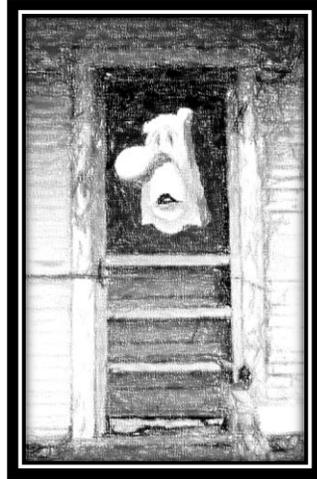


Chapter Two – Pt 1

“D’oh! I’m still locked, you know!”



The Doorknob From: “Alice in Wonderland”

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DROPPING wearily into the hard, wooden desk chair, RapMonster tapped his ear once, twice and then a third time. *Who the heck was singing ‘Happy Birthday’ in his head, followed by strange, yet familiar voices and WHY?*

Hoping maybe it was coming from the room next door he leaned in close to the wall blinking curiously. “Aishhh,” he muttered, “impossible . . . that’s our second room for the rest of the members. It’s empty.”

Flipping on the overhead light he was certain he was hearing children. Eyebrows furrowed, face pinched, he strained to make sense of the abnormal song now mingling with J-Hopes light snoring in the bed beside him, and sound of running bath water where Suga had rushed to have a long-awaited soak, after their arrival.

The dim room bathed in a soft glow made him wonder how long they would be stuck here. They were used to hotel rooms. That wasn’t the issue . . . the missing members were.

As the confusing chorus of noises intensified, he felt the need to break down and write the words he was hearing. Searching his backpack for his iPad, for some reason, it couldn’t wait another minute. With a strange feeling of foreboding, he began typing furiously . . . unconsciously humming ‘Happy Birthday’ to himself as he recorded the whispered sounds.

Smiling, satisfied he had the beginnings of a new ‘eerie’ sounding rap, he leaned over in the chair tossing his bag and I-Pad on the bed beside J-Hope. Toppling over sidewise, he lost his balance, and in an attempt to catch himself smacked his shoulder on the wooden edge of the bed frame, hitting the floor with a loud thud.

Jolted up off the bed, eyes bleary, J-Hope mumbled, “Hyung, you okay?” staring at his friend sprawled out at the foot of the bed rubbing his throbbing muscles.

Letting himself relax, RapMon crossed his arms over his chest, a low chuckle beginning to form in the lower regions of his belly.

No wonder they called him ‘Destruction’. Even his body was constantly at risk. Gradually rearing up, he nodded ‘ok’, realizing the singing in his head was surprisingly gone.

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WAS it possible she had gotten to the ice machine just in time to snag the very last bucket of ice on the entire floor? Grinning at her good fortune, Alexandra peered into the empty case, hiking up her sagging pajama pants. Unable to resist ‘Eminem’s’ rapping pounding through her earbuds, she closed her eyes crumping her way around in a circle, fists pounding the air, knees bent, mouthing the words as she went.

RapMonster let the hotel door slam shut behind him, anxious to get to the ice machine and fill the bucket for a cold glass of water. Composing was hard work . . . *Who was that?* Straight ahead of him, down at the far end of the hallway was a pajama clad girl, flinging herself in circles, empty ice bucket in hand, head rocking back and forth as she listened to ‘something’.

Pausing momentarily, he watched amused at her crumping style. *Well . . . regardless . . . she was pretty damn good!* Chuckling, he stepped away from the door unable to resist the urge to sneak up on her from behind, imitating the gyrations and arm punching she was doing in mid-air.

Feeling a presence at her back, Alexandria (Alex for short) stopped suddenly, swinging around to confront whoever the stalker was.

“What?” she shouted accusingly, seeing RapMonster, standing perfectly still, arm’s folded (ice bucket in one hand) innocently staring at her, lips curled up in a slight, engaging smile.

“Ice,” he announced, lifting the bucket in front of her, watching her tug out the earbuds, totally enamored by her statuesque face and set of dark, expressive eyes.

Reaching over teasingly she dipped clear to the bottom of the chest, scooping the final cubes into her own container holding it up in front of him like a prized ‘first place’ trophy, following a sporting event.

