

# 10080

*Chanyeol wanted a divorce. Baekhyun asked for a week.*

Their time of courtship lasted only seven months. Their happiness was measured in the amount of laughter they shared, the amount of endless nights where they spent tangled in each other's arms, and the amount of love they had for one another. Brief kisses on the college campus sufficed whereas the nights satisfied. It took Chanyeol two weeks to come down from his composed cloud to gather up the courage to approach the petite and lively brunet in one of his classes, but it only took Baekhyun a second to say yes to whatever the handsome tall guy was asking him.

Within a month, they learned about each other. Baekhyun was a writer majoring in English and journalism, though he didn't have any plans on working for any magazines or newspapers. He preferred writing novels and being his own independent person. Chanyeol was in marketing and business. Everyone who saw them thought that the two were an unlikely pair. Baekhyun was open about his thoughts and constantly smiling, whereas Chanyeol always had this look on his face along with a quiet demeanor. Their differences went deeper than their majors and personality. Baekhyun liked his coffee with milk and sugar and wrote works of impossible situation and fantasies. Chanyeol, on the other hand, liked his coffee black and preferred practicality and realism over fantasy. People believed Baekhyun's outrageous and fun personality would never click with Chanyeol's collected and rational self, but they were wrong.

Seven months of absolute perfection, Chanyeol proposed and his petite brunet, Byun Baekhyun, said yes.



They waited a few months before promising to love each other until Death would tear them apart. After their graduation and wedding, they found an apartment. It was small, but it didn't bother them. Baekhyun's touches made it into a home; a home that Chanyeol enjoyed returning back to at the end of a hard day at work. Every night he'd hold Baekhyun and whisper promises of a bigger house, one where he could decorate to a broader horizon. And every night, Baekhyun would smile into Chanyeol's bare chest and thank him.

Chanyeol's work ethic and charming personality at work enabled him to climb up the company ladder quickly. As his income rose, so did their bank account. One night, Chanyeol gently pulled Baekhyun's laptop away from him and set it on a nearby coffee table. Then he kneeled before him, taking his husband's hand in his.

"Baek," he started slowly, keeping Baekhyun's gaze, "I want to buy you that house I've always been promising to buy for you one day."

With quivering lips, Baekhyun nodded profusely before gasping, wrapping his arms around his husband's neck while thanking him. That night they entangled themselves in each other, savoring the touches and making love slow and deep.



The house had to accommodate what Chanyeol thought Baekhyun needed for his line of work: peace and serenity. They found a small, but perfectly quiet estate out in a spaced out higher class neighborhood out near the country. When Chanyeol looked at Baekhyun and asked, "What do you think?" he already knew the answer.

"I love it, Yeol..."

Smiling, Chanyeol took Baekhyun's hand in his. "Then let's get it."

Looking up at his husband, Baekhyun looked a bit worried. "But it's an hour away from your work."

Chanyeol shrugged. "If you love it then I don't mind the commute. It's only sixty minutes to and then sixty minutes back. It's not an impossible feat to commute back and forth."

After a moment, Baekhyun asked him again if it was really alright. Chanyeol nodded and soon after, the papers were signed.



The arrangement was for Chanyeol to travel back and forth from work, but as time dragged on, work began to pile and pile, causing Chanyeol to work overtime. As the endless cycle continued on, he found it hard to commute on a daily basis. He often found himself tired and blurry eyed when driving. Because of this, he had to drink caffeine before driving, which would either cause him to crash during work or make him unable to sleep once he arrived back at home.

Baekhyun began to feel guilty for enjoying a quiet life while his husband labored to give him that type of lifestyle. Contemplating about other alternatives, Baekhyun came to one possible solution to the problem.

“Chanyeol, maybe you should get an apartment in the city,” Baekhyun gently suggested at the dinner table one night. When he raised his eyes to his husband, he saw tired eyes looking back at him.

“You want me to get a what?” Chanyeol said, sounding like he was in disbelief.

Sighing, Baekhyun gave him a concerned look. “I don’t like seeing you this way anymore, Yeol. Every day you go to work looking like you’re half dead. Then when you come back, you end up looking worse. You spend two hours just going back and forth. That could be time that you’d be using to get more sleep...”

In a bad mood, Chanyeol rubbed the corner of his eyes. “Baek, I’m fine.”

“No, you’re not!” Baekhyun argued. “Listen, an apartment could mean—”

“I said I’m fine, Baek,” Chanyeol repeated sharply. “Quit worrying, damn it.”

Baekhyun grew irritated at Chanyeol’s indifference. Setting down his utensils, Baekhyun stood up from the table. “Well, is it wrong to worry about you!?” he cried in a strained voice.

Unlike Baekhyun, Chanyeol kept himself in his seat. “Baek, sit down.”

With closed fists, Baekhyun glowered. “No. Chanyeol, you’re not hearing me out. I just want to help you.”

“Help me?” Chanyeol snapped. “No, Baek. To me, having you try and case the idea of me getting a separate place to live makes it seem like you want me gone.” The lack of sleep and the fact that he had been overworking himself did no good other than make him more irritable.

Taken aback, Baekhyun looked shocked. “That is not what I want!”

“Keep your voice down, Baek,” Chanyeol growled. “You’re being too loud.”

Frustrated, Baekhyun harshly pushed his chair in. “I don’t want you gone! You’re such a frustrating man, but damn it, I love you! So it hurts watching you add two more hours of stress onto your day just travelling back and forth.” Baekhyun bit his lips. “It hurts so bad, Yeol, but you don’t see it because the moment you step into this house, you fall asleep. You don’t even look at me anymore because you’re that tired.”

For a moment, Baekhyun waited for a response, but Chanyeol remained static. Then he said, “You’re being overdramatic,” he muttered.

Baekhyun felt as if he was just struck. It was obvious that there was no reaching Chanyeol. His husband refused to listen to him and even had the outlandish audacity to call him out for being “overdramatic” when in fact, he was just expressing his concerns. Shaking, he turned and left the table before Chanyeol could see the bitter tears forming in his eyes.



When Chanyeol’s mind was finally in full clarity, he re-evaluated Baekhyun’s proposal the night before. He admitted his fault in not allowing Baekhyun the chance to present his case, but ultimately blamed the lack of sleep for causing his sour and disagreeable mood that night. Finally willing to hear out his husband, Chanyeol knocked on Baekhyun’s closed and locked office door.

“Baek, I know you’re in there. Open up.” As a minute passed by, Chanyeol knocked again. “Baekhyun, open the door. We need to talk and you letting me just stand out here

is wasting time.”

It wasn't long until Chanyeol heard Baekhyun unlock the door. Letting himself in, Chanyeol watched as Baekhyun turned his back to him to sit back down at his desk. Chanyeol wasn't amused at Baekhyun's decision to give him the cold shoulder, but he rationed that he probably deserved it. Neither of them spoke for the longest time until Chanyeol set his hands on the back of Baekhyun's chair, leaning over him.

“Baek...” he said, softly. “You know I don't like it when you ignore me...”

Turning his head around, Baekhyun gave the giant a sad, but angry look. “But when I actually care, I'm overdramatic, right?”

In that moment, Chanyeol regretted not biting down his tongue the night before. He knew that they were different. Baekhyun liked to voice himself out whether that meant moving his hands or straining his voice, whereas he liked to keep things settled. But sometimes he'd forget that Baekhyun's habits made Baekhyun himself, insult those intricate details, and ultimately hurting his spouse.

With a solemn look on his face, Chanyeol swiveled Baekhyun's chair around and pulled him up. When Baekhyun resisted, Chanyeol tugged a little bit stronger until Baekhyun reluctantly stood up. Engulfing him in his arms, Chanyeol nestled his face against the top of Baekhyun's head.

“I didn't mean that.” Slightly rocking their bodies from side to side, Chanyeol continued. “I'm sorry, Baek.”

It seemed like forever before Baekhyun finally moved his arms, slowly touching Chanyeol's chest with the tip of his fingertips before wrapping his arms around his waist. “You've been really moody lately, Yeol...”

Chanyeol pursed his lips. He knew his mood was in the gutters lately—in fact, for weeks. Lack of sleep and overtime did its damage. It was clear to him, though, that the damage was not only done to himself and his body, but his relationship with his husband as well. “I know. I'm sorry.”

To Chanyeol, there wasn't much he could do other than say he apologies. He couldn't make promises. He couldn't make promises to get home more early, to cut work, or to get more sleep. Promises like those were impractical because he didn't know if he could even uphold them. It was better to give no promises at all rather than to give a hallow

one.

If he hadn't been listening or if the room hadn't been as quiet as it was, Chanyeol would never have heard Baekhyun's snuffle. When he tried to look at his face, Baekhyun only hugged tighter, pressing his face harder against Chanyeol's chest, restricting him from seeing. Chanyeol stood still for a while and only moved to place a soft kiss on top of Baekhyun's head.

"I shouldn't have shut you down," Chanyeol admitted. "You were just trying to help."

