Halcyon

Life is Fragile

☆

A quiet sigh escaped Chanyeol's parted lips as he stood, back against the smooth concrete wall of the train station. The platform was full of life, people hurrying about, briefcases in hands as they glance upwards at the clock displayed on the wall; and next to it, the estimated time of arrival of the train.

Furrowing his brows, Chanyeol's lips pressed into a thin line and he shook his head; his thick mop of mahogany hair obscured his vision. Tongue clicking against the roof of his mouth, Chanyeol resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

He wished that people would slow down – enjoy life for what it was; live a little; take things as they come, not rush about with their gaze fixed on the ground below. People missed out on the beauty that life had to offer that way. All the little things that could make you smile – gone, without having realised it.

With a quick flick of his head, Chanyeol's dark hair was pushed from his eyes. As he relaxed, Chanyeol's shoulders slumped as he smoothed out his denim shirt. With a gentle push, Chanyeol moved away from the brick wall and began his way slowly along the platform, observing the people that pushed their way around him.

At the very top of a platform sat a petite boy in a simple cotton shirt; his coffee coloured hair was swept to one side, a plastic umbrella clutched tightly in his small hands. Peering up at the cornflower sky, Chanyeol let out a quiet chuckle; there wasn't a cloud in sight!

This guy certainly was a piece of work. The way he clutched onto the umbrella, turning it over and over in his hands as though his life depended on it … Maybe he was holding it for someone? Or maybe, he was prepared for the unexpected. Chanyeol wasn't sure why, but he felt a small smile creep onto his face.

The shrill whistle of the train caught his attention and Chanyeol glanced up; it had only just pulled into the station now and its wheels screeched loudly against the tracks as it fought against the breaks. The platform's occupants pushed and shoved one another in an attempt to try and align themselves with the automatic doors.

Making his way to the edge of the platform, another quiet sigh escaped Chanyeol's lips and he found himself at the back of a large cluster of people; each one bouncing impatiently on the balls of their feet, necks craned in an attempt to locate an empty seat.

Finally, Chanyeol made his way into the train, managing to find himself a seat next to the window. Placing his satchel on the vacant seat next to him, he gazed out of the window as the train began to move; the beautiful cityscape of Seoul, the city that never rests speeding by.

A throat cleared next to him quietly, barely loud enough for Chanyeol to hear. Slowly, he turned his gaze away from the window and found himself face to face with the guy in loose cotton shirt; the plastic umbrella was still clutched firmly in his hands. With a quick gesture to the seat next to Chanyeol, occupied with his bag, the stranger tilted his head to the side. "I'm sorry," he said, "but do you mind?"

Chanyeol shook his head and quickly slid his satchel from the seat next to him onto his lap. Gratefully, the stranger took a seat next to him, sliding the plastic umbrella under his feet and the two, after exchanging one final glance, uttered not another word. Instead, they gazed out opposite windows, determined not to pay mind to the other.

The train ride had lasted just over an hour, and much of the carriage's occupants had emptied. Yet, Chanyeol remained, his gaze fixed out the window; and the guy, silent, beside him.

Something touched his shoulder lightly and Chanyeol broke his gaze away from the passing countryside. From next to him, the guy had fallen asleep, his head resting gently against Chanyeol. A small smile crept across his face as his brushed the others tousled fringe lightly from his eyes.

Chanyeol gazed at the sleeping boy next to him for a short while before he furrowed his brows. What if he was to wake and find him staring? That would not end well. Breaking his gaze away, Chanyeol repositioned himself in his chair carefully, so as not to disrupt the others slumber. Shaking his head, the smile still on his face, Chanyeol turned to stare out of the window once more when something caught his eye.

A piece of paper, or at least, what was left of it – he had been twisting it over and over in his hands for much of the train ride until it had become a highly crumpled form. His grip on it had loosened considerably in his unconscious state, and it was threatening to fall through his fingertips and onto the carriage floor.

Without thinking, Chanyeol reached for the paper, untwisting it carefully and smoothing out the creased surface over his knee. Glancing over it, he sighed thoughtfully.

Go to an amusement park.

Watch the sun set atop a Ferris Wheel.

Make friends with a complete stranger.

Chanyeol's brows knitted together as he continued down the page; there were so many things on the list but only a few, somewhat odd ones stood out to him. They were normal things; things that everyone would have done at least once in their life.

Have a home-cooked meal.

Make someone smile.

Buy a painting for the corridor.

Surprise someone.

Fall in love.

Chanyeol's eyes widened in realisation at what he was reading. It was a bucket list. How strange. Without thinking, Chanyeol's free hand dug into his bag, returning moments later with a pen. Uncapping it, he held the creased paper to the window of the train, writing down his phone number – and a promise.

"I'll help you with your list," he murmured quietly, tucking his pen into the pocket of his coat.

Quickly, he folded in the corners; tucking them over, then under, then over once more until a small paper crane rested in the palm of his hand. It looked batted and far from elegant, but it would certainly make the stranger smile when he saw it. Yes, Chanyeol thought, what a nice way to wake up.

Peering out of the window once more, he realised that he was getting closer and closer to the small rural station in the town in which his sister lived. Placing a hand on the shoulder of the sleeping stranger, Chanyeol got carefully to his feet, ensuring the other maintained his balance as he stood

A small grin crossed Chanyeol's face as he turned his back to the sleeping form of the; the countryside slowed down around him as the train came to a stop – the automatic doors sliding forward. Shooting one last glance at him, Chanyeol stepped off the train, taking his phone from his pocket and turning it over in the palm of his hand.

Chanyeol hadn't the slightest expectation of the stranger to contact him and he knew that if he had fallen asleep, waking to find a phone number written on *his* list, he would not even consider it. But, Chanyeol decided, should the stranger contact him at all, he would gladly keep his promise.

Chanyeol hadn't expected him to text. Not exactly. But somewhere deep down, buried beneath his pride and expectations, there was a small glimmer of hope - a small yearning that this stranger would save his number, maybe even memorise it. And if he did … Chanyeol had hoped that he would contact him. He didn't care how long it would take as long as he did.

The stranger didn't have to call if that made him feel uncomfortable – a simple *'hey, I got your message – thanks for the offer!'* would have sufficed. And that is exactly what Chanyeol got. Well, kind of.

'Will you really help me?'

Chanyeol couldn't contain the grin that played across his face the day he received the response he had been waiting for.

"Of course," Chanyeol murmured, chuckling to himself.

And with that incentive, he went about scheduling a meet up, without knowing so much as a name; hopes high that he will, soon, see this stranger once more.

To be perfectly honest, Chanyeol wasn't sure why he was so eager to meet someone he had only exchanged a few words to. But, it was his lack of concern and easy going, pleasant nature that really intrigued Chanyeol.

When the day eventually came for the two to meet, Chanyeol found his legs walking him towards the train station with a bounce in his stride. The thought alone of meeting this guy for the second time around in order to help his out with his life's ambitions was enough to calm any nerves he previously had and brighten the gloomy day - well, for Chanyeol at least.

Shaking his head, Chanyeol's lips curled upwards into a lopsided smile. Running his thumb across the smooth screen of his mobile phone, he allowed a small chuckle to escape his parted lips.

The air was crisp in the city that morning, the tall buildings providing little shelter from the icy breeze that wove and wrapped its way around them. Adjusting the navy scarf tightly around his neck to ward off the cold, Chanyeol took in his surroundings; the snow-topped trees and the lake, coated in a frosty glaze that glittered in the pale sunlight. This was the correct meeting place, he decided at a glance. But the guy from the train hadn't gotten there yet.

