

## XXVII

"I can't believe it, dammit!" Nori complained. "I went to the mixed baths, but there wasn't a single female in there! Heck, not even an old lady or anything! It was *just* middle aged men!"

"How did you not see that one coming?" Yuuto laughed. "It's always middle-aged guys sitting in there hoping to catch a glimpse of some naïve young girl who just happens to walk in thinking that it'll be an actual *mix* of men and women. Friggin' pervs. I guess that's why you went though, ain't it?"

"Yeah," Nori admitted, "though I had a hunch that your fiancée woulda dragged you there too, and I must say, I kinda wanted to sneak a peek or two."

"Well, you'll be devastated to know that I talked her out of it," Yuuto chuckled. "Sorry not sorry."

Nori sighed. "I *will* get a peek at a girl during this trip," he declared. "I swear, if it's the last thing I do!"

"Well, good on you. Let's turn in for the night, man. I feel tired as fuck right now," Yuuto yawned.

"God, when you're tired you become a karate master, don't you?" Nori inquired.

"Yeah, I asked my parents about that a little while back. They told me I had apparently learned martial arts at one point, and Mom claims that it's just muscle memory kicking in thanks to my barely-functioning tired brain," Yuuto explained.

"I see," Nori chuckled. "Well, that's...a little terrifying. I suppose it *would* be best for us to rest, then. I'm off," he said, waving as he entered his room, "g'night."

"Rest well, friend," Yuuto smiled as he turned around and walked into his own room.

Yuuto slowly opened his eyes. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a bright light coming from the direction of the window. "Morning already?" he mumbled. "Wow, I must have fell asleep fast...but why don't I feel energized at all?" He sighed, closing his eyes and enjoying the warmth that was suddenly enveloping his body. "Ah, the sunlight's nice," he muttered, "it's all warm and soft and—wait...*soft*? *SOFT*?"

Yuuto's eyes shot open. The light had disappeared, and instead, all he saw before him was darkness. He felt two arms wrapped around him and he heard someone else's gentle breathing. His face was enclosed in warmth from all directions. Out of the corner of his eye, Yuuto spotted a long strand of pink hair.

"Hanae, why are you in my room?" Yuuto inquired quietly, poking her in the arm. "And why are you lying beside me?"

Hanae jolted awake and looked down with a smile, placing a kiss on Yuuto's forehead. "Don't worry, darling," she whispered. "I wanted to spend more time with you, so I decided to settle, remember? Just relax. Let's just go to sleep."

"*This* is what you meant by 'settle'? You know this is against the rules, right?" Yuuto asked with concern in his voice.

"I understand that," Hanae answered, "but I'm alright with it. I'll take full responsibility if we're caught, but I just wanna spend some time with you..."

Yuuto sighed. "A-alright I guess," he said, "but let's just go to bed, okay? I'm really tired already, and it's seriously getting late. You need your rest too; after all, we have a big day ahead of us tomorrow."

"Of course," Haane whispered to him, snuggling close to him and nuzzling his cheek. "But I want to talk for just a little while, darling, if it's alright with you. It's about something really important to me, and I think now is the right time to talk about it."

"That's fine," Yuuto replied, instinctively putting an arm around his fiancé's waist and pulling her slightly closer. "What do you wanna talk about?"

Hanae took a deep breath before continuing. "Do you remember me, darling?" she asked bluntly.

Yuuto froze at the sudden question. "Uhh...what?"

"You know, from that visit when you were a child. That was almost a decade ago, so I don't blame you if you've forgotten, but I want you to know that I remember that day clearly...the day we first met. Our fathers were busy drinking, and our mothers were discussing the details of our engagement. On that day, you and I were playing outside," Hanae said, as if she was reciting the events in the memory. "A wild dog had appeared, and started to chase after me. You fought it off with a stick, but it almost bit you," she continued, tears forming in her eyes. "You were almost hurt trying to protect me...and since then...my heart's throbbed whenever I heard of you. That's why, later that day when my mother told me on our engagement, I was overjoyed. I wanted to do anything to impress you when we met again, so I studied hard to be smart and trained hard to be athletic. I became more outgoing so I could talk to you easier and I changed my hairstyle to be more to your liking, according to what my mother had told me. It was all info *your* mother had given us."

Yuuto lay still, staring at her in shock. "I..." his voice trailed off. "I did that?" He gulped. "I...I'm kinda surprised at myself, actually." He broke into a slight chuckle. "I probably should have remembered such an event, huh? Sorry about that," he apologized. "The thing is, all my memories from when I was eight years old or younger are really fuzzy. My parents told me that I had a serious accident and got a concussion a few weeks after my eighth birthday, and I ended up with a case of amnesia. It took me weeks to remember all my friends and family, and I still haven't managed to recover—or should I say salvage—all my memories from before the incident."

"I...see," Hanae mumbled. "No wonder you don't remember it...you were hurt and your memory was taken away." She took his hand and rubbed it gently. "Well," she smiled, "you remember now, right? You *know* now," she added with emphasis. "And it doesn't matter if you don't remember *everything* from your past. I'll stay by your side for the rest of my life, and I'll help you remember, bit by bit. I'll do it even if it takes us the rest of our lives. I'll do it because I want you to remember the happy times you've had, and I want you to remember the joys of your youth and the lessons

you've learned before. I want you to remember all of it, and I'll help you do so. I promise," she smiled.

Yuuto lay in silence. Slowly, he wrapped his arms around Hanae, who put her arms around him as well. The two embraced deeply. "Thank you," Yuuto whispered to her, feeling relaxed and strangely calm. "Thank you so much, Hanae. You...you honestly mean more to me than you'd ever know."

Hanae placed a hand on his cheek and pulled him closer, placing another kiss upon his forehead. "I'm happy to hear that, darling," she replied, "more than anyone would care to believe. I love you." She giggled gently as she closed her eyes. The two slowly drifted off to sleep in each other's arms.