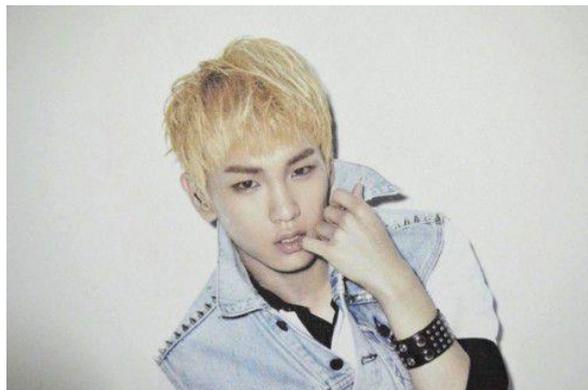


“BAD GIRL”

Part 2



Yeah, I fell for you
It's sweet 1 and 2 and 3 day,
But,
I didn't know at first . . .

(Lyrics Sung By: Henry Lau)



MAY 2007 – 11:05 P.M. - ‘SM’ PRACTICE STUDIO – SEOUL, S. KOREA

STEPPING away from the piano in the ‘SM’ practice room, Henry cracked his knuckles unconsciously, glancing down at his watch. Damn, as usual, the music had taken hold of him, losing track of time. He should’ve already given up and gone back to the dorm for the night.

Realizing he should be calling a manager to pick him up, he opted on a group member instead. The dorm was close and surely someone would be available. Most of ‘SM’ emptied out by 10:00 and fans normally didn’t hang around in front. Pulling out his phone, he scrolled hurriedly through his member contacts.

“Ahhh, ReoWook. I can always count on him. Not much of a social life that one. Probably watching a drama or reading a fanfic.”

Texting him . . . GET OFF YOUR LAZY ASS AND COME GET ME AT SM . . . he snickered at Wookie’s always kind, accommodating response. ARASSEO, BE RIGHT THERE.

Swiping his damp brow, he grabbed his backpack, rising as he stretched, headed for the door. One finger on the light switch, the cell (still clenched in his hand) rang through an actual call. Glancing at the caller ID, it didn't surprise him he didn't recognize the number. Extremely careful about who he gave his personal information to, since his debut, all his contacts had their own ringtones. Shrugging off the nondescript ring he answered in English, merely to satisfy his curiosity, and throw the caller off-balance.

“This is Henry. State your purpose.”

“Hi babe. Whatcha doin? Busy?”

The voice on the other end was low, sexy and unfortunately . . . more than familiar. *How in the hell had 'she' managed to get his new number?* Leaning into the wall outside the closed practice room door, Henry bumped his head against it in frustration.

“YEAH, as a matter of fact I am!” Literally shouting into the phone, his response bounced off the walls, echoing down the deserted hallway. “How the fuck did you get my new number Erica?”

In a split second, he felt himself go from calm and collected to so enraged he could barely breathe. If it was one thing he wasn't, it was gullible and stupid. He was aware of the fact that if he didn't appease her with small talk, she would be as relentless as a cougar stalking its prey, forcing him to change his number, yet again.

“Henryyyy . . . OMG, the language babe. Your mom gave it to me, who else? You didn't think I'd let you go all the way back to Seoul without at least some sort of a final goodbye, did you?”

Scolding him like a child, the calm, seductive tone of her voice, infuriated him even further. *Of course, it made sense it would be his mom. Always with the best intentions, she was the epitome of 'Mother-of-the-Year' unconsciously getting him in a shitload of trouble. Why should he suffer just for going home to visit?*

“You need to stop calling me or you're gonna force me to change my number. AGAIN,” he growled into the phone.

Taking off, he strode purposefully toward the lobby, nodding to the night maintenance man with a broom and trash can, lazily making his way down the long corridor in front of him.

Eyes down, concentrating on the aggravating conversation, he approached the entrance to the last practice room before the elevator, running smack dab into a young woman rushing briskly out a usually vacant, piano room.

Tripping over her in exasperation, his cell clattered noisily to the floor, along with a slew of her own items, knocking the glasses off her face in the process.

Stretched over her sprawled out form, their startled eyes met, “WHAT THE FUCK? Look where the hell you’re going,” he snapped. *Freaking little girl. What was she doing here alone so late anyway?* Snatching his cell from the tile floor he flipped it over in his palm, checking for cracks before comprehending exactly what he’d said.