A silent moment passed before Baekhyun lifted his head up. "I'm worried about you. You know that, right?" Chanyeol nodded. "Sometimes I think that getting this house all the way over here was a mistake. I feel so guilty at night, Yeol," he cried with a breaking voice. "You did all this for me and now you're like this. I—"

Chanyeol cut him off with a sharp look in his eyes. "Stop it. You have no right feeling guilty about anything. I love you. I did this for you. Why I'm like this has nothing to do with you, though. It's because of work, so don't go blaming yourself for my lows."

"But if we had just picked some place in the city, then—"

"It'd still be the same," Chanyeol argued. "It'd still be the same amount of work load and the same amount of unreasonable issues I have to go through on a day to day basis. Plus, you wouldn't have the quiet life you need to concentrate on your books, and I know how important the one you're working on right now is. It's your debut novel and you don't need any distractions. That's why we're here. That's why I chose listed places where it's quiet. I did it for you and if I had the chance to change anything back to when we were house hunting, I wouldn't change anything, because I promised you something like this and I got it. It's our little haven from the city, Baek."

Biting his lips, Baekhyun glanced down. He dropped his hold around Chanyeol's waist and, instead, held him by his shirt. "The commute is too long. It's too long. You drive in the early morning and late at night. I don't want you to get into an accident because you're too dead tired to keep your eyes open," he said. With a shaky breath, Baekhyun exhaled and looked back up. "Chanyeol, please consider buying a temporary apartment in the city. Just somewhere where you can go to if you find that you don't have it in you to come home."

Chanyeol unhinged his mouth to argue, but Baekhyun gave him a look. "I don't want you gone and I don't like the idea of us being separated, but if it's easier on you and

your body, then—”

“Baek, at least at the end of the day there’s you,” Chanyeol interrupted. “I might be tired as hell and I might look like hell, but at least I get to come home to you.”

“If you fall asleep driving, then no, Chanyeol,” Baekhyun said in a stern, broken voice. “You won’t. You’d be dead and the next place I’d be seeing you is at the morgue, identifying your body!”

Chanyeol dropped his arms and put his hands on Baekhyun’s shoulders. “Baek—”

“Yeol, I did the math, alright?” Baekhyun said, trying to change the subject from something less morbid. “It’s easier and more convenient than having to check into a hotel over and over again.”

“Baek, I don’t care,” Chanyeol groaned. “If anything, you’re the only one keeping my feet on the ground—keeping me sane. Sleeping at some apartment in the city might mean I get an hour or two more of sleep, but that’d be fucking isolating me from you, damn it!”

“Then let’s sell the house!” Baekhyun said desperately.

Chanyeol looked at him aghast. “What?”

Baekhyun furrowed his brows. “Let’s sell it. Let’s move back to the city. It’ll be—”

“No,” Chanyeol said adamantly. “We’re not selling this house. I got this house for you because it’s perfect for you and what you need.”

“But, Chanyeol—”

“I said no, Baekhyun,” Chanyeol said, giving Baekhyun an apologetic look. “I don’t want you to have to give this up. I don’t want to take you to a place where it’s always about the fast life—the loud hustling and bustling of the city.”

Moments passed before Baekhyun asked, “Then what do you want to do?”

Looking down at him, Chanyeol rubbed the back of his neck before cupping one side of Baekhyun’s cheek. “Fine. We’ll...” He clicked his tongue and heaved a deep breath. “We’ll look for something—but we’re gonna sit down and plan everything out,” he said

sharply. “Like, if I’m scheduled to have a busy week, you have to come and visit me at least four times a week to cook for me something. Because I need you, too, Baek. Not just sleep. I need you in bed with me, whether that’s to just go to bed together or to do something more.”

Slowly, Baekhyun nodded, slightly happy that Chanyeol had agreed. “We won’t let distance be a problem. We’ll call—No, I’ll call. I’ll call during your lunch breaks and everything. You have to call me if you decide you want to come home for the night, but as for the weekends, you have to try and come back for at least those two days. Saturday and Sunday, I mean, because I need you, too.”

Catching and interlacing their hands together, Chanyeol relaxed his shoulders. “When do you want to go start looking?”

“Doesn’t everything we do depend around your schedule?” Baekhyun kindly reminded with an attempted smile.

The remark was true. Everything that they did together had to fit with Chanyeol’s schedule. It didn’t used to be. Back in their newly wed period, Chanyeol wasn’t as busy as he used to be and had more room to change his activities at work. Now, it was structured. Some things like meetings and presentations couldn’t be move, and it was very rare for anything else to be rescheduled just because someone wanted a day off with their spouse or lover. Even though things had changed, they had learned how to cope with these strained changes, especially Baekhyun. Chanyeol was slow at noticing, but it was only because he was part of it all. Baekhyun noticed more because he was the one sitting idly, watching his husband go up in rank and leaving him at the beginning.

“Let’s go when you have a day off.”

“I don’t have any days off, Baek.”

Baekhyun gave him a small laugh and a light punch on the side. “I know.” He sighed in an exaggerated fashion and shrugged. “I’ll look at listings and we can go together when you do have the time. If not, I’ll do it for you.”

After studying Baekhyun’s face for a moment, Chanyeol softly asked, “Are you sure about this?”

Gently, Baekhyun nodded his head. “Yes. It’ll just be like owning two houses. It’ll be



fine.” Hugging Chanyeol again, Baekhyun buried his face in Chanyeol’s chest again as his husband wrapped his arms around him. “We’ll be fine.”



“Fine” perfectly described their situation, but fine only lasted a while. For weeks their arrangement turned out okay. After finding an apartment for Chanyeol when he didn’t feel like he could safely go home, they put their plan into effect. On nights when Chanyeol decided to stay in the city, Baekhyun—if he could—would quickly prepare some food, take a fairly long ride on the subway, and then a cab just to go give Chanyeol his dinner. He always made sure that the food tasted just right and that it was something Chanyeol was probably craving, which he had developed a sixth sense for after being married for nearly two years.

Chanyeol tried to go home on the weekends like they had arranged, but he found that exhaustion would just devour him by the end of the week and wouldn’t allow him the well-being enough to do so. So, after many attempts and a few successful tries, Baekhyun smiled at him and told him that it was alright to stay in city and that he didn’t need to strain himself just to go home. At first Chanyeol was hesitant in accepting Baekhyun’s kind gesture, but in the end he began staying the weekends in the city. And even though the apartment was supposed to be used for those difficult moments when he couldn’t get himself home, Chanyeol began to use it frequently each week until it’d been months since he last stepped foot on the property he had gotten for the two of them. In a way, their little haven was blurred in his memory, replaced by the practical function that the large one bedroom apartment in the city had to offer: convenience.



On Baekhyun’s part, he began to frequent the apartment less and less due to the deadline of his first book. He would take the time and try to reach Chanyeol by phone or video call when he could, but like everything else, those moments declined in numbers also. When Chanyeol was working at the office, Baekhyun was sleeping after writing and planning until the break of dawn when he would finally collapse on his bed alone.

And in the rarity of those moments when Baekhyun would have luck on his side when

calling his husband, their conversations were always brief and generic. Overtime, it had gotten bland with the casual and usual questions of “How have you been?” and “Have you eaten yet?” The calls were always kept brief because of the simple fact they both knew how one or the other either needed to go to sleep or go to work.

One night as Baekhyun lied alone in their bed with nothing to look at, but the full moon glowing past the window and the soft waving of the thin curtains, he thought about their decision. He contemplated about what was happening. He felt a rift between them. Distance was not a kind factor, but nor was it an impossible feat to overcome. The fact that they rarely saw each other in person wasn't a very big factor. To him, it was more. Distance didn't matter because even if they were living under the same roof, the situation still wouldn't change. Both of them would still be too busy for each other. It'd be the same situation, but with different circumstances.



Back in college, Baekhyun held an interest in different languages. One of the things he'd often do to Chanyeol was leave him messages in foreign languages that he knew his business-minded boyfriend would have no idea how to read. To him, that was the fun part; watching Chanyeol do work in deciphering his message.

Baekhyun always made sure to keep his messages simple, but meaningful. Often times, they were just “I love you” notes. Chanyeol, despite looking and acting like a cold-shouldered brute, would always write back the words, but in Korean, the language that the both of them shared.



One of the things that Baekhyun picked up in his many days of following Chanyeol around the library was an interest in binary codes. As Chanyeol would sit and look through stacks and stacks of reference books for an upcoming test or quiz in one of his classes, Baekhyun would look over the shoulders of other students, observing them as he usually did since he was more of an observer than a doer. It wasn't until he looked over one student's book that his interest was caught by the amount of ones and zeros on the page.

The student was writing in a language Baekhyun recognized, but their eyes were glued

to the book. It took a moment for him to realize that they were translating the numbers. No matter how much he stared, Baekhyun couldn't figure out how the hell they were getting letters from what looked like a random arrangement of the first two positive numbers—though one could argue that zero is neutral.

It was then that Baekhyun stepped back and ran back to where Chanyeol sat. Then he quickly asked his knowledgeable boyfriend what he just saw, to which Chanyeol answered with his usual face, "It's binary code, Baek."