Twisting his brows into a frown, Chanyeol exhaled, his breath crystallising in front of his eyes. He knew what the stranger looked like, but he had no idea who he was. Narrowing his dark eyes, Chanyeol glanced across the lake.

There sat a familiar figure, his army-green muffler shielding the lower half of his face from the wind; his jacket tight fitting and classy, fixed neatly around the chest with small brass buttons.

He was sitting on a small wooden bench a short way away, his gloved hands tearing small chunks of stale bread apart for scavenging ducks who bustled about his ankles. Chanyeol paused for a moment, watching his laugh happily as the greedy animals fought one another for the biggest chunks before he allowed his shoulders to slump, his body relaxing.

Any previous nerves that he once held were now replaced by excitement as he surveyed the cheerful boy feeding the ducks. Straightening out his winter coat, Chanyeol began the short walk around the outskirts of the lake before taking a seat on the small bench beside the -now startled- brunette.

"I am glad to see that you have made it to the meeting spot safely," he said with a nod, a small grin tugging the corners of his lips upwards. "I'm Chanyeol."

 The guy stared up at him for a few moments before looking away, adjusting a gloved finger.

"Baekhyun. Will you really help me with my list?" he asked his voice no more than a murmur. Chanyeol nodded once more, his eyes softening.

"I will."

Baekhyun exhaled loudly and shook his head. Glancing away from Chanyeol, he looked at his feet as they swung back and forth on the bench; his hands disappearing into his pockets.

"Thank you," he said. "I appreciate it, I really do. But even with your help, I know this won't be completed in time."

At this, Chanyeol raised his brows in confusion. "Why do you need to get it done so quickly?" he asked. "Take your time with it - you'll enjoy it more that way."

Baekhyun lifted his gaze. When his eyes met with Chanyeol's, he offered him a sweet smile.

"I guess I just want to finish as much of the list as I can."

Chanyeol surveyed him for a few moments before shaking his head, dragging his fingertips through his mahogany hair.

"I told you I'd help you with the list," he said gently. "And that's what I'll do. We'll get them finished. It may take a while, but we will."

"Promise?" Baekhyun asked, a small grin spreading across his face. Chanyeol nodded.

"*Promise.*"

Over the next few days, Chanyeol and Baekhyun met at the same spot next to the lake to discuss which goal ("objective," Baekhyun would interject, wagging his finger at Chanyeol whenever he would call it as such. "It's an *objective*!") Baekhyun would prefer to complete first. After much deliberation, the pair settled on going to the theme park; it was a lot less crowded during the winter months, and the thought of avoiding shoving, restless crowds in sweltering heat was more than appealing.

Baekhyun couldn't contain his excitement as he rushed up and down between the stalls filled with goods and treats – he wanted to try everything! Chanyeol shook his head, a quiet laugh escaping his lips as he observed the energetic boy. Reaching out, he caught Baekhyun's wrist, gently pulling the small brunette back to his side.

"Slow down, Baek," he said gently, causing the other to tilt his head to the side in confusion.

"But Chanyeol," he began quickly, "there's not enough time to do everything!"

Chanyeol's lips tugged upwards into a grin. "There's plenty of time to do everything, Baek. Don't worry. Hey, are you hungry?"

He didn't wait for Baekhyun to reply – he didn't have to. Chanyeol knew perfectly well that the small brunette was starving – all of this running around was certain to wear him out.

"Let's go."

Towing him down the rows of stalls towards the food corner, Chanyeol glanced around before something caught his eye.

"Did you want some Fairy Floss?"

Releasing his grip on Baekhyun's wrist, he made his way slowly towards the stand, passing the owner some coins.

"Two sticks, please."

Baekhyun watched from afar, intrigued by the sugary pink fluff that blew around in the small bubble. After observing the lady dip a stick into the machine, he couldn't help but more closer to the stall out of curiosity.

Chanyeol passed Baekhyun his treat before waiting for his own, and soon, they made their way back through the rows of stalls, Fairy Floss in hand.

"You know," Chanyeol began, "you're allowed to eat it, you know. It's not that bad."

Baekhyun crinkled his nose as he thought about it. "I've never tried it before, Yeol. What if I don't like it? You would have wasted your money on me for nothing."

"No I wouldn't," Chanyeol laughed. "Because I would eat it if you didn't. Now go on, try some."

Baekhyun moved the Floss towards his mouth before pulling it back quickly, surprised by the texture.

"It's sticky," he said, holding it away from him. Chanyeol grinned.

"That's the fun of it!"

Extending a hand, he tore off a small piece of floss from his own stick and held it out to Baekhyun.

"Say ah~"

Reluctantly, Baekhyun opened his mouth and no sooner had he done so was the Fairy Floss in his mouth. Startled, the small brunette's eyes widened at the sweetness before the corners of his lips tugged upwards into a slight smile.

"It's good."

Chanyeol chuckled in triumph as he watched Baekhyun take another small bite of the sugary Floss.

"See?" he said. "I told you it was nice!" Lips curling upwards into a grin, Chanyeol attempted to hide the laugh that threatened to escape his lips, instead, forcing out a cough.

"Is something wrong?" Baekhyun asked and Chanyeol shook his head, the grin on his face widening.

"No," he said quickly, "nothing."

Baekhyun didn't buy that and instead, pressed the question.

"Really," he said, tilting his head to the side. "You're not good at lying."

Realising he had been caught out, Chanyeol offered him a one shouldered shrug. Extending his hand, he wiped the corner of Baekhyun's mouth; the pink floss that once clung to his lip vanished.

Baekhyun's cheeks flushed with embarrassment and he looked away quickly.

"Yeol?" he murmured, not wanting to meet the others' eye.

"Mmm?"

"Thank you."

The day was coming to a close, the sky darkening gradually. The sun dipped behind cloud after cloud in its decent, casting the world below into puddles of shadow. Chanyeol and Baekhyun made their way through the carnival grounds; Baekhyun, with a large stuffed rabbit nestled closely to his chest.

Chanyeol had won a carnival game no more than an hour ago and had asked him which stuffed animal he would like. Baekhyun, unable to contain his excitement chose the rabbit and it hadn't left his arms since.

Hugging it close to his chest, Baekhyun felt something touch his arm and he glanced up. Chanyeol smiled in response.

"It's getting close to sunset now, Baek. Would you like to go on the Ferris Wheel now?"

An excited grin spread across Baekhyun's face and he nodded his head in response. The two walked side by side, laughing happily as they went through the carnival grounds. Even though it was late afternoon, most of the carnival-goers had already left, leaving the pair alone in their walk to the Ferris Wheel.

It didn't look too bad from afar, Baekhyun decided. There weren't any people in this part of the grounds, so the wait wouldn't be that long. But when the two reached the Ferris Wheel, Baekhyun's brows furrowed and he took an involuntary step backwards. Noticing something wasn't quite right, Chanyeol turned quickly.

"Something wrong?" he asked, concerned.

Sucking in a sharp breath, Baekhyun shook his head. "I didn't think it would be so high," he said, his grip on the stuffed rabbit tightening. Hesitating, he drew it closer to his face. "I need to do this, but … I don't like heights."

"It needs to be high if you want to be able to see the sun set," Chanyeol reasoned.

Baekhyun took another glance at the Ferris Wheel and turned away. "I can't …" he murmured quietly. "Let's just take this one off the list." He looked down at his feet, afraid of what Chanyeol would think of him.

Something warm wrapped around Baekhyun's hand and he froze, slowly lifting his gaze. Chanyeol stood in front of him smiling warmly, his big hand held onto Baekhyun's.

"It'll be okay," Chanyeol encouraged. "I'm here, and I'll protect you."

The brunette was about to protest before Chanyeol cut him off once more.

