

“FIRE”

Part 2



Just by meeting, our eyes we'll know everything,
take my hand, so you can be my side

(Lyrics Sung By: SHINee)



BAGGAGE CLAIM – LAX CON'T.

FATE AND TIME

“I . . . I.” Stuttering incoherently, Father Time glared into Fates tearful face, not knowing if his anger was perpetrated on her lack of faith in him or his own inability to interfere. “What the hell just happened?”

“We’re still here?” Wiping flushed cheeks, she curled up out of her fetal position on the floor, observing the only change was SungWoo sneaking away from the area behind a tall, skinny man dressed all in black.

“Obviously.” Ushering her off against one wall, Times eyes skirted their surroundings. The girls were walking out the large glass doors, luggage in tow, the boys casually chatting with their manager, heading curbside as well.

“FATE. I WAS HELPLESS! NO POWER. I SWEAR, I’VE NEVER . . . NEVER HAD THAT HAPPEN BEFORE.” Twisting the bottom of his grey beard, the stout balding man, quivered with unexpected fear.

“Me either.” Eyes focused on her bare toes, the girl experienced in all things ‘soulish’, was baffled as well. “We need to report. Immediately. Do you think it’s safe with him gone?”

“I suppose so. Someone needs to know.”

Brushing both large palms across his sweating head, Father Time strode away, not wanting to look back at the place that had just sucked away his power, only to spit it contemptuously back in his face.



STRIDING toward the trio with renewed enthusiasm, Henry grinned, reaching out to shake MinSeok Wu’s hand firmly. “Hello sir, I’m Henry Lau, thank you for coming.”

“My pleasure Henry. MinSeok Wu. I work for ‘SM’.” Shaking his hand as well, MinSeok liked Henry’s no-nonsense, adult-style grip.

MinSeok Wu? What happened to Mr. Yook? His raised eyebrows registering disappointment, Henry’s face fell at hearing the unfamiliar name. *No shacking up with the hottie in the jean shorts now . . .* Attempting to regain his composure he nodded politely. “Nice to meet you . . . Sir.”

“I apologize, you were obviously expecting Mr. Yook. Your Manager contacted them earlier, saying you’d missed your flight and with the delay, he had business he couldn’t reschedule, so I offered to take his place. Had to come get my Keis anyway and since we’re neighbors, it was a no brainer.” Rattling on excitedly, MinSeok glanced over at IlSeok and Keis his heart pounding with fatherly pride.

She was finally here, and none the worse for wear. Flying Commercial had obviously not destroyed her after all.

Turning his attention back to the Idol he grinned, patting the young man’s shoulder. “Seems like you and Keis have already met, the other giddy one is my youngest daughter, IlSeok. We call her Seoky for short.” Studying Henry’s facial expression their eyes locked. “You’ll be seeing a lot of them over the next few months. Especially Keis.”

Chuckling under his breath he could already envision the two of them going head-to-head in workshops. If it was one thing Keis excelled at . . . it was her fearless, pre-occupation with the piano. Henry was in for one hell of a ride!

MEANWHILE – CURBSIDE LAX

STRUTTING through the double doors, Key took a deep breath of mild, California air. Expecting the sweet smell of flowers, instead the acrid stench of pollution, gasoline and exhaust overtook him, not unlike his terminal experiences in S. Korea.

Coughing uncontrollably, he wished instead for a movie-worthy, ‘Welcoming Committee’ of tall, tanned, bikini-clad hotties, lining up to assure he and Minho started out their American experience on a high note.

Sighing over the blatant reality, he felt Minho’s hand on his shoulder, shoving him carelessly to one side of the already crowded sidewalk.



“Move hyung. Trying to take pics. Damn, your big head. Always in the way.”

“Yahhh.” *Even in another country his hyung was the same.* Hiking his sleeves up in the warmth of the sun, Key threw his eyes in the direction of LAX’s massive taxi line-up. *No sign of a white van yet. Where was their Manager?*

Yawning, tired and anxious to be on the move, he meandered down the sidewalk stretching his legs before another extended ride into Malibu. As diverse as back home, he studied the throngs of people passing by, relishing the opportunity to move about freely. Captivated (as always) by the variety of colorful outfits, and outlandish hairstyles, he was also fascinated by his continuing ability to pick up bits and pieces of conversational English.