Binary.

Binary was simple, yet secretive to a point where only a few of the general public could understand. Not only that, but it had some sort of "cool" factor to it that drew Baekhyun in. Cracking a large smile, Baekhyun thanked Chanyeol, quickly kissing his bookworm boyfriend before wandering around the library in search of something that would teach him the art of Binary.



In their early days together as a married couple, back in their tiny apartment, the two of them would dedicate Saturdays to movies. Some days they would watch romantic comedies and other days, they would watch a dramatic family movie that would leave one of them—most of the time, Baekhyun—in tears.

In times like those, Chanyeol would pet Baekhyun's head and tell him not to cry, that it was just a movie, and that crying wouldn't change anything about what just happened. To that, Baekhyun would huff and argue, challenging Chanyeol by asking him whether or not it was wrong to wish for a different outcome. Chanyeol would always answer, telling him that there was no point in wanting a different ending because the movie was done and there was nothing changing it. Baekhyun would proceed to call him an insensitive brute, to which Chanyeol would ignore the remark, lean over, and kiss Baekhyun's movie-induced tears away.



Once Baekhyun's first book was published, he finally felt free. He felt as if he could finally go visit Chanyeol and visit him, but with the success that came with its publication, a full schedule also ensued. The one night that Baekhyun went to visit Chanyeol, it was spent with general talk. Baekhyun still said "I love you" and Chanyeol also, but it didn't have the same warmth dripping from the words like it used to way back when.

And when they made love that night, there was a need, but all the while, it felt forced. Both of them felt it. They felt the rift between them. There was a fear between them that they sought to fill up by making love like they used to, but there was no helping it. Chanyeol was tired. Baekhyun was tired. But, they still put up the effort to feel something despite craving sleep and rest over a lustful night with each other.



Board games were something that they used to enjoy on Friday nights. When Chanyeol would come home at around six, Baekhyun would prepare dinner and pick out a game board to play with. After eating, brushing their teeth, and a little bit of heated play, they would take out the game and begin. Sometimes there were stakes. One time, they played Monopoly. Every time Chanyeol would buy out one of Baekhyun's properties, the smaller guy had to take something off. Chanyeol—being the business major—always played tactfully and would have Baekhyun stark naked within the first thirty minutes of the game.

Their board game nights would never last long. The creaking of the bed would always last longer than their games. And when they finished, Chanyeol would whisper, "I win." Baekhyun would smirk, pull them closer and shake his head.

"No. I won," he'd say, kissing Chanyeol deeply. "You're mine. Forever."



"I've got a book sign event this weekend, Yeol," Baekhyun said, smiling into the webcam.

Chanyeol returned him a tired smile. "Really, now. Your book's doing good?"

Nodding, Baekhyun grinned. "Yeah, it's pretty high up on the charts for new authors. I'm

really happy about that.”

“Congratulations, Baek.”

“Thanks, Yeol.” There was an elongated silence following them for a second. “So, will you come? Please?”

Opening his mouth, Chanyeol hesitated. He knew that he most likely wouldn’t be able to go so he didn’t know why he said, “Sure.”

Beyond Chanyeol’s notice, Baekhyun’s eyes lit up. “Buy a book! I’ll sign it for you!” he joked. Then he glanced down at the time. “Ah, I have to go now,” Baekhyun said, yawning.

Chanyeol bit down the urge to yawn also. “Alright. Bye.”

“Bye,” Baekhyun said, nodding. “Oh, are you coming home this weekend?”

“Baek, I—”

Hiding behind a smile, Baekhyun waved him off. “It’s okay! I already knew the answer, so you don’t need to say anything. I understand... You should come back some time, though. I planted some nice flowers out in the yard.” Seeing Chanyeol’s face, Baekhyun knew that his husband didn’t know how to respond to that. Feeling like he was making his husband feel bad, Baekhyun picked up his mood, even if it strained his face. “I’ll take photos for you, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Bye, Chanyeol. I love you.”

Chanyeol took a moment. “Bye, Baek.”

Baekhyun waited for the “I love you” part that would usually ensue, but after two seconds, he nodded and signed out. He reasoned that Chanyeol was just too tired to remember; he was too tired to remember those three simple words.



Baekhyun had the habit of carving on trees. Back when Chanyeol usually had the weekends off, they'd leave their apartment and go to the park. That was where Baekhyun would use a sharp object to carve their initials into the wood. Chanyeol would keep on the lookout, worried that some sort of authority figure would arrest his whimsical husband for damaging a tree, even if he was doing it for love.



At the signing event, a crowd of people showed up, but no matter how much Baekhyun craned his head, he couldn't see his giant anywhere. Figuring that perhaps he was running a little bit late, Baekhyun went on with his day, signing happily for fans and curious onlookers who were interested in getting a book signed by a possibly famous individual. He had hoped and he held Chanyeol's promise to heart, but as the crowd died down and Chanyeol was still nowhere to be seen, Baekhyun's heart felt a little empty.

He knew he shouldn't have taken it to heart. Chanyeol was busy, he knew that. But he also knew that Chanyeol didn't make promises he knew he couldn't keep, yet he still told him that he'd be there.



The next time they video called, Baekhyun didn't try to appear like he was happy, because he wasn't. "Upset" was the word, but he didn't want to lash out because Chanyeol was busy. He had an excuse not to go to some stupid book signing. But it wasn't just a "stupid" book signing to Baekhyun. It was his first and he wanted Chanyeol to be there, but he wasn't, and that was that.

Chanyeol was too tired to see what was wrong. He had apologized, but Baekhyun's mood didn't seem to lighten up despite the fact that he had said it was okay. In turn, it irritated Chanyeol, making him cut their call short and call it a night.



With success came strain. Time was no longer available for leisure. It was no longer available for one to spend time with their loved ones or reconnect with friends. Time no longer provided intimate moments. It provided the opportunity for productivity in one's line of work.



Like old photographs, their relationship began to change. Like the faded images of pictures that were once bright and vibrant, their relationship had grown stale and quiet. They had become strangers in their own marriage, often forgetting the moments that they used to have together back when things were simpler.

The calls became less frequent. The text messages were brief. Visits were rare. They had basically stalled.



Two years and eleven months in their hanging marriage, Chanyeol stood in his bedroom, looking at his picture perfect self in the mirror. He fixed the cuffs and perfected his hair. He looked at the time and found that he was on schedule, but with no minute to spare. But despite his clock-work routine, he couldn't help but sit down at the edge of his bed, heaving a heavy sigh as he stared at his open wall.

His heart felt weighed down and it had taken him weeks—perhaps a month—to self-diagnose his issue. It was uncertainty. He struggled with the horrid thought of not being in love with his husband anymore, but as the recent days passed, he found that he could deny it no longer.

He felt lonely, but Baekhyun was too out of reach for him. Chanyeol knew that he still loved the brown haired author, who he'd sometimes see in the papers or online, but he knew that he didn't feel like same way like he used to. They hadn't made love in

months. Baekhyun rarely visited. Date nights were never a thing, because they weren't possible with their schedules. In fact, the more Chanyeol thought about it, he saw more of Baekhyun through their short and infrequent video calls than he did in person.

Turning his head, he looked at his empty bed. He missed it. He missed the attraction, the activities—everything. The distance was one thing. The isolation was another. The lack of communication foreshadowed the end, but it was the heavy feeling in Chanyeol's heart that brought the gavel down on the block.



Sometimes Baekhyun thought about moving on, but his heart wouldn't let him. He still loved his giant despite the fact that every night he went home to "their" quiet estate only to lie in a bed with a cold side unoccupied at the end. He missed the nights when they'd stay up just whispering to each other. He missed the board games, the trees, and the movies. The only thing that would sometimes get him through the day were the photographs from their wedding day.



Chanyeol was obligated to go to his company's annual Christmas party for appearances sake and had to reject Baekhyun's offer to come back home for the holidays. Like always, Baekhyun said he understood and hung up soon after. The lack of argument and Baekhyun's peaceful conceding bothered Chanyeol. He thought that maybe if Baekhyun had fought for his time a little harder, he would have said yes. But then he reminded himself that he couldn't have said yes. He was busy.

With a relationship dry and cold like the weather, Chanyeol moved on. With a drink in hand and a smile on his face, he lifted his eyes. It was there at that annual Christmas party that he met Kyungsoo.





During one of the hardest times in Chanyeol's finals week, Baekhyun sweet talked Chanyeol's roommate, Kris, into letting him into their room early one morning the day of Chanyeol's exams. He placed three pieces of Chanyeol's favorite candy near his textbooks before tiptoeing over to Chanyeol and gently putting a sticky note on his head. With a smile on his face, Baekhyun quietly laughed before backtracking and quietly leaving the room.

When Chanyeol woke up thirty minutes later from his alarm clock, the first thing he noticed was the paper stuck on his forehead preventing him from rubbing his eyes. Taking it off, he squinted his eyes and took a closer look at the letters. As his eyes focused, he noticed that the written items weren't letters, but rather, zeros and ones.