"You can only cross this off your list if you go on it," he said firmly. "Come on - the sun's about to set! I'll hold your hand if you're scared."

With his free hand, Baekhyun gave the plush bunny a tight squeeze before sighing. Slowly, he turned to face Chanyeol, and the Ferris Wheel.

"Okay," he said slowly.

He knew that, despite his fear of heights, everything would be okay if Chanyeol was with him. And it was.

It had been a good three months of the two frequently meeting to complete objectives that Baekhyun had written down on his crumpled list. And slowly, very slowly, more and more of the things had been accomplished and crossed out with a fine point pen. Of course there had been instances, quite a few at that, where the two had planned to meet up and Baekhyun had cancelled.

Expectantly, of course. And each time Baekhyun cancelled their plans, Chanyeol found himself feeling disappointed. They would leave his days feeling as though something was missing – the days without Baekhyun by his side felt long; empty.

"I'm sorry," Baekhyun would say. "I have appointments." And he would leave it at that.

But no matter how disappointed Chanyeol would feel, he knew that Baekhyun's apologies were heartfelt. No matter how disappointed Chanyeol felt, never once did he question why Baekhyun cancelled.

"Why are we in here again?" Chanyeol murmured as he followed Baekhyun down the rows of different décor. The furniture store was grand, and although Chanyeol seldom ventured inside of one, he was certain that they weren't as nearly as big as this.

The scent of treated wood reached his nostrils and Chanyeol shook his head; his fingertips tracing the smooth surface of an elegant oak wood desk. "I thought you wanted a painting?"

"I do," Baekhyun grinned. "But since we're here, I just thought I'd have a look around."

"Why?" Chanyeol questioned quietly, eyeing the employee who trailed a few paces behind, determined to achieve a sale.

"You don't understand, Chanyeol," Baekhyun replied. "Everything is so beautiful. If we get the painting straight away, then … I just … I just want to spend time out here with you. Is that too much to ask?"

Taken aback, Chanyeol shook his head.

"No," he said. "It isn't."

After inspecting the different types of décor the furniture store had to offer, the two made their way back towards a row of paintings that were displayed on the wall. The majority were monochromatic, beautiful in texture and composition; each one told a story of its own, the painters viewpoint conveyed. The brass frames that held the canvas were elegantly mounded and caught the light.

One painting, significantly smaller than the rest was frameless; displayed on a simple rectangular canvas, its corners folded behind and stapled to the wooden backing. Abstract in design, it was covered with a spectrum of different colours. Bright, bold splashes of yellow here, streaks of viridian there – great big dollops of crimson decorated the centre.

Chanyeol cringed when he saw it. The canvas looked tacky and held no mystery or story behind it. It was not artistic at all, and he wasn't sure if it was painted by an adult or a child no older than three.

To Baekhyun, however, it was beautiful.

"I'll take this one," he said, pointing at the bright artwork. "It's perfect!"

"Baek," Chanyeol tried to reason. "Why? There's no story to it. It doesn't say anything."

At this, Baekhyun grinned, his lips curling into a playful smile.

"It's not about what it says, Yeol," he said. "It's about what it doesn't. Sometimes, it doesn't matter about what is on the outside to be able to truly understand someone."

Chanyeol nodded once, knowing that Baekhyun had got him there. But he decided to try once again to reason with him.

"Why that one?" he asked. "What about this one? See the texture? The perspective? It's amazing."

"It is pretty, Yeol," Baekhyun murmured, "but it's dull. This one will brighten up the corridor and bring happiness to those who see it."

Tilting his head to the side, Chanyeol studied the abstract painting once more. It wasn't *that* bad.

"Sometimes," he said, "all people need is a little happiness."

It was mid spring when Chanyeol invited Baekhyun over to his home for the first time. He was bubbling with excitement at the thought of the two cooking dinner together, and had spent a great deal of time that afternoon tidying everything for Baekhyun's arrival.

Everything had to be perfect. Why, he wasn't sure. Baekhyun probably wouldn't even notice should a pillow be out of place, or the newspaper left on the coffee table. But Chanyeol didn't care. He wanted everything to be in order, because even if Baekhyun didn't notice, he wanted it to be perfect for him.

When Baekhyun arrived, Chanyeol was already waiting by the front door, a wide grin on his face. Greeting him quickly, Chanyeol lead Baekhyun inside and showed him around. The living room, the bathroom, the kitchen. Chanyeol couldn't help but relish at the excitement held in Baekhyun's eyes as he explored the house.

After offering Baekhyun a seat at the kitchen counter and asking to see the list, Chanyeol scanned over the contents; a sudden pain shot through his chest. The list was dwindling rapidly. Would Baekhyun still want to see him after the list was complete? Chuckling quietly to himself, Chanyeol shook his head. Passing the list back to Baekhyun, he moved to the pantry and began fetching ingredients for their meal. Of *course* he would still want to see him.

"What's so funny?" Baekhyun asked, his lips tugging upwards into a small smile as he observed him. Chanyeol shrugged lightly.

"It's nothing," he said smoothly, changing the subject as quickly as he could. "Why is a home cooked meal on your list?" he asked. Crinkling his nose, Baekhyun pulled a face, unsure of how to answer.

"It's not something I've had for a while."

At this, Chanyeol snorted. "So you eat out every night? That's not good for your health!"

Baekhyun offered him a one shouldered shrug and began to rinse the carrots, the icy liquid running over his hands. "Not quite *out* per se. I don't eat at home, though."

Chanyeol looked the brunette once over before turning to collect the potatoes.

"Well Baek," he said, "that just means you have to come over for dinner more often."

A small smile crept onto Baekhyun's face and, as he began to peel the carrots, he pondered what Chanyeol just said. Did he really mean it? Did Chanyeol really want him to visit again? A rush of pain surged up Baekhyun's arm and he cussed quietly. Chanyeol moved to his side in seconds.

"What happened?" he asked as Baekhyun tried to hide his hand.

"Nothing," the brunette replied quickly.

"Show me your hand, Baek."

"No, it's okay," Baekhyun defended.

Chanyeol's hand quickly shot out and he took hold of the brunette's shoulder, turning him slowly.

"Oh, Baekhyun," he sighed, reaching for the cut hand. Cupping it gently, Chanyeol positioned the brunette's hand under the tap and rinsed it.

Although small, the cold water stung the cut causing Baekhyun to flinch, his hand retracting away from the icy waters reach.

"Are you okay?" Chanyeol asked, grabbing the hand towel and patting his hand dry gently.

"Yeah," Baekhyun murmured, looking away. "It just stings a bit, that's all."

Without thinking, Chanyeol lifted Baekhyun's hand, his lips grazing the reddened skin gently.
Baekhyun's cheeks heated up when he realised what Chanyeol was doing, but he kept his gaze fixed on the floor.

"It doesn't hurt anymore," he said quietly in hopes that Chanyeol wouldn't hear. But Chanyeol did hear, and he couldn't stop the smile that spread across his face.

The stars hung suspended, almost magically in the navy sky, the world below illuminated in the pale moonlight. Chanyeol moved quickly behind Baekhyun's chair and pulled it out for him before offering his arm and helping him to his feet. They had been talking and laughing for so long, neither had kept track of the time. Passing Baekhyun his coat, Chanyeol opened the door.

"It's dark," he said, glancing outside. "I'll take you home."

Quickly, Baekhyun held up his hands. "It's alright," he assured him.

"You can always stay the night, you know," Chanyeol offered. "It's dangerous at night!"

"I'll be fine, Yeol. Don't worry!"

It took a while to convince Chanyeol, but once he did, Baekhyun started towards the picket fence gate.

