**CHAPTER ONE**

<p align=justify>The birds are there again.</p>

<p align=justify>The cool wind blows, ruffling their feathers. The gust forces them to huddle close next to each other to share the warmth of their collective body heat as they perch on one of the strong branch of an exceptionally bushy zelkova tree. Little do humans know, how their black, beady eyes see and observe everything. Humans just never realize it.</p>

<p align=justify>So inherently, the birds see.</p>

<p align=justify>Out in the park, they see the usual morning commotion and hear the low hum of people bustling around and making their own ways to start the day. A teacher cheerfully shepherding a line of excited kindergartens in their fluffy coats and square <i>randoseru</i> school bags. A group of friends in uniforms walking together and playfully bickering as they walk to their school. A mother taking her baby for a walk with a stroller. A wife lovingly giving her husband a good luck kiss before he goes to work. A folded newspaper, which is left behind by the man who not long after he finished his morning coffee walked away from his wife all grinning, tells the birds it’s October 5th, the second month of autumn. The early mist and the soothing wind the third season of the year seems to carry love around in its particles.</p>

<p align=justify>Be that as it may, the birds chirp to each other still: does love live forever? As crazy as it sounds, they have <i>known</i> all too well, as their black beaded eyes have been silently witnessing, how people take precarious twists and the love they were so loudly confessing changes.</p>

<p align=justify>Away the black orbs of the birds’ eyes drift. This time, to the bedroom’s balcony of a house at the far end of the road. The windows are open and the white linen portière are all tied up, giving way for a lone ray of the golden morning sun to pass through and for the line of their vision to slip in.</p>

<p align=justify>Inside, the birds see again.</p>

<p align=justify>As if trying to show our quiet watchers something, the sun has its bright finger pointing to light up some objects in the middle of the now empty bedroom. It arrived upon a clean and neatly organized desk with only two things sitting on top of it: a framed family photo in the size of a postcard, and a black leather-bonded journal.</p>

<p align=justify>The photo looks like a family photo. A tall man with a dimpled smirk, who has one arm draped over the shoulder of a slightly shorter man whose warm smile sets the tone of the photo, is hugging the latter tightly. The sitting men are carrying two toddlers on each of their laps, a black haired boy and a girl with hazel curls who are both laughing with their innocent, large round eyes focused on the camera.</p>

<p align=justify>Next to the memento, stand two people, the same ones as the little children smiling on the photo—even though all grown up, very much older and wearing black, with the jet black haired man holding close in his embrace the hazel haired woman with red rimmed eyes.</p>

<p align=justify>The birds see, but they don’t know why.</p>

<p align=justify>So away they fly, taking a closer peek when the two humans have left the room. They settle themselves on the balcony’s railing, their bodies changing colors under the sunlight that passes through canopy of leaves ablaze in colors sprouting from the lining maples, alders, zelkovas, and birches. Again the cool wind blows, but this time to open the seemingly heavy cover of the shut tight journal. It seems to understand and approve our feathery friends’ doing, as it flicks the papers of the journal to open a particular recto verso, which keeps one detached paper.</p>