*"01000111 01101111 01101111 01100100 00100000 01101100 01110101 01100011  
01101011 00100000 01101111 01101110 00100000 01111001 01101111 01110101  
01110010 00100000 01100101 01111000 01100001 01101101 01110011 00101100  
00100000 01100111 01101001 01100001 01101110 01110100 00100001"*

Chanyeol's eyes dragged down and looked at the bottom part of the message.

*"01001001 00100000 01101100 01101111 01110110 01100101 00100000 01111001  
01101111 01110101 00100001."*

Despite having just woken up, Chanyeol took the time to decode the note. As he walked to his class that morning, he quickly and efficiently copied the numbers onto his cellphone. Using a translator, he read what Baekhyun had written for him.

*"Good luck on your exams, giant!"*

Lastly, Chanyeol translated the shorter message at the bottom.

*"I love you!"*



Christmas passed and all that was shared between them was a card on Baekhyun's part. A simple gift was also sent. Baekhyun didn't know what to send, so he sent three pieces of candy.



It should've felt wrong, and maybe it did, but as time went by, the office attraction grew. What went from innocent glances eventually evolved into something more physical starting from when Kyungsoo took the step and slanted his lips over Chanyeol's.

And when Chanyeol laid Kyungsoo down on his bed, he did away with the voice inside his head that kept telling Kyungsoo didn't belong there. The voice kept telling him that it was Baekhyun's bed as well as his, but never Kyungsoo's. To this, Chanyeol executed his conscience, reasoning that Baekhyun was no longer there, that they were estranged, and that he needed something—something that Kyungsoo could give him and Baekhyun could not.

Just before Kyungsoo lowered himself on Chanyeol's body, he took Chanyeol's hand and slipped his wedding ring off, tossing it to the side where it silently fell to the floor



It was in late spring that Baekhyun suffered pain. He began to notice it when the headaches that he began to frequently have wouldn't go away. He also noticed his body being fatigued. After two weeks of trying to cope with the use of pills, he caved. There wasn't much in his mind about what was wrong with him other than the thought that it was just headaches and issues that would soon go away with a magic pill from the doctor.

He went in expecting nothing and came out with the feeling like the whole world was on his shoulders, bearing down on his heart as well.



They told him that he was scheduled to have a CT scan the next day, but for once, Baekhyun truly didn't want to do it alone. The first person that came to mind was Chanyeol, his husband and his rock. Quickly taking the subway, Baekhyun headed over

to Chanyeol's apartment, holding back the tears and trying to maintain a strong front.

Afterwards he jumped in a cab, only to freeze when the driver asked him for an address. He realized that in that moment he didn't know. He wasn't aware. He tried to recall, but he couldn't remember the address he had once known like the back of his hand. Flustered and upset, unable to explain his sudden and temporary memory loss, Baekhyun jumped out of the cab and opted to run, because unlike the address, he remembered with faded memory the streets and the corners where his rides in the past had usually turned.

He had a hope that perhaps they'd reconcile and take one night to make up for the year of blatant time lost. Baekhyun had hoped and he imagined, but as his eyes focused in on Chanyeol coming out of his apartment building with someone with their hands intertwined and with their faces smiling in happy content, Baekhyun stopped and watched as all those hopes fell apart.

And like the pain that he had felt in those past weeks, his eyes watered slowly, before trickling down until he could no longer bear any of it anymore. With shaking knees and blinded eyes, he took a step back and turned the other direction. Alone.



Six months into the year, in the beginning of summer, Kyungsoo sat on Chanyeol's bed, waiting for him to come back from the shower. In his hand was Chanyeol's wedding band, which Kyungsoo kept turning and turning, inspecting every aspect and every detail. It had passed the time long enough for Kyungsoo to be entertained when Chanyeol came back to the room.

"What're you doing there, Kyungsoo?" Chanyeol said with a small smile.

Shrugging, Kyungsoo's stoic face remained. "I was just thinking—actually, I've been thinking about this for quite some time, really."

Zippering up his pants and grabbing for a shirt, Chanyeol looked at him. "What's on your mind?" When he saw the ring in Kyungsoo's hands, Chanyeol sighed. "Kyungsoo."

"Chanyeol, why don't you just divorce him?" Kyungsoo burst.

“Kyungsoo, he’s—”

“You’ve been estranged for so long,” Kyungsoo said. “Your relationship was already beyond dead when I met you. Why’re you dragging something when neither of you feel anything for each other anymore?”

“I can’t just slap divorce papers on him so suddenly,” Chanyeol argued. “He needs some notice, at least.”

“Then give him a notice,” Kyungsoo said, gripping the ring in his palm. “In fact, have one of those lawyers deliver court papers to him. That’s notice enough, don’t you think?”

“That’s—”

“—Chanyeol.” Kyungsoo gave him a look. “It’s better to end things now, you know. So we can really have a fresh beginning. Then you and I can get married and the both of you can move on. You’re with me now and, let’s face it. He probably has someone else, too.”

Chanyeol’s throat tightened at the thought of Baekhyun having another man. It was hard to imagine and ultimately struck a chord in him. “Kyungsoo...”

“I love you, Chanyeol, and I know you love me, too,” Kyungsoo rasped. “So just do it, please. For us. For him. For all of us.”



On Monday nights, Baekhyun would slip inside Chanyeol’s dorm room and climb into bed with him. Chanyeol would stir, but end up wrapping an arm around his tiny boyfriend, and Kris would wake up the next morning with another roommate.



0:00:01

Chanyeol stood outside the house that he once shared with Baekhyun for a short period in time. He remembered the promises that he had held and the hopes and dreams that they had, but at that moment, past things like that were dust to him, because they were things that he hadn't thought of in countless months. Gathering up his courage, he lifted up his hand and knocked on the door. He expected the door to open and to be greeted by Baekhyun, but it took longer than he had thought and the person who had opened the door wasn't his soon-to-be ex-husband.

"Hello."

The young, pleasant-faced girl that had opened the door smiled up at him. "Hi, there." After a small pause, she asked, "I'm guessing you're Chanyeol."

Nodding, Chanyeol confirmed. "Yes."

"Well, come in," she said, stepping aside. When Chanyeol was inside, she closed the door behind him. "I'm Luna, by the way."

"Nice to meet you," Chanyeol said, holding out his hand.

"Thanks!" she replied brightly, shaking his hand. "Baekhyun should be down here any minute." Then, with a softer, but sadder look, she said, "He's been expecting you."

It hurt Chanyeol a bit to hear the words, but there was no helping the truth in them. He had filed for divorce and he was sure that Baekhyun got the notice two weeks prior. Of course Baekhyun was expecting him. If anything, standing in that foyer made him slightly nervous as to how Baekhyun would react. He imagined Baekhyun yelling and screaming at him, shedding tears with eyes that sought for blood.

But this image didn't hold up. When he looked up on the staircase where Baekhyun was making his entrance, Chanyeol caught the smile that used to make his heart stop—and it still did. Chanyeol stood at the entrance of the house, heart-stricken and heart-stopped by Baekhyun. Snapping himself out of it, Chanyeol approached him slowly. "Hey."

Walking towards his husband, Baekhyun opened his arms. Without even waiting for Chanyeol to make the first move, gave him a hug, before pulling back at an appropriate time. "Hi, giant."

Chanyeol's lips thinned. He didn't want to be called "giant" anymore. It brought back too

many things that would drift him off course from his purpose. "Don't call me that anymore, Baek."

With his mouth slightly open, Baekhyun nodded understandingly. "I'm sorry," he said with a laugh. "I forgot that we were divorcing. Of course." Patting Chanyeol on the arm, Baekhyun turned on his heel and crooked his finger. "Let's move over to the living room, okay? Luna, can you go make Chanyeol some tea? I'll have water."

"Do you want lemon, Baek?" she asked.

"No. Just plain."

"Got it," Luna said, clicking her tongue and making her way to the kitchen.

Chanyeol watched as she left, wondering about Baekhyun's relationship with her. In his mind, Kyungsoo's words reverberated. Maybe Baekhyun found someone just like how he found Kyungsoo. They both found people who were convenient to be with.

Once seated, Chanyeol studied Baekhyun's face. "You look a little...tired, Baek. Sleeping alright?"

It took a moment, but Baekhyun nodded with a smile. "I've just been working a little hard lately. That's all."

"Okay..." Chanyeol took a breath for a second before opening his suitcase. "As you know, I came with things for you to sign."

"Of course."

"It won't take long."

"I know."

"I'm trying to make this as painless as possible for you, Baek."

Baekhyun laughed softly. "It'll never be painless."

Chanyeol looked in Baekhyun's eyes. "I'm sorry..."

"I'm okay..."

Unable to stand the heavy atmosphere, Chanyeol moved on. He took the papers out and slid them across the coffee table over to Baekhyun, who sat across from him. As Chanyeol noticed, Baekhyun moved a little slow, but he figured that he was just afraid to face the reality the papers would bring.