"I'll see you tomorrow morning then?" Chanyeol called as he watched the other close the gate behind him. Baekhyun made a face, turning slowly and offering him a thin smile.

"We'll see," he said and turned away.

Chanyeol watched Baekhyun's retreating back until the darkness engulfed him entirely. A low sigh escaped his lips and, with one final glance outside, Chanyeol made his way back into the house. Collecting the dishes from the table, something caught Chanyeol's eye and he frowned, squatting down next to Baekhyun's chair.

There, folded neatly despite its creased surface was Baekhyun's list. A quiet sigh escaped Chanyeol s lips as he picked it up, spinning the small, folded rectangle between his fingertips. Should he call Baekhyun? Let him know that it must have fallen from his pocket? He dismissed this idea quickly with a shake of his head. No, he'll be seeing Baekhyun tomorrow, anyway. He can just return it then.

Tossing the list onto the dining table, Chanyeol moved into the kitchen and began to fill the sink before his curiosity got the better of him. Shutting off the faucet quickly, he moved back to the table and hesitated. Would Baekhyun mind if he went over the list without him being there? Chanyeol pushed that thought to the back of his mind with a shake of his head. Of course Baekhyun wouldn't mind.

Unfolding it carefully, Chanyeol smoothed the paper out with his fingertips and glanced down the list once more. He needed to know how much longer he had to spend with Baekhyun. How many more things they had left to do. He hoped that he would add more to the list; he hoped that they could do this forever.

Running his eyes down the list, Chanyeol froze, the breath catching in his throat. There, the very bottom objective had been crossed off. It was written hastily, messily; something that hadn't been there when he had looked at it earlier:

Fall in love.

Chanyeol stood by the lake, his hands tucked behind his back neatly; gaze fixed on the ducks that frolicked and flapped about happily in the defrosting water. His grip tightened on the

piece of paper he had rolled up and, allowing his shoulders to slump, Chanyeol looked away from the lake; a heavy sigh escaping his lips.

It wasn't like Baekhyun to be late. He was always exactly on time for their meet ups, if not, being so eager he'd arrive well before Chanyeol.

"Sleeping in again, were you?" he would tease. *"You don't have to worry about beauty sleep!"*

Chanyeol frowned at the thought. Something wasn't right. He began to circle the lake at a slow pace, his mind clouded with not only thoughts, but a great deal of -mostly horrifying- scenarios to explain Baekhyun's absence.

Chanyeol's heartbeat began to quicken as he continued to imagine the scenarios before a frustrated growl escaped his lips. It wouldn't do to get himself so worked up for something that could be as minor as a traffic jam or a delayed train.

Pausing briefly by a small patch of flowers, Chanyeol stooped down, plucking a dusty blue flower from the ground. The thin coating of fur on the stem ticked his fingertips as he twirled it in circles. It reminded him of Baekhyun. Simple, yet captivating in a way that he couldn't seem to explain.

Reaching the lone, dew covered bench, Chanyeol 's brows furrowed and he sat down, his hand dipping into his pocket to retrieve his mobile phone. Running a thumb across the screen, Chanyeol scowled at the lack of alerts he had; one message from his sister and another from a close friend of his, Kris.

Chanyeol 's thumb hovered over the screen for a brief moment before he opened up his message box, hoping that he had simply misread the meeting time that Baekhyun and he had decided on. *No.* Chanyeol's lips twisted together in a frown; he was exactly where he needed to be at the time they had promised. But why was Baekhyun so late?

Exiting out of his message box, Chanyeol's fingers seemed to work by themselves as he punched in Baekhyun's number; he had spent his nights memorising it as the two would text, laugh and joke after a long day together.

Finally, Chanyeol hesitated, his thumb positioned just above the call button. Blinking down at his phone several times, a small smile crept onto Chanyeol's face. The chances of remembering any number aside from his own (although he was known to forget it on occasion) was certainly something the shaggy haired boy did not expect. But yet, he had Baekhyun's number memorised; encoded in his brain without him knowing, right down to the very last digit.

Drawing in a deep breath, Chanyeol shot one final glance around the deserted parkland before tapping the 'call' button. Raising the phone to his ear, he let out a quiet sigh of relief as he listened to it ring.

'Hello?' came the voice on the other line and Chanyeol found himself smiling at the cheerful tone almost immediately.

"Baek, it's me. Where are you? Is everything alrigh-"

'Just kidding~' the voice continued. *'Unfortunately I'm unable to answer the phone right now. Please leave your message, name and number and I'll get back to you as soon as possible.'*

Baekhyun's voice disappeared and was replaced with a single, monotonous beep. Cussing in annoyance, Chanyeol hung up.

What could possibly be keeping him? Maybe he witnessed a car accident and stopped to help out? Chanyeol shook his head. That was a stupid idea. Maybe he was helping out a traveller with directions? Chanyeol crinkled is nose at the thought. But that wouldn't prevent him from answering his phone. So, that wasn't likely, either.

Dragging his fingertips through his messy dark hair, Chanyeol sighed sadly. He wasn't sure why Baekhyun was ignoring his call or skipping out on their meeting. Their *date*. Maybe it didn't mean as much to Baekhyun as it did to him. But, Chanyeol was absolutely sure of one thing; he was going to have to have a word with that guy about his misleading message bank.

It was late in the afternoon when Baekhyun had finally made it to the park. A part of him was still hoping to see Chanyeol there, waiting for him. But Baekhyun knew that was just his selfish feelings. Some sort of inner yearning that he would. Pushing those feelings aside, he glanced around; as he had expected, Chanyeol was long gone.

Baekhyun knew he couldn't expect Chanyeol to wait for so long without him contacting – or, at the least, apologising for being so late. Baekhyun's brow furrowed slightly. Even though he wasn't there when he had promised, he couldn't deny the pang of hurt that washed through him at the deserted park.

Tugging the beanie farther over his ears, Baekhyun started at a slow walk, his head tilted upwards at the darkening sky. He would have contacted him; he wanted to. But he had always been told to leave his phone behind when he visited *him.* He didn't want any interruptions. He was always like that, for as long as Baekhyun had known him. It was all business, all seriousness. He was the opposite of Chanyeol.

Continuing along the granite track that ran along the outskirts of the lake, Baekhyun slowed to a halt when he neared the lone bench on the far side, secluded and seldom visited. It was there where he first waited for Chanyeol; his excitement and nerves had his stomach churning with butterflies long before he had left that day to meet up with him.

But this time, it was different. He knew Chanyeol was not waiting for him any longer. Instead of the excitement he once felt at the prospect of meeting him, the feelings were instead replaced with guilt. A sort of incomprehensible sadness that he had brought upon himself.

Something caught his eye. A diamond in the rough. Its powder blue petals stood out against the dull grey, faded wood of the bench. Baekhyun's lips tugged upwards into a small smile as he carefully picked up the wilted flower; it had been smothered by the original owner, and slowly dying.

Gently plucking the bud away from the stem, Baekhyun crossed the path once more towards the lake and knelt down at the edge; his hand, cupped, dipped into the icy water, causing goose bumps to immediately cover the surface of his arm.

The small flower floated away from Baekhyun's hand as he watched it; setting it free in the freezing waters. And even though the vastness of the lake, as dark as it was, tried to swallow the flower whole, it remained afloat, despite its odds; continuing on its journey until it could no longer withstand its fate.

Baekhyun watched as eventually, the flower began to sink into the murky depths of the lake. And even in the darkness of the icy water, the powder blue bud still stood out; a sole light in a dark place.

Chanyeol found himself smiling against his will as Baekhyun wandered around in the garden. He had –initially, at least- every intention to be angry with him for dropping all contact and breaking their promise to meet up.