“Sorry. All gone.”

“Aishhh, yahhhh . . .” he moaned, leaning over to glance into the chest making sure she wasn’t lying. “Share?” Assuming she was the sympathetic type, eyes twinkling he started to grab a few cubes from the top of her overflowing bucket.

“Wow, really?”

Staring him down her eyes never leaving his, she took in his tall frame, and white blonde hair cascading casually over one eye. He was adorable, looking all pitiful like a shunned puppy, waiting for a treat. *Should she share?*

“Bet there’s another chest on the second floor . . .” Turning away she shunned him mockingly, sticking one earbud back in while rocking her head mindlessly to the rap once again.

“Come on. Please? It’s just ice.” Begging with his best rendition of aegeo, (CUTENESS) when she proceeded to walk away, RapMon reached over into the bucket for the second time, snatching out one slippery cube, and popped it in his mouth before she could protest.

What was he doing? She didn’t know him! And, she didn’t know where his hands had been. “HEY. Ice thief. Did you wash your hands before you came down here? I don’t know how I feel about you TOUCHING my clean ice,” she scolded.

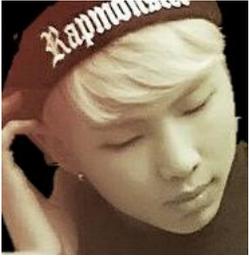


“Sure. Always. Is that Eminem you’re listening to?”

Now walking side-by-side, they headed toward the end of the hall, to the set of adjoining rooms, #301 and #303.

“Yeeessss . . .”

But before he could respond and carry on with the conversation, several random voices began popping up inside his head, cluttering his thoughts. Tapping one ear lightly, he tried to continue walking as he managed to capture the phrases, ‘They’re beautiful’ and “Play for me later.”



“Did you hear that?” he asked, stopping at room #303, watching as the ‘crumping-girl-with- no-name’ dug into the pocket of her ‘Alice in Wonderland’ pajama bottoms for the room card.

“Nope. Here!” Grinning, she handed over her cold container, sliding the card in the door. “Dump half in your bucket. Don’t let it be said I let a fellow human stranded in a storm, go without ICE! Damn.”

“Thanks. Really. You sure you didn’t hear that?” he reiterated, letting the cubes clunk loudly into the bottom of the bucket. “It was so clear, ‘they’re beautiful’, and ‘play for me later’ . . .”

Alex squinted into his puzzled face with sudden understanding. “It’s okay. I hear voices too. Helps me write my raps. Do you talk back to yours? I do,” she rambled on. “One’s name is Ricky. Sometimes we carry on pretty detailed conversations. So, I get it.”

Observing they were now standing at his own room #301, RapMon studied this unusual girl thinking she sounded like V’s long-lost twin, talking to some random disembodied voice named ‘Ricky’. *Why was that? And now that he thought about it, adjoining room #303 had been reserved for the rest of his members. The day wasn’t even over. What if they still showed up? Oh, this wasn’t good.*

“Did you just get here? To the hotel I mean?” he asked, peering through the cracked doorway as she started through, but all he could make out was the closet door, and three sets of various women’s shoes.

“Yep. ‘Bout thirty minutes ago. Gotta bounce. Maybe I’ll catch ya around later.” Seeing he was watching her every move, Alex turned her back, hand against the door handle and began slipping in gingerly so he couldn’t follow her. *After all . . . cute and adorable or not. He WAS a stranger . . .*

“Shit,” he mumbled, as the heavy door whooshed shut in his face. “Happy Birthday singing . . . girl’s next door . . . play for me . . .” *Maybe he was still sleeping in the car on the way from Chicago and this was all just a bad dream!*

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OH my GOD! *Could the day get any worse?* Andrea dropped her iPhone on the floor beside the hotel bed, kicking her feet in frustration at the prediction. She had read it over and over again,

starting early that morning ‘before’ the freak storm began, and now (for the third time on yet another site), attempted in vain, to prove it wrong. YOUR DAY WILL BE WONDERFUL, YOU WILL MEET THE MAN OF YOUR DREAMS.