As Baekhyun lifted the papers and scanned over them, Chanyeol spoke. "You're basically acknowledging that we both want this. It also means that you're willing to go to the court dates and meetings where we'll discuss how to split everything. But, Baek, the house...this house will remain with you, I promise you that."

"You promise me?"

"Yes."

"You promised me things at the altar, too," Baekhyun said softly in a ghost-like whisper. "But here we are." Not wanting his husband to dwell on it, Baekhyun waved the subject off. "So where do I sign?"

"At the bottom of the page," Chanyeol said. He reached into his pocket. "Do you need a pen?"

"Yes."

As their fingers brushed against each other's when Chanyeol gave the pen over, he noticed Baekhyun's body temperature. "Are you cold?"

"No, I'm fine."

"But your hands aren't usually cold. They're warm."

"I'm glad you remember."

A minute passed and Chanyeol watched as Baekhyun held the pen, yet never moved it. "Baek—"

"Hey, Chanyeol," Baekhyun said brightly, looking at him with a smile that made Chanyeol feel like he was back in in their college days. "Can I ask you for something?"

Knowing what he was putting Baekhyun through, Chanyeol nodded. "Sure. Anything."

Baekhyun held Chanyeol's gaze softly before asking, "Please stay one week with me."

"Baek—"

"Chanyeol, please."

"I can't."

"Why, Yeol?"

"Because of Kyungsoo."

Baekhyun held his breath. He knew about Kyungsoo. He knew about the guy who would answer his calls for Chanyeol. Still, Baekhyun couldn't help, but feel a shot of pain in his chest. "It's just one week..."

"It's one week too long."

"We've been married for almost four years, Yeol," Baekhyun said with a sad smile. "One week's all I'm asking for, giant."

Chanyeol thinned his lips. "What do you expect to happen over seven days?"

Even though the silence grew, there was a certain type of calm in the air. Baekhyun had looked away, but when he answered Chanyeol's question, he looked solemn and honest. The tired look in his eyes made him look innocently beautiful and calm, and that was something Chanyeol couldn't help, but notice.

"I'm not expecting anything to happen..." Baekhyun slowly said, lacing his delicate fingers. "For one week, I just want you to pretend, Yeol," he said with a voice that threatened to break. "I want you to love me the way you used to..."

"Baek—"

With a sad smile on his face, Baekhyun put up a hand. "I said 'pretend'. Remember that, giant." He laughed lightly. "You don't have to be in love with me. I already know you're not anymore. I just want you to pretend. I won't ask any more of you. This'll be the last promise you'll ever have to hold for me..."





1440

It felt odd being in the house again, but even more, sleeping in a different room other than the one he shared with Baekhyun—or used to. As he lied in his bed that first night, he contemplated his situation. He felt like if God had decided to smite him right then and there, he would have deserved it for doing what he was doing. It still didn't sit well with him to know that after months of barely any contact, he finally contacted Baekhyun only to break his news of wanting a divorce. But in the end, in his mind, it was inevitable. They weren't functioning together anymore. Chanyeol moved one way. Baekhyun moved the other.

He turned his head to the right and looked out the window. And as he took notice of the bright stars up in the sky, Chanyeol wondered what else living in the city had prevented him from ever seeing.



One of Chanyeol's concerns were clothes; he hadn't brought any seeing as how he wasn't planning on sticking around for more than a few hours. When he told Baekhyun of this dilemma, Baekhyun smiled and told him not to worry about it. As the time came around to retire for the night, he had taken Chanyeol to a guest room near what was once their bedroom. Baekhyun left for a moment, but came back a little while later with three shirts in his arms while Luna, who was following closely behind him, had plenty more including pajama pants, shorts, boxers, and more t-shirts.

"I couldn't carry them all," Baekhyun had explained. "They're too heavy for me."

Chanyeol then looked at the small pile that Baekhyun and Luna had carried in and set on his bed. "They don't look that heavy."

"They weigh like a ton to me," Baekhyun said quietly.

When Baekhyun left after Luna, bidding Chanyeol good-night, he recited a sequence of numbers before leaving. Unable to understand the binary, Chanyeol moved on. But the more he stood there alone in his room, the more a certain curiosity ate at him as his eyes drifted back to the stack. Then he moved over to the bed, gathered everything and lifted it up.

It wasn't heavy.



Despite the circumstances of his situation and the angry text messages he received from Kyungsoo the night before, Chanyeol woke up with a peaceful calm. He couldn't figure out why that was. Maybe it was because he wasn't in the city and, for once, had sleep that didn't involve the background noises of sirens and cars. Or maybe it was the house itself. Baekhyun didn't miss a detail in making every room in the house comfortable and warm.

He took a quick shower and slipped into the clothes that Baekhyun had lent to him. It wasn't until he looked in the mirror that he saw his appearance and realized something: Baekhyun had given him the clothes he had left behind.

Bitterness washed over him. He didn't know whether Baekhyun had done it on purpose, which Chanyeol knew he probably didn't. There were questions in his mind as to why Baekhyun still had them. They were old. He hadn't worn them in years. He left them in behind.

Why hadn't Baekhyun gotten rid of them?

The more he looked in the mirror, the more Chanyeol realized he looked the way he used to be. It was funny how a few old clothes and no hair products made him look the way he was two to three years ago. But that was contrary to how he felt. It wasn't funny. It was bitter and it burned something inside of him. Maybe it was guilt. Chanyeol didn't know. He just wanted to get through six more days and go home.



Chanyeol was distant. He didn't know how to act, despite the fact that Baekhyun had only requested for him to pretend. How do you act to pretend? It was a cycle that had no answers.

Breakfast went a little rocky, but Baekhyun tried, making Chanyeol feel like he needed to try also. Luna had made coffee. Baekhyun requested Chanyeol's coffee to be black. Then he requested milk with his. And when Chanyeol gave him a look, Baekhyun grinned at him and sheepishly shrugged.

"I still remember," he said. Then he opened his mouth, wanting to tell Chanyeol that every so often he would review the things of what he liked so he wouldn't forget. But in the end, he closed his mouth and hid behind a smile.



"There's a tree that's not too far from here, Chanyeol," Baekhyun said when Luna was cleaning up their breakfast.

"What do you want to do with a tree?"

For a moment, Baekhyun gave Chanyeol a blank look before softly looking at him. "I want to carve something."

In that moment, it clicked in Chanyeol's head. He remembered Baekhyun's old hobby of writing their initials in the bark of trees, saying that it'd be there for the entire world to see. Chanyeol frowned. "Baek—"

"Let's go, Chanyeol."

"Don't do this."

Baekhyun couldn't catch himself. His smile faltered for a visible split second. "We're only pretending, remember?"

The key word was "pretend". Chanyeol didn't know why Baekhyun wanted to do something so cruel as to pretend when they both knew nothing that was happening was actually real. He could see how everything was hurting the petite brunet. But still, it was

only for a week and it was Baekhyun's one condition for signing the papers. It was the most Chanyeol could do, so in the end, he nodded.

"Okay."



In his short time there, he noticed Baekhyun moved a little slow at things. Sometimes it'd take him a minute to process something complex and when he had to do a task that involved too much labor, Luna was around to do it for him.

Chanyeol still couldn't understand Baekhyun's relationship with Luna. He didn't know whether she was a housekeeper, a maid, or a girlfriend—though "girlfriend" was out of the question since their interaction seemed strictly brother and sister. But even though Chanyeol couldn't draw the line as to what it was, he knew that Luna was protective over Baekhyun for whatever reason.

As he waited in the foyer, he could hear Baekhyun and Luna's voices around the corner. With ears perked, Chanyeol couldn't help, but eavesdrop.

"Are you sure you want to walk that far?" he could hear Luna's concerned voice say.

"I've walked there plenty of times. I'll be alright."

"That was before..."

"It's okay. I have Chanyeol."

The conversation ended there. In the next moment, Chanyeol saw Baekhyun turn a corner and start walking towards him. Behind him, Luna tried to keep a happy look on her face, but Chanyeol could see the distinct look of true concern.



They walked for ten minutes on a path and only came upon the tree Baekhyun was

talking about when they went off the trail. After a fair amount of vegetation, Baekhyun pointed at a tree that seemed to be the master of all trees around it.

Chanyeol watched as Baekhyun happily inspected the tree's base. Then he took a seat as Baekhyun started to work on his tiny project. As he watched, Chanyeol felt something warm inside of him just by looking at the sight of the tiny male against the gigantic tree. It was a pleasant sight and for the first time in so long, Chanyeol let his guard down.

After five minutes of trying to penetrate the hard wood, Baekhyun sighed and turned to Chanyeol, holding out his pocketknife. "Can you do it for me?"

Chanyeol blinked before rising to his feet. He walked over and gently took the sharp object from Baekhyun. "Is the wood hard to cut?"

"I'm just a little tired."

Chanyeol glanced at him. "Did you sleep well at all last night?"

Silence grew for seconds before Baekhyun answered. "Yes..."

"Then why're you tired?" Chanyeol asked, looking back at the tree and inspecting the knife.