 Of course, there was also the added issue of waiting outside in the cool air for well over four hours and developing a fever as a result, but he was certainly not about to let Baekhyun know that he waited that long for him, let alone got sick from it.

For now, at least, seeing Baekhyun was enough. And whilst Chanyeol was happy to see him, prancing around the community garden, an overjoyed smile plastered on his face, he found that he was also saddened.

Baekhyun moved quickly to Chanyeol's side, his small hands wrapping around his wrist; after one gentle tug, he lead him towards a large stone fountain, the centrepiece of the breath-taking gardens; tall trees blocked out the cityscape around them and creating the illusion that they were amidst a tranquil oasis.

Baekhyun dipped the tips of his fingers into the crystal water of the fountain, home of two koi fish, monochrome were the colours of their scales, who swam curiously around his hand. Tilting his head upwards, Baekhyun smiled, a hearty laugh escaping his lips. Reaching upwards with his free hand, Baekhyun wiped the icy liquid on Chanyeol's cheek, stepping away almost immediately; a cheeky grin tugging the corners of his lips upwards.

Chanyeol spluttered in disbelief as he wiped his cheek dry with the back of his sleeve. Glaring playfully at Baekhyun, who hovered just out of arms reach, he shook his head.

"This guy," he sighed.

Baekhyun stuck his tongue out teasingly before taking his cap off, setting it on the side of ledge of the fountain; his fingers dipped back into the cold water once more.

Immediately, Chanyeol looked away, his hands shaking. He couldn't stand the sight of him, not like that, anyway. He couldn't bare it any longer. It hurt him to see Baekhyun so happy, all of the time. So happy despite knowing. Raising the sleeve of his jacket to his mouth, Chanyeol coughed.

"Baekhyun," he said, his voice hoarse as he fought against the lump in his throat. "Put your hat back on."

Confused, Baekhyun lifted his hand away from the water and turned in a half circle to face the taller boy.

"Why?" he challenged, a glint in his eye. "You don't like my new haircut?"

Raising his dry hand, Baekhyun dragged his fingertips through the short, spiky hair that came no farther than his ears; the rich coffee coloured sheen was gone, instead replaced by a dull, lifeless brown.

 His eyes met Chanyeol 's and he waited silently for a reply. Chanyeol didn't like it. He hated it with every fibre of his body. Chanyeol also knew that Baekhyun could tell how he felt about it.

Exhaling slowly, Chanyeol closed his eyes. "No," he said. "I don't."

 A small smile played across Baekhyun's face and he turned back to the koi fish, sweeping up the cap and dropping it onto his head in one swift motion.

"Yeol?" he murmured after a few moments of silence, but he didn't take his gaze off the koi fish.

"Mmm?"

"You can mark the Botanical Gardens off the list if you'd like."

Chanyeol fished the crumpled list from his pocket, smoothing it with his fingertips as he uncurled it. A pen slid out from inside the paper roll and Chanyeol uncapped it quickly, placing a thin, shaky line through the objective that had been scrawled down in their haste.

The list had been expanded; new objectives would be written as Baekhyun thought of them, and as a result, there was a great many more things Baekhyun wished to do; more time the two could spend together.

Chanyeol 's lips curled upwards into a sad smile as he glanced down the list at the two new additions; one in particular caught his eye.

To be sung to.

Chanyeol let out a sad sigh as he shook his head.

Why, Baek?

"Yeol," Baekhyun called as he closed the front door behind him. "Are you ready? We've got lots to do today!"

Chanyeol didn't respond and a mischievous smile crept onto Baekhyun's face. Whenever he came over, Chanyeol would usually hide with the idea of springing up behind him when he least expected it. And it worked. For the first two times, at least. Until it became a regular occurrence and Baekhyun grew to expect it.

Deciding to play along with it, Baekyun kicked his shoes off. "Are you still sleeping?"

As he padded his way softly down the hallway, hands held out at the ready, Baekhyun glanced around, his keen eyes darting to every nook and cranny that Chanyeol could have concealed himself behind.

Eventually arriving in the kitchen, a small frown played across his face; Chanyeol was leaning heavily against the kitchen counter, fingers on his temples. He looked up when Baekhyun cleared his throat, a soft smile playing across his face.

"You're here," he said, his fingers making quick work of the list that he had spread out atop the bench. "I was just," he slipped the list into his pocket and made his way around the side of the counter towards his, "seeing what objectives we could complete today."

Baekhyun's brows knitted together. "Is everything okay?"

"Of course," Chanyeol replied. "Should there be any reason for things to not be okay?"

Baekhyun shook his head, although he didn't believe him. "You look … Sad, Yeol. You're paler than usual."

Chanyeol felt his chest tighten at his words; Baekhyun was concerned with his health. *His.* And yet, he couldn't deny that his observations were not correct. His face was drained of colour; large, dark bags hung underneath ebony eyes that had lost their sparkle. His lids were heavy and he struggled to keep them open

Chanyeol's lips twisted their way into a broad grin and he placed a hand on Baekhyun's shoulder. "I'm fine. Let's go."

"What's next on the agenda?" asked Chanyeol as the two exited a second hand bookshop.

They had taken the oldest, most well-loved books and slipped small notes in between the pages; a quote here, a statement there. Either way, it was bound to be a surprise for whoever was to pick them up, and, Baekhyun had hoped, bring a smile to their face. Imagine going into a bookshop after having a horrible day, peeling the cover back from the dry pages and discovering a note saying '*you're beautiful.'*

Yes, Baekhyun thought with a slight nod at Chanyeol. Yes, it will make whoever picks up the book smile. Sometimes, only the smallest of things are regarded as the kindest of gestures. Sometimes, it only takes a few seconds to bring a smile to the face of someone who needs it most.

"It's still the same," Baekhyun replied, unable to contain the smile on his face. "To make people's day with the smallest of things!"

Chanyeol shook his head at the eager brunette as he followed, a few steps behind. "You've made my *year* just by existing," he murmured quietly. "That has to count for something, right?"

Baekhyun glanced around in search of their next target before shooting a fleeting look over his shoulder at his friend.

"Did you say something, Yeol?" he asked.

Chanyeol shook his head slowly, his lips twisting into a small smile. "No," he said. "Nothing at all."

"Your hair has gotten shorter," Chanyeol noted as the two sat in the middle of the outdoor shopping complex, cold drinks in hand; a large tree shielded them from the suns warm rays. Baekhyun's hair was now no longer than two centimetres in length and was close to his scalp. Here and there, a patch of bare skin was visible, devoid of the thin, lifeless hair completely.

"Has it?" Baekhyun asked jokingly. "I hadn't noticed."

Chanyeol's hands tightened on the bottle of water he held, the clear liquid splashing against the sides in protest as the plastic pressed inwards. A shrill noise pierced the air and he lifted his head slightly, shooting a glance towards Baekhyun who fished his phone from his pocket.

"Hello?" he asked into the receiver, plugging his other ear with a finger to try and eliminate the background noise of the people who bustled around them. "Yes, I'm doing well." A pause. "Today? I can't … No, I'm sorry … I'm with someone right now … I know, I know. Would it be okay if I come by tomorrow then? … Yes, okay. Thank you."

Chanyeol waited patiently until Baekhyun hung up the phone before he spoke.

"That was *him* again, wasn't it?" he asked. Baekhyun confirmed his suspicions with a simple nod.

"It was."

Chanyeol reached out, placing a hand on Baekhyun's knee.

"I'm coming with you, tomorrow," he said firmly. "I'm not going to let you be alone with him. Not again."

A silence fell upon the two as they sat there, side by side as they continued to sip their drinks. Chanyeol finished his quickly before leaning backwards against the bench.

