother on the floor in front of her, his bloodstained shirt bundled up on the floor beside him as she continued working on his wound. “You should go to ER, they’d make it so much neater.” Lisa sighed as she stuck the needle into the skin again for another stitch. Ae hissed but shook his head. “Nah, you do a good job. Shit, can’t believe that jerk face had the audacity to take a knife on me. Asshole.” “Like you always fight fair and square. This is on you, dumbass. Instead of picking fights, you should do something productive, like apologise to Pete.” “Who? Ow!” Ae groaned when Lisa painfully twisted his ear. “Should I stitch up your mouth too so you can’t spout bullshit like that ever again?” “I got nothing to apologise for!” Ae slapped her hand away. He huffed, eyes fixated on his own bruised hands. “I don’t need his pity, I can take care of you myself!” He grumbled, earning himself another smack. “Like hell you can. Ae listen to me. Pete didn’t pity you, I did. I just couldn’t watch you waste away like that. One of those illegal fights would end up with you dead with how stupidly sleep deprived you were, and I’m not having this baby without you as an uncle. I know you could make the money, I really do, I just wish you just...”

Lisa sighed. She finished the last stitch and wiped the wound with alcohol one more time before slapping some adhesive bandage over it and handing Ae one of his t-shirts. As he put it on and packed up the suture kit, Lisa took his hand and lead him onto the sofa beside her. “Ae, I asked Pete for the money. He didn’t offer it as a charity case, I asked him for it. Because of that boy I was able to pay my medical bills, buy a stroller and other baby stuff, and get a freezer full of groceries. With your money it would take a while to afford, and no, I don’t want your money. Please, understand me brother.” Lisa sighed. “You’ve already done so much for me, my whole life you’ve taken care of me. Pete did what you did to him before. He helped out a friend in tough situation. You have to apologise to him, you gave him bruises, dumbass.” Ae’s eyes widened. “How do you know that?” “Because he called me crying. Said that you probably hate him now. So you better knock down your stupid pride a notch and beg for his forgiveness. He really likes you, you know? I can’t imagine why though.” “Oi!”

“Hey...”

Just by that one word, Pete could tell who's voice that was. He hasn't heard it in over a week, yet it was burned into his brain so well he recognised it immediately. Even in his drowsy state he just knew it was Ae. Why was he calling at 2am, Pete had no idea. Pete tried to clear his throat, he didn't want Ae to know the phone call woke him up. "Ae?"

"Can I see you?"

"Uhm, tomor--"

"I mean right now. I'm in your garden; which window is yours?"

"Ha? Wha-?"

"Just tell me, quickly."

Pete sighed. He switched on the lamp and walked towards his window, doubtful that Ae was actually here. Then he saw it; the man was leaning against a tree, phone to his ear. There was no way he could climb the wall or jump to the second story window, and Pete hesitated. Even though his parent's room was in a different wing of the house, he was scared the maids wouldn't sniff Ae out; literally. "Stay there, I'm coming down." Pete whispered before hanging up. He tiptoed down the stairs and into the garden where he grabbed Ae's arm and rushed him back into his room, locking the door behind them.

"What are you doing here? How did you get past the security system? If anyone saw you..." Pete murmured. Ae pulled a folded paper out of his jean jacket and handed it to Pete who had to squint really hard at the picture. "Is that...?" "Lisa's ultrasound. She's having a girl. The doctor's messed up the dates earlier, she's actually over five months now. I thought you'd like to see it." Ae shrugged. The young man looked around Pete's dimly lit room with envy. It was massive, bigger than his entire apartment, and there were at least two doors that most likely lead to bathroom or a closet. His bed was huge, the carpet was thick and fluffy, and everything looked insanely expensive. His anger made him wanna piss on the floor and walls. "Alright, I'm gonna go now so- oi, hey, why are you crying?" Ae whispered when Pete sobbed quietly, clutching the picture.