"I've been sick for a while..." Baekhyun replied.

"Have you gone to the doctor?"

"Yeah."

"And?"

"They said it was just a cold," Baekhyun said, looking away. "They told me I'd be alright..."

"Just a cold, huh?"

"Just a cold."

Chanyeol pursed his lips and pointed the knife at the tree. "So, what do you want me to

write?”

“Binary.”

Chanyeol snorted, but he smiled softly anyways. “It’s always binary with you.”

“Numbers can say things that humans never have the courage to say in words sometimes,” Baekhyun said, smiling back. “Where words are vague, numbers are clear.”

They paused for a second before Chanyeol moved again and Baekhyun slowly told him the sequence. By the time Chanyeol was done, an hour and a half passed. In the end, it wasn’t wasted time. They talked about the past and the times that made them laugh until tears were pouring out of their eyes.

Baekhyun laughed for the first time in so long and it seemed to unlock something in Chanyeol’s ears as the beautiful sound filled them. For so long, Chanyeol was deprived of the laugh that made him look twice at Baekhyun back in their college years. And now, with the ringing back in his life, Chanyeol was flooded with different types of emotions. He wasn’t sure how to feel. All he knew was that he felt warmth inside his chest and the beating of his heart coming back to life.

And by the time that it was all done, they walked back together to the house at Baekhyun’s slow and staggering pace, leaving behind a message in the forest that read:

*“01001001 00100111 01101101 00100000 01110011 01110100 01101001 01101100  
01101100 00100000 01101001 01101110 00100000 01101100 01101111 01110110  
01100101 00100000 01110111 01101001 01110100 01101000 00100000 01111001  
01101111 01110101”*

And if Chanyeol had known binary, he would have known what the numbers were trying to tell him.

*I’m still in love with you.*



That night, Chanyeol felt something warm crawl into bed with him. When his eyes

cracked open, he saw the outline of Baekhyun's figure standing over him against the moonlight. Then in a quiet voice, Baekhyun asked, "Can I sleep with you tonight?"

He should have hesitated, but Chanyeol didn't. He moved and flipped the covers over. "Come on in..."

Slowly, Baekhyun laid himself down. He kept his distance, facing the other way, but it was Chanyeol who unexpectedly pulled them together. It wasn't necessary. There was nothing in their deal about physical contact, but Chanyeol wrapped his arms around Baekhyun's waist anyways. It surprised Baekhyun for a second, but then he settled into his husband's strong arms, biting back tears as he tried to fall back to sleep.



2880

They spent the second day singing. Chanyeol hadn't touched a guitar in so long, he surprised himself by playing fairly well. He messed up on certain notes and couldn't keep up with certain tempos, but all in all, Baekhyun clapped and smiled at him, praising him for remembering so much despite the years of lacking practice.

While Chanyeol played the guitar, he also sang, but it was Baekhyun who sang for the most part—or at least he tried. His voice cracked and he couldn't go as high as he used to the way Chanyeol remembered. He would look upset, but Chanyeol would nudge him with his knee and give him a smile. Then they'd continue on with Chanyeol singing the leads and Baekhyun falling back to being the one singing along. Neither of them minded the change in roles. Their voices were still harmonized.

When the sun set and the stars came out, Baekhyun took a blanket outside and invited Chanyeol. In the yard behind their house, Baekhyun set the blanket down, and with the help of Chanyeol, they laid it out.

Lying on their backs, they lied in comfortable silence watching the stars glow. When Chanyeol commented on how rare the stars were in the city, Baekhyun mentioned the light pollution.

"They keep you from seeing the sky. It distracts you."

“It keeps me from seeing this every night.”

“Yeah...” Baekhyun replied gently. “It does that.”



4320

Chanyeol didn't know if Baekhyun had always been clumsy. The first time Baekhyun knocked over a glass of water seemed like an accident, but when he squinted his eyes, trying to reach another glass twenty minutes later only to knock it down again, Chanyeol could see that something was wrong.

When they settled on the living room floor, getting ready to play a series of board games that Luna had gotten from the attic, Chanyeol couldn't help, but ask. “Are you okay, Baek?”

Raising a slightly interested brow as he dusted off the games, Baekhyun hummed. “Yeah, I'm fine.”

“I meant your health,” Chanyeol clarified. “Are you sure it's just a cold?”

“What else could it be?” Baekhyun shrugged. “I'm tired all the time because of it.”

Chanyeol felt that there was something more, but he didn't push on. “I see you taking medication sometimes,” he muttered. “Are those for the cold, too?”

Baekhyun paused before he lifted the top off the Monopoly game. “Yes...They're for my cold. I get headaches sometimes.”

Slanting his lips, Chanyeol said, “Maybe you should go see a doctor again.”

“Maybe I should.”

The atmosphere was heavy, but as soon as the game started, it lightened. They had no stakes. No one was promised into taking off clothing for every property lost, but the laughter and joke-like insults were all real and no pretend.





5760

On the fourth night, they huddled together under a blanket on the living room couch. The two of them—along with Luna, who sat on the floor—watched *Titanic*, one of Baekhyun's favorite movies. Chanyeol knew that Baekhyun would be gushing with tears in the end, but to his surprise, the wary male, who was too tired to even stay up past ten, fell asleep leaning against his shoulder.

He looked peaceful even in the dark with only the lighting from the television illuminating his face. Chanyeol took note of it. Deciding that it wasn't worth Baekhyun waking up sore from sleeping in such a way, Chanyeol rose from the couch and picked Baekhyun up in his arms.

Luna got up to help, trailing right behind Chanyeol until he set Baekhyun in his own bed. After pulling off his shoes and tugging on the covers until it covered the fatigued male's body, Chanyeol turned around and faced Luna, who was watching everything he was doing.

"Is he always this tired?"

There was a silence. "Not always," she answered back.

Looking back at Baekhyun's sleeping self, Chanyeol sighed. "He said he's been suffering from a cold."

"A cold..." Luna mumbled.

"Tell him to get medical attention if it gets worse."

Luna began to start, but failed to go through with her words. She heaved her shoulders and nodded. "I'll tell him." She stood there for a few more minutes before figuring that Chanyeol wanted to be alone with Baekhyun. Retreating, she left the room.

Once Luna had gone, Chanyeol's gaze turned completely onto Baekhyun. Moving his hand, he swayed the hair out of Baekhyun's face. As he touched the strands, he noticed the feel of them. They weren't as soft or as glossy as they used to be—or at least how

he remembered. Chanyeol didn't know what to think. In his mind, the cause might've been stress. When he looked over his shoulder, he saw the laptop that Baekhyun had open and plugged in.

In the end, Chanyeol reasoned that it was stress due to working too hard on another book. Leaning down, Chanyeol hesitated at first, but conceded to the desire. He kissed the top of Baekhyun's forehead and let his lips linger for a moment above the fragile male before pulling back and stepping out of the room.



7200

During their rift, Chanyeol was often too busy to ever pay attention to Baekhyun's plans and his work. He knew Baekhyun's interests in general, but work always caused him to be too tired to care. In the afternoon, for the first time, Chanyeol sat down and listened to Baekhyun's plans.

Baekhyun moved slowly, but Chanyeol was used to his pace now. He was also use to Baekhyun occasionally forgetting things or having stalled responses. It wasn't a rare occasion for Baekhyun to rub his eyes and close them for a while. Chanyeol, trying to do what he could, would go and retrieve water whenever possible.

Papers splayed out on the living room floor. There were small papers with notes on them as well as stapled packets. Baekhyun spread them out and Chanyeol watched as he struggled to organize them the way he wanted—if that was why he kept looking frustrated and confused.

"So," Baekhyun started, "these are all my ideas and plans."

"That's a lot," Chanyeol commented, looking at the mess. "Are these the ideas you had years ago?"

"No. I threw away everything I had back then."

Chanyeol raised a brow. "Everything?"

Nodding, Baekhyun confirmed. "I threw everything away in late spring."

“Why?”

“I wanted to start over. I realized I’ve been writing nonsense.”

“Well, nonsense is your thing, isn’t it?” Chanyeol said, offering a smile.

“It is, but I wanted to try something different. That’s all.”

Glancing down at the words on paper, Chanyeol grinned. “Well, I’m sure it’s gonna be good. Just like the rest.”

Looking at Chanyeol, Baekhyun’s eyes twinkled as his lips curved. “Thanks, Yeol.”

“You’re welcome.”

After a moment, he asked, “Will you read it?”

Chanyeol blinked. “Your book?”

Nodding, Baekhyun said, “Yeah. Once it’s published.” Then he added, “I won’t make you promise me that you’ll read it, though. I already told you that this week is the last thing I’ll ever ask of you...”

Feeling a heavy tug on his heart, Chanyeol lifted a hand and turned Baekhyun’s face towards him. “I’ll read it.”

Baekhyun looked more of sad than happy, which was the complete opposite of what Chanyeol expected. Biting his lips for a second, Baekhyun nodded again. “Thanks.”

“No problem.”

