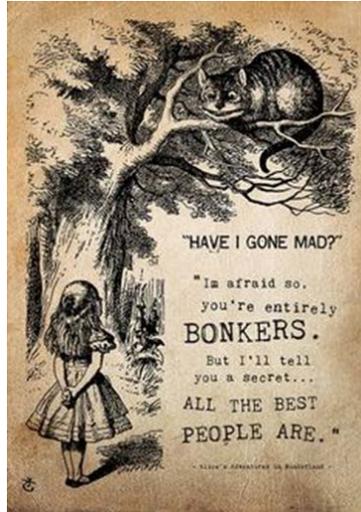


# Chapter One – Pt 1

## “BONKERS!”



Quote from: *Alice in Wonderland*

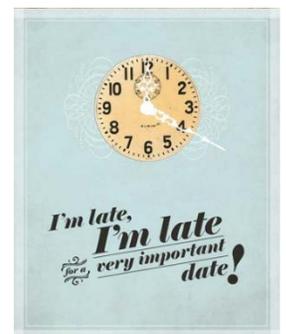
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### ILLINOIS COUNTRYSIDE OUTSIDE OF CHICAGO

AS the snow swirled and blew outside, piling up in drifts on the front porch, the old 1800's farmhouse (crumbling in disrepair) began to take on an eerie, unnerving personality all its own.

Past the peeling, faded black door, the only indications of life inside were a collection of cheery red balloons whipping in the unrelenting wind, along with a colorful sign reading . . . ‘I’M LATE, I’M LATE FOR A VERY IMPORTANT DATE!’

Pushing closer to the front door, four young men, half of the members of the popular Korean boy-band ‘BTS’, huddled against one another, stomping snow from their wet shoes. Stranded, had not been on their agenda that day. They should’ve already been warm and snug in a hotel room on the way back from their concert venue in Chicago. Now they were not only cold and freezing, they were hungry and desperate.



Despite the blizzard conditions, the odd party paraphernalia proved there might be people and FOOD inside. But, did they dare take a chance and ring the bell?

“I’m turning blue here. Ring it. Geez,” the outspoken red-head V urged, nudging a hesitant Jimin in the ribs.

Wanting to comply but realizing if something happened sending them further from their other three members the usually compliant Jimin frowned.

“HELL NO, this is creepy. I’m for heading back to the car. This storm can’t last forever.” Rubbing his grumbling stomach, he turned his back on the others, one foot already headed down the icy step. *He was in shape. He could hold out.*

“Don’t do that!” JungKook squealed, his large eyes widening with fright that another member would separate from the group, scattering them even further from each other. “It’s just a farmhouse.” Nervously running his cold hands through a dark wet shock of hair, his voice was low, “Geezzz, surely they have a phone.”

“A phone without electricity isn’t going to do us any good. Who’s going to come save us out here in the middle of nowhere? And, no cell service,” Jin reminded them, holding his phone in the air above their heads again, checking one last time for any indication of a connection.

“So, the rule is we stick together. We’ll be okay. A warm house, a little food . . . yep I’m in.” Squeezing to the front V shoved the doorbell numerous times to announce their arrival, impatiently blowing into his hands to keep warm.

### **15 MINUTES EARLIER . . .**

**IT** was nearly time. Eyes intense, 21-year-old, Sumre Whyte crouched low, studying the collection of male dolls lined up in a row at the base of the large Victorian doll house. *With so many to choose from, why was this such a difficult decision YET again?*

Picking up one in each hand, she rose banging the first one’s head on the edge of the rooftop before turning to the others, grumbling with finality . . . “Guess he can't come to the party now. He has a headache.” Dropping him into a miniature, hand-made bed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, she scratched into her teased updo thoughtfully.

Last night she dreamed the upcoming birthday party would be a huge success, with all her suitors in attendance. But, upon awakening, it occurred to her . . . several of them didn't deserve to share in the happiness of she and sister Sundae’s special day. So, creeping downstairs in the dark, (past her favorite ‘Alice in Wonderland’ portraits and wedding photos of Granny and Pop)

she proceeded to sit in quiet contemplation over the assortment of dolls, hoping to decide before morning, who was IN and who was OUT.

Now, as the time drew closer to the appointed hour, sister Sundae suddenly appeared, dressed in her usual, mundane, party attire looking pale and ghostly in cream and brown.

And, the fight for their FAVORITE guests, began.