<p align=justify>The birds see again.</p>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<center>\*\*\*</center>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<p align=right><i>December 24th, 2041</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>It’s a nice evening.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>I don’t know what this writing is supposed to be. A love confession letter? A last will testament? A blind date advertisement?</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>But anyway, you may want to marry my husband.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Why am I doing this? All I want in this world is for my husband to be happy. I need to find someone to help me make my husband happy when I no longer be able to do so, hence here I am looking for one.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>As the story goes, today marks exactly nineteen years, eleven months, twenty seven days, sixteen hours, and fifty six seconds I’ve spent with an extraordinaire of a man (or so the calculator said, haha).</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Forgive me for the little pun, since all I know is that for twenty years I’ve played as one of the two main characters of a wonderful story along with Baekhyun, the other main character, and coincidentally, my husband also. All I know is that I want to spend another twenty years with him, and even infinite times more of it.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Despite me knowing the aforementioned admirable fact, sadly, it was only true until six months ago, since recently I no longer know how much years I’ll have the honor to play the role as Baekhyun’s husband.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Don’t worry, we didn’t fall apart, split up or divorce. In fact, as greed is intertwined and bred in the deepest core of human nature, I want</i> more. More <i>chances to tick off the things in our bucket list: see our kids happily marry the loves of their lives, travel the world once our kids have families of their own.</i> More <i>of our goals to be turned into achievements.</i> More <i>quality time to spend with my family once me and Baekhyun had grown so old.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>But no matter how much humans plan, there will always be a greater force to reckon. God’s will, fate, destiny… you name it all. Because again, it was six months ago when signs of an end of our story started to show themselves in front of us.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>With the cuckoo clock that’s obnoxiously loud both in sounds and appearance ticking my seconds off, let me begin. I need to finish writing this piece while I still can discreetly do so without my husband knowing about it, and of course, while I still can remember clearly the memories of us (I’ll tell more of that seemingly annoying clock that me and my husband actually love dearly later on).</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>I started fainting. I would always woke up with Baekhyun right beside me, hands clasping mine. But one day, I woke up from yet another episode fainting only to find out that an untreated and late detection of grade 2 astrocytoma which had been dwelling in my brain and showed no symptoms had developed into something much worse.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>My friend that has been living in my head turned out to be glioblastoma multiforme or the GBM. Hard to spell, I know, I can’t spell it correctly either. But Baekhyun helped me to understand (for example, he knows how much I love Harry Potter books, so he told me to say</i> for Muggles it’s more commonly called a brain tumor <i>if people ask! Haha).</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>On that note, it reminds me now that it’s time to list the qualities my Baekhyun has (enough about me, I’m pretty much boring). I guarantee that you’ll love him by the end of this letter.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>I’ll start the list by telling you that my Baekhyun is smart. Back to when we first met, at our university days, Baekhyun could make sense of love with his mathematical theorems, and together we could find love even amongst the dusty books, deadlines and exams. Baekhyun knows the exact way to cheer me up, one of them being every day he manages to tell me at least three different trivial facts. My favorite one, the one that makes me smile all the time is how he knew</i> Park <i>is the 110th most used surname in the world compared to</i> Byun <i>as the 5,328th, but still he chose to use</i> Park <i>as our family name. Even when I refused to acknowledge the existence of that so-called ‘new friend’ in my brain, denied that I’m sick, and even despising my own existence, Baekhyun was the one who came into my aid. He diligently studied about my condition, did researches on how to cure me, and made me see the light that there’s always hope.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is strong. He can make our kids understand their other father needs some time. At first he hid his tears. But just like he has known me for a quarter of a hundred years, I’ve known him for just as long. One day I caught him letting his tears out and we talked, and since then he turned his sorrow into his number one reason to fight, which later on not only became his strength but also mine and our kids’. At home, he used to cling onto my arms and I’d give him piggyback rides, but now that my legs are barely able to stand still, without me asking he’ll carry me up in his arms. He’ll take me just wherever I want to go, so stubborn in carrying me to the point my wheelchair got dusty (no worries, it’s the only thing he lets the dust piling up on). And even with the knowledge that my doomed ending will never change its course, still he believed that we wouldn’t stop fighting until the last second remaining, that he would always have faith in me… in us.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is a brave, courageous man. He stays standing bravely next to me at all times. When we went to the haunted house, even though along the way he had his eyes shut tight and arms clinging onto me, he trudged away until the end with me. When I know how our world was slowly torn apart piece by piece, crumbling beneath our feet as we heard the final verdict of my life rolled out of the neuro-oncologist’s tongue. Even on that moment when the doctor could no longer give us another trained broken smile or a hurried reply of</i> don’t worry much it will be just fine <i>after I asked how long do I get to live. Let me tell you: the result was, in one word,</i> worst, <i>but there Baekhyun was, still refusing to back down even when the fate’s cruel hands seemed so determined in crushing us two into pulps.</i></p>