When Baekhyun paused for a second to close his eyes and take in deep breaths, Chanyeol looked at him with a concerned face. “Headache?”

“Yes...” Baekhyun said weakly. “Headache.”



8640

Chanyeol looked at his phone and saw Kyungsoo's text messages. He answered them briefly and curtly before turning his cellphone off again. When he went to the kitchen, he found Luna alone, which was what he needed. Tapping her on the shoulder, Chanyeol stepped back instinctively when she turned around with a knife in her hand.

"Oh," she said. "Hi, Chanyeol."

"Hi." Chanyeol fixed his posture for a second and fixed his shirt, which he was pretty sure was from his college days. "I wanted to ask you for a favor."

Luna looked at him. "What kind of favor?" she asked, cautiously.

"Can you make Baekhyun's favorite food tonight? And do you have any wine?" he asked.

"Wine..."

"To accompany the dinner," he justified.

"I think Baekhyun would be better off with water, Chanyeol..." Luna mumbled.

Chanyeol was taken aback for a moment, but then he nodded understandingly. "Alright. No wine. But can you make the food?"

Setting the knife down on the counter, Luna crossed her arms. "What're you trying to do?"

"I'm trying to give him a nice dinner."

"Why?"

"It's my last night here."

With thin lips, Luna sighed. "Chanyeol, don't. You're not doing anything good for him by doing this. You know that this is only going to hurt him right? You're going the extra mile for him for one night, but you're leaving him the next day. I know you're just being nice, but this is really cruel."

Chanyeol's jaw locked. He didn't know what to say. "But I want to do this. Not to hurt him, but rather, to make up for everything."

"What's there to make up for when all you're going to do is leave him for another person the next day?"

Taking a step back, Chanyeol felt a panging in his chest. It was true. It was the cold hearted truth. Tomorrow he was going to leave the house with those signed papers, never to look back. He'd be leaving Baekhyun behind with nothing, but the house and some money. It felt horrible because for the last few days, he had been escaping the reality. Now, the night before he had to leave, Chanyeol didn't know how to deal with it anymore.

Swallowing, Chanyeol tried. "Luna, it's for one night. Please."

Luna stared hard at him before turning back. "Fine."

Chanyeol wanted to sigh in relief. "Thank you."

After a few seconds, Luna asked, "Do you still love him?"

"What kind of question is that?" Chanyeol muttered, unsure of the answer.

"It's a reasonable question."

Thinking, Chanyeol realized that he didn't know. He felt conflicted. The word "home" no longer had a definite meaning. The days he spent in the house felt warmer to him than the apartment that he had been living in for years. Baekhyun's laugh seemed to soak him pleasantly in its sound whereas Kyungsoo's laugh seemed like a mere replica that tried to affect him the same way Baekhyun's did. His eyes were more tired than Chanyeol had ever seen them, but in the recent days, despite how faded Baekhyun's eyes had gotten, Chanyeol could see the fire that was once there.

There should have been no hesitation for his heart knew the answer, but his head—the master of all his thoughts and actions—intercepted the confident answer from his heart and distorted it, leaving Chanyeol speechless and confused. His heart said yes, but his head flashed him the image of Kyungsoo.

After waiting for minutes and still not getting an answer, Luna shrugged it off. "Never

mind that I asked. I'll cook for you tonight. Make him happy, even if it's just for the night."



A few candles lit the room. Dimmed lights set the mood. The food was set on their plates.

When Baekhyun walked in, he bit his lips so hard, he thought he'd bleed. He wanted to back out and run away because it didn't seem real, but when he felt Chanyeol's chest against his back and his hands on his shoulders encouraging him to move forward, Baekhyun had no choice, but to comply.

After they sat down, they began to eat. They didn't speak for the first few minutes, but gradually the conversation moved. It lightened even more when Baekhyun grinned and commented on their appearance. Chanyeol was wearing a plain shirt and shorts. Baekhyun wore a t-shirt and pajama pants. Neither of which was proper attire for what was supposed to be a romantic dinner date.

And once they were all done, Baekhyun rose from the table after thanking Chanyeol. He planned on heading off to wash his hands, but when he rose, Chanyeol rose faster than he and walked over to him, pulling him up. He led Baekhyun to the living room, which was just as dimmed and filled with the small flares from the scented candles as the dining room.

Then he took the music player's remote and hit play, initiating a flow of slow music out of the speakers. At this point, Baekhyun was shaking. It was too much for him to bear. He wanted to drop down to the floor, but Chanyeol's arm wrapped around his waist kept him up. With his other hand, Chanyeol took Baekhyun's right and intertwined them as they began to sway from side to side.

It was a sweet moment, but for Baekhyun, it also brought him pain. And even though Chanyeol rested his cheek against the top of Baekhyun's head, and even though he kept them swaying to the soothe sound from the speakers; he could hear Baekhyun crying against him.

As Chanyeol's grip on the smaller male against him, he clenched his eyes and bit his lips. He tried to ignore the dryness of his throat and fought the heavy urge to silently cry

as well.



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When morning came, Chanyeol didn't feel like going back to the city anymore. But he had to. That was where he belonged. He functioned there. That was where his life was. It was where Kyungsoo was. Heaving a sigh, he got out of bed and checked his phone. There were plenty of missed calls from his boyfriend and Chanyeol figured it was about time to call back.

He got an earful when Kyungsoo immediately answered. There was a lot of "Why didn't you call me back!?" and "You've been ignoring my texts!" thrown around, but as the minutes dragged on and Kyungsoo had calmed down, Chanyeol plainly explained to him that he'd be going home that morning. In a huffy voice, Kyungsoo conceded, telling him to do it quickly so they could move on with their lives. Soon after, they hung up.

Chanyeol took off the clothes that made him the man that once belonged to another time and slipped back into the clothes that he arrived at the house in. He fixed his hair and fitted his suit. Soon after, the next time he looked in the mirror, he recognized the miserable fuck that he had been for the last years.

In the kitchen, he saw Baekhyun sitting at the table. When he looked up, Chanyeol noticed that his eyes were red. It was obvious that the Baekhyun had been crying, which made Chanyeol's chest twist in unimaginable ways even more when Baekhyun smiled.

"Good morning."

"Good morning."

A silence ensued as Baekhyun glanced down and took the folder that was in front of him and held it out to Chanyeol with both hands as if one hand was not enough to lift the lightless folder. "It's all signed."

Chanyeol grimaced as his fingers took the folder from Baekhyun. They were shaking,

but Chanyeol tried to control his body. "Thank you."

Nodding, Baekhyun looked away. "Will you be staying for breakfast?" he asked quietly.

"No..." Chanyeol replied softly. "I have to get back to the office in the early afternoon...I have to leave as soon as possible."

Without looking up at him, Baekhyun nodded. "I understand." Giving Chanyeol one last look, Baekhyun smiled until it hurt everything inside of him. "Thank you for everything, Yeol," he said in a shaky voice.

Chanyeol felt gutted. He wanted to pull Baekhyun out of his chair and kiss him, cry, and tell him whatever he needed to say in order to make himself feel better. He wanted to fix things. He wanted to stay. Chanyeol genuinely wanted to stay. He didn't want to go back to his job or to his apartment. His heart yearned to stay in the place that it had always called home, but Chanyeol's body disagreed.

With a stoic face, Chanyeol gulped and nodded, accepting the fact that Baekhyun had yet again looked away. "It's no problem. Thank you...for the papers." Knowing how Baekhyun wasn't going to respond to that, Chanyeol continued. "Take care, Baek."

"Bye, Yeol," Baekhyun said in a whisper like voice. His face was still turned towards the table, refusing to look up.

In a way, Chanyeol was thankful of the fact that Baekhyun was refusing to look up. He would have seen the sorry look on his face. With a heavy heart that didn't want to be wretched from the where it wanted to be, Chanyeol took a step back before turning on his heels.

For a moment, he stood there, silently wishing and wanting that his fragile husband would look up at him and spare him one last glance as if to sooth his guilty soul. When nothing happened, time seemed to stand still as Chanyeol took the chance and weakly asked, "Where did we go wrong?"

The question came about in a way that Baekhyun never expected it. His eyes immediately darted in Chanyeol's direction, breaking the giant's heart. "Would it matter now?"

"It's just..." Chanyeol paused. "Things happened."



“I know.”

“And we met other people.”

Baekhyun looked down, biting his lips and fighting the urge to tell Chanyeol that he was wrong. “Yes, we did...”

With a heavy feeling weighing his heart down, Chanyeol asked, “Did we even try?”

“I don’t know.”

“Baek—”

Chanyeol stopped. The ringing of his cellphone filled the space of awkward silence. Immediately, he reached into his pocket, scanning the caller I.D. When he saw that it was Kyungsoo, he felt no hesitation.

He rejected the call.

“Who was that?” Baekhyun asked.

“Nobody.”

Baekhyun gave him a look, but proceeded to accept the obvious lie. “You should get going. You might miss the train.”

“I don’t want to leave,” Chanyeol softly confessed. “I don’t want to leave until I know we tried.”