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**HEARING** the crinkle of the large petticoat under her own bright yellow party dress, Sumre reached to snatch another doll from the table, when her twin slapped her hand in anger.

“OH NO YOU DON'T, HE'S MINE.”

“WHO SAYS?” Reeling back in horror, Sumre pouted, rubbing the stinging skin of her wrist. “I got here first. And, you don't take care of them like I do.”

“Do too!” Childishly sticking her tongue out at her identical twin, Sundae was firm. *Every time they threw a party stupid Sumre was like this. Fighting with her was like ushering in the dawn.*

Glancing over at the dining table already set for guests, it was evident the oncoming snowstorm would mess with the attendance. Last year it had been a Garden Party. Much more fun, instead of being cooped up in the confines of the stuffy, antique dining room.

Giving in Sumre dropped the smiling, dark-headed doll by the leg, lifting a different one from the lineup, studying his bright reddish-tinted hair critically, “Well, obviously HE can't come. He needs to dye that awful hair first and take a bath. GROSS. Don't you just hate it?” Her disgust evident she casually dumped him into the small, claw-foot tub at the end of the second-floor bedroom.

Lifting the first chosen doll (guest) and cradling him between her fingers, sister chuckled. “Ha, look at you tossing him aside, I thought he was your favorite? He's the one you play with the most.”

“DO NOT,” Sumre whined in denial, “I only took him outside the other day before the storm hit to help me plant tulip bulbs. Now he's filthy.”

“Well, not my fault. These are MY two choices. No tradsies this time.”

Sighing, Sundae rolled her eyes holding the one doll possessively to her breast. He had been her first choice last year as well, and his painted-on abs looked so amazing (even though she'd used up the only black marker in the house to achieve it).

*Ahhh, last year had been the best. Maybe there would be good karma surrounding this event if she invited the same two young men again. Sister could SUCK IT. She was never satisfied. Unlike herself who thrived on repetition and simplicity.*

Turning side-wise, she watched the annoyingly pristine girl (quietly singing, 'Happy Birthday to me') maneuvering a blonde-headed doll into a sitting position, plunking him at the teeny desk facing the back-bedroom window.

“Go ahead, make Mr. Sassy dye his hair. I guess you're going to do whatever you want. You ALWAYS DO. He's the one who spoiled the party last year anyway, NOT one of mine.” Her voice curt and laced with innuendos, Sundae skimmed her fingers lovingly over the tiny, white, button-down shirt of her favorite ‘guest’. Staring into his face she bent, kissing the miniature, red, heart-shaped lips (enhanced with lipstick).

Sumre balked throwing her hands in the air in frustration. “Since you're being so POSSESSIVE this year, you leave me no choice. I'll HAVE to give him another chance.”

"I suppose you will." Licking her lips in satisfaction, Sundae rose stretching. "Come, before we're late. It's time." Attempting to resist the urge to light the candles on the cake as she walked by, she nudged Sumre muttering harshly, "MY turn this year."

“NO.” Squealing loudly, Sumre jumped away from the doll house, careening across the floor in her bare feet, headed toward the lighter (positioned just so) beside the tall three-tiered cake. “I did it THAT year. You can't change it. NO . . . NO . . . NO . . .”

Dropping the pretend guests on the floor at their feet to fight over the lighter, the arguing sisters heard the clanging of the front bell, loud and clear.

“OH. IT'S THEM.”

Pushing Sundae out of the way, Sumre snatched her shoes from the floor beside the chair. Tripping excitedly across the tattered rug she tugged them on, rushing headlong toward the massive wooden door, her bony fingers stretched out in anxious anticipation.

Staggering from the force of the shove, Sundae threw her arms out grabbing her impetuous sister about the waist, hauling her back into the vestibule. *Dear God, why was she acting so crazy? She knew they would eventually be here. They came every year.*

“STOP IT.” Unbending she clamped one hand over Sumre's mouth, her warning stern. “You'll scare them away before we ever get the door open. And, they can probably hear you! Are you going to relax, or do I need to get the juice?”

Still jumping under the tight hold, the nervous sister felt her right eye begin to twitch (like it always did when she was overly excited). Shaking both hands to relieve the tension, she took a deep breath under the sweat of Sundae's palm, nodding to signal she was indeed attempting to calm down. *Anything to keep her from taking the juice!*

“Are we good?”