<p align=justify>I won’t lose you because I know I won’t lose this battle, and so will you, <i>Baekhyun once said to me as he drove us home after that fateful day, after we had decided it was time for me to receive palliative treatment in the sanctuary of our home. He gave me more than answers: dark cinnamon eyes staring momentarily into my dark mahogany ones to relay a rush of every pleasant feeling in the world, warm hands that were strong enough to pull me out of depression’s trench, and a chuckle that comes along with a cheeky pun of how we’ll go through this one together and won the game, just like our Battleground matches (another plus point, Baekhyun is an excellent gamer!).</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is a gorgeous human being. Casting my pink colored glasses down, still I can testify he’s the most handsome person I’ve ever laid my eyes upon. Here’s the best part: he brings out and enhances the beauty of everything he touches—my life included. He looks at me with his ever-twinkling eyes radiating eternal fondness like I hold the entire world in my palms, when in reality</i> he <i>is the cynosure of all eyes, the unceasing wonder that makes the world go round.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is that cool dad who taught our daughter Seolhyun how to waltz for her very first prom and half of the first person who she chose to go along with her to her favorite band’s concert (I’m the other half person, so all three of us finally went to the concert together). He’s that cool dad our son Sungyeol would rather meet to consult about love and conspired with to bake a cake for his crush (even though naturally the kitchen ended up in a mess and I have to bake the cake again for them).</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is always full of surprises. Something simple like stealing a sloppy kiss that 99% of the time leads into us chasing each other across the apartment, or some of my favorite confectioneries hidden in the pockets of whatever I’m wearing for the day. Something daring and audaciously bold like suggesting an idea of having a tattoo of a simple crosses on our ankles to represent a screw, saying it’ll be another thing that will keep us together alongside our love wired hearts and connected minds. Something adventurous like going to the airport for a spontaneous trip and taking randomly any flight available right at the moment to spend a day at wherever the airplane will bring us, laughing nonstop as we pantomimed our words to find our way around new cities and talk to its citizens.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Even though Baekhyun spends his weekdays as a Mathematics professor, cramped up in his office at Kyunghee from nine to five overloaded with his students, to me he’s an artist, in a way. He paints my days with laughter, my face with smiles and kisses, and a lot more times than not he also paints our kitchen with white flour as we cook for our family and our clothes with watercolors as we help our kids work on their art homework. Even when my skin started showing purple bruises from the chemotherapy doses’ side effects, with his gentlest voice and tender touches Baekhyun turned the painful spots into beautiful, violet rose petals.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun finds laughter in almost everything. When we’re out doing karaokes and embarrassing ourselves. When any of us failed in our attempts, still he knows exactly what to do and how we can try again next time. Even when our fears were so dead set in making us grieve and weep, still he could make us laugh on how we look like Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer after we cried. Baekhyun finds laughter in everything and makes it better.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is always patient and understanding. As I get weaker, my limbs are chained to the bed. This saddens me, as we no longer are able to go on adventures again, though I understand if my husband won’t be around with me and will get bored eventually. But my Baekhyun, with his gentle voice, reads to me stories and books. His magic turns the four walls confinement of my hospital room into faraway paradises, majestic castles on foreign hills, the kingdom of the aquamarine ocean and cream sandy shores, and even soft cotton clouds of the white heaven up above.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>And as my health fails me, our future is robbed, and so are our dreams. From that moment onward, we have learned we can’t rely on what’s next and our plans were all terminally ended. So we moved on to our back-up plan: to live and focus even further in the moment. We don’t go for</i> more, <i>but we go for</i> enough.</p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun makes the hospital our playground. He’ll bring me on my wheelchair to explore every floor and every place we can go to, to have us people watching, guessing what was on people’s mind as we whisper to each other our own silly guesses and paying absolutely no care even when people stare at us with weird looks when we laughed harder than we should. He’ll smuggle my favorite chocolate gateau once in a while when I’m too fed up with the hospital’s bland menu for my chemotherapy diet that the doctors put me through. And though there are nurses who can take care of me, he’ll always insist to be the one who bathed me gently using wet clothes soaked in lukewarm water and brought sunshine yellow rubber duckies to cheer me up with his own squeaky voice and ducky lips. When the drugs get me falling asleep at uncertain times, either at the hospital or at home, the first thing I see as I open my eyes again will always be his eyes staring intently into mine.