"Do you mind if we rest here for a little longer?" he asked, "I'm tired."

His head had begun to throb – they were out in the sun for far too long for his liking.

A playful grin crept upon Baekhyun's face. "Getting a bit out of shape, are we?" he teased. "I don't mind, take as long as you like. I'm content to just sit here if I'm with you."

At this, Chanyeol looked away. He couldn't take it anymore.

Chanyeol leaned against the wall as he watched the man sit with Baekhyun a short distance away, the two deep in conversation. On occasion, he would reach across the table and take Baekhyun's hands in his, turn them over in the palms of his hands and place them back down on the table once more.

Jaw clenched, Chanyeol moved to stand behind the brunette, draping his arms in front of Baekhyun protectively, his eyes fixed on the man.

"And you must be Chanyeol ," he grinned toothily, "Baekhyun has told me all about you."

Instead of extending a hand in a friendly gesture, the man lifted his hand to his face, brushing away what could have been a strand of black hair, had it not been gelled backwards neatly. He did not introduce himself, instead, returned his attention to Baekhyun.

Chanyeol , too, made no move to greet the unfamiliar man, nor did he care for introductions of any sort – he was certain this man would only gloat about his status or profession. Or both. Instead, Chanyeol offered a curt nod in response and his grip on Baekhyun tightened.

"Baek, my dear Baek," the man began in a slow drawl, "I must ask you – why do you insist on keeping your hair the way it is?"

Chanyeol's ears pricked at the question. He, too, was curious as to hear the answer, but this man had no right to ask. Half expecting him to be offended by the bluntness of the question, Chanyeol was surprised when Baekhyun offered him a one shouldered shrug.

"You're my doctor," he said, "I know you're not stupid. You know that I have Leukaemia; I know that I have it, too. And, as much as I try, I know that I can't change that fact. My hair is … "

Chanyeol 's heart gave a lurch. Baekhyun had already told him of his illness, but this … This was …

"-the last part of my former self that I can hold onto. I'm dying, I know. But my hair is the last part of my past that I … I don't want to let it go. I can't."

"Well, that went well, don't you think, Yeol?" Baekhyun smiled as the two walked hand in hand through the moonlit city. It was empty now as the city slept, but it hadn't yet lost the magnificence that it held during the day. The tall buildings were illuminated by digital advertisements; the streets by rows of lamps that reflected the glistening light on the droplets of dew and moisture.

Chanyeol remained quiet, his grip on Baekhyun's hand tightening. Everything was going to be alright, he reassured himself. Baekhyun can get through this. He hadn't wanted to face the reality just yet; he didn't want to lose Baekhyun. But what if he … No.

His pace slowed and, with his free hand, Chanyeol dragged his fingers through his matted hair, his breathing deepened.

"Everything alright?" Baekhyun asked, shooting a worried look in his direction.
Chanyeol shook his head.

"I'm alright," he replied. "I'm just exhausted, is all. It's been a long day."

At this, a small laugh escaped Baekhyun's lips. "You slept in until one-forty this afternoon. You're getting lazy, Yeol!"

Offering the small brunette a small smile, Chanyeol allowed his shoulders to slump. "I had trouble sleeping last night, my head hurt."

"Well then, stop thinking so much!"

Chanyeol tilted his gaze upwards towards the navy night that seemed to stretch on forever. The moon had passed behind a cloud, leaving nothing but the stars to illuminate the darkened sky.

Stop thinking? It wasn't as simple as that.

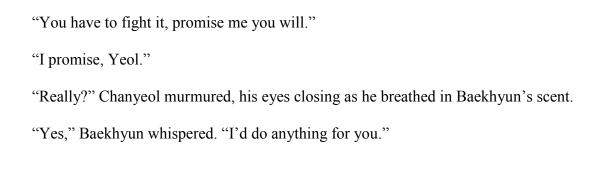"Baek?" he murmured after a while. Baekhyun stopped walking and turned to face him.

"Yes?"

Chanyeol swallowed the lump in his throat. Letting go of Baekhyun's hand, he pulled him into a tight embrace; one that lasted longer than either seemed to pay mind to, yet neither wanted to let go.

"Please don't leave," he murmured as he held Baekhyun to his chest.

Wrapping his arms around Chanyeol's waist, Baekhyun buried his face into the crook of his neck.

"I won't," he said.

"You have to fight it, promise me you will."

"I promise, Yeol."

"Really?" Chanyeol murmured, his eyes closing as he breathed in Baekhyun's scent.

"Yes," Baekhyun whispered. "I'd do anything for you."

"Hey, Yeol?" Baekhyun asked as Chanyeol had walked him back to his hospital room; it had become somewhat of a permanent home for his these past few months, and he hated every minute of it.

Whilst he was allowed out during the day, as a sort of 'last wish' type of scheme, the nurses would poke and prod him all night, monitoring his breathing and blood pressure. Everything that could have been done during the day to ensure it was out of the way, Baekhyun pushed aside. He would gladly sacrifice a decent sleep for a chance of living life. For a chance of being with Chanyeol.

That changed, however when the two had reached the Hospital's reception. Baekhyun's blood test had come back; the leukaemia had relapsed and was back with vengeance. The doctors, unsure of how much longer Baekhyun had before the disease deteriorates him completely, had ordered he be confined to his bed until he succumbed to his fate.

"Mm?" Chanyeol breathed, tucking Baekhyun into his bed. When he didn't speak, Chanyeol turned to leave, only to have his wrist seized gently by a tiny, cold hand.

"What were you reading yesterday? You know, in the kitchen?"

Chanyeol paused for a moment before a soft chuckle escaped his lips. "Your list, of course."

"You lie," Baekhyun defended. "It was in my bag."

Gently prying Baekhyun's hand from his wrist, Chanyeol turned. "Since you looked to be enjoying your list so much, I thought I would make one, too."

Baekhyun's eyes lit up almost immediately. "And you will let me help with your list too, right?"

Chanyeol shook his head slowly, and leaned forward, his lips brushing against Baekhyun's forehead.

"You already have," he breathed. "Now rest well."

A quiet hum escaped Chanyeol's lips as Baekhyun lay, his head against the pillow before a soft, flowing tune filled the room. This was it. This was the last thing Baekhyun had on his bucket list. A lullaby.

"It's beautiful," Baekhyun whispered, his eyes closing slowly. *"Thank you."*

As Chanyeol left Baekhyun's room, he felt the breath catch in his throat. He hadn't noticed it when he had come in, lost in conversation with the other, but now, it was impossible to not notice.

The hallway was stark white, almost clinical, and offered very little. Barely wide enough for two to walk abreast, it lacked enjoyment, hope or life, something Chanyeol thought was cruel in a wing where most people were terminally ill.

However, there was one thing that Chanyeol noticed, that filled him with immense sadness. There, on the stark white wall a short way off from Baekhyun's room was a canvas; bright in colour and abstract in pattern.

The one burst of colour in a confined space seemed to add a new dimension to the skinny hallway. It stood out amongst the blinding white of the walls and seemed to give a sense of life. Baekhyun was right – it was beautiful. And what these people really needed was happiness.

Something underneath the painting glittered in the hallway light and Chanyeol ventured closer to it, he felt his heart give a lurch. There, underneath the bright artwork was a small brass plaque.

Donated by Byun Baekhyun it read. Underneath was a date of birth, a dash and a gap, just waiting to be completed.

It was a long, cold walk home for Chanyeol as he passed through the sleeping city, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his coat. His coughing had worsened at the exposure to the dropping climate but he didn't care.

