

## STIGMA

### Leisure room – Day time

With Spring being generous weather-wise, the residents were hoping for better upcoming days. Between a nonchalant amnesiac and a hypochondriac in denial, the last original ward mate was left to dwell, unsure if his turn will come anytime soon or if he will see his inmates take the leave before him.

For the past few weeks, Lucy noticed that Taehyung has become even more introverted which surprisingly contradicted with his habitual state. In an effort to cheer him up, she walked towards him in a funny way to get his attention.

“Taehyungie, do you want to play a game?” Lucy addressed him playfully.

Confused, the member questioned her, “Lucy, is everything okay?”

Upon hearing his response, RM couldn't help but chuckle feeling remorseful towards his inmates, “I am definitely leaving this place first.”

“I heard that,” Lucy shouted from a distance. “You should be encouraging us instead of putting us down, you know.”

She then turned back to her roommate, who still had a dumbfounded look on his face, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“I lost my bestfriend,” Taehyung sighed. “He knew me best. He promised me that we will leave this place together, but he abandoned me.”

Realizing that she wasn't the only one coping with a recent loss, Lucy comforted him, “Then let's work on getting you better to join him, shall we?”

“Can I though? Can I get better?” Taehyung pleaded, “I've been this way my whole life and I don't know how to live otherwise.”

“As long as you have the will, the “how” comes naturally,” Lucy reassured him. “You trust me, don't you?”

Their vital conversation was cut short when Nurse Abby called out for medication time.

“It's Magic Time!” Taehyung jumped out of his seat and sprinted to the pharmacy, leaving Lucy hanging.

“You’re wasting your time,” RM meddled. “Whether it’s ADHD or 4D, Tae is Tae and if doctors couldn’t fix him, what makes you so sure that you can?”

“I didn’t know you had it in you to sweet talk someone. So much for having an indifferent persona,” Lucy scoffed at him. “Either way, I don’t see the harm in trying to help him. Unless you’ve lost someone before, you do not get to judge either one of us for trying to get by the loss.”

“Fierce, I like it.” RM hassled her, “Just do yourself a favor and don’t try to fix me next. I don’t need your help.”

“I never offered it to begin with,” Lucy backfired before taking her turn at the pharmacy, “I hope you don’t mind solitude because therapy sessions are going to be hellish on your own.”

### **Healing room – Day time:**

The bickering between Lucy and RM last week made the aura a bit awkward during leisure time, and things didn’t get any better during the healing session. Caught in between, Taehyung tried to cheer his inmates up with a discussion slightly different from the previous ones.

“Do you have a happy place?” his sudden interaction brought the pair to smile, although RM tried his best to hide it.

“Do you have a happy place, Tae?” Lucy asked while glowering at her rival.

“I do,” Taehyung responded, “Well, I used to anyways. I can’t seem to find it again ever since.”

Lucy continued, “What is your happy place then?”

“I find it in people. Their happiness affects me and I’d like to believe it’s vice versa.”

His answer warmed her heart. He obviously didn’t know that, despite living under this miserable institute’s roof, he was the reason all of the members came together at some point.

“It is mutual,” Lucy confirmed, “Happy people equal a Happy place and you’ve been doing exactly that for the past few months.”

“Is it though?” RM intervened, “If this place was so happy, where did everybody go?”

“To a happier place,” Taehyung grinned. “Happiness is not measured with a significant space or time. You should follow your happiness wherever it leads you.”

RM raised a brow as he wasn't expecting such a thoughtful reply, "So, you're saying that we're here now because we found our happiness within these walls at some point?"

"Didn't we?" Lucy replied, "We weren't doing any better before coming here so I doubt we were any happier wherever we were before now."

"Lucy, what is your happy place?" Taehyung's curiosity was piqued.

"A place where I can be myself, find myself, and embrace myself. A place where I don't have to be judged nor tormented. A place where I can be appreciated, loved, and understood." Lucy unveiled, "I used to have it all, and I'm here to get it all back."

RM stood up, denying his members an answer to the session's debate. "Good luck with that. If you keep jumping from ward to ward, all you'll get back is pain and disappointment."

"If that happens, at least you won't have to keep carrying the burden of being the only monster in this place." Lucy threw a glare at RM as he left the room.

#### **Doctor X's office – Night time:**

While the other residents frequently felt it was bothersome to go through the monthly evaluation, Taehyung was always ecstatic about it. Facing a glass and talking his heart out entertained him on so many levels, that his session usually had a peculiar ambiance; which often made the doctors question if hypnosis ever worked on him.

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*This is the individual assessment of Patient Taehyung K., Registration Number S3012, April log.*

*Please be seated and face the one-way mirror, your assessment will begin shortly.*

*You will be put under hypnosis to allow the evaluation to go smoothly.*

*Feel free to talk about your feelings and condition according to your current situation.*

*You may remain silent if you do not wish to share.*

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"Unlike the other members, I never found my condition troublesome.