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is our lucky charm. Wherever whenever, if I’m holding his hands even with our eyes closed we’ll still feel the magic that we’ll never let go. Even though I might lost my battle with my own body, he’s the living evidence that I’ve won in life still.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Any time spent with Baekhyun is always a good time.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Spending Friday nights gulping cheap cold cola and snacking on too salty popcorns while watching our favorite old movies at Seodaemun Art Hall’s old drive-in theatre, cozying in our cherry red convertible. Playing golf at that country club at Cheongnam with exorbitant rates once a month or so, pretending to be pros and sipping rich cocktail when all we do was just fooling around and sending more than half of the golf balls into the lake. Forming two teams of me with Seolhyun and Baekhyun with Sungyeol, bowling and roller-skating, competing against each other for a bet the losing team should treat us all boxes of pizzas and crunchy waffles with scoops of ice cream on top. Taking the kids to spend a day at the Everland amusement park and scream on top of our lungs as we dive some meters down on the roller coaster ride. Sneaking out after the kids have gone to sleep to have a midnight drive and visit the Gyeongpo beach, having the moon watching us kissing under the starry sky and the sea changing into liquid silver by the moon’s bright white light.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Maybe Baekhyun isn’t number one on the list of the most romantic person in the world. But his willingness in learning the things I love, his constant yet various ways of showing how much he cherishes us, and his astuteness in understanding what I really feel without me saying a word make him the one and only winner of my heart. He’s the one whose gestures are so sincere and full of love he brings the feeling of home wherever whenever. He makes falling in love as fun and thrilling as swinging down on the biggest canyon swing in the world after getting suspended from a 160 meters high platform to go on a 300 meters long arc (which we did on our tenth anniversary trip to Queenstown, New Zealand!).</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Like I did, maybe at first you’re disappointed Baekhyun doesn’t really share the same sentiment as you and I do on the use of lovey dovey songs or reciting poems out loud as a way to pronounce his love. But in the course of time I learned that he’s the man who spent all the money of his very first paycheck just for me to buy a place that’s now my (and his) dream bakery. No matter how tired he is after teaching until late, still he helps me carrying our sleeping kids up to their bedrooms and afterwards he’ll help me kneading pastry dough just so I can serve fresh bakes in the morning. He never let go his tight hold on my hands and warm hugs around my body, both in happy and even sad days. You’ll find his love even in the most mundane things as he loves drawing smiley faces on our oatmeal bowls with slices of strawberries and bananas, with a great knack sorting my outfit for the day along with my favorite tie or pair of socks, sticking Post-its with doodles of our family in his handwriting just at any place imaginable, and of course, giving me unexpected, slow and sweet kisses.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Baekhyun is not only my husband, he’s also my (and everyone else’s) best friend. He’s unequivocally kind. He can find something to value in anyone, however apparently insignificant or wretched. I believe these noble features of his endow him great humanity and sympathy.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>With all of those things being said, I’m going to miss Baekhyun, so much.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Truthfully now I feel it’s quite useless writing these down because really, it just came to my mind again how words can never compliment Baekhyun properly. But if it adds to the scores, last but not least I’ll tell you how Baekhyun also makes my heart feel the way it should: warm even in the coldest night, calm even under pressure of the heavy storm of my thoughts, and with that small but enthralling smile of his… he keeps it beating alive.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>What did you say? I’ve promised you one thing? Oh, right: the cuckoo clock. Will you be mad at me if I tell you that there’s nothing special behind it? No funny inside joke shared between us to laugh at, no romcom movie worthy events happening around it about how we found love in the most hopeless place, no cheesy or witty meaning as to why we’re destined to know we’re each other’s soulmates?</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>But I can tell you it’s the clock that counts every precious second we have spent together, and how my Baekhyun turns every single of it into our forever.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>Why am I doing this again? Please help me to make my husband happy. I believe the story should never end on me and I want the magic to continue to live on. Here I present you the love of my life, the miracle that the universe gave me, Baekhyun.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>I will excuse myself for a moment after this, for I can hear Baekhyun calling my name, probably asking for my opinion on the ginger cookies he and the kids have just finished baking. The house is warm with the sweet cinnamon aroma wafting through the air, on the tall Christmas tree the red and green lights are winking merrily at me from the corner of the room, and of course, the sound of my husband and my kids’ laughter. It’s not just a nice evening, it’s indeed a beautiful Christmas eve. So goodbye, for now.</i></p>