“Joesonghamnida . . . sorry. But, I’m in a hurry. Damn, get up, get up.” Offering one hand to help her rise, he threw out a stern warning, “Be careful next time,” disappearing into the empty lobby, headed toward the main doors and sweet freedom.



“**WHAT** the hell?” Lunging toward the disc player next to the practice room mirror, Key punched the ‘OFF’ button quickly. Practicing late was common for the young trainee, even catching the bumps and noises of other incoming and exiting artists. But, for some reason . . . this encounter sounded unusually angry.

Was there a fight going on? Glancing up at the clock over the door, it registered 11:11 P.M. **WHAT THE HELL.** *Who in their right mind would be duking it out in the middle of ‘SM’s’ maze of practice rooms at this hour?*

Mildly spooked he hiked his grey joggers up his slender hips, curiosity getting the better of him, and padded quietly toward the door. Inching it open just a crack, he blinked down through the dimly, lit hallway.

It was a girl. In a baggy sweatshirt, head down, she squatted awkwardly, scrambling to retrieve books, papers, and a pair of glasses. Heart pounding, he eased the door open wider. *She obviously needed help. Where was everyone? Usually the halls were abuzz with activity, even at this late hour.*

About to step out to lend a hand, his phone dinged in a message. *DAMMIT*. Cursing the timing, he hesitated glancing into the screen, seeing Onew's name. But, it wasn't him.

IT'S TAE. EMERGENCY. THINK I LOST MY PHONE. CHECK BACK CORNER OF PRACTICE RM WHERE I THREW MY BAG. GAMZA. LET ME KNOW ASAP.

Letting his foot hold the door open, Key shook his head in disbelief. Leave it to baby Tae. They'd only been allowed phones for a month, and here he was already losing his!

CHECKING NOW. BABO!



FEELING a presence watching her, SooMin too hesitated, looking up. Already angry and self-conscious at being run over like a freight train, she scrambled to her feet hoping she could make a hasty getaway before the stranger in the knit hat staring at his phone managed to see her face-to-face. One embarrassing encounter tonight was enough.



Dressed like a homeless person, hair scraggly, and sweaty from practicing all she needed was to get out and get out quick. *Why had she ever thought hanging out at 'SM' this late just to see her dreamy 'beach baby' was a good idea?*



Making a beeline for the lobby, on the heels of the handsome young 'freight train' who had accidentally accosted her moments earlier, she hoped to God, her call to GunRa meant he was already ready and waiting outside in the parking lot.

By the time Key had returned the text and looked back, the mysterious dark-headed girl in the sweatshirt was gone. In her place . . . the janitor, methodically making his way toward the farthest corner of the hallway, nodding politely at the trainee's bleak smile.



WITH his frustration level at an all-time high, Henry pushed through the double doors, feeling the cool night breeze on his face, grateful at least he'd lost Erica's call in the commotion.

She was crazy as a two-dollar bill. Scanning the deserted parking lot for fans or anyone suspicious he jogged toward the waiting vehicle.

Slipping into the front seat, he nodded to ReoWook in greeting, tossing the bag between his feet hissing, “Damned ex-girlfriend called, won’t f’ing leave me alone. Among other things.”

Clueless about the business of having a girlfriend, Wookie smiled in return, swinging out of the parking spot, just as the nerdy girl in the glasses, backed into the heavy lobby doors, shoving them open.

Chin propped against an arm full of music books and disheveled papers, she stumbled precariously into the nearly deserted lot. Glancing out the window Henry saw her hike the books up closer to her face, searching the area for a ride.

Damn, he should’ve stayed to help her. Well, it was too late now. Obviously, she was a trainee. If he ran into her again when he returned from America, he would make sure to apologize properly.

Thinking about the interrupted phone conversation with Erica, he turned to Wookie frowning. “Do yourself a favor hyung. Don’t EVER fall in love. All women do is mess with your f’ng mind. We don’t have time for that shit.”

Chuckling, Wookie could see that ‘Americanized’ guys had so many more dating issues than Korean’s did. ‘He’ could barely get up the nerve to touch a girl, and Henry had already spilled his guts about his numerous sexual conquests ‘in and out’ of the bedroom, including (the duly-noted) Erica, who was obviously trying to invite herself back into his private hell. It was too much. For an extremely talented artist, Henry seemed to be a disaster when it came to relationships. At the rate he was going, chances were, he would be single for a really, long time.