Lifting his camera in the air, Minho zoomed in on the fidgety Key, strolling fearlessly amongst the heavy crowd like he always did when left to his own defenses. Having wandered several yards away, he was already near the exit to the next gate. *Crazy kid couldn’t stand still for a second.*



PAUSING once more to check for the van, the familiarity of somewhat harsh (Korean speaking) voices nabbed Key's attention in the midst of the mindless chatter around him. Not normally one to eavesdrop, curiosity got the best of him. Craning one ear, he inched closer to the pair of gruff looking men, huddled nearly out of sight against the doorway to International Pick-Up.

"Thought you were leaving? What's stopping you? Told you, I'm headed into Malibu to pay Ms. Wu a little surprise visit."

Startled at the mention of the name 'Wu', Key ducked discreetly out of sight behind a cement column. *Weren't he and Minho headed to the Wu's later that evening, as well?*

Snapping a few random photos of his jittery hyung, just for kicks, Minho ambled over, stepping up beside Key, also observing the faces of two mysterious looking men locked in (what seemed to be) a heated discussion.

Eyes wide, Key hushed him, one finger to his lips. What they both heard next was puzzling to say the least.

"Nothing's stopping me but your irrational agenda. You know the Chairman's gonna have your balls when he finds out what you're up to. Unauthorized visits WASN'T part of the original assignment."

"Shittt . . . not unless someone squeals he won't. Who the fuck cares, anyway? I don't pay you to worry about what I do with my free time. You just do your job and I'll do mine."

"Yeah, whatever . . . asshole."

Tossing a slim cigar butt into a nearby trashcan, SungWoo bolted off, splitting from Andy before being swallowed up in the maize of awaiting taxis.

"HOLY SHIT. You missed it hyung," Key hissed jiggling Minho's arm up and down frantically. "That one guy mentioned Mrs. Wu. Where we're going tonight, right? The Wu's?" Feeling like the writer of a suspense drama, the young Trainee's imagination ran wild, his previously calm, tourist-like demeanor suddenly far from cool.

What had they stumbled across? They'd been told ahead of time Mr. Wu was a well-known figure in the local 'SM' community. So, who was the short, creepy character insisting that he

needed to pay Ms. Wu a visit without the Chairman's approval? Who was the Chairman? And, why was the other guy so upset?

Seemingly unconcerned, Minho motioned him closer clasp one arm about his sweaty neck. Ruffling a shock of blonde hair, almost lovingly he whispered, "Ye, so what?"

"Yah, jeonglyujang (STOPPPP). It's bad enough the wind's blowing." Rearing back, (one hand to his flyaway bangs), Key's frustration at his friend's inability to sense the possibility of danger in the making, was evident.

"Relax hyung. So, they know each other. Big deal. Could be anything. You stress me out sometimes. I told you inside, not to wander off. Gaja (LET'S GO)."

"Damn, I just wanted to stretch my legs. You can't tell me that guy with the cigar didn't make your skin crawl. Maybe there's something going on we should tell WonBin about, since that's our host home."

"Ani. Mind your own business." Even though he HAD been 'creeped out', Minho wasn't about to feed into some dramatic analysis of two random men talking in Korean outside an International airport. "Rides here." Chuckling to clear the air, he spotted the manager in question, motioning them toward the van, pulling up at the curb.

AT THE CROSSWALK

LEAVING Daddy Wu and Henry lagging behind (chattering relentlessly), SooMin grabbed IlSeok's hand bursting through the airport's sliding glass doors, anxious to feel the warmth of spring on the West coast. Stretching both arms wide, she twirled giddily, grateful to finally be on California soil, headed to Malibu, Mommy and freedom.

"Oh my GOD Seok . . . out of hell and back to heaven. I LIVE FOR THIS . . . LOOK OUT MALIBU, KEIS WU IN THE HOUSE." It was only here she could embrace the person she was born to be.

Hugging her waist tightly IlSeok stopped her from taking another step, letting the crowd move on around them. Her voice dripping with sisterly interest she giggled lightly. "SO . . . tell me about Idol boy over there. I'm not moving another inch until you do. He's an Idol AND a pianoooo playerrrr. Right up your alley."