The sharp edge of folded paper brushed against his skin and Chanyeol exhaled, pulling it from his pocket. Stopping under the pale light of the nearest lamp, he unfolded it.

Neatly written in the centre of the page were two tasks, or objectives as Baekhyun would call them. One had been marked off; ruled out elegantly as though it had been done so the moment it was written.

Love.

The one thing Chanyeol wanted, he had achieved. Under it, however, was something he both yearned for, but knew he would never complete. It would remain untouched for as long as he lived.

Say goodbye.

Those two simple words were what he wanted to do, perhaps even more so than love. But he knew that, in his heart, he never could.

The sky was dark, overcast; the grey clouds clung low to the sky. A slight breeze washed across the countryside, catching the discoloured leaves of autumn and carrying them off into the afternoon sky.

Quiet was the surrounding landscape; nobody spoke, nobody stirred. In fact, seldom did they visit, although they had always promised to. I don't suppose one could blame them, though. It's not like their promises would be remembered, and, of course, the unchangeable past was always something that would, over time, be forgotten.

A variety of stones littered the surface of the area, breaking apart the earth in clusters each one of a different size and shape; tombstones, elegantly carved and highly decorated. Yet not one stone, as elegant as they were could convey the breath-taking beauty and uniqueness that its owner, in life, possessed. Not one stone could capture the personality lost, or the heartbreak felt by the loved ones left behind.

A sole figure walked through the graveyard, his head bowed low in respect for those who rested there; a bouquet of powder blue flowers gripped tightly in his hand. Pulling his jacket closer, the figure continued the walk up the gentle slope until what he sought for came into view; his friend. His love. His only.

The breath caught in his throat as he looked upon the limestone monument, eyes red from crying, yet unable to prevent tears from falling. He was helpless without the other; lost. A great piece of him was missing, one that was impossible to get back, not even with the passing of time.

The scent of freshly churned soil reached his nostrils and, kneeling beside the grave, he placed the bouquet of flowers by the headstone - a final reminder of the time they had shared together - before his body began to shake violently, and for ages, he remained by his love's side, curled up, sobbing.

Long ago had the sun dipped behind the horizon, casting the world below into unavoidably dark, moonless night. But not once did the sobbing figure leave; instead, he remained put beside his loved one. One of the last times they could share together.

Lifting his head gently, he extended an arm; long fingers tracing over the name that had been carved into the stone. Allowing his shoulders to slump, he closed their eyes, a soft tune escaping his lips. It was one he knew all too well, the lyrics familiar - unforgettable. The lullaby that had been sung by the hospital bedside the last time they saw one another.

"*Don't hesitate another minute; please take away my heart.*

Yes, the sharper the better - the night the moon has closed her eyes."

His heart was aching as he pushed himself to continue; the lyrics becoming off-key and irregular as they were forced out in between sobs.

"*Baby don't cry, tonight, after the darkness passes,*

Baby don't cry, tonight, it'll become as if it never happened.

You're not the one to disappear into foam, something you never should've known.

So baby don't cry, cry, my love will protect you."

The final, shaky note escaped his lips and he slumped, rocking backwards; a gentle keening sound replacing the tune that he once carried

"Chanyeol," Baekhyun choked as he reached out to touch the headstone once more. "How long did you know you had Pneumonia? Why didn't you tell anyone?"

He fell silent as he waited for the response that would never come; his bottom lip quivered.

"They told me I'd had a relapse; they told me I only had a few days to live. But … I held on. I fought it - for you. Chanyeol … Because I would do anything for you."

He paused, wiping the tears away roughly with the sleeve of his jacket. "I can't do this without you, Yeol. I … *Why*?"

It all seemed to come together at that one moment. Chanyeol's fatigue; the oversleeping; the constant coughing; the weakness; the headaches - he knew. He must have. But … He kept quiet. He was more concerned for Baekhyun's wellbeing than his own.

Baekhyun sighed as he ran his fingers over his smooth head, the skin, exposed to the wind, was freezing. Shooting a quick glance upwards at the sky, alight with streaks of orange and purple, he got to his feet. Raising his hand to his lips, Baekhyun then placed it atop Chanyeol's headstone.

"I love you," he breathed and turned away. "Goodbye Chanyeol … Until we meet again."

With his head bowed low, Baekhyun walked. He didn't care how far he walked or where he ended up. He didn't care who he bumped into and what he passed. The last thing he ever said to Chanyeol was "thank you"; it wasn't a confession of his feelings. It wasn't a declaration of his love. It was a simple "thank you". And for what? He had sung him a song. One that hadn't left his mind since.

It wasn't as though Baekhyun had planned the last thing he would say to him, although he had hoped it would be him who would leave, in turn, Chanyeol remaining behind in order to carry out his life; to be happy; to find another love. But he …

Baekhyun could never move on. He could never forget. And no amount of trying was going to make him.

Although, deep down, what hurt him the most was not the fact that he did not get to say goodbye. Baekhyun felt guilty for Chanyeol's passing; he had kept his secret hidden from him – he had given Baekhyun every ounce of support and care he could. And in return, Baekhyun was not by his side when Chanyeol needed him the most.

It wasn't fair. But who was it not fair for? Baekhyun felt his heart sink further than it already had at the thought – it wasn't fair for him. As much as Baekhyun would have given anything to be able to help Chanyeol as much as he had helped him … Chanyeol had left – exactly how he wanted it.

And Baekhyun couldn't help thinking that by his being there during Chanyeol's final moments, no matter how much he wanted to tell him he loved him and that everything would be alright, it would make Chanyeol's passing difficult. Something he knew Chanyeol did not want.

If Baekhyun had been there that night, by his side, Chanyeol would not have wished to leave. It would have hurt him far more than it did.

Baekhyun glanced upwards at the dark sky; the rain streamed down in thick sheets and obscured his vision, Baekhyun continued to walk – the small droplets of water ran down his face, and strangely enough, they tasted like salt.

The dark sky cracked open as a fork of lightning lit up the world for a brief moment before returning to the shadowed state it was previously. Baekhyun continued to walk, oblivious to the storm as people pushed past his in an attempt to escape the rain, umbrellas –sometimes upturned – clasped tightly in their hands.

What if he were to exchange places with Chanyeol? What would Chanyeol feel had Baekhyun had passed instead of him? Would he have moved on as Baekhyun would have

liked – live a happy life, fall in love once more? Or would he, too, never truly be able to move on?

Baekhyun arrived home early that evening to his old apartment – it had been so long since he had been allowed to leave the hospital room, and, it was exactly how he had left it. Mostly. The small kitchen was coated in a thin layer of dust and held very little in it. The lounge, consisting of a table, a single armchair and a small television propped up by two bricks and a plank of wood was all that decorated the room.

Exploring the empty room with no more than a sweeping glance, Baekhyun headed to his room; a single bed was stripped of its sheets and rested neatly in one corner; a small plain wooden night stand stood next to it.

Above the bed, and probably the only thing that Baekhyun had liked about his home, was the large window that he would look out of every night as he lay in bed; watch the stars and wonder if there was anything beyond.

Breaking his gaze away from the window, Baekhyun turned away from his room with a sigh – this was his life outside of the hospital. And it was empty. Moving to the fridge, Baekhyun's brows knitted together. He couldn't remember the last time he had been in his apartment, and, judging by the layer of dust that coated every surface in the tiny kitchen, the apartment, too had seen nobody after him.

Although he wasn't exactly sure why, Baekhyun tugged the door of the fridge open and surveyed the empty shelves. He hadn't expected it to contain any food, but something compelled him to check, just in case.