<p align=justify><i>I’ll send this letter tomorrow (I hope I’ll make it, I’m hiding this on my journal for the time being). At the end, as I write the last paragraph of what probably will also be the last thing I wrote in my last days, after I told you all you need to know about my wonderful of a husband Baekhyun, I’m giving you an empty space below. It’s for you two to write another story, and to live love happily.</i></p>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<p align=right><i>With all my love,</i></p>

<br>

<br>

<p align=right><i>Park Chanyeol</i></p>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<center>\*\*\*</center>

**CHAPTER TWO**

<p align=justify>The birds are there again.</p>

<p align=justify>The flock is flying and hovering above, with wings gracefully waving as if saying their goodbye, following wherever the autumn breeze orchestrates them. Then at last, the drift stops and their clawed feet find someplace to rest on a low hanging branch from one of the old yew trees.</p>

<p align=justify>And the birds see again.</p>

<p align=justify>It seems they arrive at the end of something, and they find as they observe. A ring of people standing under the envelopment of an oak tree’s humble and low lying leaves. The opus consisting of murmurs and low hums from the crowd down below. The perceptible natural movement of the air sometimes rifling through the blades of springy turf. Dew dripping along the tall arches of the freshly mowed jade green grass, mirroring the way the tears are streaming down on the hazel haired woman’s cheeks.</p>

<p align=justify>Soundlessly the birds watch as the participants of the poignant procession slowly start trickling out and leaving them behind, finally opening up the curtain of people in black to reveal the curious object that was previously surrounded by the rows of human.</p>

<p align=justify>With their eyes, which have became the ancient talisman that embodies the lore of a thousand lifetimes, the birds have long known and learned a thing or two about life. It also has taught them an unsung truth about autumn. The leaves do fall away and part ways from the trees, and the flowers wilt and wither away, it’s true. But the sublime colors that each drop of leaf and petal brings along makes it one of the most beautiful forms of goodbye.</p>

<p align=justify>But is it really a goodbye, a farewell?</p>

<p align=justify>Since despite all, the birds know something is different today. The fallen yet vibrant and brightly colored leaves seem to act as an assortment of confetti cascading down the cerulean sky, as another part of the celebration of the reunion of the two lovers. Besides… again the spring will come and again it’ll wake up the sleeping buds of future leaves and flowers, right?</p>

<p align=justify>By and by, this time the flock of birds’ black beaded eyes are all trained on one thing. Past the shade of garden-fresh white lilies standing sprays and baby blue carnations wreaths placed on its feet and among the scattered red, orange, and yellow leaves, they find the shining distraction. There is no need for them to fly close to read the engravings written in gold letters on the white marble headstone, as it gleams under the daylight.</p>

<br>

<br>

<center>PARK CHANYEOL

Born <i>November 27th 1992</i>

Died <i>December 25th 2041</i>

<i>Fly on, ride through, maybe one day I’ll fly next to you</i></center>

<br>

<br>

<p align=justify>Next to the slightly weathered down engraving, there’s a much newer inscription with a new sentence added to the epitaph, which seems to complete it. Almost as if everything has finally come into a full circle.</p>

<br>

<br>

<center>PARK BAEKHYUN

Born <i>May 6th 1992</i>

Died <i>October 4th 2067</i>

<i>Fly on, ride through, maybe one day I can fly with you</i></center>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<p align=justify>The birds see, and indeed they don’t know why, but they can be sure for one thing. Though the stories of humans’ lives may not last until the end of time… just like a circle that goes on in perpetuity, love does live forever.</p>

<br>

<br>

<br>

<center>\*\*\*</center>