With his body beginning to feel weaken, Baekhyun’s lips trembled as he shook his head. “I don’t know, giant. I don’t know...”

In that moment, Chanyeol accepted the reality that neither of them was brave enough to admit the truth.

Neither of them did.

Taking in a small breath, Chanyeol nodded. “Okay...” he said with regretful eyes as he began to turn away. “I guess this is good-bye then—”

“Giant?”

With his back turned to his husband, Chanyeol closed his eyes, feeling wretched from hearing the endearment he had grown to know by heart. Slowly, he looked at Baekhyun. “Yes, Baek?”

Despite how it seemed as if standing hurt the fragile male, Baekhyun did so anyways with a small smile on his face. “When I was in college, I met the most pessimistic giant in the world. He told me I was weird, but he ended up asking me out a few weeks later. We dated all the way until graduation and I loved every minute of it.”

With his breath caught in his throat, Chanyeol creased his brows as he waited for Baekhyun’s words to come spilling from his lips.

“We got married soon after graduation. It wasn’t a big ceremony, but nothing can ever take away the moment when I looked down that aisle and saw him—the giant that called me weird—looking at me the way he did. And in that moment, he was more than just my husband. I knew he was my soul mate.”

Drifting his eyes to the ground as he evaded direct eye contact, Baekhyun took in a shaky breath and continued. “We started off small. Our apartment wasn’t much, but it was nice. He came home every day and I’d always be there to welcome him. I didn’t cherish those moments at the time, but now I do.”

Baekhyun didn’t know when it started, but his eyes began to burn. “But things changed gradually. It’s hard to tell you when we started growing apart, but we did...”

Breaking from the forces that held him stationed away, Chanyeol took a step forward towards Baekhyun. And then another. “Baekhyun...”

It wasn’t until Chanyeol hesitantly placed his hands on Baekhyun’s weak shoulders that the smaller male looked up at him, showing him his wet eyes. The sight was painful to see and Chanyeol couldn’t escape from feeling sick as he watched Baekhyun to muster up the strength to continue smiling.

“It has been years, Chanyeol,” Baekhyun said in a weary voice. “It has been years since I’ve seen the giant that called me weird. And it has been years since I’ve seen the giant that looked at me like I was his world. My giant left me and that’s why I haven’t seen him.”

With a shaking hand, Chanyeol ran his thumb across Baekhyun's face, gently wiping the small droplets of tears away.

"But I saw glimpses of him this week," Baekhyun said with a small that broke Chanyeol to pieces. "I saw him in the moments when he asked me if I was alright. I saw him when he smiled at me during board game night. And when I was showing him my work, I saw him there, too..."

"Don't cry..."

"After a time of seeing him here and there, I realized that he was never really gone," Baekhyun said, slowly raising his hands and holding onto Chanyeol's. "I might be delusional. It might just be my medication. Perhaps I'm hallucinating, but when saw him...I realized that my giant never left. He was just hiding."

Chanyeol wasn't aware of the tiny drops of water falling from his eyes, but Baekhyun was. Lifting his hand, he wiped Chanyeol's tears away just as the giant did to him. "Chanyeol, people grow, people move apart, and people lose one another, but there are things that will never change. Some things will stay as it is on the inside no matter how much it seems the outside has morphed into something else."

For a moment, Baekhyun went silent, holding Chanyeol's face as he had when they first danced at their wedding—soft and gentle. Then, for the first time in so long, he opened his lips, caressing the words as they left his mouth.

"I love you..."

Chanyeol looked at him with hurt eyes.

"I have loved you since the moment you gathered up the courage to ask me if you were allowed to date me," Baekhyun recalled, laughing at the memory. "I have loved you even in the moments when we weren't even sure if we could make the rent. All this time, despite everything, I have loved you, and the only thing I regret is not telling you just how much I do."

Reluctantly, Baekhyun began to let go. "It may be too late, but my time is running out."

Chanyeol's hold on Baekhyun's face tightened as he felt his husband begin to release him. "What're you talking about? What time?"

Baekhyun ignored the question. "It's now or never for me," he said quietly, "so have I to say it before I can't. I love you. I still love you. Nothing in that aspect has changed for me, Chanyeol. You're still my giant and I will never find it in me to love you any less."

Finally breaking eye contact, Baekhyun glanced away and began to pry Chanyeol's hands off of him. "I want you to stay," he confessed in a hoarse voice. "I want you to stay with me, but you can't. You should go, giant. I'm leaving soon and I don't want you to be here to see me go. I don't want to leave you all alone because I know how badly it hurts to be all by yourself."

Lost, Chanyeol tried to keep his hold, but despite Baekhyun's weakness, he was able to push Chanyeol away.

"Baekhyun, what do you mean you're leaving? Where?"

Closing his eyes, Baekhyun held his breath as a small wave of pain came over him. "I...I can't tell you. I don't want to..." he said as he slowly took a seat.

"Baek—"

"I'm okay..."

"No, you're not!" Chanyeol argued. "You're sick. Something's wrong with you."

"I'll be fine. I just need my medicine. That's all."

"Your medication doesn't help you!" Chanyeol said angrily. "You haven't gotten any better since I've been here."

"My medication isn't to cure the pain," Baekhyun said faintly, "it's to ease it..."

Looking down at the male, Chanyeol's fists curled. "There's something you're not telling me."

Baekhyun nodded slightly. "Yes..."

"Why can't you just say it?"

Dragging his eyes down, Baekhyun looked away. It then occurred to Chanyeol that they were back to the way they were just a few moments before.

“I don’t want to say it, because unlike me, you have a life,” Baekhyun said, “and it’s too late for me to take you away from it. It’s better this way.”

“Baek—”

“You asked me if we tried, giant,” Baekhyun said as his voice grew weaker and weaker. “You asked me if we tried and I said I didn’t know. But just a few moments ago, I did. I tried. I told you how I much I still loved you, and that, Chanyeol, that was me trying.”

Before Chanyeol could say another word, his phone rang once again with Kyungsoo’s name flashing on the screen. Baekhyun lifted his eyes up at him and Chanyeol met his gaze.

Like a leaf in motionless water, they were afloat, but not progressing in any direction. And that was when Chanyeol knew that it was time to go. Although he worried for Baekhyun’s health and for the secret he refused to tell, Chanyeol backed away.

Just as Kyungsoo was calling him, his life beyond that house was pulling for his return. He faced conflict within himself about which decision to make, but with a reluctant turn of his heel, he made his choice. Gripping the bag in his hand, Chanyeol spared Baekhyun one last glance.

“I guess this is good-bye...”

“Yes...”

Then Chanyeol tore his eyes away.

“Good-bye, Baek...”



When Chanyeol returned back to his apartment, it was like he returned back another man. It was funny to him how one week made him despise all he had been for the last two years and what he had done. Kyungsoo greeted him happily, but Chanyeol found that it hurt to smile. He wanted to cry, but he couldn’t. He didn’t want to cry because then his thoughts would go right back to Baekhyun. Instead, he forced his body to wrap

his arms around Kyungsoo.



Four months had gone by and Chanyeol still felt like he was floating right on by life. Fall was in the midst—perhaps in its end—and the colors of the trees had changed. Unlike the trees, however, Chanyeol's feelings remained static. And despite the fact that time had moved forward, he was still stuck in moment when Baekhyun held his face as he told him he still loved him despite everything.



Months had gone by, but Chanyeol never forgot. Instead of using the time to move on and forget, he found himself using it to contemplate everything. He wasn't aware just how much time had passed, but when a knock came at his door with news of his soon-to-be ex-husband, he realized he wasted too much.

The very next day after receiving the visit from Luna, who was apparently Baekhyun's caretaker, Chanyeol packed his bags and left the apartment he shared with Kyungsoo. The man wasn't pleased by his brash decision and was left confused as to why he was being left.

Kyungsoo's reaction was angry at first. He screamed at Chanyeol's stupidity and impulsiveness, and then he yelled, cursing everything in sight and attacking Baekhyun himself. Chanyeol paid him no mind, but continued to pack.

The small male was hysterical with every bag Chanyeol filled. His confusion was mixed with anger as he questioned what Baekhyun had done to lure Chanyeol back. It never occurred to him to see himself as the third wheel in the picture. To him, he never stole Chanyeol away. He merely picked up the pieces that Baekhyun left.

Anger gradually turned into desperate pleas of begging the moment Chanyeol began putting the bags into a cab. Time and time again, Chanyeol apologized, but he knew it would never help.



Chanyeol arrived at the house, but it felt cold to him unlike before. It seemed as though there was no longer life that kept the house alive and Chanyeol knew exactly why.

He knocked on the door and Luna let him in.

Without an exchange of words, she led him up the stairs. For the first time in so long, he opened his eyes and saw the house as his home.

Silently, they walked to the master bedroom. Just before the door, Luna stopped and smiled at him, indicating that she would not go any further.

Stepping forward, Chanyeol turned the door knob and entered.

“Baek?”

Chanyeol faintly heard a weak gasp and then a quiet, strained voice say;

“You came back... My giant came back...”