Swinging around to face her, Keis pursed her lips thoughtfully. Should she tell on Idol Asshole? Let sister in on the fact that he was a strange combination of personalities, ranging from despicable to adorable, depending on the circumstances? She'd noticed him oogling the both of them earlier when being introduced. Or was it IlSeok he was gawking at? Hmm. Best keep the truth to herself right now. Play his little game, and see where it led.

"He's talented for sure. I don't really know him THAT well. We had some conversation on the plane. Nothing special." Bumping her hip against IlSeok playfully, she pointed to the crosswalk, noticing that Daddy and Henry were about to catch up. "Which way to the SUV?"

"Keisss . . . you didn't really answer my question." Not sure she was giving up the whole truth about the handsome, well-mannered Idol at their back, IlSeok tugged her sister forward. "Comon, the 'walk' sign is on, we parked over there to the left."

Feeling dissatisfied that the ecstatic Keis hadn't blubbered over him like she usually did when there was an Idol mentioned Ilseok wondered why, (especially one she had so much in common with). If nothing else, she could picture them starry-eyed, side-by-side at the piano, making their boring classical music together. *Yikes Seok! Bubble burst. This is Keis you're talking about. She only gets starry-eyed by the likes of unavailable absentee Idols, and novel hotties like Derrick.*



PAUSED at the crosswalk, Key leaned his head against the van window, continuing to people watch as another group passed across in front of them. Beside him, Minho continued snapping pictures out the side of various travelers, the airport itself, and even the billowing clouds overhead. *Hyung and his camera. He was as obsessed with it, as he was his sports. It was going to be a long-ass summer if he was going to keep his nose stuffed behind a lens for the duration.*

Thoughtlessly squashing Key further into the corner, Minho leaned over the center console, attempting to capture as many different shots as possible. This was the opportunity of a lifetime. Suddenly, without warning, a tanned young woman, in a tight pair of jean shorts (accentuating her luscious round butt), entered to the right of his lens, her dark ponytail flapping playfully from one side to the other.

Continually clicking away, it dawned on him that right smack in the center of his sights he might very well have spotted the human version of the anime 'Dream Girl' he and Key had fought over in the air.

“HOLY SHIT HYUNG,” he barked, never letting the lens leave her as she skipped in front of the van with an air of excitement, tugging another girl by the hand. “IT’S HER. Dammit. It’s Dream Girl.”

“WHA . . . WHERE? Move the fuck over, I can’t see.” Grappling to push him out of the way, Key ignored the chuckling breaking out from the Manager and driver in the front seat. *Aigooo, why were they laughing? If his Dream Girl was materializing out of thin air he needed to see. What did they know about fate?*

“There . . . she’s almost to the other side.”

Back to his original position by the window, Key squinted, his nose pressed to the glass like a child experiencing his first snowfall. But, in spotting the dark ponytail, his eyes followed instead up the arm of the girl skipping over the asphalt directly behind her.

Her large chest bouncing as she trotted to keep up, she turned her back to the van (as if searching for someone behind her). Her own ponytail swaying back and forth in the brisk wind, discreetly disguised her entire face from view. *Were she and the other girl sisters? Friends? Twins maybe?* In the split second it took Keys heart to register an innate feeling of déjà vu, they were gone, swallowed up in the crowd headed into the parking garage.

Sighing, Minho dropped the camera to his lap leaning back into the seat. “Wowww, hyung. You saw her . . . ye?”

“Uh, huh.” Still crunched in the corner, the suddenly pensive Key, wasn’t sure he hadn’t just had a run in with destiny. A firm believer in fate, whoever she was . . . maybe . . . just maybe, they would cross paths again. “You got pictures, right?” he asked hopefully.

“Of course!”

Minho, now positive he’d managed to some decent shots of her from his vantage point, was even more anxious to get to Malibu and have the photo’s developed to examine them further. Dismissing a slight tingling in his left butt cheek as a sign of a pinched nerve from sitting too long, he purposed himself to head out for a run on the beach later, to shake out the kinks. With luck, maybe she’d re-appear out of nowhere . . . again.