Closing the door shut behind him, Baekhyun crossed the apartment in five steps and, after grabbing his soaking jacket from the coat hook, left the apartment. He didn't bother locking the door as he made his way down the three flights of stairs, onto the street; he didn't know for how long he would be gone, or if he would come back at all. If someone were to take advantage of the fact that he had left his apartment unlocked, he would not be any worse off than he already was.

The storm had worsened during his time indoors and the rain fell heavily; Baekhyun's already soaking jacket absorbing the moisture and weighing his down. As he made his way down the streets, Baekhyun looked at his feet.

He arrived at the pebbled path that lead towards the lake and found himself heading involuntarily down it until the familiar sight came into view. Making his way slowly around the lake, Baekhyun slumped down on the park bench. Waiting.

Waiting for what, exactly, he did not know. But he remained there, nonetheless. For something to happen? Maybe. Although something deep within his heart told him that he had to wait.

The sky grew steadily darker still and, after what felt like hours of waiting for nothing in particular, Baekhyun pushed his freezing body to his feet. Long ago had he stopped feeling the icy rain against his skin. Instead, his entire body burned with a constant cold that seemed to eliminate every other sense.

With joints, stiff from sitting for so long, Baekhyun slowly made his way out of the parkland, back along the trail and out into the city that, despite the downpour, still seemed to buzz with life.

"Why do you need to get it done so quickly? Take your time with it - you'll enjoy it more that way."

"I guess I just want to finish as much of the list as I can."

Baekhyun snorted at the thought; all this time, Chanyeol had been in perhaps a worse state than he. But despite that, he was willing to befriend a stranger. He was willing to help no matter what happened to him.

He looked down at his feet once more as he began the journey back through the city. Closing his eyes, Baekhyun sighed heavily. He felt as though he had no control over his mind or body anymore. It moved on its own. It would think on its own. And right now, his body seemed set on revisiting the places he spent with Chanyeol. It was set on conjuring up Baekhyun's most treasured memories of him. And to make it stop was out of his control.

A loud ring of a horn and screams of onlookers snapped Baekhyun back to reality as a bright light flooded across his vision, blinding him.

A truck, Baekhyun realised; he had crossed into the middle of a busy road without realising. A wave of different emotions washed across him. His eyes widened in panic, but his body refused to move.

The light burned Baekhyun's eyes. He did not know what was happening, nor could he see his surroundings any longer. Instead, he was surrounded by a spectrum of bright colours, indescribable in beauty.

This was it, this was what he wanted.

To be with Chanyeol once more.

The light slowly began to fade; the spectrum of colours slowly dissolving into the landscape around him. Baekhyun's hands twitched as he felt the springy grass beneath him. Pushing himself upwards, Baekhyun took in his surroundings.

He was sitting in a beautiful meadow, clusters of soft blue flowers surrounded him. To the north was a weeping willow, a small bench sat underneath it, and to the east, if Baekhyun squinted, he could just make out a babbling river whose crystal clear water and rainbow pebble bed reflected the sun.

The sky, a vibrant shade of cornflower held no trace of clouds, yet with all of this sun, Baekhyun did not feel any warmth.

A strong pair of arms wrapped around his waist, helping him gently to his feet; a face burying itself into the crook of his neck.

"Baekhyun," Chanyeol murmured, "I've been waiting for you."

The moment the sound of his voice reached Baekhyun's ears, he spun around in his arms, wrapping his own around his neck – and cried.

"Chanyeol ," he managed to choke out. "I thought I'd lost you."

With an index finger, Chanyeol tilted Baekhyun's head upwards and brushed away his tears; the other arm tightening in a protective grip, as though he was scared he would leave.

Moving his head forward, Chanyeol placed a gentle kiss on Baekhyun's forehead and the second Chanyeol's lips touched his skin, Baekhyun felt warm for the first time.

"Please don't ever leave," he murmured and Chanyeol shook his head.

"I never will."

Chanyeol and Baekhyun walked, side by side, hand in hand through the beautiful meadow. Following the bank of the crystal clear river, they headed up the side of a small hillock before Chanyeol paused. Letting go of his hand, he crouched by the riverbed, his hand dipping into the icy waters before he withdrew it shortly after.

Moving back to Baekhyun's side, he took up his hand, pressing something cold and smooth into it. Confused, Baekhyun uncurled his hand; a beautiful pebble of marbled blue rested in his palm. It was no bigger than a pocket watch and was shaped in a heart.

"Please cherish it," Chanyeol said, a gentle smile crossing his face. Taking Baekhyun's hand in his once more, they made their way over the grassy hillock.

"Just over here," Chanyeol smiled, leading Baekhyun out of the clearing.

Surrounding the pair was a wall of trees; trunks so close together that it was impossible to squeeze through. The only way through was an uprooted tree that rested on its side; it wasn't tremendously high and Chanyeol scaled it with ease.

Holding out his hand, he offered Baekhyun a smile.

"We're almost there, Baek," he said. "I'll help you."

Balancing on his toes, Baekhyun grinned. "I can do this," he said.

Placing one foot at the bottom of the fallen tree, he made a grab for a branch. And then, slid back down again. A small, embarrassed laugh escaped his lips as he lifted his gaze to meet Chanyeol's once more.

"So, it wasn't as easy as I thought," he said. "But I've got this. Really."

Raising his foot once more, he placed it on the base of the rough bark, scrambling to reach a nearby branch. As he stationed himself on it, he reached for the next one, his balance faltering and he fell to the ground with a light thud.

Again and again Baekhyun tried to climb over, tears of frustration welling in his eyes. *Chanyeol.* He was waiting for him. He had to do this. Feeling a gentle tug in his heart, Baekhyun looked up.

From his position atop the fallen tree, Chanyeol offered him his hand once more.

"Take it," he said. "*Please.*"

This time, Baekhyun nodded and made to take hold of his hand. Each time he would wrap his fingers around his wrist, he would find his hand empty; Chanyeol's wrist replaced with nothingness.

The tears of frustration turned to tears of panic as Baekhyun looked around frantically – there had to be a way to get over. He just had to.

"Chanyeol," he managed to call, but Chanyeol shook his head, a sad smile curling the corners of his lips upwards.

"Baekhyun," he murmured. "Look at me. Don't be sad. We can be together some day, but … It's not your time now."

Baekhyun's eyes widened and he made to grab at Chanyeol's hands once more.

"Please," he cried. "I can't leave you!"

Chanyeol got to his feet, tears staining his cheeks.

"*I'm sorry, Baek … *"

Something sharp pricked Baekhyun's skin and he groaned, opening his eyes. A wave of excruciating pain washed across him and he let out a small cry. Baekhyun's vision was blurry; his surrounding spun. Bright lights shone on him from every angle and his eyes stung. Pushing himself into a sitting position, Baekhyun could hear the muffled sounds of people yelling.

They were yelling *his* name.

And then, he was pushed back down once more.

"Baekhyun," a doctor said, his voice low. "You left … We thought we had lost you!"

The surroundings began to stop spinning and Baekhyun could see where he was now; inside an operating room, his body covered by a blue, plastic material. Every inch of his body ached, throbbing with pain.

A choking cough escaped his throat, followed soon after by a long, low keening sound. Tears fell uncontrollably from Baekhyun's eyes and his body began to shake. His body felt numb. No longer did he notice the white hot pain of his battered arms or his crushed legs. He could only feel the aching of his chest, his heart, and that, to Baekhyun was the most excruciating type of pain he had ever experienced.

He was alive. He was exactly where he did not want to be.

Raising his bruised, swollen hand to his face to wipe away his tears, Baekhyun noticed something for the first time. Turning his hand over, he gently uncurled his fingers.

There, in the palm of his hand sat a stone, no bigger than a small pocket watch; marble blue in colour and shaped like a heart.