“Yeah right,” she hollered, curling the white robe around her tightly, her eyes flinging around the bleak hotel room to the frosty windowpane where outside the blizzard raged relentlessly.

What had happened to her ‘wonderful’ day, and REALLY? The man of her dreams? She had studied every guest milling about the lobby in the two hours it had taken them to secure a room. Not one blonde-haired, blue-eyed, muscular athletic type in the bunch. If he was here . . . he was digging someone out of the snow instead of seeking her out.

Pulling on a headband to keep her hair out of her freshly washed face, she sighed. Stopping here wasn’t on the agenda. They should’ve already been in Chicago. Sipping colas and salivating over the city’s famous deep-dished pizzas.

Flopping back across the bed in disgust, she curled her painted toes against the rough hotel carpet. *And where was Alex with the ice? When she said ‘hurry, I need a cold drink’, she hadn’t meant take thirty freaking minutes!*

But, the silence was heaven, and she was so exhausted. With Abby down in the dining room having lunch, it was exquisitely quiet. Resisting the urge to strip and crawl under the covers, she curled up fetal style instead, figuring she would take advantage of being alone, and catch a quick nap.

Then, the commotion began. Quietly sporadic at first and growing in intensity until finally all she could hear was a raucous mix of what seemed to be drumming, tapping, pounding, and loud singing, (something about being ‘bulletproof’) *What the hell?*

Slapping her hand against the mattress she lunged off the bed, catapulting herself toward the door adjoining rooms #301 to #303. Whoever was on the other side better look out, because she wasn’t about to be sympathetic to their lack of concern for other guests.

“HEY!” Hollering she pounded both fists on the door in aggravation, blue eyes flashing daggers. “BE QUIET. Some of us want to sleep.”

Stepping away as the noisy interlude stopped, she smiled satisfactorily. “Humph. Taste of your own medicine huh?” But, turning away, it started again, only this time directly behind her on the connecting door itself, accompanied by the sound of low, masculine, laughter.

“It’s my jam,” came the voice behind the enclosure, “sorry, go back to bed.”

And, the room went silent. Now curious, as to not only the voice, but the person behind it, Andrea tied her robe tighter, and smoothing down her long blonde hair approached the door again. Tiptoeing straight to the crack she stuck one eyeball into the sliver of dim light attempting to see who was on the other side. *Of course . . . nothing.*

“How can I?” she barked back, not waiting for an answer. “I’m up now. That was rude.”

The faceless voice responded apologetically again. “I said I was sorry. I’m not used to being quiet. Don’t like hotels.”

“Well, get used to it. We’re here for the duration if this snow doesn’t let up,” she berated him, “Not to mention . . . we ARE going to need to sleep. Sometime.”

“I know.”

“Are you alone?” she finally asked, suddenly wondering who might not have showed up to take the adjoining room she and her two friends had managed to snag at the last minute.

“Now? Yes. Members are out.”

“Members?” she whispered to herself. “Ah, how many members?”

“Two more and a manager.”

“Manager . . .”

She wasn’t the smartest crayon in the box, but she did know that musical groups usually referred to the other guys as ‘members’, and with ‘members’, came ‘managers’. The accent was assuredly Asian. She couldn’t put her finger on it exactly, but she had spent enough time traveling the Asian countries with her parents to recognize one when she heard it. She had to know.

Was it safe to ask him to unlock the door? Aghhhh. She was alone as well. What if he was a crazy person? But, wasn't she the adventurous one? Wasn't it her who always encouraged the others to 'have fun', don't worry about the consequences . . . YOLO.

“Hey,” she barked at him, even louder, “are you dressed?”

“Of course.” Suga glanced down at his bare legs, dripping a puddle around his feet. “Ahhh, welllll . . . wait a minute!” Dashing back to the bathroom, he tugged the white terry hotel robe from the hook behind the door and throwing it around his wet, naked body, scurried back to his original position in the doorway. “Ye. Dressed. Of course,” he nodded reassuringly.

“Are you surrrre?”

“Uh huh.”

“Okay then. Unlock the door. I need to talk to you. Whoever you are.”

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