“I’m fine, I’m just happy for her, you know?” He said as the tears poured out of his eyes. Ae reached out to wipe them, but when Pete flinched and pulled away, he let his hands fall down. “I’m not going to hurt you. I...shit.” Ae scratched his nape. “Look, I’m sorry how I yelled at you, and...attacked you. I didn’t mean to flip out like that. You were right, I was too prideful. My whole life I took care of Lisa, and it was irritating seeing some kid to step up and show me up. I was kidding myself when I thought I could handle this on my own. Your money really helped her, I’m very...grateful.” Pete quickly wiped his eyes with his pyjama sleeve and set the ultrasound on his bedside table, his eyes measuring Ae with suspicion. “You really scared me back there, you know?” Pete whispered as he took two confident steps forward and touched Ae’s hand. Same hand that left his wrists bruised for days. “I’m sorry. How can I make it up to you?”

Pete glanced towards the locked door, then pointed at the other one, painted baby blue. “There’s a bathroom with a shower. Stay the night and...let’s talk.” He urged him before pushing on Ae’s back and shoving him in the bathroom. Those minutes Pete spent waiting in the bed seemed like eternity, but when Ae finally returned, Pete suddenly wished he had stayed in the closed bathroom longer. He felt nervous when Ae approached the bed wearing his shorts and laid on the bed too. He washed his entire body but his hair was dry and Pete could still smell the faint scent of smoke and Ae’s shampoo. He missed it. “Are you shy? You weren’t shy when you snuggled me for two days straight.” Ae teased Pete who’s face was now flushed. “Yeah, because you weren’t nearly naked at that time. And now you’re just all...abs and biceps. And you’re wearing my shorts. It’s hard not to look.” Pete admitted before switching the lamp off and burrowing himself under the duvet. Ae smirked. He took Pete’s hand and guided it to his chest, almost sadistically enjoying how bashful the boy became and how his hand trembled as it traced the defined musculature of Ae’s chest and abdomen.

“You have an amazing body...” Pete whispered when his hand stopped at Ae’s lower abdomen and he just felt the fabric of his shorts. “Pete...can I touch you too?” Ae asked respectfully. His hand hovered over Pete’s chest, and when the boy nodded, he proceeded to unbutton his pyjama shirt, exposing his flat chest. It was quite cute how quickly Pete reacted to his touch when it only took a couple of second before he tightly squeezed his legs together in a futile attempt to hide his erection. But Ae knew, he noticed, and he slowly moved his hand under Pete’s pyjama pants, stroking him. Pete let out a quiet moan as he hid his face in Ae’s neck, coming way too quickly than he would liked. A switch has been flipped in the older guy and Ae mercilessly attacked Pete’s lips with a deep kiss, pushing Pete between the pillows. He knew better now to not grab his wrists, but he still straddled his thighs and hungrily kissed Pete’s lips, jaw, neck, chest.

“Ae...w-wait...mmh...I...ah!” His incoherent words seemed to make no effect at Ae who continued mapping his body with passionate kisses and inhaling his sweet scent. “Ae, wait...please...” Pete gasped when two hands tugged at the string of his pyjama pants. “What’s

wrong?” Ae stopped, relaxing his hands on Pete’s hips. The boy quickly sat up and touched his shoulders, hesitant at first. “I don’t think I want it like this. I’m not ready when you’re being too...fast.” Pete mumbled bashfully. His underwear was sticky from the hand job and he was already starting to feel aroused again, but Ae was touching him too wildly, and he found himself silently freaking out. To his surprise, Ae smiled and gently kissed his lips, his hands moving to Pete’s cheeks. “It’s okay, sorry for going too fast. Let’s leave this for when you’re ready-“ “No.” Pete shook his head. “I want this, just...go slow? Please?” “Are you sure?” Ae asked. “I don’t want to pressure you into anything.”

Pete averted his eyes. “Actually...I’ve been thinking about since the day I met you.” He admitted bashfully. Pete covered himself with the duvet before wiggling himself completely out of his pyjamas and boxers underneath it, and tossing the clothes off the bed. When Ae did the same and moved closer to him, Pete cuddled closer to him, his hands hesitantly touching the young man’s chest. Ae kissed his cheek. “Have you ever been with anyone before?” He asked, pretty sure of the answer already. When Pete shook his head, Ae knew he had to take it slow. He didn’t want to make the boy cry, and so half a bottle of body lotion later, he knew he was well prepared. Pete’s fingers dug into his back and the boy trembled, but his expression wasn’t painful at all. “Shhh, you’re too loud...” Ae chuckled before shushing Pete with his lips and catching his moans from escaping and getting them into trouble. Ae really didn’t mean to work him so hard, but when Pete pushed against his chest with a whimpering ‘enough’, he finally pulled out and jerked himself off onto the boy’s stomach.