Waiting patiently, Sundae peeled her fingers away from Sumre's lips tentatively. *The guests would come as always, and sister would have to contain her childish excitement if she wanted to continue the parties they'd started after their gloriously unforgettable 18th birthday.*

Cracking her knuckles to ready herself, she finally hissed, “Go stand behind the door and quit that nervous twitching, I'll let them in. You know how they react when they see you first. You're sort of overwhelming.”

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**AT** precisely 12:20 (the time registered on the imaginary clock-sign) the weathered door flew open, sucking the balloons inside above their heads. Greeting them, a tall, blonde-haired vision in a pale beige party dress, (a kind, sexy smile spreading across her thin lips).

V blushed under her scrutiny. *Dear GOD ALMIGHTY. In the middle of their trudge up the road through an icy hell, they had died and gone to heaven . . .* As the Angel from the farmhouse ushered them inside, his excitement level rose.

“Oh, goodness, you made it,” she crooned, her eyes twinkling, “We thought the snow would delay your arrival. My, my . . . you all look so nice.”

Collectively curling her arms inside JungKook and Jimin's, she noticed immediately that this year they seemed especially handsome, their eyes bright, faces flushed and cheeks rosy from the biting cold.

Ignoring the others, she stepped away proceeding to brush the wet snow from their jackets, first one and then the other, now clucking over the inconvenience of the weather.

“Tsk, tsk . . . I'm sorry it had to storm like this. Wouldn't a spring garden party have been so much more enjoyable? Like we had last year?” Questioning, she grinned sheepishly into the face of her SPECIAL guest . . . the smiling, dark-haired JungKook.

Returning her admiration, JungKook tipped his head arrogantly to the others as if to say . . . “*Wow, she picked me for a garden party last year,*” before realizing they hadn't been here last year, and obviously NOT attended an outside party.

Without hesitation, Sundae swiveled in her spot between the four young gentlemen slamming the front door with one foot, satisfied as it echoed throughout the vast living room.

\* \* \* \* \*

“HI.”

Flying from behind the door (the aggressive) Sumre startled them all, hurtling herself like a cannon-ball against V's cold, jacketed chest.

Struggling to avoid her he backed up, dropping both arms to his side apprehensively. But, it was no use. She was on a mission.

Rearing back, she pointed at him accusingly shouting, "YOU . . . You better not spoil things this year. You were SO sassy last time and made me SO angry!"

Then flipping on a dime, she looked around, smiling at both he and the remaining three, her pinched face melting into a kind, accommodating expression when she noticed his still flaming red hair.

“I told sister you'd look much better with DYED hair, but she disagreed,” she cooed, fluffing her own teased hair-do coquettishly, before reaching to smooth the wrinkles from her full, crinkly skirt.”

For all practical purposes, the ‘Angel-in-Cream’, had just been joined by the ‘Devil-in-Yellow’. Staring into her awkwardly made-up face, V wondered if he should laugh it off and play along or gather the remaining members and hightail it back out the front door to the abandoned, van.

Leaning into V's quizzical face Sundae whispered, "I'm so extremely sorry," apologizing for Sumre's erratic behavior, yet again. "You remember how overly excited she gets when it's party time."

Urging them to remove their shoes and come all the way inside the vestibule she reached behind Jin for the latch locking it securely and drawing the chain announcing matter-of-factly, "Can't have it blowing open in the wind, now can we?"

Her explanation drawing raised eyebrows and mumbling between the members, only seconds later (head cocked) she jarred Sumre in the ribs with one elbow. "Hear that?"

From the confines of the decorated dining room a quiet 'GONG' could be heard, followed by the voices of children singing, "Happy Birthday". Feeling her heart leap with excitement she took JungKook by the hand tugging him in that direction.

"Come along, all. The party is officially started! You too Sumre. Don't dawdle. You wanted to light the candles remember?" Baffled, she didn't understand why her sister had just treated her favorite guest with such disdain. *Mr. Red-head was adorable, and the stern reprimand was totally uncalled for. At this rate, the poor boy wouldn't even consider coming back next year.*

Baffled, she didn't understand why her sister was treating the guests with such disdain. And, her stern reprimand to the totally adorable Mr. Red-head was totally uncalled for. At this rate, the poor boy wouldn't come back next year.

Holding back, the always open-minded V studied the unusual girl who had just physically attacked him. *What in the hell was going on? Had they stumbled onto a movie set in the middle of nowhere with actors using them to rehearse lines on?*

Starting to open his mouth to speak, the music spewed forth at full volume, just as Sumre tucked her finger to his lips, shaking her head a definitive, 'NO' asking only, "Well . . . are you coming?"

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