"So I'm a bit extra, what's wrong with that anyways? Still, I realized over the years that my illness affected people around me and I don't want to see them hurt.

"I feel ashamed for liking the way I am despite everybody else trying to fix me. I feel sorry for my family the most, but if I can cope with it, then so should they. My current worry now is whether I should take a step forward or hold back.

"I fear for the remaining residents, I fear for what's left of her sanity and I dread whatever he's hiding. I wish we could all leave this place at once, but I know that sooner or later one of us has to go and if that person happens to be me, I won't be around to calm the tension down anymore.

"I am Taehyung. I am a son, a sibling, a friend and these four initials cannot control me. I know what I am and I know I can control myself. Pill or not, no one can tell me what to do or how to be, I have been in many people's shoes in my career, and now the time has come to fit in my own shoes.

"I think I am ready."

#### **Leisure room – Day time:**

Yet another quiet day went by in the leisure room. Lucy and RM avoided one another for the past month and barely looked each other's way. If it weren't for Taehyung, they'd barely share a proper conversation. While RM was brainstorming in seclusion, Lucy was jotting down her thoughts in her journal. As the clock indicated lunch time, she realized that Taehyung hasn't come down from his room yet.

"Nurse Abby," she called as she walked towards the pharmacy, "Have you seen Taehyung?"

Uneasy, the nurse handed her a sealed letter, "He asked for you to read it out loud."

Taken aback, Lucy grabbed the letter and sat on the nearest arm chair, uncertain of what she'll find inside. The staff gathered around her out of curiosity, and although being seated far away from her, RM made sure to listen to her every word.

"Hello, my name is Taehyung and I have ADHD. However, today I stand here before you with a promise to help cure my illness and free myself in the process. Well, I am not really standing before you but I hope that my words and image will. I was a happy child and lived a happy life. I have always dreamt of becoming an actor and although my childhood was a bit troublesome, I eventually made it. I was always hearing comments about my condition and how it will ruin my career, but one person always had faith in me. My grandmother, who practically raised me my whole life, always told me that I was special and that my condition was unique. I chose to believe her words because I knew she believed in me. The day I lost my grandmother, my condition worsened and its value became meaningless. I couldn't even mourn her properly and it destroyed me. That's when I chose to get rid

of my illness and admitted myself, because I felt that it was the only way I can be redeemed in my family's eyes. During my healing process, I met all of you and I realized that there is no shame in being myself, and that I should embrace it for the sake of that one person that anticipated watching me on the big screen. I've been acting my whole life, and now it's time for me to get a reality check. I didn't want to celebrate my departure because leaving you two behind is not worth the festivities. I tried to overcome it, but I failed miserably. The time I spent here amongst you made me realize that we are the only people responsible for what we feel and fear. I hereby vow to not defy my illness, but rather accept it and slowly build myself around it: better, stronger, healthier, until I bid it farewell. I promise to be on my best behavior. Thank you for your constant love and support."

### **Ward S – Night time:**

This was the first time Lucy came back to her solitary ward without receiving a proper goodbye. She has lost her last friend and this turn of events made her dread whatever was coming her way next.

Lucy entered her room and put her journal on the desk only to find an audio recorder with a note on it that says "Play me." She recognized Taehyung's handwriting and it instantly drew a smile on her face, "I knew he wouldn't leave without saying goodbye."

Throwing herself on the bed, Lucy plugged her earphones and pressed play. The first few seconds were basically Taehyung doing a mic check before realizing that it was already recording. "Ah, typical Taehyungie."

*"Lucy, can you hear me ? Well, there is no way for me to know so I'll just take it as a yes.*

*"I'm sorry I didn't greet you properly; goodbyes ache my heart and the thought of being the one to leave instead of you or RM pained me endlessly. I wish I was doing less better to give either of you the chance to leave first.*

*"When my file was approved, I was both happy and sad: Happy because I will finally reunite with Jimin, and sad because I will no longer be with you. Thank you for believing in me the way my grandmother did, you brought me the comfort I longed for all this time. I'm also sorry for always leaving mid-conversation, don't blame it on my ADHD but rather on my 4D.*

*"I know you and RM are not on good terms, but he was right. I can't always use my condition as an excuse. And about your question: yes, I do trust you and I also trust that I will see you very soon.*

*"You know it all. Until then, enjoy these last spring days, my friend."*

With a hot tear resting on her left cheek, Lucy read the final line.

Although she thought that she had made peace with her roommate back when she read his letter, his deep voice narrating all of their moments together aching brought back all of the memories.

The thought of being the only remaining patient alongside RM also pained her: she was debating whether she should ignore his rudeness and help him anyways, or simply leave him behind and save herself.

Brushing these nocturnal thoughts off of her mind, she opened the nightstand drawer and put the recorder alongside all of the previous mementos her inmates left her, "Until then, my friends."