Pete rolled over onto his stomach, the cum sticking to the sheets but he couldn’t care less, he felt very overwhelmed and sensitive. When Ae finally laid back beside him and put his muscular arm around his back, Pete whined quietly. “What’s wrong? Did I hurt you?” Ae asked worriedly. Pete shook his head. “No...this is the most awesome moment in the past 17 years.” He whispered before taking a peek at Ae and quickly hiding his face again. “Are you still shy?” “Of course!” “Haha. You should sleep now...” Ae said as he wrapped his arms around Pete and kissed his cheek. Pete, who was now facing away from Ae, hugged the man’s arm and sighed. “Okay, but you have to hold me like this all night.” Pete demanded, and Ae couldn’t help but think how cute the boy was. He himself wasn’t a huge ‘cuddle after sex’ guy, but this time he was unable to let go. Pete’s body fit into his arms perfectly, and he smelled so good, there was no way he would let go. “Even if you told me not to, I still wouldn’t let you go.”

“Stop smiling like that, it’s creepy as hell.” Tin grumbled as he poked Pete’s cheek with his pencil. He noticed how dazed his friend seemed to be ever since they arrived at university, but no amount of poking and teasing would fade away that cheesy smile and glazed over eyes Pete was sporting. “Hmm? Aw shut up.” Pete giggled quietly. He was floating on cloud nine even with the slight soreness in his lower half accompanying him for the entire day, because

nothing could take away the memory of last night. He managed to sneak Ae out as he woke up for university, and the two shared a several way too passionate kisses in the car that resulted in Pete having a hickey under his collar. Tin cringed. “Oh god, what did he do to you this time? Don’t tell me he popped your cherry?” “Shush!” Pete finally snapped out of his daydream and slapped his friend’s arm, blushing profusely.

“Wait, seriously?” Tin hissed. He quickly looked around, just to make sure no one in class was paying attention to their conversation, before ducking his head lower to hide behind their classmate in front of him. It wouldn’t be too wise getting caught by the professor, especially when they talk about this kind of stuff. Pete nodded. “He came over last night and we...you know. And then he left in the morning.” “So he came over just to have sex with you?” Tin frowned. “How wonderful.” “No!” Pete shook his head. “He came to apologise for last time. The sex was just...the mood was there, you know?” Tin scoffed. “Apologise? You mean for those bruises and stuff? What a dick...” “I told you, it wasn’t like that. We’re good now.” Pete grumbled, regretting even saying anything in the first place when he knew how protective Tin could get. When Tin leaned closer, Pete expected another jab with the pencil, but nothing happened, except Tin now had a very curious expression. “So how was it anyway?”

“Tin!” “I told you about my first time, you owe me!” “I didn’t ask you, you just bragged!” “So it was bad, huh?” Tin teased, which made Pete poke his leg with a pen. “No it wasn’t. It was just a little...chaotic. That’s all.” Pete grumbled. His cheery mood was now ruined, and he was so embarrassed he wanted to disappear, but the lecture was still another twenty minutes and had to endure his friend’s remarks. “It was painful?” “Not really. All I’m saying is, it wasn’t the way I imagined it, you know?” Pete admitted after a while. “It was still pretty good though.” “Cool. I’m glad you and your criminal boyfriend are all lovey dovey now.” Tin muttered bitterly, but as much as Pete wanted to tease him for being jealous, he couldn’t bring himself up to tell Tin he and Ae were not boyfriends. He himself didn’t know what exactly they were. Is this what dating is? Meeting someone on random occasion, sometimes kissing, one time sex, not even setting up their next meeting? A lightbulb went off in his mind and Pete quickly pulled out his phone. Of course, Ae called him last night. He finally had his number! With a big grin, Pete typed a message, but nearly immediately deflated as he read the response.

Pete 13:22

Ae, it's Pete, can I come see you tonight?<3

Ae 13:23

You're not interesting anymore, stop bothering me.

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